

LOVERS AND FRIENDS.

A NOVEL.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-street, London.

LOVERS AND FRIENDS;

OR,

Modern Attachments.

A NOVEL.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

BY

ANNE OF SWANSEA,

AUTHOR OF

CONVICTION, GONZALO DE BALDIVIA, CHRONICLES OF AN ILLUSTRIOUS
HOUSE,
SECRET AVENGERS, SECRETS IN EVERY MANSION, CAMBRIAN
PICUTRES, CESARIO ROSALBA,

&c. &c.

“I hold a mirror up for men to see
How bad they are, how good they ought to be.”

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LOVERS AND FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

“In a frivolous age like this, while fantastic Folly jingles all her bells, Genius, Sensibility, and Modesty, are treated with contempt.”

“Why, Fashion has clapp’d a fool’s cap on his head, and persuaded him, that he who can make himself most ridiculous is most eminent.”

“When those baneful passions, envy and jealousy, take possession of a female bosom, she is transformed by their influence to a fiend.”

The Danger of possessing Genius—A Fashionable Party—Modern Friendship.

TWO days, not the most pleasant of her life, having passed since her arrival at the castle, Cecilia on the third arose with the sun, to write, as she had faithfully promised, to Mrs. Doricourt, an account of all that had occurred since she left the Hermitage.

Miss Delmore did not make a single comment while narrating her introduction to the Countess of Torrington, nor on the fashionable party with which she was associated; yet in the warmly-expressed wish to return to the calm delights, the rational amusements of the Hermitage, and her tender friendship, it was evident to Mrs. Doricourt, that her gentle mind had been greatly shocked at the reception given her by lady Torrington, and that her good sense and virtuous principles disapproved the free manners of her guests, though they were all of them persons of rank, and that the earl of Torrington and his son were the only persons exempt from her mental censure.

Of Oscar lord Rusdale, described by the ingenious Cecilia as affable, elegant, and well-informed, Mrs. Doricourt thought with much apprehension; her beloved child had a heart to bestow, and she endured ten thousand fears lest the inestimable prize should be given, where unfeeling pride, incapable of appreciating its value, would oppose, and eventually destroy its happiness. But while distressing her own too-sensitive mind with unpleasant presentiments and anticipations of evil, Mrs. Doricourt was careful not to drop a hint of her apprehensions to Cecilia; she merely requested her to be careful of forming hasty judgments, and of suffering her eye to mislead her heart; she tenderly reminded her that the Hermitage was her home, and that whatever new friendships she might be led to form, she should always tenaciously cling to her right of being always considered her mother, and most affectionate friend. Mrs. Doricourt in her letter did not dwell on the regret she felt at their separation, or urge Miss Delmore’s return to the Hermitage; but Caleb Baldwin, the venerable domestic, commissioned by Mrs. Doricourt to deliver her letter, and a beautiful silver and gold filligree casket, informed Miss Delmore, that his mistress had been but poorly ever since she had been away; and though

he was not desired to say so, yet he was sure his mistress felt the loss of her company, and longed to see her.

“And she shall see me,” returned Cecilia, eagerly, her bright eyes filling with tears of grateful sensibility, “Yes, Mr. Baldwin, I will return to the Hermitage directly; there is no place to me so pleasant. There is no being on earth half so dear to me as Mrs. Doricourt; I will hasten to her, and prove, by my unremitting attention, that the heart she formed cannot be sensible of pleasure, with the knowledge that she is unwell or unhappy. I will go back with you, as soon as I have informed the earl and countess.”

“My dear young lady,” said Baldwin, “let me beg of you not to be so hasty; my mistress is not alarmingly ill, and will be angry with me for having put you into such a flurry; and she will be sadly vexed too, should you affront the earl of Torrington by leaving the castle so suddenly; besides, I know my mistress does not expect you to return home yet awhile, for she has sent your harp, and your drawing-box, and a large trunk full of fine things, that arrived from London yesterday.”

“How shall I ever repay her generosity, her more than maternal solicitude?” said Cecilia.

“Why by always remaining as good as you are now, my dear young lady,” replied honest Baldwin; “my mistress wants nothing that money can purchase, for she has abundance of that, and she will be sufficiently repaid in seeing you virtuous, and kind, and grateful, Heaven bless your sweet face! When Mrs. Doricourt first took such a liking to you, we, her servants I mean, thought you a little angel, that was sent on purpose to comfort her, for it is certain, her health and her spirits have been much better since you have been with her; and do pray now, my dear young lady, think over very often all the prayers, and lessons, and good advice my mistress has given you, and don’t let the wicked example of these London lords and ladies turn you to their evil ways; for I am sure it would break Mrs. Doricourt’s heart, and all our hearts, if any thing amiss was to happen to you. I beg pardon though, my sweet young lady—I hope my boldness in speaking has not offended you; but while I was in the hall just now, I heard and saw such behaviour with the London servants, mercy upon us, and forgive our uncharitableness! but one is apt to think but badly of the masters and mistresses that keep such reprobate servants. But I hope, my dear Miss Delmore, you are not displeased with my freedom in speaking my mind.”

“Offended! no, Mr. Baldwin,” replied she, pressing his old withered hand between both hers; “on the contrary, I am sincerely obliged to you for your kind counsel; and be assured it will be my pride to deserve the approbation of a worthy man like you.”

Old Baldwin kissed the white hands that so gratefully pressed his, and begged her, when she intended a visit to the Hermitage, to write a few lines to Mrs. Doricourt, to prepare her for the pleasure—“Because, you know,” said the old man, “her nerves are so weak, she cannot bear surprises, even though they are joyful ones.”

Cecilia promised to be guided by his advice; she then dismissed him to Mrs. Milman's parlour, where she hoped he would not be annoyed by the intrusion of fashionable valets and pert chambermaids, whose assurance and conceit even exceeded their masters and mistresses.

She then hastened to her own apartment, to examine the magnificent casket delivered to her by Baldwin; it contained a complete set of oriental pearl ornaments, among which was a chaplet of lilies for the hair; the necklace, armllets, and bracelets, had

superb brilliant clasps. A beautiful cross of emeralds and diamonds, attached to a curiously-wrought gold chain, with several costly rings of various jewels, made up this elegant and valuable present.

The trunk was filled with dresses, made in the first style of fashion, and of the richest materials. One was of lace, to be worn over white satin; the sleeves and bosom of this dress were trimmed with pearls, in the form of lilies, chains, and tassels.

Cecilia stood astonished. Mrs. Doricourt's own dress was always black, extremely plain, though made of the very best materials; nor did she recollect ever to have seen her wear an ornament of any kind, except mourning rings; that she should procure for her dresses and trinkets so rich and expensive, surprised and pained her; for though, like other young women of her age, Cecilia was pleased with elegant dresses and costly ornaments, yet a sentiment of delicacy, the remembrance that her mother was sister to the present housekeeper of Torrington Castle, made her hesitate, and doubt the propriety of wearing satin and jewels fit for the daughter of a nobleman; but while the blush of timidity crimsoned her cheek, and a tear of conscious inferiority trembled in her eye, she beheld a folded paper at the bottom of the trunk; it was addressed in the hand-writing of Mrs. Doricourt—"To Cecilia Delmore, the child of my affection." On opening it, bank-notes, to the amount of one hundred pounds, and the following words, met her sight:—"The sum of one hundred pounds, my beloved Cecilia, will in future be your quarterly allowance; you will perhaps think and say that I have left you no occasion for money; but I am far better acquainted with these matters than you are, and know that a young lady received into the fashionable parties of the countess of Torrington will assuredly have demands upon her purse. In a word, to satisfy your delicate scruples, I am rich, and can afford, if I see it necessary, to do much more for you than this. I hope, my love, you like your dresses; they were made under the direction of the celebrated madame de Cloude, Pall-Mall, the present goddess of taste, who will be worshipped till some new arbitress of fashion, by the invention of a vest, or a trimming, supersedes, and decrees her obsolete and antideluvian. Remember, my Cecilia, that it is my pleasure that you wear what I have sent you; my fortune will allow these trifles; and though I no longer dress, it is my will that you do."

This was not a hard command, yet Cecilia's modesty made her wish the dresses had been less expensive; she feared the countess of Torrington would think her presuming, and accuse her of attempting to outvie herself and her guests in the splendour of dress; she shrunk from the idea of incurring ridicule, and provoking animadversions on her birth and dependent state. But it was the will of her more than mother that she should wear those elegant dresses, and her will she had ever considered a law.

Consigning the pearls to their magnificent case, she wrote a letter to Mrs. Doricourt, expressive of her heart's grateful feelings, which having given with her own hand to Mr. Baldwin, and charged him with kind remembrances to all at the Hermitage, she hastened to select one of the plainest of the dresses, wishing at the same time to do honour to the countess, whom she knew expected an addition to her present party.

When her toilet was completed, her watch told her she had yet full two hours before the company would assemble in the *salle-à-manger*; and wishing to inquire after her harp, she entered the library, with an intention of ringing for a servant, when the first objects she saw were her harp, portfolio, and drawing-box.

Cecilia had not heard a note of music since she left the Hermitage, and she flew to the harp, with sensations joyous as those we feel when we hasten to embrace a friend, from whom we have some time been separated. Her fingers passed rapidly over the strings; but notes of joy did not assimilate with the emotions of her heart; these were sorrowful, for she thought of the supercilious conduct of lady Torrington, and contrasted her *hauteur* with the tender generous friendship of Mrs. Doricourt, till unconsciously the sprightly measure changed to a plaintive air, of which her friend was particularly fond, and accompanying the notes with her voice, she sang—

Ah, where are now those eyes of light,
That made the passing hours so bright?
I never mark'd time's rapid flight,
So lucid were their beams.

Ah, where is now that rosy smile,
So full of beauty and of guile,
That I did ne'er suspect the while
I ere should rue its pow'r?

Yet though those eyes, that smile no more,
This cheated bosom can adore,
Yet I their falsehood shall deplore,
Till silent in the grave.

While thus employed she cast her eyes towards the folding-doors at the end of the room, and beheld the earl of Torrington, pale and agitated, gazing on her. In an instant the strain ceased, and blushing and apologizing, she would have withdrawn.

“Stay, Cecilia,” said the earl, advancing towards her—“stay, and inform me where, and by whom, you were taught that air, for it never was published? it was written and composed——”

“By a gentleman of the name of Saville,” interrupted Miss Delmore.

The eyes of the earl gazed wildly on her, and his lip quivered as he asked—“How came you by this knowledge—who told you this?”

“Mrs. Doricourt informed me, my lord,” replied Cecilia, “that the words and music were composed by the brother of a very dear friend of hers—a Miss Saville.”

“And what more did she tell you?” asked the earl, in an eager agitated tone.

“Nothing more, my lord,” replied Cecilia, “only that this beloved friend was dead.”

Miss Delmore had before seen the earl strangely agitated, but his emotions were now stronger than ever; his face was ghastly pale, and large drops of perspiration started on his forehead—“True, true,” said he, covering his face with his hands, “she is dead—she is happy; her abode is with angels, pure and innocent as herself.”

Cecilia wondered how the name of Miss Saville should produce these terrible conflicts, and began to believe that the earl was affected with temporary fits of insanity, when he relieved this apprehension by asking, in a composed voice, Mrs. Doricourt's maiden name?

“It was Greville,” replied Cecilia; “her mother was the youngest daughter of sir Alan Oswald.”

“I thought so,” replied the earl, striking his forehead: “retribution comes. I remember Julia Greville; she would have persuaded, she would have preserved, but it was ordained that I should be wretched.”

Of these broken incoherent sentences Cecilia could make nothing, and she rejoiced when the paroxysm going off, he became sufficiently restored to himself to request to see her drawings.

Cecilia opened her portfolio. A beautiful view of the castle, as seen from the lake, a romantic dell on the margin of the Derwentwater, and the rocks, temple, and cascade, seen from the windows of Mrs. Doricourt’s boudoir, were all the finished drawings it contained, except two heads—a Hebe and a Bacchus, so admirably and correctly pencilled, that the earl was lavish in commendation of them, when the countess, her friend lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, and lord Rushdale, entered laughing.

“I came to announce to your lordship,” said the countess, “that lady Welford and her party will be with us to dinner.”

The earl, without taking his eyes off the drawing he held in his hand, replied—“I shall be glad to see lady Welford; for the fools she brings in her train, I cannot venture to promise so much.”

“I really think we ought to beg pardon for our very abrupt intrusion,” said lady Jacintha, turning her eyes with a malicious glance from Cecilia to the countess; “I actually believe we are interrupting a very interesting *tête-à-tête*—study, I mean.”

“You have spoken truly, lady Jacintha,” returned the earl, with a look of undisguised contempt; “but allow me to assure you, the drawings before me are so worthy of admiration, that praise is a just and voluntary impulse, not a studied compliment.”

“Some Italian artist’s pencil, I presume,” rejoined the countess, approaching the table; “very beautiful and clever, I dare say; every thing done by the natives of delightful Italy must be charming.”

“But these drawings, lady Torrington,” said the earl, “are not the productions of an Italian, but a very youthful English artist, whose modest blushes would betray her, even if I were inclined to withhold from her the meed of praise.”

“Miss Delmore’s pencil!” exclaimed lord Rushdale; “these views are indeed correctly beautiful. How exquisite is the delineation of that dell! how soft the shadow of that tree! and here is the east front of Torrington Castle. How bold and perfect the touches of the pencil on that tower! and there, on the distant Skiddaw, how admirably the perspective is preserved!”

Lady Jacintha frowned and bit her lip, while lady Torrington, affecting a laugh, said—“Oscar is quite an enthusiast in paintings and if Heaven had not thought fit he should be born the heir to an earldom, he would have made a tolerable artist himself. For my part, I like to look at a pretty drawing, but do not pretend to be a judge of its beauties or defects.”

“Nor I, thank my stars,” rejoined lady Jacintha, spitefully; “I leave these important decisions to men of genius who have money to throw away, and persons whose want of money renders it necessary for them to cultivate and employ their talents. I

always remembered Chesterfield's advice to his son; and knowing that pictures were to be bought, seldom troubled myself to attend to the instructions of my drawing-master."

"If you had," returned lord Rushdale, "you would have found your pencil a delightful resource in the hours you pass alone."

"Alone!" exclaimed lady Jacintha, "what a notion for a young man of rank! Alone! you really make me smile! Why I never have half an hour to myself, from the beginning to the end of the year! what with dressing, shopping, paying and receiving visits, the park, the theatres, the opera, masquerades, auctions, concerts, balls, and the thousand other amusements a person of fashion is obliged to attend, I promise you I have scarce time to sleep; but, bless me! what a superb harp that is! I did bestow a little attention upon this divine instrument, because our attitude-master recommended learning the harp, to shew the grace of the figure, and the beauty of the hand and arm." She then placed the harp before her, and without waiting for a request, played very indifferently a popular air. Then addressing lady Torrington—"This is your harp. Well, how modest to conceal your accomplishments from your friends! I declare, countess, I will never forgive you, for not introducing this ravishing instrument, when you knew how I doat upon music."

"Really, my dear friend," replied the countess, "I never beheld that ravishing instrument till now. Lord Chesterfield's opinion has also governed me. I think he says, there is no occasion for persons of rank to be themselves musicians, while they can purchase the abilities of others; but music, I suppose, is another of Miss Delmore's accomplishments; the harp, I presume, is hers."

"Yes," said the earl, "that harp belongs to Miss Delmore; and I am proud to say she is of that as perfect mistress as of the pencil; and I promise myself, lady Jacintha, with the assistance of yourself, lady Eglantine, the count del Montarino, and lord Melvil, to form an agreeable musical party. Oscar breathes a tolerable flute, and I can beat a tamborine."

The eyes of lord Rushdale, expressive of delight and admiration, had wandered too often to the face of Miss Delmore to escape the watchful glances of lady Jacintha; and as she had fixed on him, by the advice of the earl her father, for her partner in wedlock, she was not a little chagrined and disappointed to find that the unstudied graces and genuine talents of Cecilia, a nobody, were likely to deprive her of his attentions, and defeat her scheme of obtaining a wealthy husband, her own fortune being inadequate to the support of her rank. Full of spleen, she again turned to the harp, affecting to admire its ornaments—"It is very handsome," said she; "to the full as magnificent, I think, as the duchess of Eltham's, for which she told me she paid a hundred and fifty pounds. Pray, my lord, if it is not a secret," glancing her eye insidiously towards the countess, "what might it cost?"

"Not being a purchaser, madam," returned the earl, "I cannot reply to your question."

"Not the purchaser!" repeated lady Torrington, incredulously; "why I understood Miss Delmore had been brought up entirely at your lordship's expense."

The earl saw how much Cecilia's delicacy was wounded by this gross allusion to her dependent state; and his tone and manner evinced the displeasure he felt, as he replied—"This, madam, is a subject I should have thought politeness would have prevented your introducing before persons in no way concerned in my private

transactions: but since it is thus indelicately brought upon the tapis, with Miss Delmore's permission I will inform you she has not cost me one single guinea for the last ten years; her education had been conducted by Mrs. Doricourt, who has also supplied every other necessity with so liberal a hand, that she has only left me the title of Miss Delmore's father—a title which I shall proudly arrogate to myself, till she shall choose herself a dearer protector in a husband."

Cecilia's eyes were suffused with tears as she modestly bent to the earl; the countess and lady Jacintha smiled contemptuously; while lord Rushdale, with a suppressed sigh, said—"How enviable will the lot be of that mortal whom Miss Delmore honours with her affection!"

Lady Jacintha liked neither the speech nor the look of lord Rushdale, and determined, if possible, to mortify Cecilia, she asked—"Pray, Miss Delmore, can you tell me what were the configurations of the planets at the time of your birth?"

Smiling at the strangeness of the question, she replied—"Not really, madam."

"Well, certainly," resumed lady Jacintha, "if any faith is to be placed in astrology, you, Miss Delmore, were born under a lucky constellation of stars: no doubt your friend, this Mrs. Dor—Dorland—what is her name, is very rich?"

"Certainly she is," replied Cecilia, with a dignified air of reproof, "for money never appears an object to Mrs. Doricourt; in her charities she is most liberal and diffusive; and in her presents to those whom she honours with her regard, she is generous even to profusion."

"I really congratulate you on having so munificent a friend, Miss Delmore," said lady Jacintha; "I suppose those yellow cornelians on your neck were her gift; they are handsome if they are real."

"Madam!" said Cecilia, colouring highly, "Mrs. Doricourt would not allow me to wear any ornaments that were not real."

"Indeed!" returned lady Jacintha; "very genteel people though wear imitations; and they are now brought so near perfection, that only jewellers and lapidaries can tell the difference; if yours are real, they cost a pretty sum; earrings, broach, and bracelets to match—a very handsome present indeed! My jeweller charged me fifty guineas for my set, and they are not so large nor so handsomely cut as yours."

"Mrs. Doricourt's presents are costly presents indeed!" said the countess. "Pray, Miss Delmore, who makes your dresses? some person at Keswick, I suppose; this is a pretty peach-coloured satin of yours, and is trimmed very smartly for the country. I want a few things done; and as Smithson's hand is at present disabled, I will thank you to give her the address of your——"

"This dress, madam," said Cecilia, vexed to see her very clothes provoke the spleen of these high-bred ladies, "was made by madame de Cloude, of Pall-Mall, and is very inferior to some others Mrs. Doricourt has just sent me."

Lady Jacintha almost shrieked at this intelligence, but affectedly applying her eye-glass to the trimming, which was tastefully composed of blond and white roses, she observed it was tolerable—"But De Cloude," continued she, "has exhausted her fancy, and is sinking fast in the estimation of ladies of rank. She has now, I believe, poor creature! leisure enough to work for merchants' wives, or even persons of an inferior class, if they can come up to her price."

The drift of this speech, and the contemptuous look that accompanied it, did not escape the earl; he also saw the indignant crimson on Cecilia's cheek, and instantly replied—"I cannot pretend to prop the fame of madame de Cloude, which your ladyship asserts to be sinking, but I must beg permission to set you right in one point. Mrs. Doricourt, though retired from the deceits and frivolities of the *haut ton*, has prominent claims to that rank on which you so peremptorily insist, and on which you appear to place so high a value, being herself a branch of one of the highest and most ancient families in England."

The countess and lady Jacintha listened with surprise, as the earl continued to say—"Mrs. Doricourt is a granddaughter of sir Alan Oswald, and her mother's sisters, the one the duchess of Alverston, the other the marchioness of Inglesfield, would, I believe, be not a little astonished and offended to hear your ladyship herd their niece with merchant's wives, and persons of even an inferior class to these."

Lady Jacintha was really disconcerted by this rebuke. She protested that she had no sort of intention to offend against Mrs. Doricourt's dignity, though she was unacquainted with her family and pretensions to class with persons of rank; "but your lordship," continued she, "must be sensible that I am quite correct, when I assert that money will effect almost any thing."

"And while I subscribe to the truth of that remark," replied the earl, "I sincerely wish it had the power of removing from the female heart, envy, hatred, and arrogance, particularly from those who, possessing beauty, rank, and accomplishments themselves, ought to be superior to such mean and debasing passions."

The oblique compliment conveyed in this speech did not blunt its severity, and stung to the quick lady Jacintha, who coloured through her rouge.

Cecilia, feeling she was the occasion of this unpleasant conversation, wished herself back at the dear Hermitage, where the evil passions, envy, hatred, and arrogance, never entered.

Lord Rushdale saw her uneasiness, and anxious to remove it, spoke of some beautiful songs, composed by Emdin, whose music was gaining great celebrity in the fashionable world.

The countess, offended at the earl's severity to her friend, and more at her son's assiduity to the housekeeper's niece, was luckily prevented from uttering her displeasure by the abrupt entrance of sir Cyril Musgrove, covered with dust—"You are under an infinitude of obligations to me," said he, gasping and panting for breath.

"Have the goodness to inform me," replied lady Torrington, supposing herself the person addressed, "what mighty favour you have conferred on me?"

"Why I am choked with dust, and have rode, at the imminent hazard of breaking my neck," said sir Cyril, "to inform you, that lady Welford and her party are, at this present moment, within half a mile of the castle."

"I confess my obligation," said lady Torrington, with a stately bend.

"Who does lady Welford bring with her?" asked lady Jacintha; "what beau? Come, leave off gasping and panting, which I know is all affectation, and satisfy my curiosity."

"That you may prepare your *nods, becks, and wreathed smiles*," returned sir Cyril. "Well then, as all the world knows the pleasure I feel in obeying the commands of a fair lady, lady Welford's barouche is driven by lord Wilton."

“What, is that coxcomb of the party?” said lady Jacintha. “But I don’t want to hear the order—I only wish to know the persons who form the train of lady Welford. There is another proof of the power of money—that woman’s wealth—But deuce take her wealth! Dear sir Cyril, who is coming?”

“Sir Middleton Maxfield, and his sister Jemima,” replied sir Cyril, “the sweet child of nature, as her aunt Mrs. Freakley calls her.”

“And is that insufferable old fool of the party?” asked the countess.

“The sweet child of nature,” returned sir Cyril, “is, you know, a ward of Chancery, and wants three years of being of age; and her aunt is so afraid of the lovely innocent being run away with, that she never trusts her out of her sight; besides, I was present when you told her you should be happy to see her in Cumberland. The rest of the party are the honourable Tangent Drawley and colonel St. Irwin. How fortunate that you are all dressed! I must hasten to put off the savage and adonize. Rushdale, ’pon my soul, I envy you the happiness of handing the child of nature from the carriage! take care of your heart, or her leaden—pshaw! her blue eyes I mean, will shoot through it like a pair of bullets. *Pardonnez moi!* can’t stay to answer another question,” and sir Cyril withdrew as abruptly as he entered.

“Miss Maxfield’s fortune,” said lady Jacintha, “is a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, besides great expectations. I suppose, my lord,” addressing Oscar, “you will improve the hint given you by sir Cyril.”

“I have not yet, madam,” replied he, “become so great a worshipper of wealth as to sacrifice happiness at the shrine of avarice.”

“No,” said the earl, “no, Oscar—I trust not; for miserable is that wretch who deludes himself with the hope that wealth will supply the place of mutual love; wretchedly will he be deceived, who fancies wealth will prove an equivalent for happiness.”

Lady Torrington cast a glance of disdain on her husband, in whose words she found an allusion to their own marriage, formed by interest, without attachment on either side. Perceiving lady Welford’s barouche entering the gates, she took her son’s arm, and requesting lady Jacintha to assist in receiving her guests, they left the library.

They were no sooner alone, than the earl, taking Cecilia’s hand, said—“I am sorry, my sweet girl, that you should have been subjected to the impertinence of lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, who is a compound of pride, affectation, and envy, though it gave me an opportunity of witnessing your equanimity of temper. The insolence and folly of lady Jacintha, failing of the effect she wishes, will subside; and as she cannot mortify, she will learn to respect you.”

Miss Delmore’s pride had compelled her to hide her mortification, but she had poignantly felt the contempt thrown upon her by the countess and lady Jacintha, and most happy would she have been to return to Mrs. Doricourt; already she had seen enough of fashionable manners to convince her, that it was scarcely possible to associate with the great, and preserve the bosom free from evil passions: ardently did she wish to return to Mrs. Doricourt, endeared to her by a comparison with the countess and lady Jacintha; from her lips she had never heard contumelious speech—her every look and action expressed affection and approval.

But the earl would not hear of her quitting the castle; he had that very morning dispatched a letter to Mrs. Doricourt, requesting permission to wait upon her—"And if she consents to receive my visit," said the earl, "you shall accompany me."

With this promise Cecilia was obliged to be content.

"As yet," resumed the earl, "you have seen nothing of life; and I consider it my duty not to let your youth, your beauty, and talents, be buried in the seclusion of St. Herbert's Island."

Cecilia could with truth have said, the specimen she had seen of life and high breeding, since she had been at the castle, had decided her preference for retirement; but respect for the earl prevented her so freely declaring her sentiments; and the second ringing of the dinner-bell put an end to their conversation.

Conducted by the earl, she entered the *salle-à-manger*, where the guests were already assembled.

The earl of Torrington was instantly surrounded, and saluted with many flattering compliments; but though all gazed on the beautiful confused Cecilia, she remained unIntroduced, till the earl, irritated at the marked neglect of the countess, reminded her, in a manner unusually stern, of her inattention to the unpleasant and awkward situation of his adopted daughter.

The countess did not choose to offend her lord by a downright opposition to his will; she pleaded forgetfulness, made a slight apology to Cecilia, and introduced her to her guests, as the *protégée* of the earl of Torrington.

Lady Welford, a good-humoured, lively widow, without any striking claims to beauty or wit, was greatly admired by the gentlemen, for she had fifty thousand pounds a-year, without child or encumbrance. She was sensible that though warmly pressed to spend the summer at Torrington Castle, she was no favourite with the countess, or her friend lady Jacintha Fitzosborne; but the beaux that fluttered in her train were men of high ton, and consequently desirable acquisitions to their party.

Lady Welford had no pretension to genius, but she had amiable qualities, that amply compensated for shining talents; she possessed a generous and feeling heart. The countenance of Miss Delmore had, at the first glance, made an impression in her favour, which the cold and rude neglect of the countess confirmed; and lady Welford resolved, as she placed the diffident girl next herself at table, to make the "*earl's protégée*" the object of her particular attention.

Miss Maxfield, a ward of Chancery, was just emancipated from a boarding-school, to reside under the protection of her aunt, Mrs. Freakley, who, having a most devoted reverence for titles, was determined that her niece should marry an earl; for, as her father was a baronet, and her own fortune was very large, and her expectations still greater, she made no hesitation in saying, she thought Jemima might, without being accused of presumption, aspire to the rank of countess. Mrs. Freakley had heard much in favour of the youthful lord Rushdale; report had represented him of a sentimental turn, singular in opinions and habits, to the young nobility who had courted his acquaintance. In Mrs. Freakley's eyes her niece was all sweet simplicity and engaging innocence; and as there was rank to recommend the alliance, she thought this sentimental youth would be exactly such a husband as she could wish for her child of nature. Full of this project, with indefatigable perseverance, Mrs. Freakley worked herself into every party where she knew the countess of Torrington was invited; and having discovered that she was weakly

fond of flattery, she so successfully complimented her person, taste in dress, and equipages, that her endeavours were crowned with an invitation to Torrington Castle.

Miss Maxfield was a complete hoyden, with an alabaster complexion, flaxen hair, and lead-coloured eyes; she was of the middle height, and a good deal warped, which irregularity of shape was, as far as possible, concealed by padding the sunk shoulder. Her features, though not bad, were insipid; her mind was a blank, and she had profited little by an expensive education; but it was a favourite position with Mrs. Freakley, that money was more valuable than sense or education; and though her sweet Jemima was not a wit, she had a very large fortune; and, as far as her own observance of life and manners went, she had always found that men hated clever women.

The company had seated themselves at table, when lady Eglantine Sydney was led into the room by lord Melvil. She lisped an apology for her late appearance, but really had no idea of its being dinner-time, being so pleasantly engaged.

“With a love tale,” said lady Jacintha, “in which there is nothing new or marvellous.”

“No, Heaven knows,” replied Mr. Drawley; “the subject is worn ‘to tatters, to very rags,’ as some poet says. I really wonder any lady can lend an ear to such stuff!”

“Or any gentleman take the trouble to repeat it,” said lord Wilton. “Did I not hear you tell lady Welford this morning, that her cruelty would drive you to despair, and that it was only for the happiness of being near her that you came into Cumberland?”

“Pray, my lord, don’t put Mr. Drawley to the trouble of recollecting his tender speeches,” said lady Welford, “which, I promise you, have no more place in my memory than his own.”

“Dear, how odd!” observed Miss Maxfield. “Well, I never forget what a gentleman says to me.”

“Your memory then must be like old lady Napper’s lumber-room,” rejoined lady Jacintha, “in which there is not a single article that you can depend upon as fit for use, or that is worth preserving.”

“*But when she spoke,*” said lord Wilton, “*forth from her coral lips even satire broke.*”

“*Nonsense* you mean,” returned lady Jacintha; “but I pardon you, on the consideration that satire would be lost on people determined to play the fool.”

Drawley bowed affectedly; said he was perfectly sensible of her ladyship’s compliment, but that the fatigue of talking prevented his expressing his gratitude—“Really,” said he, yawning, “I am so wearied, so inert, that I don’t believe I shall be able to utter another syllable to-night.”

“Not speak again to-night!” exclaimed Miss Maxfield; “why I never knew any body before that did not love to talk! I am sure I should think it a great punishment if I was obliged to hold my tongue; should not you, Miss Delmore?”

“To be constrained not to speak,” replied Cecilia, “would certainly be far from pleasant; yet, in my opinion, a less punishment than to be compelled to converse.”

“When neither the person nor the subject were interesting,” said lord Rushdale.

“But this is liberty hall, Miss Maxfield,” observed the countess; “and I trust all who favour me with their company will feel themselves under no restraint.”

With the second course sir Cyril Musgrove made his appearance—“Ladies and gentlemen,” said he, bowing profoundly, “I beg leave to offer an apology for——” but

seeing the removal of dishes and plates, he placed himself at the table—"any apology," said he, "is unnecessary, for you have not waited."

"We never wait," replied the countess; "that, with various other tiresome ceremonies, is gone by."

"And very properly," remarked colonel St. Irwin, "or a dinner might spoil, while a coxcomb sat under the hands of his valet, or admired his person in a mirror."

Sir Cyril did not choose to resent any thing said by colonel St. Irwin; he contented himself with replying—"Your late campaign, colonel, has not blunted the edge of your wit; that I perceive is keen as ever. But if I do waste a little time under the hands of my valet, or in consulting my mirror, I have the pleasure to know it is not time thrown away."

"It would be far better employed," replied the colonel, "in the study of books—in the cultivation of your mind; for you will pardon me the remark, sir Cyril—however handsomely dressed the outside of your head may be, I never heard any person praise its inward adornments."

"Thank you, thank you for your advice, my good friend," said sir Cyril; "sorry I can't follow it; but whenever I take up a book, I fall asleep over it.—This leveret is dressed exquisitely! Now, after the acid, a little of that sweet sauce, if you please.—Lady Eglantine, 'pon my honour, you look celestial!"

Lady Eglantine simpered, and bowed to the compliment.

"Celestial blue," returned lady Jacintha.

"La! lady Jacintha," said Miss Maxfield, tittering, "do you mean to say your cousin looks blue? When I was at school, we used to say the teachers looked blue when they were cross."

"Very smart, 'pon my honour," returned sir Cyril. "But no, my charming Miss Maxfield! I did not mean to accuse lady Eglantine of looking cross, but, like a sylph, or a seraph, surrounded by clouds of celestial blue."

"Is that poetry, sir Cyril?" asked Miss Maxfield; "for I had a task to learn once about seraphs and blue clouds."

This question occasioned a general laugh.

Sir Cyril declared he hated poetry, and in plain prose had expressed his admiration of lady Eglantine's dress.

"It is particularly elegant," said lord Melvil; "blue becomes lady Eglantine's transparent complexion."

"Nay, now I am sure you are flattering me," returned lady Eglantine, with a smile of conscious beauty.

Lady Jacintha hated compliments, except when paid to herself, and she prevented the adulation issuing from lord Melvil's lips, by saying—"Sir Cyril, you have doubtless heard of a scarlet and yellow fever, but possibly not of a blue one."

"No, really," replied he; "but there may be a fever of that sort abroad, for any thing I know to the contrary."

"I shall not travel abroad for confirmation on this point," resumed lady Jacintha, "because I know it rages with great violence in England——"

"Not at this time, I hope," interrupted Mrs. Freakley; "not in this part of the country, I trust; I am so alarmed at the thought of having a fever."

"You have nothing to apprehend at present, madam," returned lady Jacintha, with a look of disdain, "though certainly with your *embonpoint* a fever might be dangerous."

Then again addressing sir Cyril—"I never heard of a blue fever till I became acquainted with lady Jane Osbright, whose lead-coloured eyes some needy sonneteer celebrated in witless rhymes, denominating them sapphire and azure; and so infatuated has she become with blue, that now her satins and velvets, the draperies of her drawing-room, her liveries, the lining of her carriage, the hammercloth, are all blue—celestial blue. Pray Heaven my cousin may not be infected by her ladyship! for I perceive strong symptoms of a blue fever."

Sir Cyril had sense enough to see the envy couched under this speech. Lady Eglantine's dress was new and elegant; and as her cousin's fortune would not allow her to indulge the love of show, she always felt mortified when lady Eglantine appeared in any thing new.

Lady Welford, during dinner, bestowed all her attention on Miss Delmore, because she perceived that the countess of Torrington and lady Jacintha Fitzosborne honoured her with very little regard; nor was she at any loss to account for their neglect. Youth, beauty, and elegance, she knew, were possessions sufficient to render her hateful in their eyes; and as much to mortify them as gratify herself, when they retired to the drawing-room, she took her arm; and as they walked up and down, she asked several questions relative to the improvements on St. Herbert's Island, and particularly inquired after the health of Mrs. Doricourt.

"Do you know Mrs. Doricourt, madam?" asked Cecilia.

"When I was Lucy Archer, I knew Julia Greville," replied lady Welford; "and when you have an opportunity, I will thank you, Miss Delmore, if you will say to her, that I shall feel most happy to be permitted to renew my acquaintance with her."

Cecilia had just time to say she would remember her ladyship's request, when the gentlemen entered the room, and a general conversation took place, in which Cecilia observed Mr. Drawley took no part; for, withdrawing to a distant window, he had thrown himself on an ottoman, in an attitude of fatigue, appearing to take no sort of interest in any thing he heard or saw.

Miss Maxfield, who admired his fine person, and had fixed upon him for her lover, endeavoured to draw him into a conversation; but to all her remarks and questions he appeared deaf and dumb, and as insensible and motionless as a statue, till provoked and tired with his obstinate silence, she flew up to lady Welford, and half crying, asked her if she had heard Mr. Drawley speak since they rose from table?

"Why really, Miss Maxfield, I do not remember," said lady Welford, "nor is it a matter of any importance, I believe; for when he does speak, it is very little to the purpose."

"La! do you think so?" returned Miss Maxfield. "Sir Middleton says he is a very sensible young man, and he must know, because they were schoolfellows together at Eton."

"I shall not presume to dispute sir Middleton's judgement," said lady Welford; "I can only say that his silence affords me equal pleasure with his speech."

"Well now, that is very odd," replied Miss Maxfield, "for I like of all things to hear him talk; and I will make him speak—I will go again and plague him till I make him talk."

"It is a pity," said lady Welford, as she ran towards Drawley, who still maintained the appearance of lassitude and insensibility, "it is a great pity that silly girl has so large a

fortune; her money will induce some indigent man of rank to marry her, who, ashamed of her ignorance, will afterwards treat her with neglect and contempt.”

The earl of Torrington proposed going to the music-room, to which lady Jacintha Fitzosborne gave her immediate assent, vanity whispering that she could have no rival in voice or finger.

Lord Rushdale selected the music, and lady Jacintha, taking her place at the piano-forte, attempted a bravura song of Bishop's; but wishing to distance all competition, she strained her voice to an absolute squall; and though loudly and flatteringly applauded, every critical ear was convinced she sung out of time and tune.

Lady Eglantine Sydney protested she was hoarse—that it was inhuman to solicit her to sing—declared that she was out of spirits—that she had not sufficient confidence in her ability to oblige; and after a thousand other such excuses, was at last prevailed on by lord Melvil to do what she from the first intended. Accompanied by lady Jacintha at the pianoforte, and lords Melvil and Rushdale on the flute and clarionet, she sang, in a very affected style, an Italian canzonet.

The applause that succeeded this having subsided, and half reclining on the assiduous adoring Melvil, lady Eglantine had resumed her seat.

Cecilia was called upon to contribute her share to the general entertainment. Never having sung but to Mrs. Doricourt, and other friends equally indulgent, she felt considerable alarm to make her *début* before so many strangers; but encouraged by the earl of Torrington, lord Rushdale, and lady Welford, she gracefully swept the strings of her harp, and, with enchanting sweetness, sang a simple Scotch ballad. Her voice, naturally clear, full, and melodious, had received every aid from taste and science. When she ceased, a burst of rapturous applause followed her song; even lady Jacintha, though swelling with envy and spite, was compelled to acknowledge Miss Delmore's voice, style, and execution, were not to be excelled.

Lady Torrington condescended to relax from her *hauteur*, and confess herself so much delighted, as to join the general request that Miss Delmore would repeat the ballad.

Ever ready to oblige, Cecilia complied; and as her timidity had in some measure passed off, she acquitted herself better than at first.

Some hours were now delightfully spent in the music-room. Cecilia sang duets with lord Rushdale and sir Middleton Maxfield, who had a fine voice, and sung in tolerable good style.

Actuated by the spirit of envy, lady Jacintha exerted all her powers to rival Cecilia's performances, but neither her voice nor science would bear comparison.

Lady Eglantine declined the contest, by affecting a cough, and protesting her constitution too weak for the great exertion required in singing.

Colonel St. Irwin had before expressed his admiration of Miss Delmore's person; but her voice, her superior style of singing, he spoke of in terms of rapture to lord Rushdale, who declared that, in his sight, Miss Delmore was the most perfect of Heaven's creatures—“If it was possible,” said he, “to escape the fascinations of her beauty, her voice would lead the heart into captivity.”

Mr. Drawley, who was lounging on a sofa, and had not before opened his lips, now started up, and laying his hand on lord Rushdale's arm, said—“You speak my sentiments exactly; Miss Delmore looks, moves, and sings, like an angel.”

“Only hear!” shouted Miss Maxfield, clapping her hands, “only hear, good folks—Mr. Drawley spoke!”

“Is there any thing so very extraordinary in that?” asked the silent youth, affecting to suppress a yawn, and relapsing into his former lounging attitude.

“Yes, indeed, I think it very extraordinary,” replied Miss Maxfield; “for I am sure, before we left the drawing-room, I asked you a hundred questions, and told you ever so many droll things that happened while I was at school; but not a word did you speak, good, bad, or indifferent. I am certain I have not heard the sound of your voice but once since we left the inn at Keswick.”

“It is so vulgar to talk,” said Drawley, shrugging his shoulders; “it is really horrible to be put to the labour of finding ideas for conversation; it is an immense exertion of mental and corporal faculties, and nothing but the extreme pleasure I felt at hearing Miss Delmore sing, could have animated me to sustain this wordy labour.”

Lord Wilton now joined the conversation by saying—“What, is Drawley actually speaking?”

‘I’ve read that things inanimate have mov’d,
And, as with living souls, have been inform’d
By magic numbers and persuasive sounds.’

And so you have been speechifying, my boy? Bravo! go on, let me entreat you. Here, Musgrove, Maxfield! Proceed, Drawley, proceed, my good fellow.”

Sir Cyril Musgrove and sir Middleton Maxfield having obeyed the call, he bade them prepare their cash; then slapping Drawley on the shoulder, told him that his loquacity had won him a thousand pounds.

“I feel immensely happy to have been so fortunate as to supply you with what I know you want,” said Drawley, “though talking is undoubtedly excessive vulgar, as one’s valet, or one’s tailor, makes use of expressly the same organ that we do to express ideas.”

“Suppose then,” replied sir Cyril, “by way of a change, you were to adopt the plan of writing yours.”

“It would never answer,” returned Drawley; “writing would be even more wearying than speaking.”

“Well, then, invent a certain number of signs to express your thoughts,” said sir Middleton Maxfield.

“It has been done already,” replied Drawley. “No; without novelty it would not do for me; besides, if I were to be at the fatigue of inventing signs, how could I impart comprehension to other people? and then the exertion attending on gesticulation would be unbearable.”

“What will become of you,” asked Mrs. Freakley, “if you marry? for it is not natural to expect that your wife will have as great a dislike to talking as you have, or, in compliance with your out-of-the-way whims, that she will put a seal on her lips.”

“And for that very reason,” replied Drawley, “I will never marry.”

“More shame for you to say so!” returned Miss Maxfield, angrily; “if all the gentlemen were of your mind, Mr. Drawley, I wonder what would become of all the young ladies of my acquaintance.”

“Why they would all be doomed to die discontented old maids,” said sir Cyril Musgrove. “But cheer up; there is no danger, my charming Miss Maxfield, of your belonging to that unhappy class.”

“I hope not,” replied she, “for I assure you, sir Cyril, I intend to be married, but not to Mr. Drawley, for I will talk as much as I please; and indeed I should be greatly offended if my husband was to yawn, and shrug his shoulders, and wave his hand, and say ‘my head aches—pray don’t speak—you weary me—it is so immensely vulgar to talk.’”

“Bravo, Jemima!” said her brother; “‘pon my honour, you are a capital mimic!”

“It was really a most excellent imitation,” replied lord Wilton. “It was just your air, voice, and manner, Drawley.”

“Very likely,” returned he; “I am prodigiously happy to have afforded you entertainment; but as the expenditure of breath required in speaking affects my nervous system, you will pardon my declining for the present the honour of your conversation.”

“Your oratory, my good fellow,” said lord Wilton, laughing, “has won me a thousand pounds, and you have now my permission to close the portal of your perceptions and conceptions as soon and for any length of time you please.”

“Is it possible,” said Miss Delmore, as she walked up the room with lady Welford, “that Mr. Drawley can be pleased to sit in that listless posture, neither joining in conversation, or partaking the amusements of the company?”

“It is evident,” replied lady Welford, “that you, my sweet girl, are unacquainted with the manners of the *haut ton*. The honourable Mr. Drawley, I will venture to assert, feels the utmost uneasiness in affecting lassitude and constraining himself to silence; but he is one of these empty-headed young men of fashion, who will even punish themselves to astonish the gaping multitude. Last winter he was a dashing, rattling, four-in-hand character—a Stentor in voice, a Hercules in strength. You now behold him reduced to a machine, a moving statue, disclaiming thought and speech as wearying exertions; but in the midst of this seeming inanity, you will discover that no fatigue, no privation, is too great to obtain the eclat of singularity.”

Cecilia smiled, and acknowledged she had no idea of such a character as Mr. Drawley being in existence.

“In the great world, my dear,” replied lady Welford, “you will find every one assuming a character different to their real one. But more of this another time, for our conversation will not suit the lady who approaches.”

This was the countess of Torrington.

Cecilia’s singing and execution on the pianoforte and harp had given general delight. Lady Eglantine, casting a languishing glance from her blue eyes on lord Melvil, declared she had never heard any one sing so charmingly as Miss Delmore.

Lord Melvil, pressing her hand, assured her, that to his ear her voice was infinitely more delightful.

Lady Eglantine smiled, and said she thought Miss Delmore’s voice and style greatly superior to lady Jacintha’s.

“Oh, certainly!” replied lord Melvil; “I am entirely of your opinion.”

“And so you would have been, most courteous lord,” said lady Jacintha, who had overheard their conversation, “if this discerning, sensible divinity, had asserted that Miss Delmore croaked like a raven. I thank your lordship though for the very high compliment

you have paid me, in placing my voice and style below lady Eglantine's. Upon her musical abilities I shall make no comment; but permit me to observe, that did she sing with the monotonous note of a cuckoo, I am aware that you have motives that would induce you to declare she warbled like a nightingale."

This speech was far from pleasant to either lady Eglantine or lord Melvil, particularly the latter, whose conscience felt its truth; but lady Eglantine imputing it to envy of Miss Delmore, gave lord Melvil a languishing smile, and suffered him to conduct her to the supper-room.

When the countess of Torrington retired, lady Jacintha tapped at the door of her dressing-room—"Not feeling disposed to sleep, I am come," said she, "to chat half-an-hour with you."

At that time lady Torrington could have dispensed with her dear friend's company; she had promised to admit the count del Montarino to a private conference. Lady Jacintha's presence disappointed the interview, as their intercourse was a secret she could not venture to confide even to the bosom of friendship. A glance of her eye was at once understood by the comprehensive, convenient waiting gentlewoman, who took an opportunity to visit the count's apartment, with intelligence that sent him quietly to bed.

The count would have been well content to give up the assignation, for he was tired of acting the passionate lover; but his purse was empty, and he wanted to draw upon her ladyship's for a supply. The wager laid by sir Cyril Musgrove and sir Middleton Maxfield, that the honourable Mr. Drawley would not speak before supper-time, was a convincing proof to the wily Italian, that they had more money than wit, and that it would be no very difficult matter to make a transfer of their superfluity to his necessity; and the time that he intended to bestow in making love, he now devoted to planning the means of making money.

Lady Jacintha perceived an air of constraint in the manner of lady Torrington, and observed that her eyes often turned towards the door. She saw she was an intruder, and suspicions, not very honourable to the reputation of her friend, rose in her mind; but suspicion was not proof, and lady Torrington's acquaintance was of great importance, for her father had suggested to her that Oscar lord Rushdale, the heir to a rich earldom, would be a very advantageous match for her.

"Bless me!" said the countess, "your spirits, lady Jacintha, are astonishing; for my part, I am worn out, and half asleep. Why," looking at her watch, "it is near two o'clock!"

"I really felt it impossible to sleep," replied lady Jacintha, "with so many alarms on my mind."

"Alarms!" repeated the countess, affecting to yawn, "what has happened to alarm you?"

"I positively could not rest," resumed lady Jacintha, "till I came to put you on your guard."

"You have now communicated your alarm to me," said the countess, her assignation with the count darting on her mind; "what have I to fear?"

"Every thing from that artful creature, Cecilia Delmore," replied lady Jacintha.

The countess smiled contemptuously—"I am sorry so insignificant a cause," said she, "should have kept you from retiring to rest; for my part, I perceive nothing in the girl to cause alarm, or prevent me from sleeping with my usual tranquillity."

“I congratulate you most sincerely, my dear friend,” returned lady Jacintha, “on your happy indifference. Some wives would be highly offended, if not absolutely jealous, if their lords bestowed such looks of tender admiration, such devoted attention, on another. I am sure the earl’s glaring attention to the girl rendered me quite uncomfortable all the evening on your account; and my friendship for you made me resolve to put you on your guard before I retired to rest.”

Lady Torrington’s tone was ironical, as she said—“I certainly must be vastly grateful to the friendly solicitude that has deprived you of sleep, and brought you here at this hour, to put me on my guard against a rival in my husband’s love; but at once to tranquillize your kind apprehensions for my peace, I beg to inform you that the earl of Torrington is at perfect liberty to bestow his admiration and attentions, wherever caprice or inclination directs, provided I am not the object. When we married, ours was an union brought about by Plutus, not Cupid; and as the early part of our wedded life was not enlivened by jealous squabbles, I believe I shall be able to proceed, without making myself ridiculous in the opinion of the fashionable world, by affecting uneasiness that I do not feel. Miss Delmore has awakened the earl’s tender passions—I really am much obliged to her, as, while this caprice lasts, he will be entertained, and prevented from becoming cross, peremptory, and gloomy, which was the case when madame la duchesse de Valencourt no longer enlivened our parties.”

Lady Jacintha felt and looked disappointed; she had deprived herself of an hour’s sleep, on purpose to light the torch of discord, and inflame the bosom of lady Torrington with jealousy; she had encouraged the hope of instigating her dear friend to insist on Miss Delmore being sent from the castle. This scheme proving abortive, she determined on trying if her apathy respecting her son was equal to that she avowed towards the conduct of her lord.

“Though you are content that the earl should flirt with this girl,” said she, “because you are certain no consequences of any importance to yourself can be the result, yet it would not be very gratifying to your pride, my dear countess, if lord Rushdale should be weak enough to fall into the snares of this Armida.”

“You apprehend things absolutely impossible,” returned the countess.

“To me it does not appear impossible,” said lady Jacintha, “that a noble lord may marry a maid of low degree; such occurrences have taken place.”

The countess drew herself up indignantly—“Lord Rushdale,” replied she, “has too much proper pride to suffer the niece of his father’s housekeeper to inveigle his affections; he knows the heir of Torrington must form an alliance with rank equal to his own. I am really surprised, lady Jacintha, how you can suffer such absurd notions to enter into your head. Cecilia Delmore marry lord Rushdale! ridiculous! But, to tell truth, my dear friend, I begin to suspect that this girl’s accomplishments, which you have affected to despise, are the thorns which have made your pillow so uneasy. I am sorry that I cannot send her from the castle to oblige you; but you have yourself noticed what a fuss the earl makes about his adopted daughter, and how impossible it is for me to interfere in the matter, without incurring the odious imputation of being fond of my husband. I shall talk with Oscar to-morrow, and let him understand where I wish him to place his affections.”

“You have selected a wife for him then,” said lady Jacintha, in a flutter of hope and fear.

“Oh yes,” returned the countess; “lady Arabella Moncrief, the second daughter of the duchess of Aberdeen.”

“Why she is a mere child, and is frightfully marked with the smallpox!” interrupted lady Jacintha, spitefully.

“She is exactly three years younger than Oscar,” said the countess, “who is now barely eighteen. He will not marry before he is of age, and then her youth will be no objection; and as to her being marked by that frightful distemper, doctor Bingley, who attended her, assured me she would not be at all injured; and she was allowed to have fine eyes, and a lovely complexion; but where such very great advantages will result from the alliance, beauty is but a minor consideration.”

It required all the dissimulation lady Jacintha was mistress of, to hide her rage and disappointment. She had given up a party going to Weymouth, on purpose to make lord Rushdale sensible of her attractions, and to discover that his mother had already planned a matrimonial engagement for him, was almost too much for her patience to endure.

She rejoiced when the countess said—“I really must wish you good night, for, in spite of politeness, my eyes will close.”

Lady Jacintha saw, in this haste to get rid of her, an intention beyond that of going to rest, and she determined to watch what was agitating. Bidding the countess good night, she extinguished her taper, and concealed herself in the dark recess of a window, from whence she had a full view of the dressing-room door. Presently she saw it unclose, and lady Torrington advance a little way into the gallery, where having remained a few seconds, she again retreated.

Soon after her ladyship’s woman appeared, and lady Jacintha was in the utmost trepidation, lest the lynx eyes of Mrs. Smithson should see her, crouching in a corner, in the mean act of eaves-dropping; but, apparently half asleep, Mrs. Smithson passed on, and entered the dressing-room.

Blessing her lucky stars that she had escaped detection, lady Jacintha rose from her uneasy posture; and perceiving that day was breaking, hurried to her chamber, satisfied in her own mind that she had interrupted an assignation with the count del Montarino, to whom the glances of the countess were so invariably and unequivocally directed, that it was evident to her there was a perfect understanding between them. But though lady Jacintha had failed to detect the criminality of her dear friend the countess, she determined the discovery should be made; for lady Torrington, by unfolding her intentions respecting lord Rushdale, had roused all the malignant passions of her bosom; and, to accomplish her own purposes, it was necessary to have the countess completely in her power, who, dreading the exposure of her guilt, would be compelled to forward any scheme she should lay down.

“The heart of Rushdale,” said lady Jacintha, “is yet free; or, if it has yielded to the siren Delmore, may be recovered. The task be mine,” said she, “to transform his goddess into an erring mortal. Be it my task, too, and that immediately, to unmask the haughty lady Torrington. Her dread of public exposure will make her a tool in my hands. Yes, yes, her reputation, once in my power, she will be glad to purchase my silence at the easy rate of pointing out to lord Rushdale the advantages that will result from an alliance with lady Jacintha Fitzosborne.”

CHAPTER II.

To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,
Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne'er, or rarely, been;
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold;
Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean;
This is not solitude, 'tis but to hold
Converse with nature's charms, and see her stores unroll'd.

But midst the crowds, the hum, the shock of men,
To hear, to see, to feel, and to possess,
And roam along, the world's tir'd denizen,
With none who bless us, none whom we can bless;
Minions of splendour, shrinking from distress!
None that with kindred consciousness endued,
If we were not, would seem to smile the less,
Of all that flatter'd, follow'd, sought, and sued;
This is to be alone—this—this is solitude! BYRON.

Reasons for not liking Catholics—Hints for composing a Sermon—A Declaration of Love.

WHEN disgusted with the world, Mrs. Doricourt formed the resolution of fixing her residence on St. Herbert's Island; her diseased and deeply-wounded mind believed, in that peaceful solitude, remote from other habitation, she should find solace for those rending sorrows, those cruel disappointments, that had almost driven reason from its seat; she fancied that, in contemplating and examining into the grand and beautiful works of the creation, in climbing to the steep summits of rocks, in wandering through waving woods, in listening to the melancholy lapse of streams, in viewing the glories of the rising and setting sun, her soul, released from the trammels of grief, would be elevated above earthly pursuits and passions, and that, resigning herself to the inspiration and guidance of religion, she should again be restored to the enjoyment of tranquillity.

But how fallacious are such hopes! in employment, in active pursuits, the mind can alone hope to detach itself from sorrow; by flying to solitude, Mrs. Doricourt deceived herself; the summer, with its warbling birds, its sunny skies, its emerald groves, and odour-breathing flowers, brought painful recollections of those lovely halcyon days, when she believed herself the sovereign of Henry Woodville's affections, when she had wandered with him through the romantic groves of Richmond Villa, and fancied that his truth and her happiness were unfading. The winds of autumn, scattering the leaves, and blighting the silken flowers, renewed on her brain the agonizing remembrance of the perfidy that had so cruelly withered her hopes; and the dark convolving clouds of winter,

the naked trees, shivering beneath the fury of the howling tempest, presented a faithful picture of her heart, desolated by treachery and ingratitude.

In unfolding and cultivating the talents of Cecilia Delmore, Mrs. Doricourt found some relief from mental torture; her quick perceptions and endearing manners made the task of tuition every day less irksome; by degrees it became delightful, for the sensibility, the gratitude, and the tenderness of the lovely orphan, repelled and conquered the misanthropic feelings, that were hastening to deform a noble and truly-benevolent heart, and taught her there was yet a being who could awaken her affections and solicitude, and reconcile her to the world.

It was not till the arrival of the earl of Torrington recalled Miss Delmore to the castle, that Mrs. Doricourt reflected their separation might be for months—perhaps for ever—that she again became sensible of her lonely situation, of the absolute solitude in which she lived.

The morning came, but Cecilia no longer drew back her curtain, and with a countenance bright with smiles, and glowing in beauty, met her eyes—Cecilia no longer sat at the head of the table, to carve, or persuade her to eat the delicacies she selected—Cecilia's song no longer awoke the echo of the rock—she was no more the companion of her evening ramble, on the margin of the lake—within the house all was mournful silence, for Cecilia's fingers no longer swept the harp, and without all was gloom and solitude.

While Mrs. Doricourt wept the loss of the lovely girl, whose buoyant spirits, and animated conversation, had prevented the wish for other society, and banished the idea of loneliness, a feeling of jealousy mingled with the bitterness of grief; for in this visit to the castle, this introduction to strangers, she dreaded a forgetfulness, if not an estrangement of the heart of Cecilia—she foresaw a division of that tender affection, which, till the present period, had been exclusively her own.

Sunk in these unpleasant reflections and forebodings, Mrs. Doricourt had wasted four days; on the fifth the earl of Torrington's letter was delivered to her. It did not surprise, for it was a compliment she had expected. The request to pay his personal respects was made in polite and flattering terms; and while she hesitated whether she would receive or decline the earl's visit, another letter from Cecilia, informing her of the strange effect the song and mention of Miss Saville had produced on lord Torrington, brought Mrs. Doricourt to a decision. From the earl she might obtain a clue to discover her early friend, whose fate still remained wrapped in such mystery, that she had never been able to ascertain whether she was living or dead. Besides, her darling Cecilia informed her, that if she consented to receive the earl, she was to accompany him to the Hermitage.

These considerations fixed the wavering resolves of Mrs. Doricourt, and she hastened to accord, by the earl's messenger, the permission he requested. Cecilia was informed by a letter to herself, that Mrs. Doricourt expected their visit, which was afterwards confirmed by the earl, who very politely referred the hour of their setting off for St. Herbert's Island to herself.

In the drawing-room their intended excursion to the Hermitage being mentioned by the earl, lady Welford again reminded Miss Delmore of her request respecting the renewal of her acquaintance with Mrs. Doricourt.

Sir Cyril Musgrove, to whom Cecilia's beauty was every hour more attractive, and who cherished the profligate hope of obtaining her, whenever he chose to make the agreeable in earnest, observed, that an introduction to the "Lady of the Lake," the epithet by which he designated Mrs. Doricourt, was the thing of all others he most desired.— "But then," said he, "I understand there is no landing on her enchanted island, or approaching her crystal palace, without going through certain examinations and tedious ceremonies; and then the difficulty of obtaining an audience is increased by the discouraging circumstance of her hating men; though, 'pon my honour," conceitedly surveying his person, "I can scarcely credit that report, it is so extraordinary, so immensely singular."

"What is singular?" asked the honourable Tangent Drawley, as if newly awakened from a trance, "what is singular?"

"That you have spoken twice within the last half hour," replied sir Middleton Maxfield.

"You prodigiously increase the consequence of my speeches," returned Drawley, "by noting the periods when they were uttered."

He then resumed his recumbent attitude, and with his eyes half shut, appeared to detach himself from the conversation. Sir Cyril Musgrove observing him fold his arms, and drop his eyelids, with the affectation of languor, laughed aloud—"Poor Drawley!" said he, "I really feel for you; the length of your last speech must have tired you prodigiously, and the arranging of your ideas must have been an immense exertion."

"Pray, Miss Delmore," asked lady Jacintha Fitsosborne, "is it true that Mrs. Doricourt has cut off her hair, and dresses in the exact costume of a nun?"

"No, madam," was the reply.

"But she always dresses in black, and she is a Catholic—is she not?" demanded lady Eglantine Sydney.

Cecilia's answer was confined to a simple affirmative, for she was displeased to be questioned on any point relative to her friend, by persons incapable of appreciating her worth.

"Dear me, a Roman Catholic!" exclaimed Miss Maxfield; "only think of that! Well, I am sure I should not have liked to live with her, as you did, Miss Delmore, on that desolate island."

Cecilia smiled, with the grateful remembrance of the uninterrupted happiness she had enjoyed while living with Mrs. Doricourt, and was on the point of removing Miss Maxfield's prejudice against Catholics, by expatiating on the accomplishments and virtues of her respected friend, when she was prevented by lord Wilton asking Miss Maxfield why she supposed she should not like to reside with Mrs. Doricourt?

"Why, because you know," replied Miss Maxfield, "all Roman Catholics fast Wednesdays and Fridays, and I don't know how many days besides in the year; and then they wear horse-hair next their skins, and beat themselves with cords tied all over in knots."

"I don't wonder, Miss Maxfield," said sir Cyril, with an air of grave acquiescence in her opinion, "that your delicacy shrinks from the severity of such frequent fasts, and the barbarity of such cruel castigations."

"But as long as you were not made to fast," said lady Welford, "and were not beat with knotted cords, what difference could it possibly make to you?"

“Why be—because—indeed I don’t know,” returned Miss Maxfield; “but I am quite sure I should not like to live in the same house with a Roman Catholic, for I have heard they are very savage inhuman people; and I read in some book, when I was at school, I have forgot the name of it, that the Catholics made a great large bonfire, and burnt ever so many bishops, and little infants, and I have always been sadly afraid of Catholics ever since.”

“A very shrewd reason indeed!” observed colonel St. Irwin; “and on the same principle, Miss Maxfield, no doubt you dislike soldiers, and are afraid of them, because they have performed their duty, by destroying the enemies of their country.”

“Dear me, no!” replied Miss Maxfield, “that is quite another thing. I am very fond of the army, I assure you; there is nothing I admire so much as a scarlet coat and gold epaulets, and the plume and the cockade; la! they make a gentleman look so handsome and so grand! besides, we ought to like soldiers, because of the reviews, and the balls, and the public breakfast, that the officers give.”

“And is the regimental coat, the pageantry of a review, the fopperies of a public breakfast and a ball,” asked the colonel, in a tone of mingled asperity and contempt, “all that recommends a soldier to your favour, Miss Maxfield?”

“Why, la! yes, to be sure,” replied the young lady; “and is not that enough?”

“Oh, certainly, quite enough,” said the colonel, “for so young a mind as yours.”

The strong emphasis laid by the colonel on the words—“*young a mind as yours,*” tingled in the ears of Mrs. Freakley.—“Jemima is quite a child of nature,” observed she, “and speaks exactly as she thinks upon every subject, and that, you know, colonel, must be expected from a mind so artless and ingenuous; and you must allow it is quite natural, at her age, to be pleased with every thing that appears gay, and promises pleasure.”

“In explaining Jemima’s feelings, aunt,” said sir Middleton Maxfield, “you have, no doubt, defined the sentiments of the sex in general: they all love scarlet coats, fine sights, and gay amusements.” Then turning to the reverend Mr. Oxley, he asked when they were to have the pleasure of witnessing his *débüt* in Cumberland?

The word *débüt*, approximating, in the divine’s opinion, with a theatrical first appearance, was extremely offensive to his consequence; but smothering his displeasure, with great solemnity he replied—“I have the honour to inform you, sir Middleton Maxfield, that the village church having undergone the necessary repairs, I venture to flatter myself with the gratification of seeing the present company assembled there next Sunday morning, to hear a sermon I have prepared for the occasion, on sound orthodox principles.”

“It is a principle with me,” said lord Wilton, “to follow the example of the ladies; if they take their morning lounge at church, I shall be found in their suit. I beg to premise, Mr. Oxley, that I expect to hear a sermon, not a lecture, for I have heard of divines who constantly make their sermons vehicles to vent their own private dislikes and resentments, to the annoyance rather than the edification of their congregation.”

“Well observed,” rejoined sir Cyril Musgrove; “and I trust, Mr. Oxley, that you will not, as some clergymen do, interlard your sermon with scraps of Latin, merely to shew your learning, for, ’pon my soul, I have entirely forgotten my college exercises, and I fancy there will be but few of your congregation able to translate those brilliant quotations, particularly the ladies, who will, no doubt, form the major part of the *assemblée*.”

“No,” replied lady Torrington; “a quotation from Tasso, Petrarch, or Ariosto, would be better understood by us. But, of all things, Mr. Oxley, let me entreat you to keep clear of personality.”

“Oh yes, for Heaven’s sake!” rejoined lady Jacintha, “remember that injunction—no personality; let us and our follies alone—stick to divinity, Mr. Oxley, but do not presume to commence censor.”

“And pray don’t let your sermon touch upon novel-writers or novel-readers,” said lady Eglantine; “for I am passionately fond of works of that description, and should positively expire of ennui, but for the entertainment I derive from novels.”

“And I am persuaded,” observed lady Welford, “that a well-written novel, while it amuses the mind, conveys more improvement to the heart than a hodge-podge sermon, garnished with Greek and Latin, from the lips of a pragmatic conceited parson.”

“Your ladyship speaks my opinion exactly,” said sir Cyril Musgrove; “I do not affect to despise novels—I always read a page or two while my hair is dressing.”

The reverend gentleman did not relish this conversation; but the rank of the speakers operated like a charm, and prevented any ebullition of his resentment; and in reply to an empty compliment of Mrs. Freakley’s on his mental endowments and oratorical powers, he expressed the hope that he should produce a sermon that would give general satisfaction.

Since the earl of Torrington’s heart had been released from the witcheries of beauty, his reason and understanding had found leisure to examine persons and things, that had passed entirely unnoticed while he was under the dominion of love; among others, the reverend Mr. Oxley, whom he had received as a tutor for his son, from the recommendation of a friend, had come under his observation, and he had found him pedantic, superficial, conceited, and intolerably proud; he now remarked, that with vanity unbecoming his cloth, he wished to impress them with a high opinion of the merits of his intended sermon; and, with a look and tone calculated to damp his arrogance, he addressed him.—“Prepare such a sermon, sir, as Christianity dictates; remember, as a minister of the gospel, it is your duty to warn and admonish the wicked, to inform the ignorant, and support the weak; let it be so worded, that the meanest capacity may understand it, for it is scriptural truths, not the flowers of rhetoric, that should be delivered from the pulpit; let your doctrine prove that you are no respecter of persons. I should be shocked to hear the gospel preached by a servile time-server, who, to preserve the goodwill of men, would subvert the important doctrine of religion.”

This speech of the earl’s seemed to disconcert most of the company. The countess placed herself, with an air of graceful negligence, on a sofa, and having drawn a circle round her, desired the count del Montarino to fan her, protesting that Oxley’s conceit, and the earl’s solemnity, had overcome her.—“Churches and sermons,” said the countess, “ought only to be mentioned on Sundays; an hour or two, once a-week, is, in my opinion, quite sufficient to wear a grave face and be doleful in.”

The count del Montarino complimented her ladyship’s charming vivacity; his was a mind sunk in sensuality, devoted to vicious pursuits, and insensible of the blessings and comforts diffused by religion; the present life and its enjoyments were all he considered worthy of thought; the contemplation of a world to come he left to those whom age or infirmity rendered incapable of entering into, what he called, scenes of delight. But while surrounded by all the pleasures most consonant with his gross libertine ideas, he was

aware of the possibility of seeing them, “like the baseless fabric of a vision,” pass away, and perceived the necessity of striking out some bold plan, that might place him beyond the apprehension of poverty; the large fortune of Miss Maxfield was not only extremely desirable, but absolutely necessary to him, who was now entirely subsisting on the caprice of a woman, that woman one of the weakest and vainest of her sex, who, possessing an ample share of all their fickleness, might suddenly entertain a *tendresse* for another, and cast him off, destitute of resources. Could he accomplish a marriage with Miss Maxfield, her fortune would render him independent of unpleasant contingencies; it was true, she was not very far removed from idiotism, but her deficiency of sense was greatly in his favour, as was her egregious vanity and impatience for a lover.

The count had made such accurate observations on the understanding and disposition of Miss Maxfield, as convinced him that her discretion would offer but slight opposition to his scheme of an elopement. Having seen Mrs. Freakley deeply engaged with the countess and lady Jacintha, in an important dispute respecting the dress of a lady at a recent masquerade, he contrived to draw Miss Maxfield to a window, under pretence of shewing her the polar star.

Miss Maxfield said it was very bright, but could not think, for her part, how any body could find that star in particular, among so many others, all shining so bright and beautiful.

The count gently pressed her unreluctant hand, and vowed the lustre of her brilliant eyes outsparkled all the stars.

Miss Maxfield simpered, and said, she believed he flattered her.

The count laid his hand on his heart, and protested his sincerity.

Miss Maxfield thought him much handsomer than the honourable Mr. Drawley, who never had spoken a word in praise of her beauty, though she had teased him incessantly.

The count perceived he had made an impression on her vanity, and pursuing his advantage, complimented her blue eyes and flaxen hair, and sighed and vowed he was expiring for love of her, till the silly girl was won by his flattery to promise that she would meet him at sunrise the following morning.

Secure of his conquest, the count cautioned her to be secret; and having compared her to all the goddesses he could think of, he suggested the possibility of their being observed, and the propriety of their separating, to which she very unwillingly subscribed.

The countess of Torrington being made sensible of the count del Montarino’s want of cash, and having listened with the utmost composure to his intention of engaging sir Middleton Maxfield and sir Cyril Musgrove at some game of chance, where his skill in shuffling the cards would ensure him success, supplied him with a more sparing hand than usual, at the same time observing, that the earl’s increasing parsimony made it horribly disagreeable, and indeed a dreadful task, to introduce the subject of money to him—“And, really, my dear count,” added she, “I have at this very time several pressing demands from tradesmen, which, coming to my lord’s ears, would inevitably draw upon me his severest philippics, from the horror of which I should not recover for a month—and I am sure I need not tell you his capability in that way.”

The count’s suspicions were raised; he fancied he saw in her manner, and the small sum she had given him, a visible decrease of that vehement love that she had so often vowed would never know abatement.

The count was neither surprised nor hurt at this change; he was not in love, and he had before experienced the inconstancy of woman. His thoughts, his hopes, now centered in Jemima Maxfield, and making himself master of her fortune—that point secured, he could laugh at the countess, and, by absolute indifference, prove that her affection was of no consequence.

The count del Montarino was not altogether wrong in his suspicions; the vain erring lady Torrington beheld the count in a different light in England to what she had considered him in Italy. She began to grow weary of him; other men were handsomer and much more agreeable; besides, he was a terrible tax upon her purse. He had often talked of selling an estate he possessed near Naples, and repaying her the various sums she had lent him; but, latterly, she had heard no mention of this estate, and began to believe that he had no possessions whatever; his demands on her purse she found it very inconvenient to answer; he was growing ugly, rude, and disagreeable; in short, the honourable Tangent Drawley was much more elegant and fashionable, and his present singular insensibility was a stimulus strongly urging her to try whether her charms would not make him try the *agréable*, for she thought it a great pity so fine a young man should adopt insensibility, and wish to make it fashionable.

Miss Maxfield had indeed been at some pains to animate the statue; but Drawley had not thought proper to hear or regard the child of nature—it required beauty more attractive, manners more refined, and understanding of a higher standard, than Jemima possessed, to allure the honourable Tangent Drawley to a new pursuit—him, whose idol was fashion, whose greatest ambition was to be thought singular.

The natural politeness of lord Rushdale had led him to pay such polite attention to lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, as he conceived due to his mother's guest; but, beyond this, his thoughts had never glanced. There was, in lady Jacintha, an obtrusive desire to be considered a wit, which often prompted her to elicit brilliancies, at the expence of good manners and delicacy. An assuming confident character was not likely to conciliate the esteem of the sentimental Oscar, whose refined ideas of feminine softness and propriety made him shrink in disgust from the undaunted eye, the unblushing cheek, and decided tone of lady Jacintha, who flattered herself with dazzling the young enthusiast with her wit, and throwing over his heart fetters forged by beauty, and polished by fashion.

The few evenings they were together in town, he had listened to her volubility with astonishment, which she mistook for admiration—he had gazed on her with wonder at the confidence of her manner, and her vanity converted his surprise into love.

During their journey into Cumberland he had been attentive to her, because she must, but for him, have been neglected. Lord Melvil had neither hands or eyes but for lady Eglantine Sydney—sir Cyril Musgrove appeared only solicitous for his own ease and accommodation—the earl of Torrington was wrapped in discontent, and noticed no one—the count del Montarino devoted himself to divert the chagrin of the countess, who, during the journey, talked incessantly of the delights she had left behind in Italy, and of the dreadful *ennui* she was certain she should endure in a gloomy old castle, deprived of the pleasure of the enchanting *conversazione* that had made her evenings glide away so pleasantly at Naples.

Every gentleman of the party having a particular object of attention, lady Jacintha would have been left to her own reflections, but for lord Rushdale, who constrained himself to entertain her, and beguile the length of the way.

But while lady Jacintha deceived herself with the belief that she had inspired the elegant Rushdale with a tender passion, she considered what the countess his mother had said respecting an union with lady Arabella Moncrief, as an obstacle thrown in the way of her wishes, that required no common skill and management to get over. She had, more than once, heard the earl of Torrington express sentiments in favour of marriages brought about by mutual affection; and from these sentiments she was convinced, that having once secured the son's affection, she should have nothing to apprehend from the opposition of the father. Lady Torrington, artful, scheming, proud, and ambitious, was much more difficult to be won.

The family of the duke of Aberdeen was more ancient, and ranked higher than hers; and the fortune of lady Arabella was known to be very large; these were obstacles of magnitude, sufficient to puzzle the Machiavelian brain of lady Jacintha, and keep her thoughts in a state of uneasiness. But when next under the hands of Mrs. Garnett, her *femme-de-chambre*, from some hints dropped by that loquacious gentlewoman, her fertile genius felt a project "peering on her brain," the accomplishment of which would place the countess so completely in her power, as to leave her no alternative between an absolute agreement with her wishes, and an irrevocable promise to promote, with all her powers, her marriage with lord Rushdale, or public exposure.

"My dear friend, the countess of Torrington, shall aid my plans, or let her beware my revenge!" said lady Jacintha, mentally, while she considered the compulsory measures she intended to pursue; "she is yet to learn, perhaps, that modern vocabularies explain the word attachment, convenience; and really, when it is remembered that the earl of Torrington's father was a bankrupt banker, and the countess the daughter of a petty apothecary, they may think themselves honoured by an alliance with lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, whose family has never yet known the disgrace of a plebeian marriage. And how do you like Torrington Castle, Miss Garnett?" asked lady Jacintha, while that paragon of slip-slops turned her ladyship's glossy ringlets over her short thick fingers.

"Why is it a fine Gothric specimen of anticrity, to be sure, my lady," replied the waiting gentlewoman; "but I can't say that it shutes my taste; give me Brighton or Weymouth in performance to this Cumberland exression. For my part, my lady, I think all the earl's people as we found here at the castle, like nothing in the world but Gorths and Vandelters: why they stared at us fashernable folks gist as if we were mounterbacks or rareeshews. And then this Miss Milman, the housekeeper, she gives herself sitch hairs—though I have heard," tossing her head disdainfully, "that she is no better than she should be; yet, for all that, my lady, I purtest she is as proud as the old gentleman."

"What old gentleman?" asked lady Jacintha; "do you mean the earl?"

"The earl!" repeated Mrs. Garnett; "dear me, my lady! no, not the earl—I meant the devil; though, if I was to take the liberty to speak my mind, I might say that he—But I would not for the world be so undiscrit, to speak in that there way of my betters; and nobody can say that ever I was ill-mannerdly, or at all given to hannivert, or speak opinions about hanny body."

"But when you have my permissions to speak, Mrs. Garnett," said lady Jacintha, "that is quite another thing, you know; and really your accounts are very clever and correct, and your descriptions of these odd bodies so extremely entertaining, that I am quite amused. And so you don't like Mrs. Milman?"

“Not at all,” replied Mrs. Garnett, delighted with the encouragement given to her idle reports, “not a bit; she is as proud and as purcise as if she had never stepped awry; and people do say, that Miss Delmore, as they call her, is her own natural daughter by the earl. Why, would you believe it, my lady, the stuck-up thing does not remit any of us to her parlour, with the deception of Mrs. Peters, lady Welford’s woman! and she is an ugly old maid, and a methody into the bargain.”

“Well, but you have a parlour to yourselves, I suppose?” said lady Jacintha.

“Oh, certainly, to be sure, my lady; the Hottenpots could not treat us so hill has to turn us like wild beastes altogether into the servants’ hall. But then you know, my lady, it would have been wastly pleasant to sit with the earl’s people, and hear little droll nanecdotes.”

“Very true,” said lady Jacintha, with an ironical smile; “for if it was not for intelligence picked up by the servants and their embellished communications, the affairs of families would never find their way into the world. But tell me, my good Garnett, do you never hear any hints dropped, and little observations made, upon this Italian count?”

“Dear me! yes, my lady, a great deal; but then, as you are very detached to the countess, you would be very angry.”

But here Mrs. Garnett was mistaken, for it was on her dear friend's indiscretion with the count lady Jacintha's hope of success in her own scheme hung, and she eagerly replied—“Not at all, Mrs. Garnett, for if my friends act imprudently, it can attach no blame to me. Thank Heaven! I am not to answer for their misconduct.”

“So I said, my lady,” resumed the talkative abigail—“so I said; and, says I, if the countess of Torrington has a little *crim. con.* with this here Nipoliter count, why my lady is not to be concluded in their armour; my lady’s virtue is not to be inspected, though Mr. Simkins, sir Cyril Musgrove’s gentleman, had the howdaciousness to assinate, that ‘birds of a feather always flock together.’”

In the earnest desire to murder the reputation of her friend, lady Jacintha passed over the impertinence of a remark levelled at herself, and impatiently asked—“Do the servants then really believe, Garnett, that there is any thing criminal in the intimacy of lady Torrington and the count del Montarino?”

“Dear me,” returned Mrs. Garnett, in a half-crying tone, “I hope your ladyship is not angry with me for exporting other people’s opinions! I am sure I am vexed to the heart to think I should have been reduced to hutter a sinable.”

“You mistake me, Garnett,” interrupted lady Jacintha; “I am not angry with you; on the contrary, I beg you will tell me, without reserve, all you have heard of this affair.”

“Oh, certainly, my lady,” said Garnett, dropping the whining tone, “and to be sure it is nothing but propriety, as I told lady Eglantine Sydney’s woman, that our virtuous ladies should be told all about it, for fear that karacters should suffer; and I devised Mrs. Painter to deform lady Eglantine, by reason I thought it was fit she should know all about it.”

“Of course then,” replied lady Jacintha, “it is proper I should be informed also; and I beg, Mrs. Garnett, that you will be quick, and tell me all you have heard, for I am absolutely dying with curiosity.”

“Well, my lady,” resumed Garnett, “the count’s gentleman swears that his master is not worth a foot of land, and that he has not a penny of his own in the world.”

“Indeed!” said lady Jacintha, in an inward voice. “If this account be correct——”

Mrs. Garnett only caught the last word, to which she eagerly replied—"Oh, no, my lady; the count dares not correct him, for he owes mounseer a power of money, and mounseer is deep in all his secrets."

"But what of the countess?" asked lady Jacintha.

"Why, my lady," replied the communicative Mrs. Garnett—"Mounseer does not sophisticate at all about her, for he plainly sinuates that the count is quite tired of lady Torrington, and cares no more for her now than he does for his grannum, only for the sake of her money, which he draws upon as freely as if he was her husband."

"Well, dear Garnett, and what more does his valet say?" demanded lady Jacintha, her eyes sparkling with malicious pleasure.

"Why, mounseer says, my lady, when they were abroad at that there places—Aples, I think he called it, the earl and countess had extinct apartments."

This required a pause to make it clear to the comprehension of lady Jacintha, who, though accustomed to the phraseology of Mrs. Garnett, was at a loss for a moment to understand her "extinct apartments." At length her apprehension was clear, and, with a smile of encouragement, she said—"Separate apartments!"

"Yes, my lady, separate apartments," continued Mrs. Garnett; "and mounseer says, it is all the same here; and what is that for? mounseer winks his eye, and laughs, and puts his finger aside his nose, and purtests, if the earl wishes a disvorse, he can furbish him with surficient proofs of her ladyship's fidelity."

"So, so; this may be turned to good account," said lady Jacintha.

"Yes, my lady," resumed the waiting-gentlewoman. "Mr. Tripton, lord Wilton's gentleman, says the earl would be monstrous glad to get a disvorce, on account of his being over head and ears in love with Miss Delmore."

"What, do they suspect that the earl is in love with Miss Delmore?" asked lady Jacintha.

"Oh dear me, yes, my lady! and all the gentlemen, is seems, are gist wild about her," said Mrs. Garnett, with a disdainful toss of her head; "though, for my part, I can see nothing so exturnary in her; but then Mr. Simkin says, and he ought to know, for he was a driveller once, and used to write for the lawyers, that it would be incesterous for the earl to think of marrying Miss Delmore, because it is inspected that she is his own flesh and blood."

"And is it really believed," asked lady Jacintha, "that Miss Delmore is the earl's daughter?"

"Not ginerally, my lady," replied Garnett. "There is a decision in our parlour on that subject; one party desists that she is no relation to the earl, and that he gives discouragement to lord Rushdale, which would not be the case if there was hany definity between them."

"Lord Rushdale!" exclaimed lady Jacintha; "what are you talking about, Garnett?"

"Why, my lady, it is exported in our parlour that lord Rushdale pays Miss Delmore the most prodigious retention and disrespect, and that he will certainly marry her."

Lady Jacintha pushed the officious waiting-maid from her, and in a voice almost shrieking, repeated—"Marry her! Lord Rushdale marry that minx! Garnett, you are raving mad! What could have put so peposterous an idea into your head?"

“Indeed, my lady,” returned Mrs. Garnett, “it is all the talk at our table, that lord Rushdale is infiriently in love with Miss Delmore.”

“Can this be possible?” said lady Jacintha. “But no; I will never believe he can be such a fool.”

“Ay, so I said, my lady,” resumed Mrs. Garnett; “but my mouth was stopped by sir Cyril Musgrove’s gentleman, who read a paper that one of the housemaids had found, crumpled up in lord Rushdale’s room, all over rhymes, about stars, and flowers, and divine Cecilia.”

“Who could have believed,” said lady Jacintha, “that lord Rushdale would have been guilty of such egregious folly! write verses,” continued she, with evident vexation, “to expose his debasing infatuation!”

“So I said, my lady,” responded Mrs. Garnett; “I said he was a great fool to write verses about a low-lived person, as had no inventions to gintility, and one who was unsufferable proud already, without having her head filled with sitch nodamontade stuff. But I assure you, when I was gist speaking my mind, as we was fetching a walk yesterday, Mr. Moreton, my lord Rushdale’s gentleman, tooked me up as sharp as a needle, and said forsooth, that the earl of Torrington would be monstrous defended, if hany person spoke a word respectful of Miss Delmore, and that he wished, from the bottom of his heart, when lord Rushdale married, he might have a wife as beautiful, and as virtuous, and as sensible, and as—I can’t remember half what besides, as Miss Delmore, who was an accomplice good enough for an empress.”

Lady Jacintha had now heard more than she wished, and in no very amiable temper she dismissed her attendant, with strict injunctions not to tell any one that she had dropped a hint to her respecting the suspected amour of the countess of Torrington and the count del Montarino. When the door of her dressing-room closed on the communicative Mrs. Garnett, lady Jacintha sat some time approving and rejecting schemes for detecting her dear friend’s amour, that having her reputation completely at her mercy, she might compel her, in spite of former arrangements of interest and ambition, to promote her designs on lord Rushdale, to whose elegant person she was far from indifferent, and whose immense wealth was of the utmost consequence to her, whom the narrow fortunes of her illustrious house constrained to look out for a husband whose possessions would support her rank, and indulge her desire of extravagant expenditure. If lord Rushdale really felt a passion for Cecilia, it would be an additional difficulty in her way; and to prevent the possibility of any transient liking expanding into love, now became a grand object in her scheme. The countess of Torrington had rejected the idea of her son attaching himself to Cecilia Delmore as ridiculous; but though her ladyship treated the notion with contempt, the earl might perhaps be inclined to treat it more seriously; and she resolved to make use of every art to alarm his pride, and, if possible, get this sorceress, who was inveigling the hearts of all the men, banished to St. Herbert’s Island, where, as she understood Mrs. Doricourt received no company, it was very unlikely that lord Rushdale and she would meet again while he remained in Cumberland; and when he was no longer within the circle of her enchantments, she would trust to the various amusements of London, the engagements of fashionable life, and her own attractions, to detach his mind from a silly passion, inspired by a low-born creature.

Among all the gentlemen at Torrington Castle, Miss Delmore saw none so handsome, so elegant, and graceful, as lord Rushdale. Sir Cyril Musgrove's person was shewy, and his teeth remarkably even and white, but he was a finished coxcomb, and so presuming, that he fancied he inspired a tender passion in the bosom of every female he met. Lord Wilton was a little man, with high cheek-bones, sunk eyes, and a very sallow complexion: he was a freethinker, and, like sir Middleton Maxfield, fond of gambling and the turf. The honourable Tangent Drawley was remarkably handsome, and so remarkable for courting notoriety, that it was doubtful in the fashionable world, whether he was most a fool or a madman. Colonel St. Irwin was a brave officer, who had *done the state some service*; his form was dignified, and his countenance expressive of good sense; his address was polite, and his manners gentlemanly, but he was many years the senior of lord Rushdale, and wanted those attractions, those nameless graces, that hover in smiles round the lips, and shed irresistible beauty on the actions of youth.

Cecilia thought, had her rank in life been equal to lord Rushdale's, she could have preferred him to all mankind; and at this thought a sigh would rise, and a wish, that she suppressed as soon as it was formed. She saw the immense distance between them, and wisely determined to think of him and his perfections as little as possible, and to carefully guard her heart from encouraging romantic desires, that there could be no hope of realizing.

But while Cecilia fortified her mind against visionary expectations of future elevation, Mrs. Milman, far less prudent, had carefully picked up the hints thrown out by the servants; she flattered herself with the probability of her niece's great beauty, and still greater accomplishments, raising her to rank; she saw, with a satisfaction that increased her own consequence in her own opinion, the influence Cecilia had, in the few days of their acquaintance, gained over the earl; and though she had reason to believe he was excessively proud, yet she also knew from experience that he was very generous, and that he loved his son beyond any thing on earth—"And if this darling son, this only child's happiness," said Mrs. Milman, debating the affair with herself, "depends on his marrying Cecilia Delmore, why to a certainty the earl will never let him pine away to a skeleton, and die for love. No, no; he could never be so cruel; he would give his consent, and I shall, no doubt, see my niece lady Rushdale; and then I know her first care would be to provide handsomely for me; I should have a neat house, keep a footman, and ride in my own gig at last."

But while these chimerical plans had the effect of exhilarating the spirits of Mrs. Milman, and keeping her in perfect good-humour, Mr. Wilson saw the castles he had built melting into air. In the first place, Mr. Oxley was so insinuating, and so artful, and so adulative to the earl and his son, that he saw, with inexpressible envy and mortification, all the livings in the earl's gift disposed of to him; and after his having, at a very great expence, educated his nephew, Solomon Scroggins, to fill these very livings, to be obliged to resign his long-cherished hopes, and seek about for another patron for him, was a circumstance disappointing and vexatious in the extreme: and then Cecilia, whom he had even from her cradle fixed upon for his nephew's wife, she was so surrounded by fops of rank, that it was next to impossible that he should ever see his wishes accomplished, though he was still persuaded they were exactly the pair that ought to come together; and if he could bring himself to mention his designs to the earl, he might be mortified with finding that he had other views for her, and he should only be

more hurt to have his proposals scornfully rejected.—“Ay, ay,” said Wilson, “*delays are dangerous;*’ this is the way; this comes of procrastination, of ‘*putting off till to-morrow what may be done to-day.*’ I remember, when I was a young man, I might have married a very pretty agreeable girl, with a tolerable fortune; but while I stood shilly-shally, and delayed speaking my mind, egad! another suitor, with more assurance than Pill-Garlic, put the question, was accepted, went to church off hand, and left me a solitary bachelor to lament my own diffidence; and this Mr. Oxley, this prig of a parson, now I warrant his bashfulness will be no sort of impediment in the way of his preferment—I warrant he will lose nothing for want of asking. I have a good mind to go and open my mind to the earl at once.” But, unfortunately, the earl was gone to Keswick, and Mr. Wilson was again obliged to postpone declaring the plan he had formed for the happiness of Cecilia and his nephew Solomon, neither of whom were acquainted with his designs, or knew each other but by name.

Cecilia’s impatience to see Mrs. Doricourt had roused her at daybreak; and in order to be ready to attend the earl immediately after breakfast, she deserted her pillow before her usual hour; but finding it would still be long before the earl left his chamber, she finished her toilet, and descended to the library, to beguile the time with a book. Having read a few pages, she opened her drawing-box, and prepared to finish a picture, on which she had already bestowed uncommon pains.

The library windows faced a plantation of evergreens, and other ornamental trees, through which serpentine walks were cut to a grotto, ornamented in the interior with a beautiful representation, sculptured in white marble, of the goddess Amphitrite, reclining on the backs of two dolphins, who, as if proud of bearing their beauteous mistress, sportively spouted two streams of pellucid water into a polished bason, elegantly bordered with Egyptian lotus and other aquatic plants.

Seated near the window, Cecilia had been some time busily employed in giving the last touches to a miniature of lord Rushdale, which, unconscious of the partiality her young heart entertained for him, she had painted from memory, as she believed merely to give Mrs. Doricourt an idea of his interesting countenance, and the beautiful intelligence of his deep blue eyes, shaded by long dark fringes.—“No,” said Cecilia, holding up the ivory in a proper light for judging the accuracy of the likeness, “no; those charming eyes of his are not to be expressed by any art of the pencil. How provoking! I may imitate their form and their colour, but I cannot give them their brilliant light, their melting softness.” Dissatisfied with her work, she gave it a few more touches; then, throwing aside the pencil, exclaimed—“It is a fruitless attempt; I might as well try to paint the splendid blue of heaven;” and as her eyes glanced from the sky to the opposite plantation, to her utter astonishment she beheld Miss Maxfield emerge from the shade of the trees, her white morning dress soiled, and wet nearly half way up the skirt, and her hair hanging in strings from beneath her bonnet.

Perceiving Cecilia at the open window, which she was obliged to pass, she walked in, regardless of the disordered state of her dress; and throwing herself on a seat, exclaimed—“La! Miss Delmore, who could have thought of meeting you here! You can’t think how tired I am! Well, dear me, I never knew that you was such an early riser before! Gracious! now do but look how wet my boots are! aunt would talk enough about my catching cold, if she saw the condition I am in. I suppose, Miss Delmore, you got up so soon this morning to meet your lover. La me! you need not blush so if you did,”

smiling and nodding her head. "I am no tell-tale—I never blab; I can keep a secret, I promise you—I have been trusted with many secrets; you need not be afraid of me."

"As I have no secret to keep, Miss Maxfield," replied Cecilia, gravely, "I have no occasion to be afraid of your divulging it. But may I take the liberty of asking where you have been at this early hour of the morning, and how you got in that wet and dirty condition?"

"I have been to the grotto," replied Miss Maxfield; "and as to my wet and dirty condition, la! bless you, Miss Delmore! why that is only dew, that I have swept from the grass."

Cecilia wished to ask if she had been to the grotto alone, but delicacy forbade the question.

"You have no notion," resumed Miss Maxfield, "how pleasant it is to take a walk so early in the morning; the little birds warbling so beautiful, and the roses and honeysuckles smelling so sweet! I could have staid out a great while longer, only I was so wet and so tired; it was so agreeable, you have no notion. Did you ever see the sun rise, Miss Delmore?"

"Frequently," replied Cecilia.

"La! have you? well, only think of that! You must have got up very early then," said Miss Maxfield. "I always hated to get up early, because I was so sleepy; but I shall try to get over that, for I should like to see the sun rise again; it looked like a wheel all fire, turning round and round; and then an early walk is so delightful you can't think!"

But Cecilia did think, and felt ashamed and sorry for the silly girl before her, for at that moment she caught a glimpse of the count del Montarino, stealing cautiously towards a gate that opened on a green lane that led to the stables. Cecilia blushed for the imprudence of Miss Maxfield, who had so incautiously placed her reputation in the power of a man who was but the acquaintance of yesterday. But while the scrupulous delicacy and timidity of Cecilia suggested all the train of disagreeable consequences that might, and would, in all probability, result to Miss Maxfield from her morning ramble, she felt it her duty to warn her of the danger she had so unthinkingly incurred.

But while she hesitated in what manner to introduce the unpleasant subject, and make the imprudence of her conduct clear to her very limited understanding, the child of nature rudely caught up the miniature from the table, from whence Cecilia, in her astonishment at seeing Miss Maxfield, and her subsequent discovery of the companion of her morning ramble, had forgotten to remove it.—"Well now, I am so glad," said Miss Maxfield, laughing, and grasping the picture—"I am so glad that I have found out your secret, Miss Delmore, for all you would not trust me."

"I have no secret, Miss Maxfield," replied Cecilia, "and I request you will restore the miniature."

"La! you need not look so serious about it," returned Miss Maxfield; "you shall have it presently, only let me look at it. I would not give a pinch of aunt Freakley's snuff for lord Rushdale's picture, for I think him a very proud, disagreeable young man, I declare, though it is as like him as can be; and I see, Miss Delmore, though you don't go a-walking of mornings, you get up to paint lord Rushdale's likeness, all out of your own head; and I am sure you must think a good deal about him, or you could never do it so well.—La! here is the little mole on his nose; never go to deny it, Miss Delmore. But if you did not love lord Rushdale, you could never paint such a good likeness of him."

This was an accusation Cecilia was unprepared to meet, and her deepening blushes might have looked suspicious in the eyes of less prejudiced judges than Miss Maxfield, had it not been acknowledged that there is a blush of innocence as well as of guilt. Cecilia did not believe she loved lord Rushdale; and in denying the accusation, she forgot the advice she designed giving her tormentor, who would not be talked out of the persuasion, that in painting his likeness, Cecilia had given a strong and incontrovertible proof of a tender partiality for lord Rushdale.”

“And if you are in love, how can you help it, you know?” said Jemima, attempting to look wise; “but you may be sure I wont tell a living soul about it. Bless you, I have been let into many love secrets before now! I used to read all the sweet pretty letters Miss Corbett had from ensign Digby of the Guards; and though he had nothing at all but his commission, he used to write that he despised her money, for all she had eighty thousand pounds for her fortune, and that all he wished or wanted was her beautiful self; and I am sure,” continued Miss Maxfield, “that was real true love, to despise such a fortune, and to think Fanny Corbett beautiful, when she squinted so bad you can’t think; but I never told a word about it till after she ran away from madame Chantillion’s, and was married.”

Cecilia vainly endeavoured to remove her error respecting lord Rushdale having inspired any thing like love in her bosom; but repeating—“You need not take the trouble to deny—I can keep a secret—you need not be afraid of me—I wont blab,” Miss Maxfield hurried from the library.

Cecilia wept for vexation, and her first impulse was to destroy the unlucky miniature, that had exposed her to suspicion and impertinence; but the likeness was excellent; the rich coral lips seemed to plead, and the deep blue eyes to implore for preservation. Her second thoughts determined her to shew it to the earl; and by candidly explaining for what purpose she had painted the resemblance, remove any impression that might otherwise be made by the communications of the silly Jemima, on whose secrecy, though so highly boasted, she placed no reliance. Having determined what line of conduct to pursue, she committed the miniature to her pocketbook. While replacing the paints and pencils in her drawing-box, the reverend Mr. Oxley entered the library. The compliments of the morning being reciprocally given, Cecilia would have withdrawn. Mr. Oxley sincerely hoped he had not the misfortune to disturb her; he protested, on the word of a man of honour, his intrusion was altogether unintentional, and that he should be quite hurt if his presence had the unpleasant effect of sending her from the library.

Cecilia replied she was on the point of quitting the room when he entered, and then, with a graceful bend, she moved towards the door.

Mr. Oxley had wished for an opportunity of speaking to Miss Delmore alone; the present was too favourable to be neglected. After many hems and bows, he begged she would indulge him with a few moments’ conversation.

Cecilia wondering what he could possibly have to say, took the seat he offered her.

Mr. Oxley seemed labouring with the importance of his subject, yet hesitated to begin. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead, raised up his collar, affectedly displayed the ring on his little finger, and with a loud hem, having cleared his throat, he at last, with much pomposity, said—“Miss Delmore, being possessed of much more discernment than falls to the share of females in general, you must, in spite of your great modesty, have perceived the very great admiration with which, from the period wherein I

had the pleasure of being introduced to your acquaintance, I have beheld you." The hems and pauses that accompanied this elaborate speech made it difficult for Cecilia to refrain from laughing in his face, though utterly unsuspecting of what was to follow—"and though my various learned pursuits, and serious avocations," resumed Mr. Oxley, "might reasonably have been supposed to guard, madam—to place a shield as it were before my heart, yet I think, Miss Delmore, you must have been aware—you must have observed the great impression your personal and mental graces, your amiable qualities, have made."

Cecilia felt confused; she had neither wished to inspire, or expected to hear, a declaration of love from the reverend gentleman. She looked towards the door, and would gladly have made her retreat; but perceiving he sat full of importance, waiting her reply, she merely said—"No, really, sir, such an idea never once presented itself to my imagination."

"How unlike the impertinent vanity of other young females is this amiable unconsciousness of possessing beauty and endowments!" returned Mr. Oxley, again applying his cambric handkerchief to wipe away the drops that were rolling down his ample cheeks; "but, madam, having heard me deliver a true statement of my feelings and sentiments, I trust to obtain a place in your esteem, and that you will not think me precipitate in urging you for an immediate reply, or that I arrogate too much in flattering myself with having won your regard."

"I have always been taught, sir," replied Cecilia, "to reverence gentlemen of your sacred calling—every clergyman, but more particularly, the earl of Torrington's chaplain, is entitled to my respect."

She now attempted to quit her seat, but swelling with consequence and self-sufficiency, he took her hand, and opposed her intention of leaving the room.—"I have not yet, Miss Delmore," resumed he, "divulged—hem! hem!—spoken, madam, to the earl of Torrington on the subject of my love; but I can entertain no doubt but he will remunerate my acknowledged merits with his usual liberal acquiescence, that is, madam—hem! hem! hem!—when his lordship is given to understand that there is a reciprocal regard between us, he will, with a becoming generosity, being sensible of my capability and zeal in the service of the church, without further procrastination, induct me into the livings now become vacant by the decease of the late worthy and venerable incumbent, and bestow on you, madam, such a portion as will place his munificence and generosity to his most amiable adopted daughter beyond question."

"Really, sir," said Cecilia, colouring with offended delicacy, "you astonish me! This is a subject to which I have never given a thought, and most certainly did not expect to hear even hinted at by you; and I must seriously entreat——"

"Another proof of your innate modesty, madam," interrupted the persevering divine. "You shrink, with the timidity of the sensitive plant, from receiving or confessing affection; but the unworthiness of the object, Miss Delmore—the unworthiness, I say, madam, of the object alone, should create diffidence and hesitation; but I trust," surveying his person with an eye of approbation, at the same time raising his cravat, and displaying his ring—"I trust, madam, your choice will, in the opinion of the world, justify your partiality."

"My choice!" repeated Cecilia, "my partiality! really, sir, I am at a loss to understand what part of my conduct towards you could have induced you to believe it

was possible I could mean to encourage your addresses; and I beg you will not so far mistake my meaning, as to construe the respect paid to your cloth into partiality for your person.”

“Mistake!” echoed Oxley, with more than usual pomposity; “I fancy, madam, it will be allowed that my discernment is not liable to mistakes; and I hope and trust, madam, that, sanctioned by the earl of Torrington, and honoured by his approval, you will allow me to offer myself to your acceptance, and permit my endeavour to win your regard.”

“As yet, sir,” replied Cecilia, “I have never even thought of bestowing my regard; and you will pardon me the observation, but I must say, I think the disparity of our ages a sufficient objection to my selecting you, did no other exist.”

This was an observation, of all others disagreeable to Mr. Oxley. He was intolerably vain of his clumsy person, and wished to sink at least a dozen years of his age. He frowned; again applied his cambric handkerchief to the drops that were oozing from his capacious forehead.—“As to age, madam,” said he, “that is a matter, madam—hem! hem!—that can seldom be decided upon with any thing like accuracy. Some persons, madam, from a loftiness of height, a dignity of figure, an inclination to fullness—to what the French denominate *embonpoint*, appear much older than they really are. Possibly, madam, I may be a few years your senior. Allowing it is so, from the prudence of your deportment, Miss Delmore, it might be concluded, that in a matrimonial engagement, you would prefer a protector a few years older than yourself; and I entertain no doubt but the earl of Torrington, and the lady by whom you were educated, will not only greatly approve, but actually persuade you to marry your senior, with the very natural expectation, that such a husband will be competent to direct and advise your inexperience.”

Mr. Oxley having talked himself out of breath, gave Cecilia an opportunity to say—“On such important subjects as love and matrimony, I beg leave to repeat, sir, I have never yet allowed myself to think, and with the greatest sincerity I also assure you, that it is not my intention, for some years to come, to seek any other protection than that so generously afforded me by Mrs. Doricourt and the earl of Torrington.”

Mr. Oxley was so disconcerted, so disappointed, his vanity was so wounded, that he did not, for above a moment, discover that Miss Delmore had withdrawn, and that he was alone. His face grew red as a firebrand; it was the first time a female had presumed to hint at his age, and Cecilia was the only female in whose eyes he had a desire to appear irresistible, though infinitely mortified at her impertinent allusion to age. He remembered that she had not expressed any dislike to his person, or hinted at a predilection for another—he considered and reconsidered, and having turned their late conversation over in his memory, he found, to his extreme satisfaction, that the case was by no means hopeless; for young ladies, either from bashfulness or perverseness—the latter he believed—very rarely spoke their sentiments in a love affair. Under this impression, he believed it not only possible, but very probable, that Miss Delmore would accept him; if the earl favoured his suit, there was no doubt of her acquiescence. His attention to the improvement of lord Rushdale—his unwearied assiduity—his solicitude in all that concerned the cultivation of the talents of his pupil, deserved greater remuneration than his yearly salary; therefore, of the livings in the earl’s gift, Mr. Oxley held himself secure, and fancied that nothing more would be necessary to complete his happiness, than

the left hand of the beautiful Cecilia, adorned with the wedding-ring, and her right holding out to him the marriage portion given by the earl. Mr. Oxley took another survey of his colossal person, lifted his collar, wiped the perspiration from his face, and protested that Miss Delmore's unpolite remark on his age had put him into as great a heat as ever he endured from preaching a sermon, divided into six heads, to a yawning congregation.

Cecilia, according to appointment, met the earl of Torrington at the breakfast-table. Her recent vexations had heightened the bloom of her cheek, and added to the lustre of her eyes. The earl had brought himself to behold and converse with her, without betraying the emotions that her likeness to a being loved too late, lamented when gone for ever, excited in his bosom; and he remarked, that taking her in his hand, Mrs. Doricourt would be sure to receive him graciously, since her bloom had suffered no diminution from being at the castle.

Cecilia was conscious that no inconsiderable part of her bloom was owing to irritation; and to prevent any further uneasiness arising from misrepresentation, as soon as the breakfast-things were removed, she produced the miniature of lord Rushdale, and rendered Miss Maxfield's promised secrecy of no avail.

The earl extolled the beauty of the painting, and admired the likeness, which, he said, was more correct than any that had been taken by celebrated artists—"So high a compliment," said the earl, "as a likeness painted by a young and beautiful lady, might well, by its refined flattery, make a young man vain; but Oscar, thank Heaven! has a mind of a superior cast, and incapable of idle vanity, will appreciate the honour you have done him as he ought."

Cecilia explained her intention respecting the picture, and added—"She would on no account have lord Rushdale made acquainted with the circumstance."

The earl fixed on her a look of penetrating regard, as if to read what were the motives that made her shrink from the acknowledgments of his son—"And why not?" asked the earl; "Oscar would consider it as a testimony of sisterly regard, proving to him that Cecilia thinks of, and estimates her brother."

A blush and a sigh were Cecilia's answer; the earl turned his head to give some orders to a servant, and they passed unnoticed and unquestioned.

Cecilia, artless and inexperienced, did not herself understand the meaning of her blush and sigh; she felt gratified and honoured by the earl calling lord Rushdale her brother, though the fluttering emotions of her heart might have told her he was dearer to her affection than any brother; but Cecilia was yet to learn that the preference she felt for lord Rushdale was love.

Satisfied with having secured herself from any unpleasant imputation that the silly loquacity of Miss Maxfield might have fixed upon her respecting the miniature, she smiled with the cheerfulness of innocence, and, in her present satisfaction, forgot the consequential overtures of the pompous Mr. Oxley.

The carriage being announced, she gave her hand to the earl; but, before the carriage-door was closed upon them, lord Rushdale stood beside it.

After affectionately saluting the earl, he addressed Cecilia, with a hope that she did not intend to remain all night at the Hermitage—"We have planned an entertainment," said he, "Miss Delmore, and cannot do without your assistance."

Cecilia feared she should not be able to meet his wishes.—“Mrs. Doricourt will doubtless expect me to remain to-night; and did I not so tenderly love her, she has claims upon my gratitude, that would oblige me to sacrifice my own pleasure to hers.”

“Mrs. Doricourt is happy to possess such influence in a heart like yours,” said lord Rushdale.

“Yes,” returned the earl, “and I am, I perceive, envied the privilege of escorting Miss Delmore to the Hermitage; for I see the eyes of sir Cyril Musgrove and lord Wilton fixed on me at this moment, with a jealous desire to occupy my place.”

Lord Rushdale bade them good morning.

Cecilia beheld him gazing after the carriage, and she wished that Mrs. Doricourt was not so averse to receiving visitors, because she was certain that she would be delighted with the sensible, elegant lord Rushdale.

The morning air, impregnated with a thousand sweets, seemed by its refreshing influence to impart new life and spirits to the earl. Cecilia had never before found him so cheerful and communicative; he talked of Italy, and its productions, natural and artificial, and, by his animated conversation, so amused her, that she did not believe they were more than half way, when the carriage stopped on the margin of the lake, and beheld Mrs. Doricourt’s beautiful yacht waiting to convey them to St. Herbert’s Island.

As the light vessel flew over the smooth surface of the lake, the earl thought he had never seen Cecilia look so beautiful—the soft breeze gently fanned her chestnut ringlets, and her eyes sparkled with more than their usual brilliancy.

“I am now,” said the earl, “like some adventurous knight in a fairy tale, wafted over a stream by a blooming enchantress to the island of calm delights.”

“Where the queen of the island awaits your arrival,” replied Cecilia, smiling, “arrayed by the Graces, and wearing on her bosom a powerful talisman, bearing the radiant impression of VIRTUE and TRUTH.”

CHAPTER III.

“Have you not seen a sweet, an early flower
Expand its buds, and raise its dewy head?
Have you not seen a cold, a chilling shower
Wither each leaf, and all its blossoms shed?
So the young heart, when fann’d by hope’s soft breeze,
Expands its folds to catch affection’s breath;
But a cold night will soon each blossom freeze,
Blight ev’ry leaf, and sink its bloom in death!”

.....

———She passes praise:
A withered hermit, fourscore winters worn,
Would shake off fifty, looking in her eye.
SHAKESPEARE.

“——Bred in the midst of wily plotters,
I was early taught to turn each circumstance
To my advantage.”

*A Suspicion confirmed—Disappointed Hopes—A Discovery, and fashionable
Compromise.*

AS soon as the yacht had doubled the rock, where it had been stationed to wait the arrival of lord Torrington and Miss Delmore, St. Herbert’s Island burst upon the sight, like a woody amphitheatre, towering above its sister isles; and as they drew near, the earl several times expressed his admiration of its picturesque effect, seen from the lake, where a beautiful view of temples, lawns, bridges, and groves, their various foliage bright with all the glowing colours of summer, seemed, like the fabled groves of Shadaski, to invite to pleasure, refreshment, and repose.

Cecilia beheld her beloved Mrs. Doricourt on the Chinese bridge, where, a few days before, she had parted from her; and such was her impatience to spring to the embrace of her friend, that she would have taken a dangerous leap from the side of the yacht, but for the timely observance of the earl, who with difficulty restrained her, till the vessel made the marble stairs where they were to land.

Mrs. Doricourt, forgetful of ceremonious etiquette, indulged the warm feelings of her heart, by clasping Cecilia in her arms, who returned her caresses with the same sincerity they were bestowed. When the emotions of joy, which they were not fashionable enough to restrain, had subsided, Mrs. Doricourt made a graceful apology to the earl, and courteously bade him welcome.

The earl had scarcely remembered that he remained unnoticed, so much was he astonished at all he beheld. Wherever he turned his eyes, he saw a beautiful transformation of barren ground into a perfect Elysium. Though so long accustomed to the classic scenery of Italy, the earl’s judgment confessed that nothing could exceed the

taste that had planned, adorned, and cultivated the barren soil of St. Herbert's Island, where every turn presented some unexpected object of elegance to admire; and as he approached the house, raised on a gentle eminence, and beheld its light colonnades, entwined with flowers, then glowing in their richest, most luxuriant bloom, he almost believed he walked on enchanted ground, and was approaching the delightful palace of a fairy.

The decorations of the interior bore a corresponding elegance with the beauty of the grounds; and the earl, charmed out of his usual reserve, in very animated terms expressed his pleasure and surprise, at beholding the spot he had left so wild and sterile, cultivated beyond his idea of its capability, and exhibiting the utmost refinement of taste, yet preserving all the grace of natural beauty.

Nor did the earl less admire the elegant person and dignified manner of Mrs. Doricourt; her countenance to him was interesting beyond the charm of beauty; her eyes, though their general expression was sadness, were at some moments lit up with a splendour that, like a luminous exhalation brightening the darkness of night, gave a glowing lustre to every pensive feature.

While gazing on her face, his imagination saw in its varied expression the lofty workings of superior genius, and he could fancy she possessed more than mortal talents and endowments; while reason, coolly examining the intelligent expanse, would have believed it possible that her life had been marked by uncommon suffering, severe as singular.

After having partaken some refreshment, Cecilia obtained permission to visit her friends and favourites.

Old Baldwin and his wife rejoiced to see her, as if she had been absent from them for months; and many a hope escaped them, that their dear young lady would remain at home, and suffer the earl of Torrington to return to the castle alone.

Cecilia flew to visit the dogs and her birds; all were well, and seemed to recognise her with grateful joy. Her flowers and plants had suffered no neglect in her absence; they were blooming in healthful beauty. From the conservatory and parterre she hastened to the urn of Triton; his grave was covered with a thick short turf, smooth as velvet, and thickly sprinkled with violets. Cecilia read the tablet that commemorated his worth, and heaved a sigh of tender regret, to the memory of her old friend and playmate.

In the meantime an interesting conversation had taken place between the earl and Mrs. Doricourt; she had questioned him concerning the mysterious elopement of Miss Saville; and his replies had confirmed the suspicion she entertained of his being the seducer of her unhappy friend, of whose death she was now made certain. But the agony the earl suffered while speaking of his lovely victim, who had fearfully expiated her errors before she was quite eighteen, gave her reason to believe he was sincerely penitent, and that his conscience, impressed with a sense of his enormous guilt, did unceasing penance—was she then, herself the slave of error, whose heart, in its secret recesses, cherished a weak and guilty passion for an unworthy object, was she to condemn, with unrelenting severity, the faults of others? Oh no! while she wept the fate of her early friend, and deeply regretted the fatal consequences of the earl's excess, she was constrained to pity the remorse and anguish he endured, and to pray that Heaven would pardon his offences, and receive to its mercy the erring being who, in her love for the

creature, had neglected to supplicate her Creator, whose power could alone have preserved her from the snares into which she had so unhappily fallen.

“For that wealth which has neither brought me peace or joy,” said the earl, “I have sacrificed truth, innocence, and loveliness—I have cut asunder the bonds of friendship, and made myself, of all men, the most wretched!”

“Retrospections are vain,” replied Mrs. Doricourt, in a soothing voice; “every soul that lives bears in his bosom the remembrance of some act, committed in the hour of giddy folly, which his more sober judgment laments the impossibility of recalling. To repent of error is all that man is capable of doing, and we are promised by Him whose word is truth, that the tear of sorrow, the prayer of contrition, shall not be rejected.”

“Angel of consolation!” said the earl, “your words are balm to my afflicted soul. I know, and I repent, the injuries I have committed; yes, could Edmund Saville, the man I have most wronged—could he behold my sufferings, even he would pity and forgive me.”

Mrs. Doricourt beheld the pale trembling state of the earl, and feared to pursue the melancholy subject further; her own oppressed feelings told her that air would be of service to them both.

Opening a glass door, she invited him to walk; as they entered on a winding path, ornamented with flowering shrubs, Mrs. Doricourt explained to the earl, that it had been cut through rocks—“And will,” said she, “be a lasting proof of the possibility of rendering the most barren soil capable of embellishment.”

The earl’s mind had become composed; he felt the influence of the air, and the charm of refined conversation, while every instant he became more astonished at the comprehensive mind of Mrs. Doricourt, which seemed to embrace universal knowledge; for while they walked, she spoke of the nature of soils, and the properties of plants, and convinced him that she was perfectly acquainted with agriculture and botany.

They were now in sight of a cascade—its sparkling water falling from an immense high rock, and bounding over its numerous unequal ledges, formed a beautiful object in that solitude, where the turf presented a more vivid green, and the flowers shed a richer perfume, owing to the little stream that wandered among their roots.

Rank and wealth had not vitiated the earl’s taste; he could feel the sublimities of nature, and admire its beauties. To the right of the cascade its waters collected in a broad stream, on the clear bosom of which two stately swans reared a numerous progeny of snowy cygnets; they knew and obeyed the voice of Mrs. Doricourt, and fed without fear from her hand; but seeing a stranger, they evinced alarm by spreading their downy wings, and collecting their young ones with the most affectionate solicitude, and hastily retiring to the concealment of their reedy habitation, under the branches of the osiers that hung over the stream.

Mrs. Doricourt being assured by the earl that he was not fatigued, led the way through an arch formed by jessamine, woodbine, and clematis, to a rocky excavation, where shells, coral, and spar, were tastefully arranged, and rustic seats invited the weary to rest. Here, on a marble table, were placed grapes and peaches, with which the earl allayed his thirst. While he lingered to admire some beautiful specimens of the buccanim and volute, a strain of music was heard. The earl looked at Mrs. Doricourt—“Are you indeed an enchantress?” asked he, smiling; “certainly you are possessed of more than mortal powers, or whence those harmonious sounds?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Doricourt, “I disclaim all knowledge of magical spells, and possession of superhuman powers; but if your lordship has a wish to see the musician, you have only to follow me.”

The earl bowed, and said he should be much gratified, being particularly fond of music.

Mrs. Doricourt led the way up a flight of narrow steps, which had escaped the earl’s notice; a door, artfully constructed, covered with shells and spar, yielded to her touch.

In the next instant the earl found himself in a Chinese temple—the walls were superbly panelled with stained glass, on which were described the feast of lanthorns, palaces, gardens, amusements, and remarkable places near Peking; the seats were formed of bamboo, inlaid with ivory; the cushions and draperies were of rich chintz, lined with rose-coloured taffeta; large gilt cages, with foreign birds; and crystal globes, with gold and silver fish, hung at the open lattices, the gilded recesses of which contained beautiful porcelain vases, with exotic plants and flowers, that filled the temple with their perfume. Here they found Cecilia; but no instrument of music being visible, the earl looked surprised, and inquired by what means she had produced the sounds which he had heard in the grotto, and which certainly were not vocal?

Cecilia smiled.—“Do you not remember, my lord,” said she, “that sir Cyril Musgrove called this an enchanted island? Can you not suppose the ‘Lady of the Lake’ has attendant spirits, who, at her potent bidding, utter magic sounds?”

“Be you then subject to my spells,” replied Mrs. Doricourt, catching Cecilia’s lively tone, “and instantly produce, for the earl’s amusement, an instrument that will at once gratify his eye and ear.”

Cecilia gracefully bent to the command—she touched one of the panels—it slid back, and disclosed a recess, which contained the most magnificent organ the earl had ever seen. Cecilia drew forth a stool, and placing herself at the instrument, played several of the earl’s favourite airs. She then resigned her place to Mrs. Doricourt, who, anxious to divert the melancholy of her guest, sang duets with Cecilia, till she supposed it was near the hour of dinner.

The earl pressed their hands respectfully to his lips, expressed his delight, and declared them both enchantresses, and that every part of the island was calculated to inspire the romantic idea of magic.

“It is all the reality of nature,” said Mrs. Doricourt, “aided by the labour of human industry. The accomplishment of my plan cost me some thought, trouble, and expence; but it now amply rewards my pains. St. Herbert’s Island, independent of its own beauties, commands prospects unrivalled in sublimity and loveliness, and while I wander over my little domain, inhaling the breath of heaven, and the odour of the flowers, I feel that I ought to be happy.” A tear trembled in her eye as she spoke; but, suppressing the lucid intruder, she added—“With your lordship’s pleasure, we will now return.”

Cecilia slid back another panel, and they descended a flight of marble steps, to a part of the ground ornamented with Chinese railings and bridges.

The earl looked back on the temple, and found that it was built in the exact Chinese style, with its appropriate decoration of gilded bells and painted minarets.

Having conducted the earl to the library, Mrs. Doricourt and Cecilia retired to dress; but as the toilet occupied but a small portion of their time, they returned to

converse for half-an-hour on literary subjects, where the earl had a fresh opportunity of admiring the modesty of Cecilia, who had concealed her knowledge of Italian and German, both of which she read with fluency, and understood correctly.

The announcing of dinner spared the blushes of Cecilia, and released her friend from the pain of receiving thanks and praise from the earl, who had never before met so much learning or so little pedantry.

Mrs. Doricourt did the honours of her table with a grace and elegance that evinced an intimate acquaintance with fashionable manners; and though the party was so very small, the earl never sat down to greater delicacies, or saw them more magnificently served up; the table-service consisting of silver, and the most expensively-cut glass.

The evening drawing to a close, the earl proposed departing. Mrs. Doricourt requested that Cecilia might remain at the Hermitage.

The earl looked at Cecilia; her countenance spoke the wish of her heart.—“I need not ask,” said he, “your wishes—I read them in your eyes; and I will not only deprive myself of the pleasure of your company, but will also make your excuses to lady Torrington, on one condition.”

“You are too good,” replied Cecilia, “too generous to make the condition a hard one.”

“It is,” said the earl, “that you prevail on Mrs. Doricourt to accompany you to the castle, where, I am certain, the countess of Torrington will consider your visit an honour.”

Mrs. Doricourt would have excused herself from accepting this invitation, on the plea of delicate health, and being, from the long seclusion, almost a stranger to the forms of fashionable life.

The earl would not admit this excuse; and Mrs. Doricourt gave a reluctant promise to visit Torrington Castle.

The earl had not for many years spent a day so pleasantly or so rationally; and when he bade the ladies farewell on the Chinese bridge, he warmly repeated his invitation, that Mrs. Doricourt would accompany Cecilia to the castle.

When seated in the yacht, he reflected on the lovely form, superior mind, and uncommon attainments and accomplishments of Mrs. Doricourt; he wondered what strange events had driven her from a world she was formed to adorn, and sighed to think that the beautiful blossom he had precipitated to the grave might have expanded to as bright a flower; while, for the sake of that wealth, now considered with contempt, he had linked his destiny with a being destitute of understanding and accomplishments.

Mrs. Doricourt thought of the earl of Torrington with pity; high in rank, surrounded with luxury, he envied the meanest peasant that moistened his hard crust in the running stream, while himself possessing all things but content, was a melancholy proof of the insufficiency of wealth to ensure happiness.

The communications of Cecilia did not exalt the characters of the countess of Torrington, or her guests, in Mrs. Doricourt’s opinion; but this very circumstance made her resolve to quit the tranquillity of the Hermitage, and mix once again with the cold heartless votaries of fashion, particularly as she found lady Welford was at the castle, which would secure her the society of one rational female, whose observations might aid her to ascertain whether Cecilia might, without danger to the purity of her mind, remain

under the protection of lady Torrington, should the earl make a point of her spending the winter with them in town.

The representations of Cecilia by no means impressed her with respect for lady Torrington, added to which, the worthy Baldwin, on whose plain understanding and honest principles every reliance was to be placed, had heard such accounts of lady Torrington and her guests, as made the old man, full of anxiety on Cecilia's account, communicate the unfavourable reports that had reached his own ear to Mrs. Doricourt.

Her knowledge of the world taught her that report always exaggerated; but the innocence and reputation of Cecilia were of too much consequence to be exposed with persons whose characters appeared to be of no value, even in their own esteem. Of these persons she determined herself to judge; and if she found the least reason to doubt their being proper society, remove Cecilia from the contagion of vice, even at the hazard of the earl's displeasure. Mrs. Doricourt considered her own fortune quite sufficient to provide amply for this darling child; but were it much less, she would preserve to her an approving conscience, and virtuous poverty was infinitely preferable to guilty wealth.

Miss Delmore being absent from the castle, lady Jacintha had no rival to divert the attentions of lord Rushdale from herself; and knowing his great partiality for music, she contrived every evening to draw him into the music-room, where, unconscious of the comparison he was drawing between her bold intrusive manner, and that of the timid, retiring Cecilia, she played and sung his favourite airs, much more to her own satisfaction than his, who, though wearied and disgusted, was, by her art, kept constantly at her side at table, and in their morning walks and rides.

This manoeuvring of lady Jacintha did not escape the observation of the countess of Torrington, who, aware of the slender fortune of her dear friend, and of her father's hopes that she would secure to herself a wealthy husband, began to suspect her design on the heart of the sentimental Oscar, whose opinions on all occasions she seemed anxious to consult; and whose taste for reading she had lately flattered, by passing hours with him in the library, while the rest of the party were contriving amusements to kill the time she devoted to study. But though of rank equal to her own, lady Torrington considered that lady Jacintha was a full seven years older than her son—a disparity on the wrong side; and that her qualities of mind, and certain fashionable propensities, particularly her passion for gambling, were not exactly what she should approve in his wife. Besides, when she was in town, it was agreed between the duchess of Aberdeen and herself, that a union of their families would, on several accounts, be extremely desirable. Oscar was exactly of an age when the heart yields itself to tender impressions, without considering either interest or consequences; and at once to acquaint her son with her own intentions, and guard him against the acts of lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, she summoned him to a private conference in her dressing-room. To the countess of Torrington, Oscar had ever conducted himself with the respectful duty of a son, but it was duty governed by a principle of right, not influenced by the warm impulse of filial affection, he believed, and accused himself of being unnatural; but he did not love his mother; he saw all her faults and inconsistencies; and her weak indulgence of his boyish follies served to convince him, that she consulted the gratification of her own idle whims, and the indolence of her own temper, rather than the improvement of his understanding, or the forming of his principles, by putting him under proper restraints. Lady Torrington was not over delicate

in disclosing to her son the treaty she had entered into with the duchess of Aberdeen—
“With which I am certain, Oscar,” said she, “you must be delighted.”

“I am of a temper, madam,” replied he, “not easily moved to ecstasies.”

“Why, positively,” resumed the countess, “you are becoming as solemn and frigid as your father, or you could not be so insensible to beauty. Surely you must remember lady Arabella Moncrief?”

“Yes, madam, perfectly,” replied lord Rushdale; “I remember she is a spoiled child, rude, pert, and uninformed.”

“Lively, artless, and beautiful as an angel,” said lady Torrington, determined not to give up the point.

“If angels in any way resemble Arabella Moncrief,” returned Oscar, “I shall always prefer the company of sensible mortals.”

“Nay, that is being too severe upon the beautiful romp,” said lady Torrington; “you ought to remember her youth, and what improvements the acknowledged abilities of madame St. Piere may produce; the duke of Aberdeen has engaged that wonderful woman, at a monstrous salary, to complete the education of lady Arabella. All the world knows that madame St. Piere is the first singer in the kingdom, and that she dances like a goddess. When lady Arabella comes out next winter, you will see her——”

“*Sans* mind, *sans* taste, *sans* every thing,” returned Oscar. “Madame St. Piere may give instruction, but she cannot infuse into the vacant mind of her pupil the ethereal genius that embodies idea—she cannot inspire her with virtue, feeling, and sense.”

“How ridiculous and romantic!” said lady Torrington, contemptuously. “There are very few men of the world but will very readily dispense with the last-named qualification; they are not generally ambitious of having clever wives. Men are tenacious of their privileges, and seldom approve of females trespassing on their ground; a pretty face, and a heavy purse, is, I believe, the prevailing sentiment.”

“With a sensualist or a miser, probably it may,” returned lord Rushdale; “but I lay no claim to either of these characters: far from bowing at the shrine of Mammon, I am not avaricious, and have never yet considered wealth an equivalent for happiness. If ever I marry, I must be certain that congenial mind, and mutual affection——”

“What romantic nonsense!” interrupted lady Torrington; “I really supposed that pedant Oxley had given you different ideas, and taught you a proper respect for rank and wealth. I am certain the rich enjoy pleasures the poor can never attain, and without abundance of that money you affect to despise, I see no possibility of a person’s being happy.”

“Happiness, madam,” said Oscar, “does not depend, as you erroneously believe, on wealth; on the contrary, I fear its possession is frequently the source of more wretchedness than ever poverty inflicted.—Happiness is oftener found in a cottage than a palace, where the moderate desires, and simple pleasures of its inhabitants, leave no stings behind them, where their wants are few, and circumscribed to their situation.”

“It is really a pity,” replied the countess, scornfully, “that you were not born a cottager; how prodigiously happy you would have been with some pretty rustic!”

Lord Rushdale thought of Cecilia Delmore, and his deep blue eyes sparkled with more than their usual lustre, as he said—“Had such been my destination, madam, I have no doubt but I should have enjoyed that sunshine of the mind which does not depend on high birth, or the possession of wealth, but is the actual result of rectitude, from a

consciousness of having performed the duties which Providence allots to every state of life; and with a rustic wife, whose mind would have understood mine, of whose affection I was assured, and on whose virtue I could confide, I am certain I should have been too happy to desire greater pleasures than were to be found in my own cottage, or in the rural sports of my equally-contented village neighbours.”

Lady Torrington tried to laugh, but the conviction that happiness was indeed the offspring of virtue made her serious, in spite of her efforts to appear gay.—“You have drawn a very pretty picture certainly,” said she; “but recollect, the golden days of Arcadia are over, and shepherds have ruder employments in this age than dressing the crook of the favourite shepherdess with flowers, and tending with her a flock of snow-white sheep. But for my part, I do not presume to believe that I have understanding sufficient to combat your opinions, which may, for ought I know, be orthodox, as your pompous tutor says; but of this I am certain, the duke of Aberdeen’s alliance will be extremely advantageous to you; and as lady Arabella Moncrief is very young, and has not entered into fashionable pleasures, I think you would act wisely to antecede other proposals; and as she is so perfect a novice, you may mould her as you please, and make it as tender and romantic as your own; and then you may create an Elysium for yourselves, and live as rural and innocent as cottagers.”

“Whenever I marry, madam,” said lord Rushdale, “I trust to live both innocent and happy; but as I have determined to bestow my heart with my hand, I assure you lady Arabella Moncrief will never share the Elysium I may create.”

Lady Torrington frowned; she had not expected such obstinate contradiction—“You are yet too young,” said she, “to see all the advantages attending this alliance: you will, when your judgment is matured by an intercourse with the world, get rid of your idle sickly sentiments, fit only for the hero of a romance. Who, in fashionable life, ever thinks or speaks of such ridiculous nonsense as mutual love? What well-bred man cares about the sense of his wife? I really blush for your folly!” Oscar blushed for his mother, who continued—“But these vulgar notions of yours, I believe to have been inculcated by that prosing animal Oxley; and as you can walk without leading-strings, I think the sooner the consequential porpoise is dismissed the better; for, in my opinion, his instructions have the pernicious effect of rendering you totally unfit for the rank you are to hold in life.”

“There you do Mr. Oxley great injustice,” said lord Rushdale, “for, truth to tell, I believe no man in existence can more devoutly worship rank and fortune than he does. Wealth, in his estimation, is the sovereign good, before which the claims of genius, the social charities, love, friendship, all fade, all sink to insignificance.”

“The man has more sense than I have given him credit for,” returned lady Torrington; “and, I trust, his wisdom will eradicate your folly, and teach you to set a proper value on the advantages you appear to despise.”

“You err, madam,” replied Oscar, “if you suppose I despise rank and fortune; as bestowing the power of being useful to my fellow-men, I value them highly; but considered as the means to indulge in ostentations splendour, to procure the heartless homage of the multitude, and obtain what your ladyship calls pleasure, I confess they lose respect in my eyes; and I believe that every rational mind estimates them as I do.”

“I am sick and fatigued with this controversy,” said the countess, “and shall be infinitely obliged to you for a rational answer to a plain question—Are you disposed to favour my wishes, by considering your hand engaged to lady Arabella Moncrief?”

“Certainly, for a cotillion,” replied lord Rushdale, “at the very first ball your ladyship gives the ensuing winter, but not for matrimony. Plainly, I do not like lady Arabella; and I see no rational cause to induce the heir of Torrington to sacrifice himself to pertness and ignorance.”

“This contradiction to my will,” said the countess, “is a grateful return for my having always indulged your humours. But I see it all. I understand your love in a cottage perfectly; I have not been blind to the arts of lady Jacintha Fitzosborne; I perceive where her ambition points.” Lord Rushdale was not so clear-sighted, till the vehemence of his mother quickened his apprehension. “But you must be mad,” resumed her ladyship, “to think of her for a wife! so many years older than yourself, proud as if she was a princess, and so poor, that she is a perpetual tax upon her acquaintance; in temper envious, satirical, and malicious.”

“Your particular friend, your inseparable companion, lady Jacintha Fitzosborne! surely, madam,” said lord Rushdale, “you cannot be speaking of her?”

The countess felt the look and question of her son; but too well-bred to appear confounded, she resumed—“I am so far her friend, as to invite her to my house, because I know her own finances are too slender to support her rank. But friendship does not make me blind; I see all her faults; she is the last woman in the world to wish an alliance with; and if you expect happiness with lady Jacintha Fitzosborne——”

“I shall be greatly deceived,” interrupted lord Rushdale. “Be satisfied, madam, lady Jacintha Fitzosborne will never be my choice; she is too deeply initiated in the mysteries of the *haut ton*; affected softness, and studied graces, will never endanger my heart.”

“No, it must be beautiful simplicity, blushing to display its own excellence, graceful timidity, in the form of Cecilia Delmore,” said the countess, in a tone of irony; “but beware, young man, of encouraging the idea of making her your wife. Do not imagine that the earl or myself will ever consent to so preposterous, so debasing a union; I should expire with shame to hear it whispered in fashionable circles, that my son had married the niece of my housekeeper.”

“Yet her mother,” returned lord Rushdale, calmly, “was the daughter of a clergyman, and her father was the son of an apothecary.”

Lady Torrington’s eyes flashed fire; in a voice scarcely articulate from rage, she commanded him instantly to quit her presence.

Lord Rushdale bowed and obeyed, glad to escape a controversy in which he might be led to betray his passion for Cecilia. She was indeed the gentle lovely creature his reason and his heart approved; but as yet they were too young to marry, and a disclosure of his affection would only expose her to the enmity of lady Torrington; he therefore resolved to conceal in his own bosom the tenderness she inspired, till being of age, he should be master of his actions, and at liberty to place her beauty and accomplishments in their proper sphere.

The count del Montarino found Miss Maxfield credulous as he could possibly desire, persuaded that he thought her the most beautiful of all beauties, and that he adored the very earth on which she stood. The silly girl agreed to elope with him, as soon as he could arrange the affair in a way to prevent discovery and pursuit. Deeply smitten with the count, and full of gay projects for the future, when she should burst upon her astonished acquaintance in all the grandeur and consequence of a countess, debating

within herself whether she would receive her wedding visits in white and silver, or pink and gold, Miss Maxfield left off teasing the honourable Tangent Drawley, who was beginning to believe he had acted the INDOLENT long enough, particularly as a friend informed him it did not take in town—a severe mortification to Mr. Drawley, who had always enjoyed the extreme delight of seeing his eccentricities eagerly adopted and imitated; and his only consolation under the present disappointment was, to believe that the character was too difficult, and that his copyists had not brains sufficient to counterfeit lassitude and inanity.

While divided in his own mind, whether to continue the INDOLENT a little longer, or to order his carriage, make his congee, and start a new character at Weymouth, he met the intelligent glances of lady Torrington. The invitation they conveyed made him give up Weymouth, and resolve to rival the count del Montarino, whose attentions to the countess were glaringly evident to every person, except the earl and lord Rushdale.

The count del Montarino did not forget to engage sir Cyril Musgrove and sir Middleton Maxfield at play; but they knew how to shuffle the cards as dexterously as himself, and he found, to his great disappointment, that he should never pluck them of a sum sufficient to enable him to carry off Miss Maxfield. To apply to the countess was the only expedient that promised success; and lest any unforeseen circumstance should prevent his carrying off Miss Maxfield, he resolved she should immediately supply him with the means. But the mind of the countess had undergone a revolution; she no longer watched for the signs, that, like another free-masonry, made them intelligible to each other. This was vexatious to the count, and obliged him to write a note, requesting an interview. This the countess would, if possible, have denied; but the count, confirmed in his opinion of her indifference, and sensible of his own precarious situation, assumed a determined tone, and insisted on her admitting him to her dressing-room.

Mrs. Garnett, ever on the alert to pick up intelligence for her lady, met the count's valet sauntering in the gallery, where he was waiting for the convenient Mrs. Smithson, who had promised to bring him an answer to the note he had a few moments before committed to her care.

“Bless me! mounseer,” said Mrs. Garnett, “what are you in retendance here for?”

The Frenchman caught her hand—“Vill you give von littel kiss for know?”

Mrs. Garnett affected to struggle; but suffering him to take a kiss, she said—“Well, there now, mounseer, I have paid for your secret; let me have it.”

“I vait de reply to von littel tendre billet de count sen to lady Torrington,” replied the Frenchman; “de count make de assignation, an vy we not be happy so vell as dey? Ma belle ange! vill you admit me to de *tête-à-tête* vid you, vile de count make de lofe to de countess?”

Mrs. Garnett asked at what hour the assassination was to take place?

The Frenchman told her, when every body retired to their beds. He then repeated his request that she should admit him to her chamber.

Mrs. Garnett disdainfully snatched her hand from the astonished Frenchman—“How dare you resume, you yeller-faced monkey,” said she, “to result my virtue by making sitch a hinsolent purposal?—Take that!” giving him a smart slap on his cheek, “and larn how to inspect a modest person for the future.”

Before the disappointed valet could recover from the smart of her fingers, Mrs. Garnett had informed lady Jacintha Fitzosborne of all she had gleaned from mounseer.

Lady Jacintha received this confirmation of her friend's frailty without any feeling of sorrow: her face glowed indeed, but it was with malignant pleasure at the near prospect of exposing her criminal conduct, and of rendering her humbly subservient to her will.

During the day, the count del Montarino so narrowly watched the glances of the countess, that he prevented her bestowing her regards on the honourable Mr. Drawley, who, having entirely thrown off the INDOLENT, danced, sung, talked loud, and played the fool, like the rest of the company. Sir Middleton Maxfield betted fifty pounds with sir Cyril Musgrove, that his late inactivity had rendered Drawley so weak, that he could not run a hundred yards without losing breath.

Drawley being made acquainted with this wager, offered to run a race with sir Middleton Maxfield for a hundred pounds. The bet was instantly accepted, and the avenue, half a mile in length, the appointed ground.

"La! Mr. Drawley," said Miss Maxfield, "I am sorry you have laid this wager, for you will be sure to lose."

"Indeed! you are sure of that are you?" returned Drawley.

"Yes, quite sure," resumed Miss Maxfield, "for Middleton is such a runner you can't think!"

"Yes," said sir Cyril Musgrove, "my friend Mid runs in debt with every body that will trust him."

Sir Middleton laughed; but his sister, throwing an angry glance on sir Cyril Musgrove, told him he was a great story-teller.

Sir Cyril bowed.

"La!" said Miss Maxfield, "I am sure you need not bow, for I did not mean to pay you a compliment, sir Cyril. But, dear me, Mr. Drawley, half a mile is a long way to run; won't you be monstrous tired?"

"Not in the least," replied he, "I am never tired."

"Dear me! how can you say so," resumed Miss Maxfield, "when it was no longer ago than yesterday, when I scolded you for pouring lobster sauce upon my turkey, you folded your arms, shut your eyes, and bade me not speak, for you were tired to death?"

"I had a very good night's rest, Miss Maxfield," replied Drawley, "and woke this morning quite refreshed, and strong enough to carry you on my shoulder to the end of the race."

"No, thank you, sir," said Jemima; "I don't at all like to be carried; for when I was at school, we used to carry one another pin-pan, make believe a sedan-chair, you know, and so I got a sad fall, and bruised my forehead, and cut my arm, and tore a long slit in my frock; my forehead was so black you can't think! and my arm was bad ever so long after. I think I had enough of being carried; don't you think I had, Mr. Drawley?"

"Yes, truly," replied he; "and after so many disasters, I shall not press to have the pleasure of carrying you."

The race of sir Middleton Maxfield and Mr. Drawley occasioned a bet between the count del Montarino and lord Wilton for twenty pounds. Colonel St. Irwin had seen many athletic feats performed by the honourable Tangent Drawley, and his opinion sided with him, in opposition to the opinion of the earl of Torrington and lord Rushdale, who viewed the florid complexion and firm-knit limbs of sir Middleton Maxfield, as sure indications of success.

Lady Eglantine Sydney, more soft and languishing than ever, thought a foot-race very clownish and vulgar. She assured lord Melvil, that it would shock her beyond measure to see him broiling and covered with dust, to gain the fame of being a swift runner, in which accomplishment she was certain her footman would excel either sir Middleton Maxfield or Mr. Drawley.

But though lady Eglantine objected to such vulgar sport, the rest of the ladies entered into its spirit; and being informed by the erudite Mr. Oxley, that footraces made a part of the ancient Olympic games, where the victor was rewarded with a crown of olive, lady Torrington declared her entire approbation, because it was classical. But, what a misfortune! they had no olive-trees.

“Laurel will do equally as well,” said lady Jacintha; “for laurel is sacred to the hero as well as the bard.”

This point arranged, a wreath was prepared to crown the victor.

Mr. Drawley, at setting off, appeared to be sinking into the *INDOLENT*, for he gave sir Middleton Maxfield considerable advantage. Lord Wilton felt so certain of winning, that he offered to double his bet; but the count del Montarino, sensible that twenty pounds would make a deep hole in his purse, affecting not to hear his lordship’s proposal, shifted his ground, which he afterwards severely repented; for in the next instant he saw Drawley shoot with the swiftness of an arrow past his opponent, and reach the goal, while sir Middleton Maxfield remained several yards behind.

Shouts and acclamations rent the air; some congratulated, others condoled, while, to prove a fashionable indifference to her nephew’s failure, and herself too well-bred to think any thing of losing a hundred pounds, Mrs. Freakley proposed that the child of nature, being the youngest of the party, should crown the victor.

But Jemima positively refused the office, telling her aunt it was quite unnatural of her to propose such a thing, when her own brother had just lost a hundred pounds—any body that liked might crown Mr. Drawley, but, for her part, she should do no such thing, and she wondered how her brother could shake hands with him.

Mrs. Freakley endeavoured to pacify the child of nature, while lady Torrington gracefully placed the wreath on the head of Drawley, who declared he felt more pleasure in being crowned by the hand of beauty, than of the victory he had gained.

Lady Torrington gave him one of her sweetest smiles.

Sir Middleton Maxfield paid the money, and swore he would have it out of Drawley another time.

Jemima said she should not have minded her brother losing, if Mr. Drawley had not taken him in with always pretending to be so tired, just as if he was not able to move a limb, and, after all, to run as fast as he did; it was quite a shameful trick, that it was; and she should hate him for it as long as she lived.

Drawley laughed, and hoped she would forget her anger.

The count del Montarino received lord Wilton’s twenty pounds with the regretful remembrance that he might so easily have made it forty; and this regret was more poignantly felt, as the mere want of cash was all that delayed his elopement with Miss Maxfield, to whom he was fearful of declaring his poverty, after having boasted to her of his Neapolitan estates, his beautiful villas, rich vineyards, and mulberry plantations; his sole hope now rested on obtaining a sufficient supply from lady Torrington; and rather

than be defeated in this grand stake, he was ready to throw aside entreaty, and enforce his demand by menace.

Mr. Oxley took an early opportunity to solicit the earl's consent to address Miss Delmore as a lover.

Lord Rushdale, who was present when this unexpected permission was asked, started from his seat, and felt as if he could have struck the divine to the earth for his presumption.

The earl's features relaxed into a smile, as he viewed the self-sufficient, portly, middle-aged gentleman.

This smile gave Oxley confidence, for he was too much in favour with himself to suppose it could be derisive or contemptuous; and while lord Rushdale felt every pulse in his body agitated with as painful emotion as if his very existence hung on the earl's lips, Mr. Oxley arrogantly hinted his own merits, and flattered himself with the hope he had founded on the earl's liberality and just discrimination, would not be deceived by his refusing his approbation and concurrence in the present momentous affair.

The earl having waited patiently for the conclusion of this elaborate speech, which did not appear to make the impression, or have all the effect the reverend gentleman expected, very calmly asked—"Pray, sir, is Miss Delmore apprised of your predilection in her favour?"

"Certainly, my lord," replied the divine, "certainly; Miss Delmore is apprised—is informed of my wishes and expectations in their fullest extent."

"And does Miss Delmore listen to your love?" asked lord Rushdale, eagerly; "can she approve—does she consent to be yours?—does Cecilia indeed encourage your addresses?"

Mr. Oxley drew up his collar—"Miss Delmore," said he conceitedly, "has acted with becoming modesty on the occasion."

"And referred you to me?" asked the earl.

"Not absolutely referred," replied the parson, "nor did she forbid the application; I have therefore acted," continued he, with a consequential smile, "on the axiom of silence gives consent."

Lord Rushdale, fearing he should betray his feelings, took up a book, which he was not conscious he held the wrong way upwards; his eyes were fixed on the page, but his faculties were concentrated; he was all ear, and listened with agonizing impatience for the earl's answer.

"I am not surprised, Mr. Oxley," said the earl, "that you should entertain a passion for Miss Delmore; she is beautiful and highly accomplished; but I remember she is little more than seventeen, and her extreme youth, and consequent inexperience, are with me strong objections to her entering into any serious engagement. She has been bred in such absolute retirement, that she cannot possibly judge what would be her choice. Matrimony is an affair that will involve the happiness of her life, and I can by no means accord my approbation to hasty measures. It is my intention that Miss Delmore shall spend the next winter in London; and if after that ordeal she prefers you, I will not withhold my consent; though you will pardon me, Mr. Oxley, if I suggest that a wife nearer your own age would be more likely to ensure your comfort in the matrimonial state."

"Surely the disparity is too great," rejoined lord Rushdale, his spirits calmed by the earl's decision; "Miss Delmore is young enough to be your daughter, Mr. Oxley."

This was a remark extremely ill-bred and disagreeable, in the reverend gentleman's opinion, who wished to be considered a young man. He coloured highly, coughed, and wiped his forehead, to conceal his vexation, when he so far forgot his own consequence, as to propose marrying the niece of Mrs. Milman. He did not calculate upon his age forming any sort of objection; he supposed the earl would be glad to get her off his hands, at the expence of a few thousand pounds. But he now began to suspect that the report of her being his daughter might be true, and that his pride, though she was illegitimate, looked for a better husband for her.

Mr. Oxley was highly offended, but self-interest taught him to smother his resentment. He acknowledged he was a few years older than Miss Delmore, but flattered himself the trifling difference of age would be no objection with her; and he humbly entreated to know if he was to consider himself honoured with his lordship's permission to endeavour at winning her regard?

Lord Rushdale threw down the book he had still held, and, as if fearful of the permission being granted, hastily replied—"Surely it is necessary to consult Miss Delmore's inclinations, to learn whether she approves——"

"Undoubtedly," replied the earl; "and till from her own lips I am put in possession of her sentiments, I must beg to remain neuter in the business. Cecilia is candour itself; she will at once speak ingenuously; and if she approves your addresses, Mr. Oxley, I shall not suffer any opinion of my own to militate against her wishes."

The earl moved from his seat; he saw Mr. Oxley was preparing another speech, but not approving the reverend gentleman's pretensions, he did not feel inclined to listen to any arguments he might offer in favour of a marriage with Cecilia. Bending with more than his usual stateliness, he wished Mr. Oxley a good-morning, and telling his son he wished his opinion respecting an alteration in the banqueting-room, they left the divine swelling with indignation.

Mr. Oxley's consequence had never before been so lowered. He had entertained no doubt of the earl's approval, nor of Miss Delmore yielding implicit obedience to his will; all the projects in which he had placed such unbounded confidence, seemed in a single moment to fall to nothing. Miss Delmore, the rich livings in the the earl's gift, popularity, dignity, and lawn sleeves, were all likely to elude his grasp. Lord Rushdale too, the boy whose ignorance he had enlightened, whom he had made acquainted with Greek and Latin, and taught to imitate the eloquence of Cicero and Demosthenes—he had not uttered a sentence in his favour, but had appeared displeased at his pretensions, and had, rather than aided, constrained the earl by his remarks to reject his suit.—"Perhaps," said Mr. Oxley, after a little consideration, "perhaps the boy has cast an eye of inclination on her himself.—Yes, it must be so; I now recollect many little circumstances to confirm the idea. Lord Rushdale is himself in love with Miss Delmore, and would not forward my views. But what will lady Torrington say to her son so degrading himself? She will never consent to receive Cecilia Delmore, the niece of her housekeeper, as her daughter."

"You are perfectly correct in that opinion, Mr. Oxley," said the countess, who, during the latter part of his soliloquy, had entered the room unheard; "but, pray, sir, inform me, for you have greatly awakened my curiosity, what has occurred to provoke you to utter your thoughts so loud and incautiously? for surely, if lord Rushdale is so forgetful of his rank and dignity to encourage a partiality of this degrading nature, you, as his tutor, ought to be sensible of the indelicacy of publishing his disgraceful weakness.

But I request, sir, that I may be no longer kept in ignorance; let me hear the extent of lord Rushdale's folly. Has he confessed a passion for Miss Delmore?—Has he solicited the earl to consent to their marriage?"

Mr. Oxley, always in the "melting mood," applied his cambric handkerchief to his forehead; his cunning whispered that he might turn the *hauteur* of the countess to his advantage. With much mock humility he apologized for his indiscretion in giving vent to his wounded feelings aloud; he then informed her ladyship of his application to the earl respecting Miss Delmore, with the little encouragement his proposals had met—"The agitated manner, and, pardon me, madam, if I say, obtrusive remarks of lord Rushdale, led me, who am ever anxious for my pupil acting up to his rank and high expectations, to suspect that his not advancing my cause, as I certainly expected he would, proceeded from himself feeling a passion for the young lady——"

"The young lady, as you call her," interrupted lady Torrington, with a sneer, "shall never be the wife of Oscar Rushdale. But pray sir, inform me, did the earl mention any engagement he had formed for her?—Did he seem at all to understand that his son was guilty of the folly of liking Miss Delmore?"

"To look into the thoughts of another, your ladyship must be aware, is beyond human penetration," said Mr. Oxley.

"But we may guess them pretty accurately," returned the countess. "Could you learn nothing from lord Torrington's countenance?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Oxley, "except that he looked very cold on my request."

"Really, Mr. Oxley," resumed the countess, "I think you have greatly honoured Miss Delmore by your regard, and you may depend that I will take an early opportunity of letting the earl and lord Rushdale know my sentiments on the business. To see Miss Delmore eligibly married, must be gratifying to her friends; and I see no reasonable objection that can possibly be made to you." Mr. Oxley bowed. "You may depend, Mr. Oxley," continued lady Torrington, "I will warmly advocate your cause; and if I have any influence, you may promise yourself success."

Mr. Oxley was all gratitude; he bowed lower and lower, as the countess, retiring, bade him hope. But doubts still hung upon his mind: Miss Delmore might accept him—the earl might be persuaded to give his consent; but if it was not his own voluntary approval, he could withhold the livings—he could reduce the fortune of his adopted daughter to hundreds instead of thousands. In short, he might obtain a pretty wife, and lose all the advantages that he hoped to grasp by marrying; and a wife without a good fortune seemed, in Mr. Oxley's idea, like being condemned to climb a high mountain with a huge load on his back. He had never considered the matter so seriously before, and till he clearly understood what the earl intended to do for Miss Delmore, he determined not to throw himself away.

Lady Jacintha Fitzosborne had kept a watchful eye on the countess during the day, and her penetration had discovered that for some cause or other, she did not appear as solicitous to engross the attentions of the count del Montarino as usual; but this might be merely an artful manoeuvre to elude observation. She was certain, from Garnett's report, that an assignation had been made, and she resolved that nothing should prevent the execution of her plan to discover and subjugate the countess to her power.

When lady Jacintha retired for the night, she artfully complimented Mrs. Garnett on her fidelity, propriety of conduct, and personal attractions, till finding she had wound up the silly creature to her purpose, she asked if she could keep a secret?

Mrs. Garnett pouted she had been the expository of many secrets.

“But you must swear,” resumed lady Jacintha, “that you will never divulge what I am about to confide to you, till I desire you to tell it.”

Mrs. Garnett would have taken fifty oaths to satisfy her curiosity, and she was greatly disappointed when lady Jacintha having made her swear, informed her that she must accompany her to lady Torrington’s chamber, as she was that night resolved to convince herself whether there was any truth in the report of an improper intimacy between the count del Montarino and lady Torrington. Mrs. Garnett began to tremble and cry bitterly—“Oh, dear! dear! I have brought myself into a pretty *dulclma*,” said she; “the countess will have me hanged for speaking *crim. con.* against her.”

It was some time before lady Jacintha could pacify the alarms of Mrs. Garnett; but at length it being artfully suggested to her that lady Torrington would make her a handsome present to keep her secret, she dried up her tears, and promised to obey lady Jacintha’s directions.

Having put on her night-clothes, lady Jacintha, followed by her abigail, stepped cautiously along the gallery to the countess’s dressing-room, the door of which they found a-jar. Lady Jacintha pushed it open, and saw Mrs. Smithson fast asleep, with a candle so near her, that it was next to a miracle that her muslin dress had not taken fire. Lady Jacintha took advantage of this circumstance; and pushing down the candle in an instant, the unfortunate waiting-woman was in a blaze. Mrs. Garnett and lady Jacintha screamed, and busied themselves to extinguish the flames, which caught the toilet and window curtain.

Mrs. Smithson, in her terror, was thrown completely off her guard; and running to the chamber-door, shrieked out—“My lady! count! you will be burnt to death!”

Lady Torrington’s voice was now heard calling to Smithson, who, coming to herself, and seeing the fire out, begged of lady Jacintha to return to her own apartment. But this was by no means her intention. She began explaining that the smell of fire having alarmed her, she had roused up Garnett, and full of apprehension for the safety of her dear friend, had hastened to inform her of her danger.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Garnett, “if my lady had not fortunately awaked when she did, you would have been burnt up to a cinder, Mrs. Smithson. But what in the world do you do out of bed at this time? if your constertution was as dilercate as mine, you would be gist dead to be up till sich hours.”

“Hush, Mrs. Garnett; don’t talk so loud,” replied Mrs. Smithson; “my lady is very unwell, and you will disturb her. I sat here, fearing she might be worse.”

“And the count del Montarino, he is sitting up also?” said lady Jacintha.

“Not that I know of, my lady,” replied Smithson, much confused.

“Oh, yes; you forget yourself, Mrs. Smithson,” returned lady Jacintha; “you called upon the count to leave the countess’s chamber not many moments ago.”

“Me call upon the count! No, as I hope to live,” said Mrs. Smithson; “you have made a mistake. Pray, my lady, return to your bed; you will take cold.”

“No,” returned lady Jacintha, “as the countess is ill, I will step into her chamber; no doubt the noise we have made has alarmed her; I will just see how she is.”

“On no account, my lady,” said Mrs. Smithson, in great trepidation; “pray don’t go to awake her.”

“She must be dead,” resumed lady Jacintha, “if she is not awake already.—Pray stand aside,” (Smithson had placed herself before the door), “for I am determined to see lady Torrington.”

Mrs. Smithson fell on her knees, and wept, and entreated; but lady Jacintha pushing her aside, entered the chamber, followed by Garnett. Flushed with triumphant malice, she threw back the curtains of the bed, and beheld the countess of Torrington, who, starting up, inquired what was the matter?

Lady Jacintha’s eyes rolled in disappointment round the chamber; they rested on a gold snuff-box, which she knew to be the property of the count del Montarino.

“Return to the dressing-room, Garnett,” said lady Jacintha; “that creature Smithson, whom terror has deprived of prudence, may want assistance. Unhappy woman!” resumed lady Jacintha, as the door closed on Mrs. Garnett, “unhappy woman! your guilt is discovered.”

“Guilt!” repeated lady Torrington; “I really am at a loss to understand.”

“Smithson, in her terror, (for the dressing-room has been on fire,) had confessed that the count del Montarino was this night in your chamber—nay, more, she thought him with you at this moment; but though he has escaped, he has left behind him a witness of your criminality.” As lady Jacintha spoke, she took up the snuff-box—“Can you deny that this belongs to the count?”

Lady Torrington tried to account for the appearance of the box; she had borrowed it of the count.

“Poor creature!” resumed lady Jacintha, “I pity you from my soul! but your guilt is confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt; and all that remains for me, whom you have so cruelly deceived, is to hasten my departure, for I can by no means think of putting my reputation in doubt by remaining longer under this polluted roof.”

Lady Torrington caught her arm; she wept—she besought her to remain—“You will not, surely, you will not expose me!” said she; “you will not be the means of separating me from the earl!—you will not render me an object of hatred to my son!”

Lady Jacintha for some time seemed inflexible; she suffered the countess to weep and entreat, while she talked in high-flown terms of her virtue being contaminated, her reputation tarnished by remaining at the castle, and affording her countenance, so degraded, so fallen. At length she affected to weep, and lament the necessity of giving up a friendship so prized, at a moment too when she had formed wishes. Here she paused.

But though extremely mortified at being found out, lady Torrington was not so overcome with grief as not to perceive that lady Jacintha expressed much more abhorrence of her error than she really felt; she was certain her dear friend had some point to carry, by which her silence was to be bought. Catching her tone, the countess declared, with many applications of her handkerchief to her eyes, that being cast from her friendship would actually break her heart, and that if she could be any way conducive to her wishes, though they were to part for ever, she should be more than happy to promote their accomplishment.

Lady Jacintha sighed heavily—wished it had not been her cruel misfortune to find a shade in the character of a friend she so truly loved and admired—a friend, whom she had formed the romantic wish of regarding still more nearly—“Oh, Oscar! beloved

Oscar!” exclaimed lady Jacintha, covering her face with her handkerchief, and affecting to weep.

The countess now discovered the intention of lady Jacintha, whom she hated worse than ever. But this was not a moment to contend or seem averse—“How blind I have been,” said lady Torrington, “not to see this partiality! but if you indeed honour Oscar with your regard, you will surely, for his sake, conceal the error of his mother?”

“Alas! poor human creature,” returned lady Jacintha; “we are all liable to error; the brightest characters are not exempt from failings; and such is my pity for you, and love for your son, that I might be induced to forget the unfortunate discovery of to-night, if I thought you would in gratitude give up your engagement with the duchess of Aberdeen.”

This was a sacrifice of no great magnitude, for the strong repugnance her son had expressed to a marriage with lady Arabella Moncrief, gave her but little hope of bringing that scheme of aggrandizement to bear. The countess gave one sigh to the blighted hope she had so fondly cherished, and promised lady Jacintha that she would never again mention the duke of Aberdeen's alliance, but would use all her influence with the earl and her son, nor ever give up the point till she saluted her lady Rushdale.

Lady Jacintha embraced the countess, promised to consign her error to oblivion, and bade her resume her gaiety, for the abigails knew their own interest better than to prate.

The waiting gentlewomen being called in, lady Torrington presented Mrs. Garnett with five guineas, for the assistance she had rendered in extinguishing the fire.

Lady Jacintha then very kindly begged Mrs. Smithson would take care of her arm (which she had been the means of scorching); and with many obliging wishes for her dear friend's repose, she retired exultingly to her own chamber.

The unfortunate Mrs. Smithson had to encounter a storm of rage, for having neglected to lock the dressing-room door, through which oversight that detested creature, lady Jacintha, had gained admittance.

Mrs. Smithson said she had locked it, and that it was all the count's fault; he ought to have waked her when he went away. It was not to be supposed she could keep her eyes open for ever, any more than other people; and though far from being pleased with the demolition of her new muslin dress, she added, “it was lucky the door was not locked, for it had most likely been the saving of their lives.”

“But it has been the ruin of my reputation,” returned lady Torrington; “it has placed me in the power of an envious, malicious woman—it has engaged me in a hateful promise; I would sooner see him dead than married to that detestable creature—poor Oscar!”

“My beautiful new sprigged muslin is burnt to pieces,” said Mrs. Smithson, crying; “if I had been allowed to go to my bed, I should not have met that loss. There is not so much of it left as will make me a frill; and here is my arm all blistered. I am sure I meet nothing but losses and crosses.”

Lady Torrington was too much in the power of her woman to let her suffer any sort of loss; she immediately gave her five guineas to buy a new dress, and told her to take an expensive muslin she had only worn twice.

Mrs. Smithson ceased to complain; she thanked her lady, and retired to sleep; while the countess, though she closed her eyes, was kept awake with the reflection that

she was completely in the toils of lady Jacintha, who, no doubt, at that very moment, was exulting in her disgrace, and laying plans to catch the heart of her noble-minded son.

Lady Jacintha was indeed exulting; she had laughed heartily at the terror of Smithson, and at lady Torrington's weakness, whom she had actually talked into a confession of that guilt, which, had she stoutly denied, it would have been impossible to prove against her.

"I suppose, my lady," said Mrs. Garnett, "having diskivered this *crim. con.* affair, you will set off directly. I shall be rather sorry to go too, for that Mr. Tripton is sitch a droll creter, with his kan-mag nanecdotes, as he calls them."

"You will certainly have the pleasure of enjoying Mr. Tripton's agreeable society some time longer," said lady Jacintha. "I have no proof, Garnett, against the countess; and if I had, I don't expect to find my friends saints; and if there was really any thing wrong, why the vices and errors of our acquaintance are not catching."

"So I say, my lady," returned Garnett, highly pleased they were not to depart, Mr. Tripton having made the castle a very agreeable place.

Lady Jacintha rewarded Mrs. Garnett with a lilac sarsnet dress, almost as good as new; and bidding her remember that she had sworn, and been well paid to keep lady Torrington's secret, dismissed her to repose.

Lady Jacintha then sought her pillow. In her dreams the scene with the countess was renewed; and when she awoke at a late hour the following day, her first thought was triumph; her first words were—"Lady Torrington is now my slave; her reputation is in my power. Lord Rushdale will be obliged to offer me his hand, or I expose his mother, and cover him with disgrace."

But second thoughts, and a consultation with her prime minister, Mrs. Smithson, had inspired lady Torrington with resolution to put lady Jacintha to defiance.

CHAP. IV.

All that the world affords of art,
All that of cunning you can find,
Is nourish'd warm in woman's heart,
Is bred in her deceitful mind.

And all that's good, or chaste or bright,
In truth is found in woman too:
Her rosy smile's the beam of light
That points to heav'n man's erring view.

Ye youths, be careful how you love;
Place, when you do, your choice aright,
For woman, when a wife, will prove
An angel pure—or devil quite!

.....

“Good gentlemen, I thank you for your loves:
But neither will I wed, so please you.”

*A Counterplot—Rejected Addresses—A Widow's
Disappointment—Castle-building.*

THE reflections of the countess of Torrington, on the following morning, were not of an enviable nature; she severely condemned herself for want of that presence of mind so essential in fashionable dilemmas; she blamed herself for being deficient in that necessary assurance, by the aid of which she might have confounded and confuted the bold artful lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, who, by the torrent and rapidity of her accusations and reproaches, had thrown her entirely off her guard, and, by mere dint of effrontery, had talked her into criminating herself.

Lady Torrington was no stranger to the malignant disposition of her dear friend, and she wept for vexation to think that, by her own folly, she had so committed herself to the power of a woman, who would have the greatest delight in exposing her errors.

But second thoughts were always considered best—a brilliant idea dried up lady Torrington's tears. She boldly determined on denying every syllable of what had passed between her dear friend and herself; and having given the ductile Mrs. Smithson a preliminary lesson, she became quite composed and easy, convinced that this measure would effectually emancipate her from the toils of the wily lady Jacintha, whom, she was quite certain, lord Rushdale would never accept for a wife, even if she could so far overcome her aversion as to receive her as a daughter.

Having arranged this disagreeable affair to her entire satisfaction, she requested Smithson to shake up her pillows, and issued a command, on no account to disturb her before noon.

The countess of Torrington always took her *déjeuné* in her dressing-room, of which lady Jacintha frequently partook; but this morning Smithson had orders to say the countess was extremely unwell—an unnecessary caution, for so satisfied was lady Jacintha with the success of her scheme, that she reposed supinely in the arms of the drowsy god, nor even dreamt that the half-witted countess had concerted its complete *bouleversement*.

When these dear friends met in the drawing-room, a few minutes before the bell rang for dinner, even the undaunted lady Jacintha Fitzosborne envied the unvarying cheek, and air of perfect oblivion, with which the countess received her salutation; but this envy was succeeded by absolute astonishment, when she saw her ladyship present the count del Montarino with his gold box.

“Your snuff, count,” said she, with an air of perfect innocence, “is most excellent; it afforded my head great relief, and I am infinitely obliged to you, though the ease it procured me was productive of rather a serious accident.”

The earl of Torrington asked—“What has happened?”

“Why poor Smithson,” replied the countess, “who fancied me much worse than I really was, determined, entirely without my knowledge, to sit up in my dressing-room, that she might be at hand if I wanted any thing; but sleep overcame her good intentions, and unfortunately she set herself and the draperies of the toilet and window on fire.”

“Has Smithson suffered much?” inquired lord Rushdale.

“Only a little scorch on her arm, and the loss of a new muslin dress,” returned the countess; “but Heaven knows where the accident would have ended! most fatally, I fear, if lady Jacintha Fitzosborne had not smelt fire, and came in time to prevent any further loss than a few yards of silk and muslin, which is of no consequence, and is good for trade, you know.”

“It is well it is no worse,” said the earl.

“But the best part of the story,” resumed the countess, “remains to be told. Smithson, it seems, had been dreaming that I was married to the count del Montarino, and waking, in terror, ran to my chamber-door, calling upon the count and me to save our lives—Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I declare I have laughed excessively to think, lady Jacintha, what your ideas must have been at seeing the confusion of poor bewildered Smithson.”

Most of the party laughed, though the mind of each made its own comment.

Lady Jacintha, trembling with rage and disappointment, muttered—“Matchless effrontery!”

Lord Rushdale indistinctly caught her exclamation, and coloured scarlet deep.

The earl threw a glance of scrutiny on the count.

And lady Torrington then said a few words, in a low whisper, to colonel St. Irwin, who replied—“You will do well to effect it as soon as possible.”

From this moment the countess did her utmost possible to avoid being alone with her dear friend, who perceived that she had nothing to expect from the promise she had extorted, and that the counterplot of the countess had left her no dependence but upon her own allurements and attractions.

Lord Rushdale was still polite; and if she could but keep that young witch, Miss Delmore, at a distance, she might make an impression on his heart; it would be double triumph to mount the towering height of her ambition without the assistance or

concurrence of the countess. To this end she put on a gentle serious behaviour, and affected the affable and sentimental.

While, with all the artful softness she could throw into her look and voice, she was reading Prior's "Nut-Brown Maid" with lord Rushdale, sir Middleton Maxfield burst into the little drawing-room, and, after a loud and boisterous laugh, said—"Are you two studying love or politics?"

"Neither, sir," replied lady Jacintha, gravely.

"Shut up your book then, and prepare——"

"For what?" asked lord Rushdale.

"By Jupiter, she is coming! I had the honour of a bow and a smile; such a rosy blush, such a dimpled smile! How you stare, instead of returning me thanks for the happy tidings!"

The envious feelings of lady Jacintha informed her it was Miss Delmore sir Middleton meant. To hide her vexation she again pretended to read.

Lord Rushdale, scarcely less agitated, asked—"Who is coming, sir Middleton?"

Lady Jacintha felt a shock, worse than the chilling touch of the torpedo, when sir Cyril Musgrove joined them, exclaiming—"Take care of your hearts! The renowned 'Lady of the Lake,' the 'Queen of the Island of Calm-Delights,' the fairy Benigna, is arrived!"

"What influence the earl of Torrington must possess, to persuade the recluse to quit her cell!" said sir Middleton. "Oh that I possessed the persuasive powers of lord Torrington! I know a little charming——"

"Pshaw, your charmer!" interrupted Sir Cyril, "compared to the charmer Mrs. Doricourt brings in her suit, is a mere Blowzabella; and though I confess my curiosity to see this *rara avis*, this *ne plus ultra* of all perfection, the 'Lady of the Lake,' yet I would gladly resign that pleasure to be favoured with one approving smile from that dove, that bird of Paradise, that phoenix!—help me to some terms, Rushdale, to express timidity, sweetness, unparalleled beauty!"

"If it were past the dinner hour," said lady Jacintha, disdainfully, "I should really suppose, sir Cyril, you had taken too liberally of your favourite pink champagne."

"Pink champagne!" repeated he, "flat as the drainings of your grandmother's posset-bowl, compared with the beauty I am speaking of! a single glance of her eye is a thousand times more exhilarating than nectar! and, *'blest as the immortal gods is he——'* No, I am wrong there—will he be, is the proper phrase—who shall call the divine, enchanting, beautiful, adorable Cecilia his!"

Sir Cyril had talked himself into a heat—he threw himself on a chair, and requested lady Jacintha to fan him.

"I had forgot," said lord Rushdale, rising, "that I have some arrangements to make before dinner."

"I wonder I was not informed," rejoined lady Jacintha, haughtily, "that Mrs. Doricourt was expected to dinner; but, *n'importe*, my toilet is soon made."

Lord Rushdale had left the room, and lady Jacintha was about to follow, when sir Cyril, starting up, placed his back against the door.—"Your beauty is resplendent enough," said he, "and wants no improvement; you cannot fear being eclipsed by the little dryade."

“Of such a consequence resulting from her beauty,” returned lady Jacintha, scornfully, “I have assuredly not thought; nor, indeed, to confess the truth, of her possessing beauty at all. I really pity the poor thing! she will be flattered into a belief that she is a divinity.”

“Envy, by Jove!” rejoined sir Middleton Maxfield; “sheer envy! There is no flattery in the case, for we all think her angelic.”

“*We!*” echoed lady Jacintha; “that *we* is truly ridiculous. Do you arrogate to yourself the plural of royalty, sir Middleton?”

“Certainly not, lady Jacintha,” replied he. “Do I, Musgrove?”

“On the subject of Miss Delmore’s beauty,” replied sir Cyril, “there is—there can be but one opinion—‘She is the peerless Rosaline!’”

“Upon my word, gentlemen, you enlighten my ignorance,” said lady Jacintha, endeavouring to smother her resentment; “I never before understood that Miss Delmore was considered more than tolerably pretty.”

“Elegant, beautiful, divine!” said sir Cyril.

“Charming, graceful, fascinating,” rejoined sir Middleton.

“*More than painting can express!*” returned sir Cyril.

“*Or youthful poets fancy when they love!*” exclaimed sir Middleton.

Their intention was to torment lady Jacintha, and they succeeded to their utmost wish.

“Pon my honour, lady Jacintha, Miss Delmore is the brilliant cynosure on which all male eyes fix: if you doubt my assertion,” continued sir Cyril, “ask Wilmot, Rushdale, Montarino, Maxfield, St. Irwin—nay, even the earl of Torrington; they will all tell you——”

“Nothing that I have the smallest ambition to hear,” interrupted lady Jacintha; “and, really, gentlemen, your detaining me here, to fatigue me with a subject so little interesting, is not very creditable to your politeness. I insist, sir Cyril, you will allow me to pass—I shall be too late to dress.”

“Beg ten thousand pardons; sorry to have discomposed—detained I mean. ’Pon my honour, I must go and pay my devoirs to my reflector.”

“Curse reflection!” rejoined sir Middleton; “I never reflect—it makes me dull and stupid.”

“Time enough yet though, to adonize,” resumed sir Cyril, pulling out his watch. “Oh time, what an enemy art thou to youth and beauty!”

“Make the most of it then,” said sir Middleton, “while it lasts; live while you can, that’s my motto.”

Lady Jacintha’s patience was at the last gasp, when sir Cyril resumed.—“The divine Cecilia is worth a little attention to the graces; and, if I don’t take care to improve every advantage, Rushdale will cut me out.”

“Do you suppose,” asked lady Jacintha, affecting indifference, “that lord Rushdale troubles himself about how he appears in the eyes of the housekeeper’s niece?”

“He has no other care on earth,” replied sir Cyril; “he is in love with her unnumbered fathoms deep—no plummet can sound the depth of his affection——”

“Or of your folly,” said lady Jacintha, angrily. “I will be kept here no longer, sir Cyril—let me pass!”

“Not till you promise me to employ your muse in writing an ode.”

“To nonsense?” asked lady Jacintha.

“A triumphal ode,” said sir Cyril.

“On what occasion?” demanded lady Jacintha.

“On the rapturous occasion——” sir Cyril paused; “no,” said he, “no, the time is not ripe.

‘Still be the secret lock’d within my breast—
I would not have my cherish’d purpose guess’d.’

’Pon my veracity, that couplet is my own—egad, I believe if I only applied a little, I should soon rival lord Byron, Walter Scott, and Tom Moore. I have infinitely undervalued my own abilities, no doubt; with a little, a very little study, I might be able to compose and ode myself on the happy occasion.”

“On what occasion?” again asked lady Jacintha.

“A very joyous one to be sure,” replied sir Cyril; “every line glowing with transport, bliss, delight; flutes breathing, graces dancing, Venus scattering roses, Cupid, with golden bow and flaming torch——”

“And Hymen,” said lady Jacintha, “bringing——”

“Brawling and squalling,” interrupted sir Cyril, “tears, hysterics, murmurings, contradictions, and repentance—Nothing in the shape of matrimony, I am much obliged to you. I have not the least objection to give a diamond ring to a fair lady, but not a plain gold one. It is time enough for me to submit my shoulders to the *jugum conjugale*.”

“You are right—my maxim exactly. None but fools marry,” rejoined sir Middleton Maxfield.

“At any rate,” replied sir Cyril, “it will be time enough for me to do penance for my sins twenty years hence.”

Again sir Cyril looked at his watch— “*My hour is come*,” said he, and removing from the door, suffered lady Jacintha to depart.

“’Pon my honour, she bore it famously, Maxfield,” said sir Cyril; “but we must never hope to be forgiven.”

Sir Middleton laughed.—“If her eyes had been swords,” replied he, “the spiteful devil would have run us through. I never knew lady Jacintha allow another woman beauty in my life. Our praise of Miss Delmore has, I am certain, deprived her of all appetite—she will eat no dinner.”

That sir Cyril Musgrove had some project floating in his brain, lady Jacintha had no doubt. Perhaps it was as well she should be ignorant in the business, if it concerned Cecilia, to whose fate, good or ill, she was altogether indifferent, so it removed her from lord Rushdale. From her dressing-room window she beheld the object of her hatred, glowing in youthful beauty, and near her stood lord Rushdale. He gathered a rose, and presented it to Cecilia, who received it with a smile, and placed it in her bosom. Mad with jealousy, lady Jacintha found a thousand faults with Mrs. Garnett, whom she had almost fatigued to death with putting on and pulling off the whole of her wardrobe. At last Mrs. Garnett, with smothering her resentment, grew quite ill, and sinking on the ground, fell into hysterics.

Lady Jacintha was now reduced to the necessity of finishing dressing herself, and with that, and exclaiming against servants pretending to be fatigued, and having fine

feelings, she so exhausted her spirits, pretty well strained before by sir Cyril Musgrove and sir Middleton Maxfield, that she was obliged to take *sal volatile*, and apply to her *eau de luce*, before she was able to descend to the drawing-room, where she had to undergo the disagreeable ceremony of introduction to another prodigy of beauty and perfection.

“Heaven defend me,” exclaimed she, “from a *femme savante*! I detest all wit but my own, and on that account refused an introduction to the Blue Stocking club; and now to be sickened with a beauty and a wit!—it is too much for mortal endurance. And here comes another of my torments,” said she, mentally, as lady Eglantine Sydney inquired if her toilet was finished? “From this *faduer*, this *petit beguele*, this worse than *automata*, if worse can be, Heaven deliver me!” thought lady Jacintha. “If I were but heiress to the wealth of her father, I cared not how soon she reposed in the monument of her ancestors.”

Lady Eglantine Sydney having settled in her own mind a very important point, came to the dressing-room of her cousin, to announce her intention of setting off in a few days for Weymouth, from whence her aunt, the honourable Mrs. Mabel Oldstock, had written, to request she would join her, as soon as politeness would allow her to take leave of the earl and countess of Torrington.

“What, in the name of all extraordinary things, can have taken the stately old maid to Weymouth?” said lady Jacintha. “I greatly fear this journey augurs contempt on the right honourable name of Oldstock; as sure as fate, Eglantine, aunt Mabel is gone to Weymouth, to try the force of her charms; weary of ‘*single blessedness*,’ she is on the look-out for a husband.”

“For shame, cousin,” lisped lady Eglantine, “don’t speak so disrespectful.”

“Well, I admire you for that,” returned lady Jacintha; “disrespectful, truly!—Pray are not you anxious to enter the respectable state of matrimony? and is not every single woman on the look-out for a husband?”

“No,” replied lady Eglantine, “for I am quite certain——”

“You have secured one,” said lady Jacintha; “the incomparable youth lord Melvil. Don’t trouble yourself to contradict me, my sweet gentle coz.”

“I declare, Jacintha, you are the strangest creature—I am sure I wish——”

“I know you do,” resumed lady Jacintha; “you wish aunt Mabel would die.”

“Me, cousin!” exclaimed lady Eglantine; “me so unnatural as to wish so kind a relation to die?”

“Yes, you, cousin,” replied lady Jacintha; “and for my part, I see nothing unnatural in the wish; she is an old woman, gouty, and asthmatic—you are a young woman, handsome, and in love; now if you could persuade her to die, her fourteen thousand a year would be a very pretty beginning for you and Melvil.”

“How careless you talk about aunt Mabel’s fortune, cousin,” said lady Eglantine, “when you know you have as much right as I have to expect——”

“Not a single foot of her land, or a guinea of her cash,” returned lady Jacintha. “I have offended past all hope of forgiveness: ever since the unfortunate likeness I discovered between her and a picture of Shakespeare’s Sycorax, she never called me niece, or gave me an invitation to her house; and having, when we met at lady Norberry’s, thrown out some little witticism about ‘*withering on the virgin thorn*,’ the old lady, craning her scraggy neck, and placing her skinny hands before her, with more than her usual formality, said—‘Lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, your rudeness is intolerable, your attempts at satire despicable, and your manner so bold, that I fear I shall never see

you so respectable a character as an old maid.' She then screwed up her portal of intelligence, as Wilton calls it, and never on any occasion afterwards honoured me with the slightest recognition. '*Unwary pleasantry*' has lost me aunt Mabel's favour; depart this life when she may, she will bequeath me only her displeasure, and unless I can persuade some rich fool to marry me, have no better prospect than sinking into aunty's respectable character of an antiquated virgin."

Lady Eglantine, tender, gentle, and silly as she appeared, was as deep a plotter as her cousin, and had artfully kept alive her aunt's resentment, which, but for her insinuations and false reports, would have been forgotten. But lady Eglantine knew that her father, ambitious and mercenary, would never consent to her marrying lord Melvil. She was deeply in love—in her eyes Melvil was all perfection—besides, he had sworn to destroy himself if she deceived him; and he doated on her with such an extravagance of passion, and had her interest so much at heart, that he persuaded her to go to Weymouth, where her aunt being unwell, would consider her leaving the gaieties of a young party at Torrington Castle, as an incontrovertible proof of her affection, and most amiable disposition; and when at Weymouth, he hoped to persuade her to a private marriage; his apprehension, if not his jealousy, being excited by a letter he had been permitted to read, from lady Eglantine's mother, in which she was bade to prepare herself to receive the marquis of Dudley, on his return from his travels, who, through the duke of Abberville, his uncle, had made proposals for her fair hand. But lady Eglantine had vowed to be the wife of Melvil, and the approbation of fathers and uncles was of no consequence.

Lord Melvil acted the jealous and despairing lover—he raved and entreated—she wept, consented that he should follow her to Weymouth, and promised that she would marry him, as soon as the ceremony could be performed without the dread of discovery.

By the poor lord Melvil this was "*a consummation devoutly to be wished,*" for the fortune of lady Eglantine was necessary to support his rank; of her person he was already weary, even before marriage, and he was eager for the performance of the ceremony, that he might be at liberty to act the perfect indifference he felt.

Lady Jacintha, of proud unyielding spirit, had never been able to conform to the formal restrictions and old-fashioned decorum of her aunt Oldstock; and she reconciled herself to the probability of lady Eglantine being her heiress, with the hope of obtaining from her weakness what she had lost by her own flippancy.—"Poor aunt Mabel!" said she, as she descended with her cousin to the drawing-room; "I ought to have remembered that a woman, let her age be what it may, never pardons or forgets a reflection on her person."

When the cousins entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Doricourt had been introduced to all the party, themselves excepted, and, spite of lady Jacintha's effrontery, she felt insignificant beneath the glance of her dark eye, which seemed to pierce into her inmost thoughts.

Cecilia's dress, a white sarsenet, simply but elegantly trimmed, occupied lady Eglantine's thoughts; her coral earring and necklace set off the dazzling whiteness of her neck, and lady Eglantine determined to have a set of coral exactly like Miss Delmore's, because they were so pretty and becoming.

Lady Jacintha's eyes, in restless movement, wandered from Cecilia to lord Rushdale, to discover the effect her beauty had upon him. His countenance was bright

with pleasure—he was no longer pensive, but joined in the sprightly jest and elegant repartee, with all the gaiety of happiness.

Lady Jacintha was mortified; his eyes had never sparkled, nor his lips smiled on her, in the way they now did; and on whom? a girl of low birth, a dependant. Pride and indignation swelled her bosom; but when dinner was announced, and she saw him lead Cecilia into the *salle-à-manger*, and placed himself between Mrs. Doricourt and her, utterly regardless of her own superior rank, her melancholy reproachful glances, it required all the art of the *haut ton* to prevent her looks and words from crushing to the earth her unconscious rival, whose innocent mind felt only sensations of pleasure. She beheld her almost-worshipped friend receiving the homage due to her superior elegance of mind and manner—she saw the smile of affability on the rich coral lip of lord Rushdale—she heard him addressing her in a voice of respectful tenderness, and she had not one uneasy thought or wish ungratified.

Lady Jacintha was placed opposite the trio, between lord Wilton and sir Middleton Maxfield; the one spoke of Drawley's wonderful resuscitation, who was now all assiduous attention to the countess, and was uttering *bon mots* to the astonishment of Miss Maxfield.

Her brother talked of his determination to win back his hundred pounds in some way or other.

Lady Jacintha's thoughts were on the other side of the table; and when applied to by the gentlemen, blundered out a negative for an affirmative, in reply to their questions: bent upon disturbing lord Rushdale's pleasure, whenever she saw him engaged in conversation with Cecilia, she contrived to want to be helped to something that stood near him, or to ask him some question; to which having replied, to her great mortification, he resumed his attentions and conversation with Mrs. Doricourt and Cecilia.

The countess, informed of the family and great wealth of Mrs. Doricourt, paid her a marked attention, which was highly pleasing to the earl; but this conduct, almost servile, did not impose on Mrs. Doricourt, who perceived at once the homage paid to her adventitious possessions; the *sauve* of the countess to herself did not eradicate from her mind the recollection of the unfeeling *hauteur* with which she had insulted the lovely innocent Cecilia on her introduction; but this the countess having herself condescended to forget, she did not suppose any other person would have the temerity to remember.

As lady Welford, Mrs. Doricourt with much pleasure recognised a pupil of her mother's; and, though she had never evinced brilliant talents, Mrs. Doricourt remembered many instances of her goodness of heart; and now, after the lapse of years, she was happy to find, among so many flirts and coxcombs, one woman of rank escaped from the contagion of folly, and preserving an unblemished reputation, with whom she could converse rationally, and whose dress and manners neither outraged decency, nor descended to vulgarity.

When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, Mrs. Doricourt took out her netting, and Cecilia, seated near her, prepared to finish a gold chain.

“La, how pretty!” said Miss Maxfield; “well, I declare, I should like to make a chain too; only I don't think I should have patience, and then it seems so difficult.”

“Not at all,” replied Cecilia; “I shall have much pleasure in teaching you.”

“Dear, you are very good; well, then, I will begin to-morrow.”

“To do what, Jemima?” asked Mrs. Freakley.

“To make a chain to hold her lovers with,” said lady Eglantine.

“The chain must be a gold one,” rejoined Miss Maxfield.

“*Sans doute*,” said lady Jacintha, “no other will be strong enough.”

“Why, la! it does not require to be strong,” returned Jemima, “just to bear a locket.”

“*Pardonnez moi*,” said lady Jacintha; “I thought it was to bear matrimony.”

Mrs. Freakley looked displeased, for though her niece did not take her ladyship’s meaning, she did, and with some tartness she replied—“I hope, with her gold chain, Jemima will secure herself a husband before she is thirty, for I should be very sorry to see her an envious old maid.”

Lady Jacintha did not choose to suppose this speech directed to her, and throwing herself in a graceful attitude, on a *chaise longue*, she protested her amazement that Drawley had relinquished the INDOLENT, while the weather continued so very warm.—“I really feel inclined to take up the character,” said she, “only I detest being a copyist.”

The countess admired the different works of Mrs. Doricourt, Lady Welford, and Cecilia—declared she was ashamed of her own idleness; but example was every thing, and she would positively endeavour to work a flounce—“That is, if I have time.” said she, “for, *à-propos*, Mrs. Doricourt, we are going to astonish all our neighbours with a *fête champêtre* and a masquerade.”

“*Oh charmante! que ravit!*” exclaimed lady Jacintha, “what an opportunity for a display of talent!”

“The person may be shewn to great advantage in a Polish dress,” said lady Eglantine.

“I was never at a masquerade—what is it like?” asked Miss Maxfield.

“Every thing that is droll and comical,” replied Mrs. Freakley; “a masquerade is like—dear me, nothing in the world that I know of; it is an assembly where people meet together, in the habits of all nations, with masques on their faces, and dance, and sing, and talk scandal, and tell one another disagreeable truths.”

“Admirably described!” said lady Jacintha.

Mrs. Freakley took irony for compliment, and her bend of thanks had nearly produced a general laugh, when the countess resumed—“And we are planning a theatre, Miss Delmore, where we expect to shine, for part of our *corps dramatique* are veterans in the histrionic art.”

Cecilia expressed much pleasure at the prospect of witnessing a dramatic entertainment.

“Why where in the world have you been buried all your life, Miss Delmore, never to have seen a play?” asked Miss Maxfield. “La, how odd! I dare say I have seen a thousand.”

“A thousand! dear me, Jemima,” observed Mrs. Freakley, “any person would believe you are an old woman, to hear you talk; consider, my love, it was only last winter you came out.”

“La! aunt, you need not tell every body when I came out,” replied Miss Maxfield; “but there you only do it to make me look like a child; but never mind—I am not so very young, but I may get a husband before you think for.”

Cecilia thought of the count del Montarino, who that instant entered the room, with the rest of the gentlemen.

Mrs. Freakley laughed at what she called the innocence of the Child of Nature.—“No fear, Jemima, my love,” said she, “but what you will have offers enough—whether you will get a good husband is the question.”

“To be sure I shall,” replied Miss Maxfield; “I warrant I shall know how to choose, and to manage a husband, though I am so young, as well as the rest of my acquaintance. La! Miss Delmore, I have hardly had an opportunity of speaking to you since your return. I missed you so, you can’t think; well, and how do you do, after your rustication, as sir Cyril Musgrove calls it? I declare Mrs. Doricourt is very handsome, only somehow she makes me afraid of her.”

“Because she is a Catholic?” asked Cecilia.

“No,” replied Miss Maxfield, “not for that altogether; but her eyes—I never saw such eyes—they look as if they saw into one’s thoughts.”

“And have you any thoughts you wish to conceal?” asked Cecilia.

“La! no, to be sure,” returned Miss Maxfield, “what should I have to think about? Only look at lady Jacintha Fitzosborne, how she shews her ancles—if any body else was to loll in that way, she would be the first to say it was indelicate. What can she be saying to the count? I hate her so, you can’t think.”

“For speaking to the count del Montarino do you hate her?” asked Cecilia, archly.

“Dear me, no—what do I care for the count? La! Miss Delmore, you look at me as if you did not believe me,” said Miss Maxfield, colouring, “just as if you suspected the count was going to run away with me.”

“That would be a service of danger, as you are unfortunately a ward of Chancery,” observed the honourable Tangent Drawley, whose ear caught the latter part of Miss Maxfield’s speech; “so, *vice versâ*, child, you must run away with the gentleman.”

“La, Mr. Drawley, how droll you are!” replied Miss Maxfield; “how can I run away with a gentleman?”

“The easiest thing imaginable; if you are determined on a matrimonial frolic, give me all your attention, and I will put you in a way to baffle the big wigs and long gowns,” said Mr. Drawley; “you must tie your lover, hand and foot, and throw him into a carriage; then you must have a pair of loaded pistols, or a blunderbuss, to convince the gentlemen of the long robe, the big wigs, you know, that you used force, and put him in bodily fear.”

“I never heard of a lady running away with a gentleman,” returned Miss Maxfield, “and I am sure you are only joking.”

“Serious as matrimony,” replied Drawley, putting on a look of gravity; “why I would have run away with you myself.”

“Would you though,” interrupted Jemima; “and why did not you?”

“Pon my veracity,” said Drawley, ready to laugh, “because I was afraid of the consequences.”

Card-tables being set, this conversation, so interesting to the Child of Nature, was interrupted.

Mrs. Doricourt and lady Welford still remained at the work-table, while lady Jacintha, who always contrived to win, was eagerly forming a party for *rouge et noir*.

Cecilia knew nothing of cards, and remained quietly engaged with her chain.

The count del Montarino had heard Mrs. Doricourt was rich, and in the hope of easing her of some of her superfluous cash, he used all his rhetoric to persuade her and lady Welford to join the card-players; but Mrs. Doricourt had an opinion of her own, from which she always acted, and the count, cursing her inflexibility, was obliged to give up his point.

“You must learn to play at cards,” said the earl of Torrington to Miss Delmore, “or what will become of you when we get you to town? Come, I insist on your joining the *rouge et noir* party.”

Cecilia played like a novice; at first she won considerably, but fortune was, as usual, capricious; and before she rose from the table, she lost eleven guineas, which the earl insisted on paying.

“I am certain I shall never be a gamester,” said Cecilia.

“And why not?” demanded the earl; “our first women of fashion play deep.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” returned Cecilia; “this fashionable amusement neither adds to their beauty, nor the goodness of their tempers. Lady Jacintha and Mrs. Freakley really frightened me! No, I shall never be a gamester.”

“Because you have been unfortunate to-night?” asked the earl; “to-morrow you may be more successful.”

“I should never like cards,” replied Cecilia, “even if I were sure to be a winner.”

“And wherefore?” demanded the earl.

“Because,” replied Cecilia, “I should be satisfied that the money I won ought to have been applied to the paying of more worthy debts than those contracted at a card-table; and if I lost, I should regret having thrown away money that might have been far better employed in acts of charity.”

The earl held a small note-case in his hand. “You prove to me,” said he, “that you understand the real value of money: receive this from your father, Cecilia—I will not have my first gift refused.”

“Pardon me, my lord,” said Cecilia; “I have already to-night been indebted to your liberality.”

“You merely complied with my desire,” replied the earl; “it was only fair that I should defray the expence of your being initiated. The approaching festivities will, of course, require decoration—if you find the sum contained in this case,” presenting it, “insufficient, do not hesitate to inform me. Mrs. Doricourt must not deprive me altogether of the pleasure of providing for your wants.”

Cecilia would have excused herself from accepting his present, but the earl closing her hand on the note-case, added—“From me, Cecilia, who have pledged myself to be your father, you may, without incurring the charge of impropriety, accept a present.”

He then joined colonel St. Irwin, whose arm he took; they seemed in earnest conversation, and often turned their eyes on Cecilia, as she seated herself beside Mrs. Doricourt, to whom she repeated what had passed between herself and the earl of Torrington.

“I did not wish my Cecilia should have obligations of a pecuniary nature, even to the earl of Torrington,” said Mrs. Doricourt, “but you must not offend him by refusing his gift; as he persists in considering you his daughter, there certainly can be no impropriety attached to his making you a present.”

Lady Welford joined in Mrs. Doricourt's opinion, and Cecilia placed the note-case in her bosom.

The countess of Torrington now joined them, and inquired of Cecilia if she had made a fortune at *rouge et noir*?

Cecilia mentioned the amount of her loss.

"A mere trifle!" said the countess; "but pray who was the winner?"

Cecilia believed lady Jacintha Fitzosborne.

"As usual," resumed the countess; "no woman in England better understands *mêler bâton les cartes* than lady Jacintha Fitzosborne; indeed some of her acquaintance do not scruple to say her wardrobe is supplied by the board of green cloth; but females of rank, who have slender fortunes, must support appearances, or how are they to establish themselves in life?"

At this moment the earl approached, and asked Mrs. Doricourt if she would allow him to conduct her to the music-room?

Mrs. Doricourt, disgusted with lady Torrington's exposure of the woman she called her friend, was glad of an opportunity to withdraw from the conversation.

Lord Rushdale took the hand of the delighted Cecilia, and they passed on to the music-room.

As the countess followed, leaning on the arm of Drawley, she said, with an affected sigh—" *Malheur pour moi*, I am neither gifted with a dulcet voice, or a scientific finger."

" *Heureux fortune pour moi*," replied Drawley, "or you would be too charming."

"What flattery!" said the countess; "*mais allons*, or we shall fall under the censure of my doughty lord, for not paying sufficient homage to madame, the reigning favourite."

"Is it possible the earl can have a favourite except yourself?" asked Drawley.

"How ridiculous!" exclaimed the countess; "surely you must have been asleep for the last hundred years, or you never could ask so absurd a question; with all his nonsensical pomp and solemnity, I must do the earl of Torrington the justice to say, he pays, in some points, a strict attention to fashionable customs; he is as politely indifferent to his wife as any well-bred man need be."

"And to other ladies?" said Drawley.

" *Pardonnez moi*," returned the countess; "as I am not at all inclined to jealousy, I am not observant of his actions, and the whom, the when, and the where, so far from rendering me uneasy, never enter my imagination."

"How superlatively happy it would make me," said Drawley, "to know I had a place there!"

The countess turned her really-handsome eyes on him, with a glance not calculated to annihilate him; neither did her voice express displeasure, as she replied—"You! what confident creatures men are—how they presume, if one condescends to bestow on them the most trifling notice!"

The reply Drawley would have made was prevented by Miss Maxfield.

"La! lady Torrington, did you hear Mrs. Doricourt sing?"

"Yes," replied Drawley; "we have not stuffed our ears with cotton."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the countess, vexed at the interruption of a conversation that was growing very interesting.

“Dear me, no!” said Miss Maxfield; “the words are very sensible, I assure you—all about love being like a rose. La! don’t you think Mrs. Doricourt sings better than lady Jacintha Fitzosborne?”

“Much better,” returned Drawley; “she sings like a nightingale that has swallowed a jelly.”

“What a droll creature you are!” said Miss Maxfield, tittering; “that’s the best joke I ever heard.”

Finding she could not get rid of Miss Maxfield, lady Torrington moved towards the pianoforte, to join in complimenting Mrs. Doricourt, who had just finished a beautiful canzonet from Camoens. Lady Torrington had not heard a single note while Mrs. Doricourt sang; but that did not signify—she was as loud in praise as those who had enjoyed the delight of hearing her.

Cecilia’s alabaster arm rested on the harp, on which she had been requested by lady Jacintha to accompany her in a song she was selecting.

Lady Jacintha was in voice, and would have got through extremely well, had she not observed the eyes of lord Rushdale fixed on Cecilia, with such evident admiration as left no doubt of his sentiments; love beamed in every feature of his fine face—love for a low-born girl, a creature brought up upon charity, a dependant! Envy and indignation are no friends to harmony—lady Jacintha was out of temper, and she sang out of tune; but too polite to notice what was evident to every ear, the company applauded, and lady Jacintha rose from the instrument with a haughty air, casting looks of displeasure at the countess, who appeared to have entirely forgotten their treaty of alliance, and her former contempt of Cecilia, to whom she seemed desirous of atoning by every possible attention.

While lady Jacintha’s bosom was the seat of anarchy, and she felt all the tortures of jealousy and offended pride, the rest of the party appeared more than usually happy; nothing like discontent appeared, every one willingly contributed the talent they possessed to add to the general hilarity.

Lord Rushdale and Cecilia sang duets, and Mrs. Doricourt and sir Middleton Maxfield joined in glees and trios. Lady Eglantine Sydney warbled a pensive rondeau, and lady Jacintha, though boiling with rage at the absolute desertion of Oscar, determined not to yield the palm to her rival. She exerted all her powers of look and voice to win back the wanderer; but, insensible to her allurements, lord Rushdale remained near Cecilia; nor, at any period of his remembrance, had he enjoyed such perfect felicity; he touched her hand, soft and white as the down of the cygnet; he saw her smile, and heard her utter the refined sentiments of an innocent unsophisticated mind; he felt that he loved her with a devoted affection, and his heart made a vow never to marry unless Cecilia was his wife.

Lady Jacintha had noticed the note-case in the folds of Cecilia’s dress, and jealousy prompted the belief that it was a gift from lord Rushdale; with much satisfaction she saw it drop from her bosom, and having the power to gratify a mean curiosity, she slyly raised it from the ground, with the malicious hope of discovering something that might render Cecilia less perfect in the opinion of lord Torrington.

It was not till Cecilia undressed, that she discovered her loss, and to what extent she knew not. She had seen that the note-case contained bank paper, but the amount she had not examined. Her aunt Milman had been some time retired to bed, and she thought it useless to disturb her; she therefore contented herself with telling the maid who attended

her to search for the note-case in the music-room, and where they had supped; and having no doubt of its recovery, she soon fell asleep, unsuspecting that lady Jacintha Fitzosborne was at that very moment arraigning fate, and execrating her malignant stars, that she could not appropriate to her own use the four hundred pounds the note-case contained, the signature of the earl of Torrington being so conspicuously written on the back of each of the notes, as to render the erasure impossible; neither was there any *petit billet* in the note-case to confirm her own jealousy, or degrade Cecilia in the eyes of others. Throwing the note-case on her toilet, she sat beating the carpet with her foot, and exclaiming, that she was, of all created beings, the most unlucky; all her schemes had failed, all her wishes had been disappointed, and, unless something could be effected to separate Cecilia and lord Rushdale, she should be utterly undone; all her creditors, whom she had put off with hints of her speedy marriage with the heir of Torrington, would be clamorous for their demands, and nothing but flight to a foreign country would preserve her from the horrors of incarceration.

Lady Torrington, since the moment of her presenting his snuff-box to the count in full *assemblée*, had actually regarded lady Jacintha with an eye of defiance, and seemed to menace a determined purpose to deny her confession of error, of which, unhappily, she had no proof beyond assertion; and though her account might be believed by some, it would militate but little against her dear friend's reputation in *haut ton*, where her rank, her power of giving splendid entertainments, would always attract the idle and dissipated, who would neither see or hear what was likely to deprive them of pleasure.

These uneasy reflections kept lady Jacintha tossing on her pillow long after the countess had sunk to rest, for the consciousness of error disturbed not her bosom; she had defeated lady Jacintha, whose wit she had often envied; and her triumph made her forgetful that a moment might yet arrive, when she should stand exposed to the resentment of her husband, the scorn of the world, and the remorseful upbraidings of her own conscience.

With the morning came new reflections—the handsome person of the late insensible Drawley, who, having thrown off the INDOLENT, was a very charming young man. As to the count del Montarino, he was grown odious to her remembrance; she wished, with all her soul, he was hanged, his neck was broke, he was married, or had met any other disaster, no matter what, that would take him for ever from her sight.

While the countess of Torrington sat sipping her chocolate, and musing on the means of getting rid of the troublesome, disagreeable count, the earl, her husband, suddenly entered her dressing-room. A kind of consciousness gave an uneasy twinge to her mind; but she was too great an adept in the effrontery of *bon ton* to suffer it to suffuse her cheek, or embarrass her manner. Lady Torrington received her lord, if not with the smile of innocence, with the assumption of smiling affability; she held out her white hand to him, called him dear Wilfred, and said it was so kind, so gallant of him to take his *déjeuné* with her—she was quite delighted, it was such an unexpected pleasure, so *nouveau*, that he should prefer a *tête-à-tête* with his wife, when there were so many more *jeunes belles* at the castle.

The earl did not even smile at this pretty *badinage*. He gravely seated himself at the breakfast-table; and when the countess had exhausted her exclamations of surprise and pleasure, he bade Smithson leave the room.

This appeared the prelude to a storm, and her ladyship, unwilling to encounter it alone, said—"But if Smithson goes, who is to attend? for I never admit the men-servants here."

"We will wait upon ourselves for once," replied the earl; "it will be novelty, and must on that account prove agreeable."

Lady Torrington, convinced she was to undergo a lecture, prepared to receive it with the spirit and dignity of a fashionable wife.

The door closed on Smithson, who was glad to escape, and the earl very provokingly said—"Do not let your ladyship's vanity set down my visit to the score of compliment or gallantry; I am not come to flatter, but to have a little serious conversation with you."

"*Mon Dieu*, serious!" repeated lady Torrington. "No, for pity's sake! you will vapour me to death; I detest every thing serious."

"I seriously believe you, upon my honour," resumed the earl; "but though I may chance to displease—nay, to give you the vapours, I shall persevere in telling you what I consider necessary to my own dignity——"

"*Ciel!*" interrupted the countess; "what are you going to tell me?"

"That I am heartily tired, madam," said the earl, "of the count del Montarino's extended visit."

"I am sure so am I," returned the countess; "I was never so weary of seeing any person in my life."

"And more than this," continued lord Torrington, "his particular attention to you, and the encouragement you have given him, have raised suspicions that I——"

"That you have no right either to feel or mention," interrupted the countess.

"When did I ever appear piqued, or interfere with your gallantries? Pray, my lord, did I resent your attentions to Miss O'Rooke, the Irish beauty, though every body at Belfast saw your attachment? Did I ever once appear offended, or take the least notice of your amour with the duchess de Valencourt?"

"I confess," said the earl, ironically, "you have been most gentle, amiable, and uncomplaining."

"Yes, yes," replied the countess, "common justice obliges you to allow that."

"But if you had been uneasy, if you had upbraided me, Emily, it would have been a proof that my affection was of some consequence to you. But do not suppose that the infidelity of a husband authorizes the libertinism of a wife, or that the vices——"

"Libertinism! vices!" echoed the countess, resentfully. "Really, my lord, your language goes beyond my comprehension. Whatever your own vices may be, I am not conscious that I deserve to be reproached with any."

"I will soften the term," resumed lord Torrington; "to accommodate your delicacy, I will speak of your errors."

"You are superlatively polite," returned the countess, with a sneer; "but I do not remember having acknowledged any errors."

"Possibly not," said the earl, "and they may perhaps exist only in suspicious idea. I trust it is so; but you must acknowledge, Emily, that the world will judge from appearance, and the count del Montarino, not my friend, but yours—not my guest, but yours, may—nay, does give license to the tongue of slander; and remember, whatever stains your fame, must communicate its plague-blotch to your husband's."

“I am sure I wish I had never seen the count,” replied lady Torrington. “Who could have believed he would have fixed himself upon us when he came to England? I should be excessively glad to get rid of him; but how to manage his dismissal without being absolutely rude——

“It must be done, manage it in what way you will,” said the earl. “I will not be made a subject of ridicule to fops and flirts—I will not suffer the world to point me out as an easy fool, a blind, convenient husband.”

“I am sure,” returned lady Torrington, “the world is too well bred to behave so absurdly; and I believe the circle of my acquaintance have errors of their own to attend to, without commenting upon mine.”

“You are mistaken,” said the earl; “it is those who are most conscious of impropriety, who are the first to seek and point out the failings of others. But of this you cannot be ignorant; and understand me, Emily, the manners of Italy will not be countenanced in England; here fashion itself does not allow a *cecisbeo*. The count del Montarino must quit the castle.”

“The things is quite impossible at present,” replied the countess. “At this particular time the count is so useful.”

“I have so seldom contradicted your whims, madam,” said earl, “that you presume on my indulgence; but in the dismissal of the count you will find me peremptory; it is my command that he quits the castle, and I will be obeyed.”

“*Contre mon gré!—bon gré, malgré!*” exclaimed the countess. “You astonish me! Where on earth could you pick up that obsolete word *command*? But jesting apart, I assure you, my lord, this assumption of authority does not at all add to your *agrémens*. I have assured you that I am as weary of the count as you can possibly be, and that I am to the full as anxious to get rid of him; but then one must sacrifice a little to convenience; at this time the count’s services will be extremely useful and absolutely necessary; indeed it is impossibility to dispense with them, for how can I conduct the *fête champêtre* without his assistance? and to do him only common justice, you must allow he has infinite taste, and is extremely clever.—Yes, Wilfred, you must confess the disagreeable wretch is perfectly *au fait* in these entertainments, and understands the appropriate emblems, devices, and decorations: when the *fête champêtre* and the masquerade have taken place, the count can be spared—yes, yes, the theatricals can be managed without him.”

“There are persons in town,” said the earl, “who can manage these entertainments as well as the count. Send to London for artists and mechanics, for I insist upon it, lady Torrington, that you inform the count, that his visit has been disagreeably prolonged.”

“*Pardonnez moi,*” replied the countess; “I can do any thing but be rude; you know I have such an aversion to being rude.”

“Let it be my rudeness then,” said the earl. “Tell him that the earl of Torrington, your husband, desires his absence—tell him——”

“That you are jealous,” returned the countess, laughing. “Well, really till now I never believed you cared about me; but jealousy is a proof of love.”

“This trifling is ridiculous,” said the earl, sternly. “Tell the count, madam, that I consider his removal as necessary to your reputation.”

The countess let the spoon with which she had been playing drop from her fingers—“My reputation!” reiterated she, with a look which she intended to be dignified.

“Does your lordship intend to insult me?—Do you mean to insinuate a belief of impropriety in my conduct?”

The earl’s temper was naturally irritable, and he warmly replied—“When a man is seen continuously following a woman, like her shadow—when he eats, and sleeps, and actually lives under the same roof with her, the world will take the liberty of making such comments as they think applicable to the case; and if they are not altogether favourable to the virtue of the lady who indulges her friendship in defiance of established rule, she has no great reason to be offended.”

“Indulge!” repeated lady Torrington, angrily. “I have never indulged myself in greater freedoms than other woman of my rank allow themselves—I have never indulged my friendships in the way your lordship has done—witness your passion for——”

“Emily, Emily,” said the earl, “this is idle and useless recrimination. I confess I have been much to blame; but remember, in these cases, no stain attaches to the character of a man, while similar indulgences degrade a woman for ever. Custom authorizes a freedom of conduct in our sex, which it never pardons in yours.”

“More shame for the customs of the world then,” said the countess, “for if infidelity is sinful and infamous in woman, it is equally so in man; and I think it very unjust indeed, that the same act should be a matter of triumph and fame to one sex, while it stamps the other with shame and disgrace. But man, when he made laws, took care they should all be in his own favour.”

“This is a point I have not leisure to argue,” replied the earl, “or I could convince you.”

“Indeed you could not.” said the countess; “I must be an idiot not to perceive that man has done his possible to make woman a patient, submissive slave.”

“Think as you please,” returned the earl, rising. “Having explained the motive of my visit, I will take my leave; I fear I have greatly trespassed on your time. Will you accept my apology?”

“Bless me! how excessively polite!” exclaimed the countess, happy to be released from what she had all along considered a wearying visit.

“I trust,” said the earl, “I have never given you reason to complain of my rudeness.”

“Oh, no, my lord, certainly not,” replied the countess; “you have always been extremely well behaved; I am sure no one ever heard me complain of your want of politeness, whatever I might do of your want of affection.”

“Emily, have you a heart?” asked the earl, with a look and tone of seriousness.

“A heart! yes, I believe so,” replied the countess. “Has not every person a heart? I never heard of any one without one.”

“Can you say,” resumed the earl, “that yours was bestowed on me?”

“Hem!” said the countess, pretending to cough.

“Recollect, Emily,” continued the earl, “ours was not a match of love.”

“Why not exactly, I believe,” said the countess.

“Did you ever seek to gain my affection?” asked the earl.

“Of that,” replied the countess, “you ought to be able to judge.”

“True,” said the earl; “and I have judged, and can, I believe, with truth aver, you never did. Vanity, not affection, Emily, has had the empire of your heart; to be admired

has been your ruling passion—to be thought beautiful, your utmost wish; your own person is your idol, and my mine acquits you of every other worship.”

“Vastly obliging indeed,” returned the countess, surveying herself in the opposite mirror. “That I possess one virtue, you must acknowledge, in an eminent degree.”

“Yes,” returned the earl, “a constant, unvarying adoration of self; and let this *amour propre* prompt you to get rid of the count del Montarino; do it in the way most agreeable to yourself, but let it be done quickly. For the sake of your fame, Emily, I do not wish to quarrel with him, which must inevitably be the case if I dismiss him; neither do I wish to assume the authority of a husband, but in this instance I will be obeyed.”

“*Grace à Dieu!*” exclaimed the countess, as the door closed on lord Torrington. “Most assuredly I will obey, as is the duty of an obedient wife, because in so doing I shall conform exactly with my own will. What can the poor man have got in his wise head, I wonder. *N’importe*,” continued she, with a *nonchalante* shrug of her shoulders; “it is impossible to guess. The count del Montarino shall be informed that his presence displeases the earl.—Yes, he shall certainly make his congee, because it is my pleasure to dismiss him, or—But no matter; I will be a submissive wife; the count SHALL depart; but not till he has arranged every thing for my *fête champêtre* and masquerade. Till then it is impossible that I can spare my machinist, my chief director, till his inventive genius has insured me the astonishment and envy of the whole country; then, nothing hurt by *le brandon de Cupidon*, I shall say—‘*Adieu, mon cher ami, de tout mon coeur.*’”

The loss of the note-case did not keep Cecilia waking, or obtrude on her dreams, but her first inquiry on quitting her chamber was, whether it was found? The apartments had been carefully searched, but nothing of the sort had been seen.

Vexed and angry with herself for having been so very careless, Cecilia was about to communicate her loss to Mrs. Doricourt, when she was prevented by the entrance of the earl of Torrington, whose censure she felt she deserved, for having paid so little attention to his gift, of which she did not even know the value.

Mrs. Doricourt had rested well, and replied to the earl’s morning salutation with such cheerfulness, that his own manner became lively, and he displayed a vein of pleasantry that rendered his observations on men and manners entertaining as well as instructive. Having spoke of the superstitions of different nations, the earl asked Mrs. Doricourt, whether she believed in witchcraft?

Cecilia smiled as Mrs. Doricourt replied, she had but little faith, and must be made to suffer before she could believe.

“Cecilia then will find an advocate in you,” resumed the earl, “for she is actually accused of having, with certain magical spells, better known by the term—fascinating glances, shot from a pair of beautiful hazel eyes, and with dimpled smiles—yes, madam, with ‘*nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles,*’ she has subjugated the heart of the reverend Mr. Oxley.”

“I positively deny the glances, nods, becks, and smiles,” said Cecilia, blushing. I never——”

Regardless of this interruption, the earl continued—“And this poor man, suffering all the wounds and torments thus cruelly inflicted on him, humbly prays that I will use my judicial authority, and closely examine the offender on the question, whether she will, in the face of all men, make satisfaction?”

“Pray say no more, my lord, I entreat you,” said Cecilia.

“Surely there is something more than jesting in your lordship’s words, or wherefore should they occasion such confusion?” asked Mrs. Doricourt. “Cecilia, my love, what am I to understand?”

“Only, my dear madam,” replied the earl, “that the reverend Mr. Oxley has solicited my approbation and interest with this fair lady, to whom he flatters himself that he shall render his addresses agreeable. But what says Cecilia to this?” said the earl, fixing his dark eyes with a scrutinizing glance on her face; “what answer does she return to the pressing suit of this impassioned lover, ‘who fears, and hopes, but still his hopes prevail?’”

Cecilia was silent; from the earl’s manner, half jesting, half serious, she believed he meant to advocate Mr. Oxley’s suit; and she felt fearful of offending him, by rejecting a person of his recommendation, though honour and inclination prompted her decided refusal of a man she was certain she could never love.

Mrs. Doricourt was not attracted by the person or manner of Mr. Oxley, though to her he had been most obsequiously polite, from the moment of his introduction; but it was not impossible that Cecilia might regard him with a more favourable eye. Well she knew that love has the magical power of veiling imperfections, and decorating, in brilliant attributes, the object of affection. Mrs. Doricourt dreaded, yet was anxious for Cecilia’s decision—“Speak, my love,” said she; “do you approve Mr. Oxley? Are you inclined to accept his addresses?”

Cecilia’s countenance bespoke the perturbed state of her mind, as she falteringly replied—“I am too young to be capable of deciding on a subject of such importance.”

“Speak to the point, my dear child,” said Mrs. Doricourt. “Do you like Mr. Oxley?”

“I really don’t know,” returned Cecilia; “I have never heard him in the pulpit.”

“Little prevaricator!” rejoined the earl. “You are not questioned whether or not you approve him in his clerical character; answer truly, do you like his person?”

“I have seen much handsomer men,” replied Cecilia.

“Will you accept his addresses?” asked the earl.

“Indeed,” returned Cecilia, “I had much rather decline the honour.”

Mrs. Doricourt’s eyes brightened, and one of her magical smiles played on her lip.

“And so you reject Mr. Oxley’s addresses,” resumed the earl. “Can you have the cruelty to blight with your scorn this lofty-minded man? Will you chill with disdain his aspiring hopes? I see you pity the wounds you have inflicted—you will recant.”

“Never!” returned Cecilia; “indeed, my lord, I am convinced I could never be happy with Mr. Oxley; there is too great a disparity in our ages, our tastes, our dispositions; I am obliged to him for the preference he has given me, but must decidedly decline taking advantage of his partiality, and sincerely wish him happiness with another.”

“My dear child!” said the earl, assuming his natural gravity, and affectionately pressing her hand, “your candid refusal proves the goodness of your heart; your decision, my sweet, ingenuous girl, meets my warm approbation. Mr. Oxley is by no means the husband I should select for you; and I am pleased that you reject him.”

Cecilia’s mind was again at ease, and her lovely face was radiant with smiles.

Mrs. Doricourt wondered that a man of Mr. Oxley’s apparent age should have thought of marrying a person so many years younger than himself.

“Mr. Oxley, madam, has much worldly wisdom,” said the earl, “and had weighty reasons, independent of love, for wishing that I should bestow Cecilia’s hand upon him—reasons which will assuredly be disappointed; the reverend gentleman, it appears to me, is fated to be crossed in fortune as well as love.”

“My beloved Cecilia is still very young,” rejoined Mrs. Doricourt; “I should wish her to see more of the world before she marries; unhappiness is too frequently the result of hasty engagements.”

“Be under no apprehension, my dear madam,” said Cecilia; “I am too happy in your affection, too sensible of the blessings I enjoy in the earl of Torrington’s adoption, to wish to exchange my present unalloyed felicity for the arduous duties of a wife.”

“Perhaps then,” said the earl, smiling, “I may as well put off the hour of disappointment, by deferring, to a more propitious time, another lover’s permission to be admitted to your favour.”

“Another lover! this is really astonishing,” exclaimed Mrs. Doricourt. “Cecilia, my love, in spite of that air of *naïveté*, I shall begin to believe you do practice witchcraft.”

“Indeed, madam,” returned Cecilia, “I am ignorant of the offence, and believe the earl is merely jesting with me.”

“In sober sadness,” said the earl, “nothing can be more remote from my present thoughts than jesting. Seriously and truly, madam, colonel St. Irwin, the immediate heir to the dukedom of Ardenbrooke, has commissioned me to express his sincere respect and admiration, and to solicit for him the hand of Cecilia Delmore.”

Mrs. Doricourt turned to Cecilia; her own countenance expressed approbation; that of Cecilia confusion and perplexity—“It is a great and generous offer, my love,” said Mrs. Doricourt. “Colonel St. Irwin is a man of sense and education, of noble family, and affluent fortune.”

Cecilia turned pale; she grasped the hand of Mrs. Doricourt, and faintly articulated—“I am honoured, distinguished by colonel St. Irwin’s preference, but I dare not, cannot accept.”

“Do not alarm your spirits unnecessarily, Cecilia,” said the earl; “this is a matter on which your own judgment and choice can alone decide. I shall merely point out the advantages that will result from your acceptance of colonel St. Irwin; no persuasions will be offered, no dictates used. It is true, St. Irwin is full twice your age, and this, I think, is the only objection that can possibly arise against him; for in person he is handsome and dignified; in manners a gentleman. His natural good sense he has improved by studying the best authors; that he is a brave man, will be acknowledged by enemies as well as friends; rank and fortune accompany the offer of his hand.”

“Above, far above my humble expectations,” said Cecilia, “are such munificent offers.”

“I will not admit this humility,” replied the earl; “I would have you consider the advantages that will result to yourself, the delight it will afford your friends, to behold you honourably elevated to rank and fortune.”

Cecilia’s eyes filled with tears, but struggling with emotion, she said—“I have considered, my lord, and perceive the path I ought to pursue. Colonel St. Irwin is your friend, Mrs. Doricourt approves him, and I—yes, my lord, duty and gratitude command my obedience—I am ready.”

“To confirm the hopes of colonel St. Irwin,” asked Mrs. Doricourt, “to accept him for your husband?”

“I perceive,” resumed Cecilia, pale and agitated—“I perceive you think it proper I should accept him. Do with me as you please; you have a right to all my obedience; I should be a monster of ingratitude if I suffered my own wayward fancies to oppose the judgment of friends to whom I owe so much.”

Cecilia could utter no more; she sunk back on her seat; the tears rushed from her eyes; they relieved her oppressed feelings, and prevented her fainting.

“Dearest Cecilia!” said the earl, affectionately pressing her hand, “recover your spirits; nothing repugnant to your own inclination will be exacted from your obedience. We are your friends, not your tyrants; and believe me, my sweet girl, I should regret to see you seated on a throne, if I thought your elevation was effected only by a principle of gratitude; nor would the knowledge that obedience to the wishes of your friends gave him your hand, satisfy a mind delicate, sensitive, and refined as St. Irwin’s. No; his heart, replete with every generous and noble feeling, would require, to constitute its felicity, a warmer sentiment.”

Cecilia being restored to composure, Mrs. Doricourt said—“I entreat you, my beloved child, let not duty and gratitude, however highly the earl of Torrington and myself may appreciate these virtuous impulses, influence you on a point so important as this. Remember, that vows plighted at the altar involve not only your earthly, but your eternal felicity. For myself, I solemnly affirm, and I am persuaded that the earl is actuated by the same sentiment, I would much rather behold you happy than great—Speak to me, Cecilia, and I charge you, be not allured with the expectation of a title, or the glitter of wealth—Can you become the wife of colonel St. Irwin with the cheerful concurrence of your heart, and the unequivocal approval of your conscience?”

Cecilia’s expressive countenance underwent many changes from red to pale, at this solemn appeal to her heart and conscience, at the moment that rank and splendour presented themselves in glittering array to her imagination. The interesting form of the elegant Rushdale pressed on her heart, and conscience whispered—“How can you solemnly pledge your faith to St. Irwin, when you are certain that you prefer another?”

Mrs. Doricourt trembled, lest the dazzling advantages of title, wealth, and worldly consequence, should get the better of Cecilia’s virtuous principles; but suspense on this point became torture, and again she requested a candid reply.

The face of Cecilia sunk on Mrs. Doricourt’s shoulder; for a moment, and only a moment, she remained silent and undecided; but virtue was triumphant—“I respect,” said she, “I esteem colonel St. Irwin; but I am certain I can never love him.”

“Then Heaven forbid,” returned the earl, “that you should marry him! Look up, Cecilia; the friends who are anxious for your advancement in life can never wish to obtain it by the sacrifice of your happiness. Be ever thus ingenuous, my sweet girl; and whenever you marry, let the chief inducement be affection, not ambition.”

Cecilia pressed the hands of the earl and Mrs. Doricourt to her lips, with tears of grateful pleasure, faithfully promising to be always guided by their advice.

Mrs. Doricourt, ever an enthusiast, clasped Cecilia to her heart, and extolled her conduct in refusing the noble St. Irwin, since her heart could not invest him with its dearest affections.

The earl promised to convey Cecilia's grateful thanks to the colonel, and to use his best endeavours to convince him of the propriety of her refusal.

When the earl had withdrawn, Cecilia informed Mrs. Doricourt of her loss of the note-case, and of her never having examined its contents.

Mrs. Doricourt expressed concern, but was inclined to believe the servants must have picked it up; and previous to informing the earl, she advised acquainting Mrs. Milman, who might cause an examination among the household.

Mrs. Milman was seated in earnest confab with Mr. Wilson, when Cecilia, affectionately saluting them, placed her hand in Wilson's, and seated herself by his side.

"Well," said Mr. Wilson, "this is something like former times, and does not smack of pride; and I am very glad, Miss Delmore, for of course it must not be Cecilia now, to see you look so well, which I did not expect, for late hours do not amend the looks."

"And why not Cecilia as usual?" demanded she, with one of those artless smiles that he had always thought so beautiful and engaging; "and why not your Cecilia now as well as formerly, Mr. Wilson?"

"No, no," replied he, shaking his head, "you are now company for ladies and lords—a very different person from my Cecilia, who used to put her little hand in mine, and trip like a fairy by my side over the fields, and amuse me with her engaging prattle."

"I may be altered in person, my estimable friend," replied Cecilia, "but in mind, in affection, believe me I am still your Cecilia."

"And then," resumed Wilson, in a querulous tone, "you are going to be married to this high priest, this Mr. Oxley, who seems to look down upon every body with such pride and consequence. A parson ought to be meek and humble, like the doctrine he preaches; instead of which, he is proud as the—and lord Torrington is to give him, as a fortune with you, the rich livings that I did certainly suppose——"

"Is this true, Cecilia?" interrupted Mrs. Milman; "those livings will be a handsome portion indeed, for they are very valuable. I much wonder though, child, that you never mentioned a word to me, that the earl had settled this marriage for you with the reverend."

"Believe me, my dear aunt," replied Cecilia, "the earl has no such intention; and I assure you, Mr. Oxley would never be my choice, if the earl could make him a bishop."

"Dear me! and why not?" asked Mrs. Milman; "I am sure, child, the reverend is a fine, comely, portly-looking man, and holds up his head just as if he was somebody of consequence already. I declare," smoothing her clear muslin apron, "I don't think I should refuse him, if he was to make me an offer, and my own father was a reverend. But perhaps, Cecilia, you are looking higher than Mr. Oxley—a lord, or a baronet. Well, child, nobody knows what luck they are born to; and you are but just out of the egg-shell, as one may say—a mere chick; you have got time enough yet to look about you, and pick and choose."

"I perfectly agree with you, my dear aunt, that I am too young even to think of marriage," said Cecilia; "and I am happy, so very happy in my present state, that let me change it when I may, I scarcely dare hope for such felicity. But come that period soon or late, if I know my own principles at all, I shall never be allured into matrimony by the nonsensical vanity of being called my lady, or with the ostentatious wish of possessing

more wealth than I know what to do with, or than others more deserving than myself of the gifts of fortune.”

“You are still my Cecilia,” said Wilson, kindly shaking her hand; “you are what I always thought you—a sensible, upright-minded girl; and since I find this high priest, this stiff-necked parson, is not your choice, why perhaps things may all be right yet, and marriages may take place, and livings may be given, *tol lol de dol lol*.” Wilson sang a bit of a tune, rubbed his hands, then addressing Mrs. Milman—“Do, my good woman, give me a glass of your peach brandy; I protest it is the finest cordial in the world.” Mrs. Milman, gratified with his praise of her cordial, rose to reach it from a liquor-case, while he continued to say—“I declare I am quite happy to find—to see, I mean, that Cecilia is not corrupted by these high-flyers, these town-bred fops and devildums of quality—Pshaw! the only qualities they possess are pride, assurance, vanity, and deceit. Well,” drinking off the cordial, “Mrs. Milman, here’s the completion of all our honest desires.”

“Amen, Mr. Wilson, with all my heart!” responded the housekeeper, settling her frills.

Cecilia’s lips did not utter an audible amen, but her heart felt a wish, in which lord Rushdale was included, and a sigh and a blush made the response.

Cecilia having mentioned the loss of the note-case, left her aunt more than ever convinced, that her extraordinary beauty could not fail to make her fortune; and so absorbed was she in ideas of her own future grandeur and consequence, that she had actually forgotten the presence of her friend Wilson, till suddenly starting from his chair, he exclaimed—“DELAYS ARE DANGEROUS; I will conquer my plaguy bashfulness, and speak my mind at once boldly.”

Mrs. Milman had often flattered herself that her comely person, her prudent behaviour, and good management, had not been overlooked by Mr. Wilson; she had, year after year, till many had passed away, expected that he would make her an offer of his hand—an offer she had made up her mind not to refuse, because it was well known to every body that Wilson was a monied man. He had lately built himself a very neat house, and had consulted her taste in the furniture, which he certainly would not have done, if he had not designed she should be its mistress; and more than this, he kept a handsome gig; besides, the man was in the prime of life, his person was far from disagreeable, and his temper appeared to be very tolerable. When he talked of speaking his mind boldly, Mrs. Milman was all over in a twitter, and she sat expecting the realizing of her hopes, and rather impatient for the declaration of his passion.

Perceiving he stood pondering, as she believed, on the important “*to be, or not to be, a husband*,” Mrs. Milman kindly endeavoured to relieve his perplexity, by asking, what he was going to speak his mind about? “I am sure, Mr. Wilson,” said she, putting on an agreeable smile, “if you have any favours to ask, nobody has a better right than you to expect to have them granted.”

“I am obliged to you, Mrs. Milman, for your good opinion,” returned he.

“Dear bless me! not at all,” replied she, smiling kindly on him, “not at all, Mr. Wilson; and I am sure, if I have any concern in your wish, you have only to ask and have.”

“Thank you, thank you kindly, Mrs. Milman,” said Wilson; “you are as good a woman as ever lived, and I am greatly obliged to you; but the favour I have to ask is from the earl, and yonder he is alone; I will go and speak to him directly.”

Wilson hurried out of the room.

“The man’s a fool, a downright blockhead, an ass, an idiot!” said Mrs. Milman, quite disappointed and vexed to think he could not take her hints. “But perhaps this may be for the best,” continued she, “after all; for if Cecilia marries a lord, why no doubt she will provide better for me than if I was to have Wilson. No one knows what they are born for, and one great event leads on to another. Cecilia becomes my lady—a countess, no doubt—she places me in affluence—I am neither old nor ugly, of course I shall be introduced among great people; and if I have the good fortune to attract some baronet myself, why I shall bless Wilson for not offering to marry, and make me mistress of his new brick-house and his handsome gig.”

END OF VOL. II.

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