

THE  
PRINCESS  
OF  
CLEVES.  
AN  
HISTORICAL NOVEL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

L'amour ne vient qu'une fois; s'il n'a pas été  
encore prouvé, il doit être attendu.

ANON.

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TO THE  
READER.

THE following Novel will, I hope, be found interesting; for the story is simple, although the actors are supposed to be persons of the first rank in life. There are certain parts of the original, which is in French, that appear to be lengthened out, rather more than is necessary, as dwelling upon adventitious or trivial circumstances, generally draws off the attention from the principal action, and, of consequence, in a certain degree, throws a heaviness over the whole relation—on which account the story, as it now appears, is something shorter than the original.

It may possibly be objected to this little piece, that it contains no moral.—I must here beg leave to offer a few words in favour of a performance, which I own has employed several of my leisure hours most agreeably.

The story at least serves to prove, that the most rigid virtue, the most distinguished rank, united to the best character, will scarcely be found powerful enough to prevent that woman from feeling the deepest sorrow and distress, who gives her hand without her heart.—There is nothing romantic in this assertion, the deduction is plain, and the lesson may be useful.

Let me add, that whatever awakens our sensibility for *suffering virtue*, will always be productive of salutary effects, to an innocent mind.

If this be true, the story of the Princess of Cleves, cannot be pronounced devoid of moral.

THE  
PRINCESS OF CLEVES.

DURING the reign of Henry the second of France, magnificence and galantry bore an equal sway. The disposition of this Monarch inclined most particularly to favour and encourage all that could promote elegance and gaiety. Venus and the Graces presided at his court; and an emulation of excellence reigned throughout: actuated by this laudable principle, each competitor gained at least some degree of perfection. The most accomplished persons only were, at this period, to be found at the French court. Mary Stuart, afterward Queen of Scotland, was then Dauphiness; her beauty and elegance were even then conspicuous. The Queen and Princess of France were also possessed of a refined taste in poetry and music; they, as well as the Dauphiness, patronized and encouraged the polite arts. The Duke de Nemours, if not of the first rank at this court, was acknowledged to be the handsomest and most accomplished nobleman there; his figure, though remarkably fine, was the object but of secondary praise: his great virtues and agreeable qualities rendered him the object of universal admiration: he possessed, in an eminent degree, these talents which make conversation delightful. A good understanding, with much information; a natural vivacity, with a most winning address; a sweetness and gentleness of manners, made him equally pleasing to both sexes. He excelled in all the manly exercises: whatever he did, was sure to procure him the applause of the beholders. Worth, honour and elegance, combined to make the Duke de Nemours beloved and respected where-ever he appeared. With so many graces of mind and person, it is easy to imagine he was distinguished by the favour of the Fair: each thought herself flattered by the most trifling attention from him; but his heart seemed to have made no election, and though beloved by many, he could not be yet said to have manifested an equal sensibility.

Ambition and galantry were the springs that here actuated every one; the ladies had near an equal share in the interests, the business, and intrigues, that employed this court; and love seemed here united with the most important concerns of state, while each followed with warmth and eagerness their several pursuits. Languor was utterly unknown. The Queen, the Dauphiness, Madame de Valentinois (the King's mistress) and the Princess, had each their several suitors and favourites of both sexes. The extreme beauty of the Dauphiness, the sweetness of her disposition, and a partiality she was thought to shew towards the Duke de Nemours, gave rise to a suspicion that he loved and admired that Princess.

He had been when in England particularly distinguished by the favour of Queen Elizabeth. The French ambassador then in London was continually repeating the favourable sentiments she expressed for the Duke in his absence. The King spoke to Nemours on this subject, and advised him not to neglect an opportunity that flattered him with so great a prospect. He at first treated this conversation as a piece of raillery; but on his Majesty's more seriously repeating it to him, he only begged he would be pleased not to divulge the vanity of the attempt, till his success might justify him to the public. The King promised he would be silent; and though Nemours declined going himself to

England, he dispatched a favourite friend and confidante to that court, to observe and watch the inclination and intention of the Queen, while he set out himself for Brussels, on a visit to the Duke of Savoy, who was there with the King of Spain.

About this time there appeared at the court of France, a lady, who in the midst of acknowledged beauties, attracted all eyes: she was of the family of the Viscount de Chartres, and one of the richest heiresses in the kingdom. Her father had died during her infancy, and left her to the guardianship of Madame de Chartres, her mother, who was a woman of great merit and accomplishments. After her husband's death, she had retired from court, and devoted her attention solely to the educating of her daughter, in a manner suited to her birth and fortune. The person of Mademoiselle de Chartres, which was naturally beautiful, had every advantage that a polite education could bestow; but her mind had been the principal object of her mother's care; and it was replete with every merit. Madame de Chartres thought differently from the generality of prudent mothers, who seem to found the security of their daughter's virtue, on their ignorance of that passion which alone can endanger it. She talked of love, and described it, as it really is, the source of our most exalted joys, and our most poignant sorrows. She informed her of the insincerity of men; of their want of candour, of their deceit and infidelity, and pointed out the causes from whence springs domestic unhappiness; while, on the other side, she beautifully represented *in the strongest lights*, the felicity attending a virtuous wife and mother; she remarked to her, that virtues as well as vices were most conspicuous in women of rank and beauty, and anxiously inculcated to her what could alone constitute her future happiness,—To merit a sincere passion, and to be capable of returning it. Mademoiselle de Chartres was, in point of fortune, one of the greatest matches in France; and though she was very young had many proposals of marriage. Her mother, who was extremely ambitious, declined every offer that was made her in the provinces, and brought her daughter to Paris, in her sixteenth year, before she had been presented at court. The Prince of Cleves happened to meet her at the house of a merchant where she went to purchase some jewels, and was so struck with her appearance, that he could not conceal his surprize at her beauty. His particular attention alarmed her delicacy, and added the beautiful blush of modesty to a face already full of charms. She received the Prince's address with an elegance peculiar to her, which added to his admiration. He perceived from her manner and the retinue which attended her, that she was of high rank: from her youth he indulged the hope that her heart was yet disengaged; and from that time he became her passionate admirer. He visited at the court of the Princess, that evening, and could speak on no other subject but the beautiful stranger. The Princess told him she believed no such creature existed, for so much beauty as he talked of, could not be long concealed. One of the ladies who knew Madame de Chartres, and her daughter, whispered the Princess, that it must certainly be Mademoiselle de Chartres the Prince had seen. A few days after Madame de Chartres and her daughter made their appearance at court, where she met with so favourable a reception from the Royal Family, as sufficiently proved how much her beauty and engaging manners had power to sway all hearts in her favour; and she received the compliments and praise of this polite circle with the most becoming modesty. The Princess, after a just tribute to her beauty, could not forbear adding, that it had made the most sensible impression on the Prince of Cleves; and at that instant seeing him near her, she called him; Satisfy my curiosity (said she) by

telling me, if in presenting to you Mademoiselle de Chartres I do not shew you again that beauty you so much wished to behold; I expect at least your thanks for introducing you to a lady who is one of the brightest ornaments of our court. The Prince of Cleves was transported to find that she who had engaged his heart was every way worthy of his choice, and found an opportunity of declaring how much he was devoted to her.

The Chevalier de Guise, who was the Prince's first friend, became, as well as many others, deeply enamoured with the fair de Chartres. She was now present at all the public entertainments of the court, and a most particular and distinguished favourite of the beautiful Dauphiness. The Prince of Cleves was her declared and avowed admirer; he pursued his suit with the utmost ardour, but feared the haughtiness of Madame de Chartres. This fear was alone the timidity of love; for he had then a very near relation married to a lady of the Royal Blood. He had many rivals to contend with; the Chevalier de Guise was one of the most formidable; their former friendship diminished daily, and they had scarcely the power to conceal their mutual resentments.

Madame de Valentinois was a professed enemy to the Viscount de Chartres, uncle to Mademoiselle; she was therefore determined, if possible to prevent the marriage of the Prince of Cleves with his niece: she employed all her interest with the Duke de Nevers, father to that Prince, who absolutely refused his consent to their union. Madame de Chartres was thoroughly sensible of the dangers her daughter was exposed to in a court, where galantry was universally pursued; she conjured her, not as a mother, but as a friend, to acquaint her with every sentiment of her heart, and to make her the confidante of every particular address she should meet with, promising by her advice and experience to guide her safely through the dangers that awaited her.

The Cardinal of Lorrain forbid his nephew, the Chevalier de Guise, to think of an alliance with Mademoiselle de Chartres, for the hatred he likewise bore to the Viscount her uncle. The indignation Madame de Chartres conceived at the affront she thought she received from the houses of Cleves and Guise, made her determined to exalt her daughter still above them. She then fixed on the son of the Duke de Montpensier, to be the husband of Mademoiselle. This nobleman was of the first rank at court, and much in favour with the King: She was assisted in her design by her brother-in-law, the said Viscount de Chartres, a man of great abilities, and had managed it with so much dexterity, that she had nearly surmounted all difficulties. She imparted her scheme to the Dauphiness, whom she engaged in her interest, both with the King and Duke de Montpensier, who was distantly related to the Royal Family.

Madame de Valentinois, having by some means discovered this matter, imparted it to the King, and so prejudiced him against the marriage, as rendered the friendship of the Dauphiness vain. He told her, he altogether disapproved of the alliance she spoke of, and desired her to acquaint the Duke de Montpensier with his pleasure. No person dared further to pursue Mademoiselle de Chartres, fearing to incur the King's displeasure, or despairing she would accept any thing beneath the match that had been proposed for her.

The death of the Duke de Nevers soon left the Prince of Cleves at liberty to pursue his inclinations; the first use he made of that liberty, was to offer his hand and fortune to the lady he had so long loved. But though having the power to convince her of his attachment by so strong a proof, he was not, however, altogether happy; he loved her to excess, but feared he had not been sufficiently fortunate, to inspire her heart with an equal degree of passion; and was not without some jealousy that the Chevalier de Guise possessed her favour more than himself. But reflexion having soon convinced him that these ideas proceeded more from his own apprehensions than her behaviour; he entreated her to make him acquainted with her real sentiments for him; assuring her, that though her refusal would render him for ever miserable, he was capable, even in this instance, of preferring her happiness to his own.

Mademoiselle had a heart full of tenderness and generosity: she pitied the passion which she had inspired, though she was not capable of returning it. She was sensible of the constancy of the Prince's attachment to her, and grateful for his kindness; these sentiments gave a softness to her speech and manner, that flattered the Prince of Cleves so far as to make him hope, he was not indifferent to her. Madame de Chartres was consulted, who approved of their union, but wished her daughter to assure her that she loved the Prince of Cleves. Mademoiselle could only answer that she highly esteemed his good qualities, that she could marry him without reluctance, and preferred no other person to him. Madame de Chartres unfortunately thought this cold assent sufficient, and ventured to bestow her daughter on a man whom at that time she did not love. His proposals were formally accepted; the articles were concluded, and the intended match made public.

The Prince of Cleves was sensible of the highest transport at the idea of his approaching nuptials, yet his reason did not assent to his joy. He could not deceive himself into an opinion, that Mademoiselle de Chartres felt any other sentiments than those of gratitude and esteem for him, as the circumstances of their situation would have warranted her shewing some degree of tenderness to her husband elect, without the least offence to her maiden modesty. Her manners remained totally unaltered, though scarce a day passed in which the Prince did not pour forth his complaints of her coldness.

Is it possible (said he to her one day) that I can be unhappy even on the eve of my marriage with the woman I adore? Yet it is certain that my heart is not at peace. The condescending softness with which you treat me, does not satisfy my ardour; you do not express the least inquietude at my absence, or emotion at my presence, and seem to be no more affected by my passion, than you would be if my attachment arose from the advantages of your fortune, and not from the united charms of your mind and person.

You injure me by your complaints, replied she, I have already granted every thing within the bounds of decorum to your wishes. Ah, charming maid! cried he, I should be too happy if I could persuade myself that you had any sentiments for me, which prudence forbade you to reveal. But on the contrary, I fear that your heart has no share even in the slight appearance of kindness with which you sometimes honour me. Ought not (said she, with inimitable sweetness) those blushes which you now call forth, and which I cannot

hide from you, be a sufficient proof you are not indifferent to me? Ah! Madam (replied the Prince) it is impossible you can ever return a love like mine.

The fair de Chartres was but too sensible of the calmness of her own attachment; and wished that the ardour of her lover might be able to kindle an equal flame in her bosom. Madame de Chartres, knowing the sensibility of her daughter, was astonished that the passion of the Prince of Cleves should make no greater impression on such a heart; and took every occasion to extol his virtues, and place his attachment in the strongest and most forcible light.

The marriage was at length solemnized at the Louvre, and the Royal Family were present; the entertainment was extremely magnificent: the Chevalier de Guise assisted at the ceremony, but it was easy to perceive the distress it gave him. The prince of Cleves was unfortunate enough to be sensible that Mademoiselle de Chartres had not added to her affection by her change of situation; he was conscious he had a right to her heart, but did not feel that he had obtained it: her person was not the utmost of his wish; he still sued as a lover for that return of passion he could not be happy without.

The conduct of the Prince was such as to leave no room for jealousy, even in the midst of a court where galantry was openly professed; and where, though she was surrounded with admirers, she admitted not of any particular address: every one approached her with respect. The Marshal de St André, who had been long her lover, and who possessed many advantages, could only prove his partiality by assiduously rendering every little attention in his power. Many others wished to be regarded with favour by this charming woman. But Madame de Chartres's excellent counsels were so interwoven with her own purity and delicacy of mind, that she convinced the court of France she had a soul so virtuous as to resist every tint of the folly that surrounded her.

The Duke de Nemours was yet at Brussels, his thoughts wholly taken up with his great design in England. Dispatches and couriers had passed and repassed from the few he had trusted with his secret. His hopes were now raised to the utmost; and his friend informed him that it was time he should make his appearance. He received this intelligence with all the joy a young ambitious mind could feel: his heart was so elevated with the apparent greatness of his fortune, that he would not permit an idea of difficulty to interpose. He immediately dispatched orders to Paris for a most magnificent equipage to be prepared, that he might appear at the court of England with the splendour the greatness of his design required. He hastened to Paris to be present at the marriage of the Duke of Lorraine, before he went for England, and arrived only time enough to prepare for the ball held in honour of the nuptials.

The Princess of Cleves had heard the highest praises of this nobleman; the Dauphiness had often spoken to her of him, as so superior to the generality of mankind, that she felt a degree of impatience to behold so extraordinary a person. She was that evening by far the most brilliant figure at the Louvre. Her dress was prepared for the occasion: that, as well as her beauty, outshone all others. She was dancing when she perceived by some noise and bustle at the entrance of the room, that some considerable

person had just then appeared: She had finished a minuet with the Duke of P——, when the King himself brought the stranger up to her; and she instantly knew him to be the Duke de Nemours.—He was dressed with the utmost elegance, and a murmur of applause attended their performance. As soon as it was over, the Queen asked if they did not wish to be known to each other. “It is impossible I can be mistaken (said the Duke) this lady can be no other than the Princess of Cleves; but I entreat your Majesty do me the honour to inform her who it is that admires her.” I believe (whispered the Dauphiness to her) you can divine as well as the Duke.” “I am not so good a prophet, as you imagine, Madam,” (answered she). “You are a hypocrite,” replied the Dauphiness. Nemours had thought the Dauphiness a perfect Beauty: such indeed she was allowed to be: he now thought the Princess of Cleves had some advantages.

The Princess was so pleased with the entertainment of the evening, that notwithstanding it was very late before she retired, she called to give Madame de Chartres (who she knew went out early to rest) some account of it; and spoke of Nemours with a warmth of expression, unusual to her.—This penetrating mother perceived it even then with uneasiness.

The day following was that of the marriage of the Duke of Lorraine. The Duke de Nemours was there, still more conspicuous than he had been the night before: his conversation was easy, cheerful, pleasant, directed to all, admired by all: every one attended to what he said; and his praises were the only theme where he was not himself engaged.—Madame de Cleves also joined in the common subject; she had many opportunities of conversing with the Duke, and he involuntarily endeavoured to render himself amiable in her eyes. As he was the most accomplished man, so was she the most accomplished woman, of the court. It was not surprising that they should be infinitely agreeable to each other.

Nemours, without being conscious of his danger, conceived a violent passion for this lady: it seemed in a short time to have robbed him of all other thoughts; he took care to be constantly of her party, and to refuse all those, where she was not to be one. He now scarcely listened to any conversation in which she did not bear a part. He went oftenest to the court of the Dauphiness, because Madame de Cleves was most frequently there; yet he was resolved rather to bury in his heart the sentiments he felt, than to suffer her name to be mentioned by the public in a way it had never yet been; his conduct in this matter was so circumspect that no one guessed at the person who had occasioned the change that was so observable in him.

Madame de Cleves herself would have been equally ignorant, had not the looks and actions of Nemours been more interesting to her than they were to any one else. She could not prevail upon herself to declare to her mother with the ingenuousness she had hitherto done, the situation of her mind; she was resolved this secret should be confined to her own breast. Madame de Chartres wanted not to be told, she was already but too sensible of the danger of her daughter, and it gave her the utmost disquiet. Her good-sense and experience taught her to observe that both the fame and peace of Madame de Cleves were concerned.

The Marshal de St. André, who was fond of shew and expence, gave a sumptuous entertainment, at which were present the King and Queen; but Madame de Cleves was the person to whom he particularly meant the compliment. The Dauphiness had presented her with some jewels which she was to wear on the occasion. That Princess had been indisposed; and was with a very small company in her own chamber, attended by no other lady than Madame de Cleves, when the Prince of Conde was admitted. "I am come" (said he, after some other conversation) "from supporting a warm argument against the Duke de Nemours, who has been bitterly inveighing against the vanity of the fair sex: it is this, he says, that causes all the distress of ours: and nothing can be so strong a support to this dangerous turn of mind, so painful in its consequences, as the public diversions of the court, where the ladies absolutely appear for no other purpose than to gain general admiration: While the lover there sees his mistress as much pleased with the empty adulations of others, as with those attentions which proceed really from his heart, she has not a look to bestow on him who truly loves her, and must have so great a consciousness of the power of her beauty as must for the time efface every other idea. "I believe," concluded the Prince, "there is a little selfishness in the opinions of Nemours, as his Majesty sends him particular dispatches to-morrow to the Duke of F——, and it will not be possible that he can be present at St. André's entertainment in the evening." Madame de Cleves attended to this conversation; it occurred to her then, though it had never done so before, that there was an impropriety in her going to St. André's ball, when she knew he professed himself her lover.—She gave this reason to her mother, who reminded her, that, in accepting an invitation where such numbers were concerned, there could be no particularity, whatever there might appear in a refusal. Madame de Cleves was so obstinately bent on being absent, that an apology of indisposition was sent. Nemours returned the day after the entertainment, and was informed that the Princess of Cleves had not been present at it; and a flattering hope arose, that his conversation had been repeated to her. She that day made her appearance at the court of the Dauphiness in an undress, as if not yet perfectly recovered. "You look so well (said the Princess, who was engaged in conversation with Nemours when Madame de Cleves entered) that I really think you might have been with us last night. I have a strong suspicion, that the arguments of this gentleman which were repeated to us, had more influence over you than any indisposition." Madame de Chartres now knew the reason of her daughter's absence from the ball. She could not easily prevail upon herself, nor did she think it right to tell her, that she knew the situation of her heart; but she took frequent opportunities of mentioning the Duke to her in a way that she hoped would cause her to think of him with that indifference it was necessary she should. In these conversations she denied him not the worth and merit he so apparently possessed; she even extolled them, but assured Madame de Cleves, that he was professedly a man of galantry; that women were his amusement; that, at present, he was attached to the Dauphiness, from whose court he was hardly ever absent. "I advise you, my dear daughter," said Madame de Chartres, "avoid this dangerous character: the world sees your great intimacy with the Dauphiness, they will at least imagine you are her confidante, and it will be better you should even resign her friendship, than engage yourself in the intrigues that are here practised."

Madame de Cleves was so astonished at her mother's intelligence, that she lost all power to conceal the distress it gave her: when alone, she gave way to the utmost anguish. "Wretch that I am! (exclaimed she) the Prince of Cleves deserves my utmost tenderness: his wish, his study, is to oblige and make me happy; while I, ungrateful and unworthy of his love, bestow that affection which is his due on one who is ungenerous enough to feign an attachment to me, in order to hide that which he really feels for another. My situation is such, that I dare not impart it to my mother. She will despise even her daughter when capable of such weakness. Yet I will tell her, and she will help me to conquer what I really despise in myself."—She went with this resolution to the house of Madame de Chartres; but finding her very much indisposed, was obliged for that time to defer her intention.

She then proceeded on her usual visit to the Dauphiness, who had not yet quitted her own apartment, where there were only a few ladies attending her. "You are welcome, my dear Madame de Cleves (said she) we were just speaking of Nemours and the surprising change there is in him since his return from Brussels. He was once the most galant of men; you know I have often told you so: he scarcely distinguished particular merit, so general a lover was he said to be; he has now lost all his gaiety, all his vivacity: tell me, is he any thing like what I told you he was?" Madame de Cleves could not hear this speech addressed to her without feeling great indignation. She very coolly replied for the present; but as soon as she had an opportunity of speaking to the Dauphiness alone, she said, "You were surely very unkind, Madame, to speak to me as you have done of the Duke de Nemours; the more so as you flattered me with your confidence, and know yourself to be the cause of that change you have observed in him." "'Tis you that are unkind, said the Dauphiness: if it were as you say, I should not keep it from your knowledge." This answer was however by no means satisfactory to Madame de Cleves.

When she returned to the house of her mother, she found her much worse: a fever had attacked her, and in a few days she was pronounced by her physicians to be in great danger. Her daughter scarcely ever quitted her chamber; and the Prince of Cleves remained constantly at her house, that he might omit no opportunity of softening and sharing the griefs of a wife he loved with the most tender and ardent affection. Nemours, who had been long well acquainted with him, took every opportunity of cultivating his friendship. He called frequently at the house of Madame de Chartres to visit him, and enquire after the health of both the ladies; for that of Madame de Cleves was sensibly impaired by her attendance on her mother. He had sometimes an opportunity of seeing for a few minutes her laudable affection and deep distress for the danger of a valuable parent rendered still more charming, as her affliction still added to her beauty, and at the same time evinced the goodness of her heart.

He sincerely sympathized in her grief. He could not help sometimes telling her so, and in terms so pathetic, and with looks so expressive of the share he took in her sufferings, as often whispered to her heart, that she alone was the object nearest to his. Her soul more than usually softened found a pleasure (she then examined not the cause of) in his soothing, thinking that any one who had talked as he did of her sorrows, would have been equally pleasing to her.

Madame de Chartres's dissolution now approached: she received the fatal intelligence with far more composure than her daughter; with a fortitude suitable to her piety and virtue. She told Madame de Cleves she had something very particular to say to her; and, having ordered her attendants to quit the chamber, eagerly grasped the hand of her darling child, and thus addressed herself to her. "Heaven has thought fit to part us, my dearest child; and to leave you, is my only sorrow. But where shall I find words to tell you the grief I experience for the danger in which I leave you? You love the Duke de Nemours, I ask you not to confess it to me; I am no longer in a situation to avail myself of your sincerity in guiding your future conduct. I have long since discovered this fatal truth, though I forbore mentioning it to you. Your heart, my child, is yet virtuous: you must be sensible you stand on the brink of a fatal precipice; no endeavours, however painful, must be spared to prevent your proceeding one single step further. Reflect upon the duty you owe a husband who merits your utmost affection; forget not that which should be ever due to the memory of a tender mother. Your fame is yet unsullied, spotless as Purity itself. This has been my pride and pleasure. Make use of your resolution, my dearest child: fear not a transient pain. Desire your husband to remove you from this court. Ardently pursue those paths which, though unpleasant at the beginning, will lead you to lasting happiness. If any other motives than honour and virtue were necessary to induce you to persist in that character you have hitherto worthily sustained; I would tell you, that a reverse of conduct will disturb my happiness in a better world. But should (which Heaven forbid!) this heavy misfortune be inevitable, I shall welcome death with joy, since it prevents my being witness to your disgrace."

Madame de Cleves bathed her mother's hands (which still held her's) with tears, while grief denied all utterance to her words. "Farewel, my dearest child (continued the expiring monitor) let us put a period to this conversation, which is far more grievous to me than my approaching fate: I see how it distresses you: may these be the only tears you will ever shed on the occasion! Adieu, my dear daughter. Forget not, I beseech you, the last words of your mother." Having exerted herself to the utmost, she experienced a short repose: but a few hours terminated her life, and left Madame de Cleves overwhelmed with sorrow.

Her husband used every tender argument to console her, and he conducted her into the country from a scene where every object reminded her of a loss her heart most severely felt.—"Ah! my mother," would she often say to herself, "why did I lose you at a time when my fate made your presence so necessary to me? What will become of me, deprived of your counsel, of your example? To whom shall I now open my heart? Who will pity and listen to my weakness; or who, alas! will now kindly endeavour to support my sinking soul?"

The behaviour of her husband touched her heart most sensibly. She was ever with him, and became so well satisfied with the situation of her affection towards him, that she imagined Nemours for ever banished from her mind. "I love (said she) only this affectionate and best of men, and I shall yet be every thing my dearest mother wished me."

A few weeks brought the Duke a visitant to their house in the country. Madame de Cleves felt more alarmed at his arrival than she thought she should have been, and the recent death of her mother gave her an opportunity of refusing to see him, without any apparent rudeness.—She chose not to return to Paris for some time; but the Prince of Cleves having business at court, he and the Duke returned together the next day.

The former being detained in town entreated the presence of his wife, whose grief he feared would be augmented by solitude; she obeyed his summons with some reluctance, as she knew she could not avoid their receiving the visits of her acquaintance, a task she by no means felt her spirits then equal to: she examined her heart, and yet persuaded herself she had nothing to dread from the presence of Nemours. Her mother's last conversation, and the sincere regret she felt for her loss, had damped every other idea, and she judged they would never more return with any degree of strength to her mind.

The Dauphiness visited her, on her arrival in town, and having told her with great kindness, how much she had been a sharer in her afflictions, "I must now (said she) entertain you with some anecdotes of a very different nature, that have occurred since your absence from court. I must begin with Nemours's history. Do you know that his conduct is a mystery not to be discovered? It is certain he loves some woman in this kingdom sufficiently to make him neglect the prospect of being wedded to a powerful Princess. No one is his confidant, not even, I am assured, your uncle de Chartres, who was always his most intimate friend.

The ambassador can no longer excuse his delay to the Queen, he tells him so in the strongest terms; he entreats him to attend more warmly to his interest. The King himself has urged him on the subject. He excuses himself with the improbability of success; but it is very plain his wishes to succeed are totally at an end. Your uncle believes and fears that he is engaged in some very unfortunate passion, as he is almost certain he holds no sort of intercourse with the object of his love, as he is thoroughly acquainted with the manner of spending his time; all places seem alike to him and none are pleasing: de Chartres is miserable that his friend, so worthy to be beloved, should have placed his affections where, according to all appearance, they are so ungratefully received."

What a conversation was this to Madame de Cleves, believing (as she could not avoid doing) herself to be the person so fatal to Nemours! Her heart, naturally tender, what did it not feel at the idea of the distress she gave to his? At the idea that she alone was the unfortunate bar between him and that glorious fortune and elevation that awaited him? His careful concealment of his sentiments for her raised him still higher in her esteem. "The world will have it, continued the Dauphiness, that I am the person who has caused this change in the Duke de Nemours, and I am continually flattered with so extraordinary a conquest."

These last words brought an unwilling blush into the countenance of Madame de Cleves. "No one (answer'd she, coolly) could make him renounce his present prospects, but yourself." "I should certainly confess it, replied the Princess, did I know it to be so: real passion seldom escapes the discovery of those who inspire it; I am convinced Nemours feels for me no more than that complaisance and attention his address and politeness oblige him to pay to every woman of rank he approaches: I have been a pretty strict observer of his change of character, and am positively certain I have no share in whatever may have occasioned it." After some other conversation the Dauphiness left Madame de Cleves to the most uneasy reflexions.

The next day she was obliged to receive a number of visits. Nemours, who had waited her return with extreme impatience, took that opportunity of paying her his compliments: he happened to find her alone: she could not be perfectly at ease on receiving him. He approached her with a respect and fearfulness attendant only on a genuine passion. Her mourning, and the melancholy cast of her features, rather added to her beauty. He condoled with her on the loss of Madame de Chartres: the subject still indulged her:—she dwelt upon it.

She told him, that though time might possibly abate the violence of her present grief, this heavy misfortune would impress every hour of her future life with a degree of sorrow. "It is true, Madam, (replied Nemours) that great afflictions, as well as violent passions, occasion alterations in our dispositions. I have often heard this advanced, but was not actually convinced of it, till since my return from Flanders; I can now from experience pronounce it to be a truth, as I am told by my friends, that I am no longer the same person they formerly knew me."

"The Dauphiness, (said Madame de Cleves, wishing to interrupt him) yesterday made some such observation." "I am no way displeas'd, Madam, said he, that the Dauphiness has made this remark; I should be very glad she were not the only lady I respect, that did so. Mine is a situation the most painful: I appeal to yourself, Madam, if what I shall now describe is not so;—To feel the most sincere, the most pure, yet the most ardent passion, for one to whom we dare give no evidence of love, except by circumstances that are not immediately addressed to themselves: yet, though forbid to utter those sentiments which torture the heart by restraint, we are yet willing they should be sensible that we regard every other object but themselves with indifference: Even a crown would be too dearly purchased if only to be attained by absence from her we love. In general women estimate the merit of their lovers by their assiduity. Alas! Madam, in attending to your sex there is a pleasure that never costs a difficulty to perform; but, to avoid meeting the person we adore, for fear of discovering to the world, or even to themselves, that passion which is at once our happiness and misery! this, Madam, is surely the most severe task that Fate can inflict. The truest proof of a love without hope of cure is, when it has power sufficient to alter our nature and render us indifferent to every thing which formerly attached our regard. When we renounce our ambition and our pleasures, surely the object for which we do so, must be dearer than them all. Is not this, Madam, a certain evidence that one only passion engrosses the whole soul?"

Madame de Cleves was in the utmost confusion during this speech: too well did she understand whose situation he thus described, as well as the object to which it referred. She debated in her mind whether she should answer as one who had a right to be offended at such a declaration, or should let it pass seemingly unobserved. A silent advocate within her own breast pleaded excuse for what was uttered with so much delicacy and respect. She therefore only agreed with the Duke on the difficulty of such circumstances, and their further conversation was happily for her interrupted by other visitors.

When Madame de Cleves had leisure to reflect, she found she had too soon flattered herself with indifference for Nemours. She was convinced he loved her, and could only hope, that those sentiments she was likewise possessed of towards him, might remain a secret to all the world, but more particularly so to him, for whom she felt them. To effect this, and to endeavour entirely to banish what she blamed to the highest degree in herself, she determined to go seldom to court, to spend her time at home, and to be as little as possible in his company. These thoughts, so painful to her delicate mind, were attended with a deep melancholy that preyed upon her health and spirits. Her late loss was a sufficient cause to the public for her retirement and aversion to all amusements. She even flattered herself, it was the principal source of every distress she felt.

Nemours was no longer seen in public. Where Madame de Cleves was not, there could be no charm for him. The Prince, her husband, was attacked with a slight indisposition, which confined him to his house, but did not prevent him from seeing his friends. The Duke de Nemours was of that number: he spent the greatest part of the day with him. Madame de Cleves was under the utmost embarrassment on this account: The more agreeable she found the conversation of her concealed lover, the stronger charm she found in his society, the more did she become determined not to indulge herself in either. —These resolutions, though they cost her heart some struggles, she put in practice; and she began by constantly quitting the room, soon after he made his appearance there. The Duke was too much interested, not to perceive she intended to avoid him. To see her, to speak to her, were now the only pleasures he was capable of enjoying: in depriving him of these, she made him the most wretched of mankind.

Her husband grew displeased at her aversion to company. He saw that she frequently left his friends to sit alone in her chamber; tears and sighs were there her only companions. He remonstrated at this conduct with more vehemence and severity than he had ever spoken to her with before. He beseeched her not to allow grief for her departed mother to overcome her regard for those that survived, and loved her tenderly. He insisted that this cause should no longer be alledged against the society of him and of her friends.

Upon which she eagerly entreated him to take her from Paris. “Let us go, my dear Sir (said she) for Heaven’s sake, for some time, from this continued scene of dissipation: Even at home we cannot avoid company. My spirits, my health, are not yet equal to it. With the example, with the countenance, of my dear mother, how happily was I situated! Alas! Sir, there were many parts of my conduct which might have been proper, in that

situation, which are now no longer so. I desire only to be yours. Take me, I conjure you, from a scene that, so far from asswaging my sorrows, is the principal source of my distress.”

The Prince of Cleves, though affected by her tears, was not to be prevailed on by her entreaties. He believed the only way to remove the dejection that preyed upon her, and to restore her to her former self, was to insist on her again partaking those amusements of which she had often been considered as the brightest ornament. He consented to her passing a few weeks in the country; but determined that, after that period, she should again mix in all the entertainments and gaiety of the court.

Madame de Cleves then hastened to her wished retirement. There she no longer feared to see the Duke de Nemours; but though she saw him not, her thoughts were incessantly employed on him alone. By continually considering how she should banish his idea, it became the more firmly rooted in her mind. The more time she had for reflexion, the more certainly did she find herself convinced, that one only subject engrossed her every thought.

Angry and dissatisfied with herself, she now became more impatient to return to Paris, than she had been to quit it. She determined without reluctance to obey the commands of her husband, by partaking of every gaiety; and this she flattered herself would be an effectual means of dissipating ideas that with sorrow she was sensible had taken possession of her heart. She was now frequently to be seen abroad. She often met Nemours; nor was it possible for a heart, little practised as hers in disguise, to prevent his seeing that she never beheld him without emotion. Her trying to avoid his looks, the confusion his particularly addressing her occasioned; a thousand involuntary evidences convinced him he was not indifferent to her.

Among many thoughts of which Nemours was the subject, his connections and reputations from England gave Madame de Cleves the greatest disquiet. She wished him happy: she approved of his ambition: Persuaded of this, she was astonished why a prospect so likely to answer his highest hopes, should however give her uneasiness and anxiety.

That friend whom Nemours had placed in London to attend to his interest there, was now expected home. Madame de Cleves had more impatience for his arrival than Nemours himself. The Queen of England had sent her picture, done by an eminent hand, to the Dauphiness (who was her relation) “Surely” (said Madame de Cleves, when it was shewn to her) “the painter is a very great flatterer; the Queen of England cannot be so handsome.” “You are mistaken,” replied the Dauphiness, “she is not only handsome, but extremely sensible, and very agreeable. You forget that her mother, Anne Bullen, was one of the greatest beauties of her time; and I am assured that Queen Elizabeth, as well as her mother, has an engaging expression of liveliness in her countenance, very unusual to English women.” “It may possibly be so, said Madame de Cleves, yet I have been assured by those who have seen the Queen of England, that she is by no means handsome.”

The Dauphiness had about this time miniature pictures of all the beauties of the French court drawn, as a present for the Queen of Scotland, her mother. Her favourite's was one of the first done, and Nemours was sometimes present when Madame de Cleves sat to the painter. The Dauphiness asked the Prince of Cleves for a miniature he already had of his Princess, to compare the likeness with the one which was then doing: after it had been examined, it was laid upon a table in Madame de Cleves's apartment.

Nemours had long ardently wished for her picture. He saw now an opportunity of getting this treasure into his possession: and as there were many persons at that time present, he knew that Madame de Cleves only would suspect him particularly for having taken it. The scheme was no sooner formed in his mind, then it was determined upon: It was too delightful not to be pursued; no difficulties were allowed to interfere; that very instant was most favourable; the Prince of Cleves was not then in the room: His lady and the Dauphiness were deeply engaged in conversation. He approached the table and stood with his back to them; looking round, he saw the rest of the company variously engaged, and hesitated not a moment to deposit in his bosom his precious theft. Turning hastily to Madame de Cleves, he soon perceived by the crimson in her cheeks, that he had not been unnoticed by her.

The Dauphiness observing her confusion and inattention, asked her aloud what had occasioned the disorder that was visible in her countenance. Nemours was not less embarrassed by the question, than the person to whom it was addressed. When she had a little recovered herself, she determined to ask for her picture: but to do it so publicly, was to discover to the world that Nemours loved her; to ask it privately, was to engage him, at least to give him an opportunity of making further declarations on a subject which she of all others wished to avoid. She was for some time irresolute; but the idea that she made him happy without being at all blameable in doing so, turned the scale in his favour, and she determined that the picture should remain in his possession.

Nemours, though he had succeeded in a matter to him far from being of small importance, was thoroughly vexed at the disquiet that clouded the countenance of her he truly loved; and in a low voice, as he leaned on the back of the chair in which she sat, he ventured to say; "If, Madame, you have really been a witness of my presumption, yet have the kindness to let me believe you are ignorant of it; this is all I dare ask of you." He waited not her reply, but impatiently retired to contemplate at leisure what he was content to purchase, even at the expence of her displeasure.

The picture was missed and searched for, the next day. The Prince of Cleves greatly regretted the loss; and nothing could hurt the ingenuous mind of his Princess more than being obliged to hear the enquiries made after it, and the necessity she felt herself under to conceal the truth on this occasion. Her husband told her with a smile, that some favoured lover had certainly received the picture at her hands, or else had stolen it: for no one but your lover, said he, would have been content with the picture only. It had indeed been taken even from the little gold frame that enclosed it, to have some alteration made in the dress. This remark, though spoken in jest, was very sensibly felt by Madame de Cleves. "To what am I reduced?" (said she, when alone) "What is become of that

laudable sincerity in which I prided myself? My actions and my sentiments no longer agree. Oh, my mother,” (continued she, with a flood of tears) “behold not the conduct of your daughter, without you have the power to sustain her weakness, and save her from herself! She is no longer that daughter who was worthy of your love.—Yet witness, most respected shade! your last words are engraven on my heart; and I will dare to be unhappy, but not guilty! Oh! be thou still my guardian angel; support me in this conflict, and point out to me what I ought to do. Sincerity was your favourite virtue: I will obey its dictates; I will open my heart to my husband. Shall I plant sorrows in his worthy breast? Shall I tell him I have given away that affection which he merits, and which is his due? Ungenerous resolve! No, let me still stifle in my own bosom distresses which I have brought upon myself. Let me be wretched alone, but let him be ever happy.”

A match at tennis had long been fixed to be played by the King with Nemours, de Guise, and de Chartres. The Queen and the ladies of the court were present. As they were retiring after it was over, one of the Dauphiness’s ladies presented her with a letter, which she told her, had a few minutes before fallen from the pocket of the Duke de Nemours.—“Give it me,” (said the Dauphiness eagerly) “I will take care of it.”

The company then attended the King to see some famous horses which he had lately purchased. Nemours and de Guise mounted two of them, that they might be seen to greater advantage. That on which the Duke de Nemours rode, was so extremely mettlesome, that in pulling him in rather too much, he started against a post with great violence, and his rider received such a shock as for a while deprived him of sense. Every one ran to his assistance. Madame de Cleves forgot the part she was to sustain; her countenance changed, and she fainted before they could procure any thing for her relief.

Nemours, after a little while, was supported to the place where she and the rest of the ladies were. He instantly perceived the emotion this accident had occasioned her to feel, nor could she be insensible, from his looks, of the extreme gratitude this mark of her kindness had excited. No sooner was she convinced of his safety, than her face glowed at the recollection of the evidence she had involuntarily given of her anxiety for him; she yet hoped it might be attributed to the delicacy of her health and spirits, at that time; but the Chevalier de Guise, who led her to her carriage, destroyed this flattering idea. “Pardon me, Madam,” said he, “if for a moment I forget the profound respect I have ever paid you. I am too much grieved at what I have but now discovered, to remain silent; absence shall effectually prevent my presuming again to disoblige. Forgive me, Madam, when I say, that till this hour I believed all who loved you were as unfortunate as myself.” Madame de Cleves was too much hurt at this observation to answer it. The Chevalier, who had indeed tenderly loved her, really quitted the court, and went abroad soon after.

Madame de Cleves made a point of appearing at court the evening of that day which had so much distressed her: to the surprise of every one Nemours was likewise at the Louvre, more magnificently dressed than usual; so far from being affected by the accident that had happened but a few hours before, an uncommon joy lighted up his countenance, liveliness and good humour animated his features; he not only seemed, but

really was, the happiest person there. That proof, so little to be doubted, which Madame de Cleves had so lately given of the interest she took in his safety, could not but influence his behaviour.

He was universally congratulated on his fortunate escape. A thousand enquiries were made after his health, nor were they omitted by any one but her, who was of all others most sincerely interested in the enquiry. She was overwhelmed with confusion at his entrance. She seemed not to observe him as he approached her. "For Heaven's sake, Madam," (said he, stung with indifference) "repent not of the pity you have this day shewn me. I beseech you to believe that I am not unworthy of it. At least, Madam, I merit your compassion." He then passed on to speak to the lady that was next her.

"Alas!" (said Madame de Cleves to herself) "all that I wished to conceal is discovered, and Nemours now believes that I love him. Yet, is he not beloved by many? See I not this night how much respect and attention are paid him? Who can refuse esteem to worth like his? To Honour, Truth, and Delicacy, is not love and esteem due? Virtue of every kind should command its reward." Such reflexions were balm to her doubting mind; she passed the evening more tolerably than she expected, by being able to assure herself there was no peculiar partiality in thinking well of Nemours.

The Dauphiness whispered Madame de Cleves, that she had something very particular to communicate to her, and having withdrawn to another apartment, she took the letter Madame de N—— had given her from her pocket. "I have here," said she, "a treasure: it is a letter to Nemours written to him by that mistress who has sole possession of his heart: you must assist me in finding out this lady; you must carefully peruse the paper, and try, if by the character or expression you can discover the writer. Come to me early in the morning, for I shall be impatient to know what you can make of it." Madame de Cleves took the letter with a trembling hand: She was unable to make any comments on the matter, at that time, but promised to obey the Princess. They returned to the company, and she took her leave immediately after.

Having shut herself up in her chamber, with no small agitation she opened the letter, and read the following lines.

"I have loved you too well to let you believe the change you observe in me is the effect of an unsteady temper. Your infidelity is alone the cause of my coldness. You have used many arts to hide your perfidy, and will therefore wonder at the discovery I have made. Never was affliction equal to mine. I believed you loved me with a sincere affection. I imprudently scrupled not to tell you my heart felt an equal passion.—You have deceived me; you love another, and sacrifice me to your caprice and inconstancy.—You are unworthy to know that I have felt any grief on your account, yet I allow you to complete your triumph, and recommend yourself to your new mistress, by convincing her that you have already been sincerely beloved. To tell you I no longer regard you, will give you but little sorrow; yet you seemed distressed at the change in my behaviour, and I beheld your apparent uneasiness with pleasure. It will be in vain for you to protest that you do not love her, for whose sake you have forfeited my affection: all explanations are

of none effect. Your repentance can now make no atonement to me; you have once deceived me, your heart has been divided.—There requires no more to render your love no longer of any consequence to me: I utterly disclaim it. Believe that my resolution is unalterable, and that I will never see you more.”

“Unworthy man!” exclaimed Madame de Cleves, “more deceitful, because more apparently good, than the rest of your sex. There wanted but this proof to convince me of my dearest mother’s observations, and to make me fully attend to them as I ought. Yes, the Duke de Nemours is just what she painted him; capable of sporting with the tenderness of our whole sex. This letter is the picture of a virtuous, a sensible, and generous mind. Such are his amusements, and such the sacrifice his vanity requires. That he should think I regard him in any favourable light is now the only uneasiness I feel; but he shall be convinced of the contrary. I have been also the dupe of his galantry—mortifying reflection! Treacherous, and almost hateful man! I ought to look upon this discovery as fortunate; it has restored me to myself. I shall henceforward be at peace.”

Madame de Cleves passed a most restless night. She found herself much indisposed in the morning, and rose not at her usual hour; she was astonished at the situation of her mind, having persuaded herself she was no longer any way interested in the actions of Nemours. She totally forgot her promise to attend the Dauphiness very early, though the letter was yet in her hand which had occasioned that promise, and though she had read it over an hundred times.

She was not the only person who lost their repose by it. The Viscount de Chartres, to whom the letter really belonged, was miserable from its loss: he had searched in vain for it; at length he was informed, a paper had been found by one of the Pages and given to Madame de N——, who seeing him take it up had asked for it, and said she herself would take care to return it.

De Chartres was more alarmed at this intelligence than before. The Queen had long distinguished him by her peculiar favour and confidence; so high a distinction was supposed to preclude all other serious attachments. Her friendship was of the utmost consequence to him; he was bound to her by the warmest gratitude, the highest respect and zeal to her interests. But Madame de Themines, a young widow of rank and beauty possessed all his tenderest affections. She was indeed the writer of this letter, which he so much dreaded being handed about the court, and reaching the hands of the Queen.

After debating some time what method was best to pursue, he recollected, that, as there were no names inserted, Nemours might be of singular service to him, through the letter’s being supposed to have been his. He went to his house before he was risen, and, as they were on the most intimate footing, desired to be admitted to his chamber on urgent business.

Nemours, whose mind had enjoyed a most delightful tranquillity from the idea that Madame de Cleves was not insensible to his passion, was extremely unwilling to be disturbed; but, on hearing the message, instantly attended the summons of his friend. "I am come" (said de Chartres) "to acquaint you with a matter to me of the utmost moment. You are but little obliged to me for my confidence; nothing but the most urgent necessity could induce me to impart to any one what I must now tell you. I hardly know where to begin, or in what terms to relate my story: but first, by our friendship I conjure you, promise me that you will own a letter which was written to me by a lady, and which I was so unfortunate as to drop from my pocket, yesterday. I am undone if you deny me this request."

"This is a very strange proposal;" (said Nemours, smiling) "do you imagine there is no one existing who would be uneasy at my receiving such letters?" "Be serious, my dear Nemours," (interrupted the Viscount) "this is really no matter of pleasantry. I doubt not of your having attachments; but you shall be enabled to acquit yourself, indeed you shall, to any particular person: At the same time be assured I speak truly, when I say, if you refuse what I now ask of you, I must by this unlucky adventure entirely break with a woman I love beyond measure, and certainly procure myself the implacable hatred of another who has it in her power to hurt my interest most materially."

"I understand you," said Nemours, "you are afraid of the Queen." "You know," said de Chartres, "that I am honoured with her friendship and confidence in a particular degree; on these terms only were they granted to me." "I am willing," said she, "and desirous that you should be my friend, but I must not be a stranger to your engagements; you must ingenuously tell me, if your heart is attached to any woman whatever." I assured her it was not. "I will believe you," said she, "because I wish it to be so. It would be impossible I should be satisfied with your attachments to me, if you confessed yourself a lover. There is no trusting those who are so, no reliance on their secrecy; their mistress certainly thinks herself entitled to their confidence: Of course such a situation would be incompatible with the friendship I expect from you; as I have many matters of the highest importance to communicate and advise with you upon."

"I dealt not ingenuously with the Queen," added he, "I loved, and still love Madame de Themines, from whom the letter I have mentioned came; judge then, on either side how distressed I shall be if this paper is handed about as mine. My conduct has been blameable, I confess; yet I entreat you to assist in extricating me from this difficulty. Go to the Dauphiness, who by this time has the letter from Madame de N——, and get it for me on any terms before it goes further."

"Your situation," said Nemours, "I allow, my friend, is an unpleasant one: You cannot doubt of my readiness to serve you; but I assure you, in this matter there are some difficulties on my own account that I would very gladly avoid: And if the paper, as you say, fell from your pocket, how am I to persuade any one that it dropped from mine?" "I thought I had before informed you," said de Chartres, "that the Dauphiness has been told the letter is yours." "How" (replied Nemours hastily; apprehending the consequence of the mistake) "do they believe it mine already?" "Assuredly," said the Viscount; "and the

reason is, that you and I were really speaking to each other, at the instant it was dropped; therefore, if you do not avow it to be yours, it must inevitably be pronounced mine, and I have already told you the fatal consequences of such an event to me; it is in your power to get it instantly returned, as yours, and to save me a world of inquietude.”

Nemours really loved de Chartres: he wished to oblige him, yet could not help hesitating to give this proof of his friendship.—He paused: he knew not what to determine upon.—“I see very plainly,” said the Viscount, “that you fear making some one you love unhappy by this mistake. This difficulty will I obviate. Most likely it is the Dauphiness herself, whom you would not suffer to imagine the letter yours. It is by no means reasonable you should sacrifice your happiness to mine. I consent to your revealing to the woman you love, whoever she be, the reasons of your conduct; and for your further justification, I give you this billet from Madame d’Amboise, the friend of Madame de Themines, who demands from me the very letter I have lost. Their names are here inserted. It is addressed to me, and will leave no doubt with the person to whom you shew it. Hasten, then, my friend, I beseech you, and set my mind at peace as soon as possible.”

Nemours gladly took the billet, as he was impatient to clear himself to Madame de Cleves, who he was certain by this time was fully acquainted with the matter. He went immediately to her house, and was a good deal disappointed to be told she was not yet risen, though it was then very late. He begged she might be asked at what hour she would see him, as he had something very particular to communicate to her. Madame de Cleves was a good deal surprised at his message but so totally out of humour at the very name of Nemours, that she answered she was indisposed, and should see no company that day.

Nemours, when he recollected the cause why he was treated thus severely, could not be altogether displeased. Any thing was preferable to her indifference; but in what manner he should be able to convince her, that he deserved not the censure he now laboured under, was a task by no means easy to accomplish. He enquired for the Prince of Cleves, and being conducted to his apartment, told him he was come to Madame de Cleves on a matter that very nearly concerned the Viscount de Chartres her uncle; that it was really an affair of some importance, and though he heard she was not well, entreated he would prevail on her to see him but for a few minutes.

He explained part of the subject of his visit, and the Prince readily conducted him to her dressing-room; where she was sitting quite in *dishabille* and alone, having desired that no visitors whatever should be admitted. She was struck with astonishment when she saw who her husband had introduced into her apartment. “You must not refuse to see Nemours (said he) he comes to you on business relative to your uncle, and you must consult together what can be done for him. I would willingly assist you, but am under a necessity of attending the King immediately. I doubt not but you will be able to relieve the Viscount from his anxiety.” Saying this he left them.

“Have you, Madam (said Nemours) seen or heard of a letter found yesterday and given to the Dauphiness by one of her ladies?”—“I have, Sir,” she replied, “but cannot

see how my uncle can be at all concerned in this matter: His name, I am certain, is not even mentioned in the paper you speak of.”—“Notwithstanding what you say, Madam, (answered Nemours) the letter is the Viscount’s, and written to him by a lady he very much regards. If you will favour me with your attention, I will relate to you, how much your uncle is interested in this affair: And if you, Madam, do not kindly lend your assistance to recover this letter from the Dauphiness, before it is rendered more public, he will think himself extremely unhappy.”

“Excuse me, Sir,” (said Madame de Cleves, a little angrily) I have not leisure at present to attend to your relation. I see not why the paper should be requested in my uncle’s name. What you could take the trouble to say to me would be of no sort of consequence; you had much better see the Dauphiness yourself. I can inform you, that she really has the letter, and likewise that she is already informed it is yours.” Nemours could not but be secretly flattered by the uneasiness visible in her countenance, when she pronounced these words. “You must at least hear me, Madam (said he) what I say is strictly true. I am really no other ways interested about this letter, than as it concerns the peace and interest of Monsieur de Chartres, to whom it really was written.”

“Very possibly, Sir, (said Madame de Cleves) but the Dauphiness has been told otherwise, and perhaps it will not be very easy to persuade her, or any one else, that my uncle’s letter should drop from your pocket. As you can have no cause, I should imagine, to conceal the truth, you had better at once confess it to be yours, and it will certainly be returned to you.”

“I have nothing to confess, Madame (said Nemours) the paper I speak of concerns my friend, and him only, and if you will deign to hear me, I will convince you of the truth of what I assert.”—He then briefly acquainted her with the circumstances that de Chartres had before told him.—The coldness and indifference with which she attended to his conversation, plainly shewed that she believed not what he said, till at length he produced the billet of Madame de Amboise; this he would willingly have suppressed; but there was no other way of convincing Madame de Cleves.

She had no sooner perused this paper (with the writer of which she was acquainted) than she entered warmly into the interests of her uncle, and confessing that the letter was then in her own possession, scrupled not to return it by Nemours. She then entreated he would assist her in framing some excuses to the Dauphiness for not returning the paper. Having agreed this matter, she was preparing to attend the Princess, when she received a message that she was impatiently expected.

“Why were you not here sooner,” (said the Dauphiness, when she saw Madame de Cleves) your delay has extremely perplexed me. The Queen has heard of our letter, she suspects it to be your uncle’s; she has made great enquiry about it, and sent to me some time ago desiring she might see it; I would not say it was with you, fearing to strengthen her in her opinion of its belonging to de Chartres, and that I had given it to you on his account. Give it me then quickly (said she) that I may send it to the Queen.”

“I know not what to say to you (answered Madame de Cleves) you will with great reason be displeas'd with me, when I confess to you that I gave the letter to the Prince of Cleves to whom Nemours had this morning told the story of his losing it. He at first only asked my interest with you for its return; but finding it was in the possession of my husband, prevail'd upon him by the strongest entreaties to restore it. He would not indeed be refus'd, after the Prince of Cleves had imprudently confess'd he had the paper. He painted it as a matter of the utmost importance, and assur'd himself, and us, that you would pardon his not waiting on you himself to request it.”

“You have acted very improperly (said the Dauphiness) to give up any thing I entrusted to you, without my consent; the consequences are, that I shall disoblige the Queen, by refusing what she will certainly believe is in my possession; and your uncle will be a sufferer, as she will never be convinc'd there are not reasons for concealing it. I am extremely angry with you (continued she) and could not have believ'd you would have abus'd my confidence so much.”

“Believe me, Madam (said the Princess of Cleves) I would not forfeit your friendship for the world; and be assur'd, I have been extremely uneasy at this circumstance, which I have not been able to avoid. I entreat that you will forgive me, and impute to the Prince my husband, that imprudence which I would not myself have been guilty of.”

“It was to you only I gave it (said the Dauphiness) and no one else but you should have seen it; however something must be done immediately, to prevent the suspicions I know the Queen entertains. She has long thought de Chartres too attentive to me. She will probably believe it is I that have written him this letter. I shall not easily forgive you for the disagreeable situation you have put me into. If you recollect the contents of the paper, instantly get it written for me, by some female hand not known, and I will send it directly to the Queen.”

“I will do any thing you command (said Madame de Cleves) happy if by any means in my power, I may be able to atone for my indiscretion.” She then hasten'd home and acquaint'd the Prince of Cleves with what had pass'd between herself and the Dauphiness, at which both were extremely uneasy. Nemours was immediately sent for, who inform'd them that the letter was absolutely return'd to Madame Themines.—“What shall I do (said Madame de Cleves) I have for ever disoblige'd the Dauphiness; were it possible to recollect the contents of the letter, I would indeed obey her commands let the event be what it would.”

“If you choose, Madam (said Nemours) to pursue this measure, by having recourse to both our memories, I am pretty sure it may be effect'd, though a word or even sentence were misplac'd or omitted, it would certainly answer to any description the Queen may have had of it. It never could be repeated so exactly to her, as we shall be able to write it.”

The expedient being approv'd on all sides, they immediately prepar'd to put it

in execution. Such an appearance of confidence in each other had a charm to both, not easily to be described. Orders were given that no company should be admitted as an interruption to their task, and the day was passed in producing a letter as like the original as possible.

Madame de Cleves had never experienced a joy so pure and sincere as this day afforded her; the presence and conversation of the man she really preferred to all others without the check of impropriety. Nay her confidence in Nemours, at this time, seemed a sort of duty, as she had been led into it on her uncle's account. The approbation and presence of her husband also combined to make her thoroughly satisfied with herself, and truly happy.

Nemours could never have seen Madame de Cleves half so pleasing as at that interview. She had entirely laid aside that restraint, which his being in her company had hitherto thrown over her behaviour, and she this day appeared a thousand times more amiable in his eyes than she had ever done before.

Several messages were sent from the Dauphiness before the letter was finished; at length it was dispatched, but so unlike that which the Queen had heard described, and partly repeated, that she was altogether so dissatisfied about the matter, and so suspicious of the delay, that it actually caused an irreparable breach between the Dauphiness and her; and the Viscount de Chartres from thenceforward entirely lost her confidence and favour.

Madame de Cleves was no sooner left alone than she began to reflect on the transactions of the day. The absence of her husband and of Nemours destroyed those pleasing illusions of happiness that had charmed her, and she felt herself the most wretched of women. "Good Heaven! (said she) is it really possible I could have been happy this day, the most culpable of my life? Have I not convinced Nemours that I love him; have I not shewn that I was jealous to the greatest degree, and have I not been visibly transported from misery to happiness, by the explanation of his conduct? Will he not think, that I approve his passion, even in the presence of a husband the most deserving of my affections? Him I deceive, and Nemours himself must despise me. This day has left me no room to doubt that my heart is guilty. Nemours only has the power to raise or depress it. While I thought he loved another, what misery did I endure! And yet, can I suppose (as I have heard him represented) that he is capable of a lasting attachment? Alas! how wildly do I talk; what is it to me if his heart were full of tenderness and truth? His virtues and his vices ought to be indifferent to me. I have suffered myself to be sway'd by an inclination most unworthy of me; but I am yet able to perceive my error, and will avail myself of that power while it is mine. I will no longer remain where this man can be seen. On this I am determined; should my husband insist on knowing my reasons for quitting Paris, I will ingenuously disclose them, and my resolutions will only be strengthened by such a confession."

These thoughts occupied the mind of Madame de Cleves the whole night, and she with great seriousness made the request the following day to her husband; assuring him,

that her health required a residence in the country for some time, and that she wished not to see Paris for many months. He laughed at her proposal, and doubted her being serious in making it. "You look too well and too handsome (said he) to be indisposed; and you forget that the marriage of the Princess, and the various entertainments prepared for these nuptials, will now very shortly take place, and you will scarcely have time to order the jewels and other articles you will want on the occasion."

"You must not, indeed (said she) oppose me in this particular; I will leave orders for what is necessary to be prepared for me. You will go to Compeigne with the King; I entreat you leave me not at Paris, but let me go to our house at Coloniers: If I am not better I shall be no ways desirous of being present at the marriage of the Princess." The Prince of Cleves could not refuse a request made with so much earnestness, and the next day Madame de Cleves departed to her retreat.

Nemours likewise attended the King to Compeigne, where they remained some time. On their return he found Madame de Cleves was still absent: He could not learn that she was expected to town. He grew uneasy and dissatisfied with every thing around him.

Since that day (so delightful, that it had never been a moment from his memory) he had not seen Madame de Cleves. His sister, the Duchess of M——, lived in the neighbourhood of Coloniers. He proposed to de Chartres, that they should spend some time at her house; to which the Viscount readily consented.

The Duchess received her visitors with much pleasure; and every amusement that the country could afford, was prepared for them. Being one day hunting, Nemours loitered behind the rest of the company: After riding some time alone, he was informed upon enquiry, that he was very near Coloniers; at the sound of that word, without further consideration, he took the direct road, and galloped towards the house of the Prince of Cleves. As he approached very near, he saw, at the end of a long walk, an elegant summer-house, with an arbour on each side, one of which opened into the garden, and the other into the park, which he had now entered.

Without reflecting what he was about, he fastened his horse to a tree, and going into the arbour, proceeded to the summer-house, the inside of which was beautifully ornamented and excited his utmost admiration. "It is here (said he) that the most amiable woman on earth passes many of her hours. Casting his eye towards one of the windows, he perceived at a good distance Madame de Cleves and her husband, who seemed coming to the place where he was. He was too much engrossed by his own ideas to be alarmed at their finding him there, and he returned to the arbour he had just quitted, only that he might see her as she approached, more plainly than he could have done, had he remained where he was; he seated himself with his arms folded and sat unmoved, though the Prince and Princess of Cleves, were now very near him. Having entered the summer-house without any of their attendants, a conversation ensued which most powerfully attracted the attention of Nemours.

“Your aversion to return to Paris (said the Prince) gives me the greatest uneasiness, as it must necessarily separate us too often, for I must be frequently there attending on the court. Your inclination for solitude, and the melancholy that oppresses you, is more afflictive to me than you can conceive. Tell me, my dearest wife, I conjure you, have you any particular cause of grief?”

“I have not, indeed (answered Madame de Cleves). Your kindness and affection awaken the warmest gratitude in my heart; you leave me nothing to wish or desire: But I know not how it is, my spirits and my health are of late very much weakened; the first is, I believe, only the consequence of the letter. I am not able to sustain the bustle and crowd our town residence subjects me to. Only let me stay here; I wish, I ask no more, except your presence, as often as you can possibly be absent from the court.”

“Alas! (said the Prince) your tears which now involuntarily flow, your countenance, your expressions, confirm me more and more that you have particular reasons for this retirement, which I am yet unacquainted with. Recompense my strong affection by telling me how I can make you happy, at least how I can dispel the cloud that now hangs over a temper by nature calm and serene: Tell me, then, my dearest life! I will not be refused; whence comes this change, so fatal to my peace?”

“Force me not, my dear Sir, I beseech you (said she) to confess to you what indeed my heart wishes to reveal, because it would not have a thought concealed from you; but alas! what I can never find words to tell you: Believe only that it is right I should absent myself from a court full of dissipation and intrigue; full of scenes which I abhor. Love me not less, I entreat you, for my choice. I would be virtuous and would be only yours.”

“Good Heaven! (said the Prince) how do you rend my heart? The anxieties you give are not to be expressed by words. What you now say is a thousand times more tormenting, than even your silence and your tears.”

“Ah, my dearest husband, my only friend (said she) sinking down on her knees at his feet, I will then make you a confession the most extraordinary, that ever yet escaped the lips of woman. The integrity of my intentions, and of my conduct, hitherto, will give me courage to proceed. You are, I am convinced, too generous to hate me for laying open to you the weakness of my heart: Be assured, your honour, or my own, can never suffer from my behaviour. This I think you will believe; but my heart is weaker than my judgment; I know what is right, and am ashamed to acknowledge I find any difficulty in pursuing it. Strengthen, I beseech you, my virtue by yours. I desire to live only in your presence. Dispose of me. Direct me. Pity me, and, if it be possible, still continue to love me.”

Had she continued still longer to speak, the Prince of Cleves would have been silent. His eyes were fixed on hers, which were rendered still more beautiful from her extreme agitation, and the tears which now stopped her further utterance. He raised her in his arms, and tenderly embracing her, “It is I, my dearest love (said he) that ought to sue

for pity, much do I stand in need of it; pardon me, if my astonishment, if my grief, prevents me from receiving as I ought a proceeding so generous as yours. I think you more worthy of esteem and admiration than any other of your sex: But alas, I cannot help thinking myself the most unfortunate of men. I have ever loved you.—Your coldness could not abate my affection, though you have never returned my love.—You love another, and I have at once the jealousy of a husband and a lover, to endure. Your behaviour is too noble, too generous, not to give me the fullest assurance of your virtue.—The confidence you repose in me is of the utmost value. You esteem me and would love me if you could, I shall not abuse your trust. I cannot love you less. You render me miserable by the clearest demonstration of fidelity that ever woman gave a husband. Stop not here then, but tell me, I beseech you, who it is you would avoid.”

“That (answered Madame de Cleves) I never shall reveal. Impute not to weakness the confession I have already made, it required less strength of mind to conceal, than to acknowledge what I have now done; ask me no further; what you would know can be of no consequence to either of us. I desire to be yours alone.”

Nemours heard this conversation with an anxiety not to be described; still more than her husband did he wish her to discover the name of that person who had occasioned a confession so extraordinary. He knew she was admired and beloved by many, and though he had sometimes flattered himself he was not indifferent to her, he could by no means be assured, that he was the person referred to in her present confession.

“I earnestly entreat (said Madame de Cleves to her husband, after having been some time silent) that you will not, by a curiosity, which must be injurious to us both, afflict yourself and me. I have this instant given you a most painful proof of my sincerity; spare me then the confusion of reciting those particulars that have made it necessary I should act in the manner I do. Be assured you will never have cause to feel that regret for me which I now feel for myself. If you believe me true, believe what I now utter from my heart. It is your affection only that can make me happy, and it is you only that I wish to love.”

“I am unjust (replied the Prince) to press you further.—Virtue has hitherto, and ever will continue, I am persuaded, to govern your actions. Would to Heaven I had no doubts more painful, and that I were as well assured of that affection I wish you to feel for me.”

One of their servants now interrupted them, to say there was a person just arrived who must see the Prince immediately. The King desired by this messenger his presence at Paris as soon as possible; and the next morning he left Madame de Cleves with the warmest protestations of esteem and love.—When he was departed, and she was left at liberty to indulge reflexion on her conduct, she was terrified with apprehensions of the consequences. “Alas! (said she) if I have unfortunately deprived myself of the love of my husband, I have lost every glimmering hope of happiness that remained for me. Yet if there was no other way, to tear from my heart a passion that disgraced it, I must not repent.—Could the confession I have made have the effect I wished, that of proving how

much I rely upon him; that I esteem and confide in him more than in myself, it could not diminish his regards.”—Such were the reflexions of Madame de Cleves.

Nemours who had quitted the garden very soon after the conversation, so interesting to him, was ended, had not for a single moment thought of any thing else. A thousand times did he pronounce himself the most fortunate of men. Many circumstances offered themselves to convince him on one side, that were as quickly balanced by an equal number of equal weight on the other.—He was no longer easy in the country.—He entreated de Chartres to return to Paris; he pretended business to his sister, and took a sudden leave of her.

On his journey to town with his friend, no other thought could find a place in his mind, but the extraordinary conduct of Madame de Cleves. Love was the only subject on which he could express an idea. He expatiated on the extravagant effects of that passion, and at last wrought up his conversation so far, as to relate the matter which wholly possessed his heart, without mentioning the person who had acted in so uncommon a manner, or allowing that himself had been particularly concerned. He spoke however of the lady and her character altogether, with so much ardour and admiration, that a less discerning man than de Chartres might have discovered he certainly was the lover, who had caused the conflict, and the conduct, he described.

His friend pressed him so much to confess the truth, and seemed so assured from former parts of his behaviour, the story was his own, that Nemours heartily repented of his indiscretion in having said so much; he declared it was related to him in confidence, and that its peculiarity only had induced him to repeat it.

The Prince of Cleves attended the King with a heart by no means at ease. The confession his Princess had made him, had raised her in his esteem, nor could it abate his affection; but the thoughts that she loved another planted tortures in his breast; for assured of her worth, of her uncommon strength and delicacy of mind, he more ardently wished to possess her heart.

On his arrival at the Louvre, the King told him he had made choice of him to conduct the Princess to Spain, after her nuptials, and she herself had desired that Madame de Cleves would attend her.—The Prince of Cleves acknowledged the honour done him, and was secretly pleased that his wife would have an opportunity of being absent from the court of France, without giving any suspicion of an extraordinary cause. He wrote to her immediately, and acquainted her with the intelligence he had received; he entreated her presence to prepare for the approaching marriage, and their journey, in a very short time afterwards.

She obeyed her husband’s summons, but they could not meet without emotions extremely painful to them both. “Your looks, my dearest life (said he) afflict me beyond measure. It is I only that have reason to be unhappy; you ought to be satisfied with possessing more virtue, truth, and honour, than any woman on earth.”—“I am here, my dear Sir (said she) by your desire; spare me, I beseech you, on this subject. I am

oppressed with shame when I speak to you.—Mention no more what but too strongly reminds me how little worthy I am of your goodness.”

“Alas! (said her husband) it is not in my power to be silent, I love you still more for that confidence which has undone me. You have filled my mind with a curiosity that preys upon my peace, and may possibly bring me to the grave. You will here behold the object of an affection that I have sought in vain; an object I cannot doubt that returns your love with ardour. With these ideas I shall ever attend you in public, and you will yet suffer me to remain in a suspense more painful than death itself.”—“Ah, my dear Sir (said Madame de Cleves) let me pretend indisposition. I will go no where. I will see no body.—This is what I wish and request.”—“It is I that am wrong (replied the Prince) it must not be so. You are and ought to be mistress of your own conduct, in every respect; but a heart like yours requires no constraint, even from itself.—My greatest security lies in your liberty. I am thoroughly convinced that you are incapable of acting wrong in any degree.”

The generous behaviour of her husband made Madame de Cleves a thousand times more attached to him than she had yet been: She felt for him every sentiment, but that which had been involuntarily given to Nemours, which she had nourished while she thought it innocent, and which she now found it impossible to banish from her heart. To avoid giving pain to him whom she really wished to please beyond any other; to prevent his thinking she feared the presence of any one, she mixed in the parties and amusements of the court, as usual. Her heart was fortified against Nemours, by the noble and delicate treatment of her husband; to add to whose happiness was indeed the study of her life.

She frequently met Nemours abroad. Her great reserve and anxiety to avoid every attention and civility he offered, afflicted him to the soul, and convinced him he had been totally wrong in the favourable conclusion he had drawn to himself from her conversation at Coloniers; however that might be he still found it was impossible he could ever extinguish in his breast, a passion the most pure and disinterested for her.—A passion which afforded all the joys and all the sorrows he experienced.

Another nobleman of the first rank yet remained to be chosen to attend the Princess to Spain. The Prince of Cleves formed a scheme to discover, from this circumstance, that secret which disturbed his peace. He mentioned to Madame de Cleves, at different times, the names of two or three, amongst whom he suspected might be the person so fatal to his quiet; but on finding no trace of emotion on her countenance, he was certain he had not yet arrived at the intelligence he at once wished and dreaded.

One evening at the Louvre after he had been some minutes in conversation with the King, he hastily came up to Madame de Cleves, and whispered her, that the Duke de Nemours was at last the person appointed to go with them to Spain. She was unable to conceal her uneasiness; her colour changed.—“No choice (said she) ought to be more disagreeable to you; he will share in all your honours. It should have been some inferior nobleman.—I really think you should if possible remonstrate against this choice.”

“Ah, Madam (said her husband) in a very different tone of voice from what he had before spoken in) forgive a stratagem I made use of to discover the secret of your heart.—You are in every thing a most extraordinary woman.—What would have lighted up the countenance of any other of your sex with joy, clouds yours with sorrow.—Every part of your behaviour excites my admiration and my love.”

He had not time to add any thing further. But it was not easy for Madame de Cleves to recover the confusion this unexpected accident had thrown her into.—She remained pensive and absent amidst all the gaiety that surrounded her, for the rest of the evening.

Nemours, who was over attentive to her looks, though at a distance, observed her distress. He could not help approaching her:— “Pardon me, Madam (said he) if I am too obtrusive: something has disconcerted you; I fear you are indisposed: every body who beholds you as well as myself will claim the privilege of being interested in your happiness.”

The sound of Nemours’s voice threw her into new distress; and scarcely recollecting herself, she said almost angrily, “For Heaven’s sake, Sir, do not persecute me.” “Who, I, Madam? (answered Nemours) Is it of me you complain, who hardly dare to address a single word to you; who am obliged to restrain my very looks; even now while I speak to you my agitation is not to be told.—Alas, Madam, I deserve not this unkindness! Is it possible, I should be accused of giving you uneasiness, who would suffer any thing to add but for a moment to your felicity.”

She now repented most heartily of the words that had escaped her; but it was too late to recall them: to extenuate or explain them would be still worse; she therefore hastily arose from her seat and very soon after retired. Her husband immediately followed, and fearing she had suffered from what he had said to her, hastened to her chamber.

“You must not shun me, my dearest love (said he) or I shall have reason to think you cannot forgive a discovery that brought a sufficient punishment along with it. I ask not your presence as a husband, but as one whose happiness depends entirely upon you; and who has for you a passion far more sincere and tender, than any other person existing.”

Madame de Cleves whose thoughts had been for some time wholly employed on the generosity of his conduct, in a situation so extremely difficult, burst into tears, and embracing him with the utmost tenderness;— “Accept (said she) best of men, this faithful tribute of my grateful heart; a heart no way insensible to your matchless goodness; were I all I wish to be, I should still be unequal to you, my kindest, dearest husband.”

De Chartres was now publicly the lover of Madame Themines, with whom he was perfectly reconciled, as to the subject of the letter, could not forbear acquainting her with the extraordinary story that Nemours had related to him: In confidence he added that he

certainly believed the Duke himself was the person who had inspired an affection which had caused a conduct so extraordinary. Madame Themines had the utmost curiosity to find out who the lady was that was so extremely partial to Nemours, and had so much attracted him.

To obtain this desirable end the story was told to several of her intimates, and at last reached the Dauphiness; to whom all matters of galantry were repeated. Madame de Cleves was not a little surprised when that Princess thus addressed her: "I have something (said she) very extraordinary to tell you.—You know we have all taken some trouble to discover Nemours's passion. I have now the whole history of this matter. He loves a lady of this court, and she returns his affection; but what will certainly surprize you, is, the conduct of the Fair-one, who is so afraid of the power Nemours has over her heart, that she has actually made her husband the confidante of her passion, that he may save her from the effects of it.

If Madame de Cleves found herself somewhat uneasy at the first part of this intelligence, she was infinitely more so at the conclusion; her own conduct was too uncommon to leave her any hope, she was unconcerned in what she heard.—"This story, indeed, is a very improbable one (said she) from whence, Madam, did it come?"—"Of that too I can inform you (said the Dauphiness) and you will allow my authority to be excellent.—Madame Themines had it from her lover de Chartres, to whom Nemours himself told it: Not indeed absolutely confessing himself the person most interested, but his denials to the Viscount's suspicions were such, as only the more convinced him of their justness.—But here in good time (added she) comes Nemours himself, and I will actually ask him, if he related any such extraordinary tale to your uncle."

"For Heaven's sake! (said Madame de Cleves, extremely agitated) postpone your enquiry. Consider, Madam, if it was imparted to my uncle in confidence, it will certainly occasion a quarrel between him and Nemours."—"You are always too wise" (said the Dauphiness.)

Nemours, who had now joined them, asked if he was not so happy as to be the subject of Madame de Cleves's conversation. "She will not believe (answered the Dauphiness) a story, of which you are said to be the author." Having repeated what she had heard, very circumstantially, Nemours and Madame de Cleves were almost equally incapable of making any sort of return to her conversation: they were in a situation the most distressing. Nemours hated himself for his indiscretion, when he read the effects of it in the countenance of Madame de Cleves, who could hardly support herself while the Dauphiness was speaking.

A painful pause ensued, when the Dauphiness was again obliged to resume the conversation. "Your looks (said she) sufficiently declare, that you not only told this story, but that you are very materially concerned in it."—"I confess, Madam, (answered Nemours) that I am extremely astonished at the infidelity of my friend. There is only one person who could have repeated this matter from me. I am only concerned, that his imprudence has betrayed one whose interests are very dear to me. The story, Madam,

relates no way to me, but by being really an occurrence of moment to one I much regard, I deserve justly to be loaded with reproaches for being the means of publishing a secret dearer to that person than his life. I am unacquainted with the name of the lady: Her lover I know thinks himself the most unfortunate of men. He loves with truth, tenderness, and unabating constancy, yet without hope; and though his situation is painful to the greatest degree, he often tells me he would not change it with those who are thought the happiest and most favoured lovers, with an appearance of the greatest sincerity. He declares that he is far more gratified by reflecting on the uncommon merits and perfections of her he loves, than he could be by the choicest favours fortune could bestow on him; and he is by no means an unambitious man.”—“Methinks you describe him very minutely” (said the Dauphiness).—“’Tis very strange, Sir, (said Madame de Cleves, a little recovering herself) how your friend should be made acquainted with this part of the lady’s behaviour. It is (said she) confided in her husband; surely he could not be base enough to betray her! And a woman capable of acting in such a manner, could never be so weak as to make a conduct so remarkable, the subject of her own conversation.”

To this Nemours made no answer. He could not summon generosity enough to clear her husband at his own expence. As Madame de Cleves followed the Dauphiness, he ventured to say, in a low voice; “I would give the world, Madam, to be allowed half an hour’s conversation with you. It is not to the Dauphiness, but to you, Madam, that I fear appearing, even in the smallest instance, culpable.”

She answered not, but turning too hastily aside, her gown caught her foot, and with her confusion brought her almost to the ground. She hurt herself so much as to make it a pretence for leaving the Louvre immediately. Her mind was too much agitated to suffer her to remain there with any appearance of composure.

The Prince of Cleves alarmed at the accident followed her home, and finding her in her chamber drowned in tears, eagerly enquired their cause.—“I never till now (said she) had reason to be afflicted. You have unkindly abused that confidence I reposed in you. You have exposed me to the censure of an ill-natured and harsh-judging world; and this from a little curiosity to which I believed your mind superior. We are both sufferers by your conduct; but I, Sir, am far the greatest. What I told you in the sincerity and anguish of my heart, and thought I communicated to a faithful and generous breast, has this night been the subject of public conversation, and was repeated to myself at the place from whence I now came. I think I deserved not this treatment, at least I merited your secrecy.”

It was in vain the Prince of Cleves persisted, that he had too much respected her confidence to make so ill an use of it; and reminded her, that such a publication from him, would have reflected infinitely more disgrace on his character than it could do on hers.

“I had (said she) no other confidante, and I am certain there is no story similar to mine; I can therefore have no doubt by whom I am betrayed.” “You now, Madam, forfeit (replied the Prince) all that character for ingenuousness for which I thought you so

remarkable; some other confidante has betrayed you, and has perhaps told more than you put in my power to relate.”

Conviction on either side could not possibly take place, and this incident rendered this unfortunate pair still more unhappy than they had yet been.—The generous treatment which each had experienced from the other, had hitherto kept up at least a mutual esteem; doubts now arose on both sides, and both were equally unanswerable.

The Prince of Cleves knew not what measures it were best he should pursue; conscious that virtue really possessed the heart of the Princess, he dreaded her name should be sported with by the public, for a conduct which he believed had the truest virtue for its basis.—Astonished, and sometimes doubtful, as to the extraordinary circumstance of their secrets being blazed abroad, he yet continued to assure Madame de Cleves of his own fidelity, and continually importuned her to dissipate by every means that uneasiness which a contrary belief occasioned.

“I still love you, Madam, (said he) Heaven knows how tenderly. I am well assured in my own mind, the Duke de Nemours is the person on whose account your heart reproaches you. I only ask you to be circumspect, and this, more for your own sake than mine. Guilt can never find a place in your heart; and it should be as little suspected by the rest of the world, as it will ever be by me. I need not dictate a behaviour, the propriety of which you can yourself so amply judge of.”

It was in vain Madame de Cleves requested she might be excused from attending the marriage of the Princess; her husband absolutely insisted upon it. And as the Princess had particularly distinguished her on the occasion, it was impossible her wishes could be complied with.

The conduct of Nemours, as it now appeared to her, gave her more real anguish than she durst own, even to her own heart. “Is this the man (said she) whom my very soul approved? Discretion, delicacy and honour, marked his character. How inconsistent is his present behaviour with these!—However he gained the intelligence of what I should have wished the whole world to have known rather than himself, should he have acted as he has done? He told it to my uncle. This he confessed; to how many more I know not. Perhaps from him Madam Themines heard it, and a thousand others.—While he thought himself unhappy, he was discreet; no sooner does his vanity cause him to believe it was him I preferred, than he published it to all the world. I have lost the love of a husband which should have been my greatest happiness. I have thought much too well of a most unworthy man, and I now am justly punished by him for whom I have been wrong. I now no longer regard him; that were impossible; but I hate myself for my weakness, for my guilt. Had he been what I once thought him, what the world believed him to be, I had then indeed been less culpable.”

The reflexions of Nemours were not at all more pleasing. “I have forfeited (said he) even the good opinion of the most amiable of women. I can have no hope of justifying myself; but must continue to appear in her eyes an empty and vain babler. All

this I owe to my own indiscretion, and deservedly suffer the most bitter punishment; her indifference, perhaps her contempt—Were she no way a sufferer by my fault, I could much better bear what I now feel: But that I, of all mankind, should wound a delicacy I idolize, is by far the severest part of my affliction. Had I lost what alone can afford me any happiness, without distressing her, it would be some consolation. I am far more sensible of the offence I have given her than of my own misfortune. Fain would I tell her so, but that would only offend her more; the sensibility of her own soul will instruct her that silence is the severest infliction I can endure. No, continued he, I will no more distress her; however hard the task, I will avoid speaking to her. Time only and my future behaviour shall convince her how much I love and respect her.”

The court were now so busied in preparations for the nuptials, that none had leisure to read that distress which various griefs had imprinted on the countenances of Madame de Cleves, her husband, and Nemours.—The Royal Marriage was at length solemnized. The Duke of Alva wedded by proxy the Princess Elizabeth of France, and the utmost magnificence and festivity presided over the court, for many days.

Among other entertainments of great expence, a very superb tournament was held in honour of these nuptials. The Duke de Nemours had long been fixed on as one of the principal performers. The King himself assisted; only the first noblemen of the kingdom were engaged in it; but the Duke de Nemours outshone all others, in brilliancy and elegance; his dress was fancied with the utmost taste and richness. The graces of his person did it ample justice, and his figure altogether attracted every one’s attention.

The tournament was admirably performed. Nemours so particularly distinguished himself as to win the favour of many far less interested persons than Madame de Cleves, who could not be (as she wished) an indifferent spectator, nor could she with all the endeavours possible avoid being sensible, that the praises of Nemours, which on all sides surrounded her, were grateful to her heart.

Notwithstanding the dejected countenance of this lady, Nemours was not the only person who thought she never appeared more beautiful. At the ball in the evening of this day he had many opportunities of speaking to her, but forbore to do so; and indeed no conduct could have had so favourable an effect. She read in his looks, an attention, respect, and a forbearance, that made him appear to her imagination much less blamable, than she had for a long while thought him.

In the midst of all these amusements the King was wounded at a tournament, and in a few hours pronounced to be in great danger. Every kind of gaiety was postponed, and Madame de Cleves being herself much indisposed, confined herself entirely at home. A few days terminated the King’s life. The Prince of Conde attended the young Queen to Spain, and the rest of the court were to attend the coronation of the new King at Rheims. He was afterwards to pass some time at the castle of Chambort.

Madame de Cleves obtained her husband’s permission to go to her house at Coloniers, till the court returned to Paris. That she might avoid the Duke de Nemours was

her motive for not accompanying it, and was indeed her husband's principal reason for complying with her request, though neither thought it necessary to declare exactly the sentiments by which they were actuated.

The long intended absence of Madame de Cleves no sooner reached Nemours, than it overcame all his boasted resolutions, and he was determined once more to see and speak to her before her departure. The court were to set out the next day for Rheims, there was no time for deliberation. That very evening must his visit be paid. There was no doubt that she was to be found at home. She was quite indisposed, and appeared not abroad. He met several ladies coming from her apartments, as he went towards them; his name was announced. A sound so unexpected threw her into the utmost confusion. She happened to be quite alone, it was then late: She hastily withdrew into the adjoining room, and sent one of her women to say, that it was her hour of retiring, and she must be excused from seeing the Duke de Nemours that evening. What a painful repulse was this, and how much did he blame himself for having attempted to pay a visit he had so little reason to imagine would be favourably received!

The ladies who had left Madame de Cleves immediately attended the Dauphiness, where they found the Prince of Cleves. The Dauphiness enquired very particularly of the health of her favourite. They said they had passed some time very agreeably with her; that she had many visitors, but they had left only the Duke de Nemours behind them.

These words, though harmless, and spoken with indifference, had no trifling effect on the Prince of Cleves. However satisfied with the propriety of his wife's conduct, however conscious that this nobleman had many opportunities of seeing and speaking to her, the idea of his being alone with her at his own house, at that late hour, filled his mind with tormenting sensations.

He went immediately home, scarcely knowing why; he was surprized to find Madame de Cleves alone and in her chamber. After some other conversation, he asked what visitors she had. She naturally omitted Nemours, because she really had not seen him; and wished not to repeat even his name to her husband.—“The Duke de Nemours (said the Prince) he too was here.”—“He was so (answered she) but as it was late and I found myself much indisposed, I did not see him.”

“You were wrong, Madam, (said her husband, peevishly) from you every thing but indifference is a favour; why should you particularize Nemours, but because you feared to see him? Does not this behaviour plainly explain to himself that it is so? You certainly must have some cause for so carefully avoiding his conversation; in this you have not been so candid with me, as you gave me cause to believe. He has told you that he loves you, and your conduct points out to him that he is of consequence to you. I foolishly believed that your virtue would have conquered a passion you blamed in yourself, but I did not reason justly when I thought so.

“I am very unfortunate (said Madame de Cleves, with a heavy sigh) I have made myself very miserable by a strict adherence to what I thought right. I flattered myself you

would be just and generous to a heart whose every thought has been laid open to you. I vainly hoped I had convinced you, that no suspicions should be urged against me, since I really concealed nothing from you. Every thing you are pleased to say or do, I ought to submit to. I am very undeserving of your present reproaches; my only study, my only desire, is to render my actions pleasing to you.” “You expect from me things that are impossible,” replied the Prince: “You forget that I love you, and am your husband; either were enough, circumstanced as I am, to deprive me of happiness. What then must both do? Good Heaven! what do they not do? Yes, I am truly miserable! Madness were felicity to what my calmer thoughts inflict upon me. I am wretched beyond all hope. I cannot check emotions too powerful to be restrained. I love and hate you. In a word, I have for ever lost my peace.—The discovery of your conversation to me in the garden at Coloniers, still adds to my distraction. How should it be known, but by—yet answer me not.—It is in vain.—Nothing you can say can give ease to a mind tortured as mine is.”

He then left her, without waiting for a reply; and after giving some necessary orders for his journey the next day, he retired, but not to rest, and departed early the next morning, without seeing her.

A few hours absence occasioned a thousand tender recollections, a thousand proofs so strong in her favour, that he dispatched a messenger with a letter full of tenderness, full of sorrow for every reproach he had uttered, and full of wishes for her health and ease. Madame de Cleves sensible that his affection was the only cause of any apparent unkindness she received from him, and far more ready to blame herself than any one else could be, welcomed his letter with tears of gratitude and joy.—The messenger waited her answer: it was such as a heart filled with virtue and delicacy alone could dictate. It contained the strongest assurances, with regard to her future conduct, and the most affecting reflexions on her past one. Truth and candour were so visible in every line, that it restored a perfect calm to her husband’s heart, and he knew no pleasure equal to that which her letters afforded him, during their absence from each other.

Indeed, whenever she spoke or wrote to him, her duty, her love of virtue, and his kindness, wrought so powerfully on her imagination, that at those times she really believed no other being had an equal share in her affections. Yet there were moments when these delightful illusions vanished, and sunk her spirits to the deepest gloom.

She was now alone at Coloniers. Since she had first seen Nemours, she had feared or hoped to meet him almost every day of that time. It was now impossible that such an event could happen, for many weeks, and this idea was attended with a pain that she in vain endeavoured to rid herself of. Madame de Themines, who had been somewhat indisposed, came to pass some days in the country with Madame de Cleves. These ladies were become extremely intimate, since de Chartres had avowed a passion for the former; but Madame de Cleves had no confidantes; she scarcely indeed allowed her own heart to believe those sentiments existed in it, which in fact, though insensibly, gave the bias and complexion to all her thoughts and actions.

Madame de Themines found her extremely melancholy; but this was by no means unpleasant to her own turn of mind. They passed their time without any other company. The house, the garden, the situation, were all delightful. They were pleased with each others conversation; and Madame de Themines would not have wished to leave Coloniers on any other terms than those of meeting de Chartres.

After some days passed very agreeably she left Madame de Cleves to set out for Chambort where the court then was. The Dauphiness with whom both de Cleves and Nemours were, when Madam Themines arrived, enquired most particularly after the lady she had left. She answered with the most extravagant praises of the situation of Madame de Cleves, and minutely described the beautiful summer-house, in which she generally passed her evenings, and a great part of the day.

Nemours, who well remembered the place she spoke of, instantly formed a scheme of seeing Madame de Cleves there, without her knowledge. He made so many enquiries, and discovered so much emotion in his countenance, that the Prince of Cleves, who was very attentive to him during the whole conversation, suspected in some measure his design, and determined that this occasion should satisfy every scruple that yet remained in his breast, relative to the conduct of her, whom, though he tenderly loved, confided in, and esteemed, he could not (from a chain of unfortunate circumstances joined to his love and jealousy) at some times help suspecting.

He pitched upon one of the attendants, who had been constantly near his person for many years, who was attached to him from gratitude and affection, of a good understanding and liberal mind; him he entrusted with his secret, and ordered him strictly to watch the motions of the Duke de Nemours, and faithfully report to him all he should observe. This person was equal to the task assigned.

Nemours having passed the night in meditating on his scheme, obtained the King's leave in the morning, to go to Paris on business. This confirmed the suspicions of the Prince of Cleves, who then imparted the matter to his confidante, and contrived that he should set out immediately after the Duke; whom he followed to a village within a mile of Coloniers, where they both stayed till evening.

Nemours walked out, unattended, as it grew dark, and the Prince's friend followed at a distance; and being pretty certain of the route he now intended to take, he shortened his own journey by a cross path, and placed himself where he knew the Duke must pass, if he went to the house.—It being now dark he heard somebody step softly that way, and was near enough to perceive that it was no other than Nemours, and that he took the direct road to the house, through the park.

Nemours, who had with some difficulty so far accomplished his task, as he approached nearer saw a light in the summer-house, and going along by the bushes came to the arbour he had once before occupied, and stopt there on the outside. The windows of the summer-house were opened. He placed himself so as to be hid by one of the

shutters, and could fully observe in this situation, her, whose presence amply recompensed all the inconvenience and difficulty he had encountered.

She was alone, and the weather being warm, her head and neck were uncovered, and her hair and whole dress were charmingly negligent. She was seated on a couch, and had a basket of ribbons before her, out of which she seemed choosing some particular colours. The little building in which she sat, was adorned with some paintings of the most remarkable *actions* in the late King's reign. In many of these Nemours had been concerned; but particularly in that of the siege of Merzs. His portrait was conspicuous, and reckoned an admirable likeness.

As he was perfectly concealed, he ventured to advance a little nearer, and perceived with no small emotion, that the colours of the ribbons she chose, were exactly those he had worn at the tournament, and that she employed herself in tying them in knots on an Indian cane, that had once been his, and which he had left at his sister's house. After she had been some time thus engaged, she arose, and moving the lights to a table exactly opposite to his picture, she seated herself in that situation; then folding her arms and fixing her eyes on the portrait, she remained buried in the most profound attention.

Nemours, who was perfectly fascinated by what he saw, could scarcely persuade himself that there was reality in the flattering proofs of her regard he now beheld. He was tempted more than once, to thank her in the overflowings of his heart, for a kindness more valuable to him than any thing the world could bestow. But to displease her, to change that countenance so full of sweetness and of love, into anger and severity, was too much to hazard; yet to be so near her, to be at that instant convinced that she loved him, and not dare to speak to her, how cruelly did he think himself circumstanced!

The night was now far advanced, he must think of returning; of quitting her whom he now loved more than ever. This last consideration determined him to avail himself of so favourable an opportunity of speaking to her. In moving but a few steps forward, confused and disordered, a part of his dress caught at the window, and the attempt he made to disengage himself occasioned some noise.

Madame de Cleves started from her seat, and turning towards the place where he was; whether it was that her imagination was full of his idea, or that she really saw him, she, with the greatest perturbation of mind, called her women, who were in the adjacent arbour next to the garden. They attended her instantly. She told them she was suddenly indisposed, and would retire to rest.

She reflected as she went to the house, that the weakness of her own mind alone could have alarmed her. The Duke de Nemours, she was certain, was with the court at Chambort, and she felt herself ashamed of having given way to so ridiculous an imagination.

Nemours returned by the way he came. As soon as he quitted the garden, the Prince's confidante watched his going back, and followed him to the village they had both left in the evening.

The idea that had long possessed the mind of Nemours, that to be convinced of the regard of Madame de Cleves would constitute his happiness, appeared now to be fallacious, his anxieties were only increased, and he gave himself but the more ardently to a passion which the doubt of a mutual return had hitherto in some measure restrained. Even tears (those only who have truly loved can excuse or account for such a weakness) evidenced his tenderness, while he thus reasoned with himself.—“That I am beloved (said he) by the most amiable and deserving woman on earth, I can have no doubts. The strongest protestations, the highest favours, that passion can bestow, are not such infallible proofs as those I have received.—Yet how is my happiness augmented? I possess a blessing, which loads me with anguish, by seeing her I love combat every idea in my favour, and continue to treat me as one that she detests. Declare to me but once, best beloved of women, that you regard him who adores you.—Let me from your own lips be once assured of your real sentiments, and I am content you should resume your former severity and reserve.—Am I not most unfortunate? The utmost of my wishes await me, yet I am not permitted to taste aught but bitterness and disappointment from them.” These thoughts employed the mind of Nemours till the next evening, when he hastened to his former situation at Coloniers. The Prince of Cleves's friend was punctual in observing him, and saw him return at the same hour as before; though he knew not the distressing disappointment he had experienced; for Madame de Cleves, still prepossessed with the idea of having seen him, and unable to pronounce whether she had reason for its foundation or not, determined to forbear visiting her favourite retreat, that evening, and Nemours after many hours expectation was obliged to depart without even the fond consolation of gazing at her at a distance, and unseen.

He now feared, from her sudden manner of quitting the summer-house on the preceding night, and her absence on this, that she had been alarmed by the noise he made, though trifling; it was needless therefore he concluded to attempt seeing her again in this way. His sister's house being at a small distance, he bent his course thither the next morning, and managed his conversation so artfully, that he led her into the proposing a visit to Madame de Cleves, that very evening. This was what he wished, as it was necessary he should join the court in a day or two, at farthest.

They found Madame de Cleves in her garden. The sight of Nemours removed every doubt of her having seen him at the time she feared; it made her receive him with a much worse grace than was usual to her. Nemours was more at ease; he praised the beauties of her situation, and above all things extolled the elegance and pleasantness of the summer-house, and its adjoining arbours.

The Duchess observing that he appeared to be well acquainted with them,—“I know not (said Madame de Cleves) that the Duke de Nemours has ever seen them; for they have not indeed been long finished.”—“Yet it is true, Madam (replied the Duke) that

I have seen them, and I cannot tell whether I ought to rejoice or regret that you do not remember I have.”

Madame de Cleves was at once confused and displeased, at such a declaration. She did not answer it; and he continued, in a very low voice; “I confess, Madam, that I was there, without your permission, and that I there passed moments equally painful and delightful.”—Madame de Cleves still continued silent, and insensibly prevented their entering the building, though they had proposed it; but it was a circumstance she was determined to avoid.

The Dutchess soon after talked of taking leave: but Nemours said he should not return with her; for as he was so far on his way to Paris, he should only stop a few hours at the next village, and then pursue his journey. This he said with a hope of having an opportunity to make some apology to Madame de Cleves for his conduct.—But she being instantly aware of his intention, told the Dutchess she would, as the evening was fine, accompany her part of her way home, and immediately ordered her own carriage to be got ready. Nemours was vexed to the soul at this disappointment, but was obliged to acquiesce.—Soon after they were gone, he returned to the village, and the next day set out for Chambort.

The person whom the Prince of Cleves had employed was well apprized of every motion. He soon followed the Duke, and arrived before him at the palace, where his master received him with the utmost impatience, and almost a surety of intelligence, that he hoped with confidence would have dissipated every uneasy idea he had suffered during his absence.

But no sooner had he observed his countenance and hesitation, than a sudden tremor overpowered him.—“Leave me (said he) I know what you have to say; distract me not by utterance; I read already in your looks what you would declare.” “It is true, Sir, (said the confidante) that the Duke de Nemours passed two nights successively in your house, or garden, at Coloniers, and that I saw him each morning return at the same hour before it was light.” “It is enough (said the Prince) be silent; I am satisfied with your diligence. —Leave me to myself.”

Never was despair and grief equal to this unhappy husband’s; so highly had he thought of the worth and delicacy of his wife; so full of truth and honour had she seemed to him; her apparent ingenuousness now appeared an artifice so extraordinary, as rendered her still more guilty to his imagination; and the distress and anguish of his mind soon brought on a fever, with symptoms extremely alarming.

Madame de Cleves waited not to be sent for. No sooner did the intelligence of her husband’s indisposition reach her, than she made all possible haste to attend him:—He was much worse when she arrived, and received her with such coldness, and almost disgust, as equally surprised and afflicted her.—She imputed it to the anguish of his disorder, and omitted no tenderness or attention to soften the distress she fondly imputed to that cause alone.

Nemours durst make scarcely any enquiries about the Prince of Cleves, after her arrival; a little reserve, at such a crisis, was but prudent and decent, he could not be insensible to the prospect that opened to his view. It was highly probable Madame de Cleves would shortly be at liberty to make a second choice: her sentiments with regard to him he could not doubt; yet when he recollected her peculiar delicacy, and her extraordinary conduct hitherto, his mind was full of anxiety and perplexity.

The Prince was now pronounced to be in the utmost danger,—having been extremely hot and restless for many hours, he thought himself somewhat easier for a moment, and endeavoured if possible to procure some sleep.—Madame de Cleves dismissed every one from the chamber, and remained there alone. After some time, thinking he had really dozed, she kneeled softly down by his bed, and shocked by his pale countenance which she attentively considered, and his uneasy breathing, she gave way to the strongest emotions of sorrow.

Her husband who slept not, was sensible of her sighs and tears, while his error about her dissimulation and perfidiousness still possessed his mind.—“You weep, Madam, (said he) for sufferings which you have yourself caused. But fate will spare you the just reproaches of an injured husband. I die of the torments your conduct has occasioned. I loved you to that extreme, I could have wished you had thoroughly deceived me. I should never have suspected your passion for another, had not you fully determined to rob me of repose, and with uncommon cruelty acquainted me with it yourself. You have deprived me of the felicity I found in loving you: Life is become a burthen to me, and I wish to resign it. I deserved your affection, and you may, perhaps, one day be sorry for the manner in which you have repayed mine. My death will set you at liberty, and you may then, without a crime, indulge your inclinations.”

Madame de Cleves had not the least idea, that more than she herself knew was even suspected by her husband, till the conclusion of his speech awakened her fears. “A crime! (repeated she) what mean you, my dearest husband? I call Heaven to witness, the most rigid virtue could not have prescribed a conduct more strict than that I have pursued towards you; every part of it have I ever wished you to have been a witness of; nay my very thoughts have I never hid from you; and for that am I now reproached.”

“Ah! Madam, (he replied) you have the art of speaking; but to save you further protestations, be assured, I have been acquainted, from evidence not to be doubted, of those nights your lover passed with you at Coloniers.”—He sighed, and turned from her.

What a severe wound was this speech to the heart of Madame de Cleves! Her pride as well as her peace were hurt beyond the power of words to describe; a thousand horrors broke upon her mind; conflicting passions choked her utterance; but after repeated efforts, with difficulty she articulated:—“To what new afflictions am I reserved? Good Heaven! what a fate is mine? Look on me, Sir, I entreat you; for your own sake alone, I ask you to hear me: were I only concerned I would be silent; but your peace, perhaps your life, is at stake. Attend to me, I conjure you, and for the sake of Truth and

Virtue, be assured, that I am so perfectly innocent of what you suppose, that it is impossible you should not be convinced.”

She then repeated to him every circumstance relative to that matter which had occasioned his suspicions.—She spoke with that confidence which truth naturally inspires; her grief, her looks, her expressions, were so persuasive, so forcible, that they could not but carry conviction along with them.

“I feel (said the Prince) when she had concluded her relation, “that I ought to believe you; and that unfortunate events have combined to give that fatal wound to my heart, which only the idea of your unworthiness could give. What you have now said has restored peace and serenity to my last moments; to think you still deserving of that tender affection I have ever had for you, is a balm to my weak and worn out spirit. I am convinced too late for my earthly felicity, but I die happy. Give me then, thou dearest and best of women, this further assurance; tell me that you will ever remember this extraordinary effect of the sincerest passion that ever possessed a human breast; and say that you will ever love and respect the memory of him who dies for you.”

Madame de Cleves was too much afflicted to be capable of answering, nor could he add more. Every hour increased his weakness and his distemper: He languished but a few days, during which she scarcely for an instant quitted him; and though the time was spent in affliction hardly to be equalled, the moment that deprived her for ever of her husband, brought with it an encrease of grief; and for many days she was reduced to a state of insensibility.

The Dauphiness, who really loved her, paid the greatest attention to her sorrows. She went herself and had her removed from the scene of her distresses, to a neighboring convent, as the fittest place for her then melancholy situation.—She gave the strictest charge that no care or kindness that could mitigate her affliction should be omitted, and continued very frequently to visit her, while she remained there.

The return of her reason was attended with very little comfort to herself. The reflection of what a husband she had lost, and *how* lost him, occasioned frequent relapses, and she fell into an exceeding bad state of health. After some time her presence was become necessary at Paris, to settle business that occurred in consequence of the death of her husband; and some of his female relations attended her thither.

Change of place made little difference in her sorrows.—The Prince of Cleves was ever present to her mind.—His generosity—His tenderness—His virtues; but above all his *last words*—REMEMBER HIM WHO DIES FOR YOU.” She condemned herself incessantly as the cause of his untimely fate; and the only idea that could afford her comfort, was, to feel that her heart was truly sensible of his loss and of his worth. She indulged her grief to the greatest extreme, so as to alarm her friends for her safety; but to their kind remonstrance, her only answer was—“You ought no longer to regard me, than while I continue to grieve for him who deserves from me the tribute of eternal sorrow.”

Nemours yet paid her no other attention than that of sending to enquire her health. He knew her too well to think more would have been permitted; and though he had not a wish so ardent as to see her, he willingly suppressed it from the fear of offending. It was whispered to him, and traced from that person whom the Prince of Cleves had sent to Coloniers, that his visit there had been discovered; and that this circumstance had occasioned the illness, of which death was the consequence.

Nemours felt a very sincere affliction at this intelligence. That he should, though innocently, have been the cause of so unfortunate an event was sufficiently distressing, but a more selfish grief took possession of his soul; lest Madame de Cleves imagining that he had been in any degree accessory to those misfortunes which so deeply touched her heart, her regard might be changed into horror or disgust.

He took frequent journeys to Paris, always calling at her house with enquiries the most importunate. He was informed she received no visitors, and had even given orders, that no messages of that kind should be communicated to her. This command he felt he was the occasion of, and that she was determined not even to hear his name mentioned.

Amongst a thousand painful and perplexing thoughts that yet filled the mind of Madame de Cleves, relative to her husband; her greatest astonishment was, how he should be made acquainted with the circumstance of Nemours's being at night in the garden at Coloniers. She believed, if it were possible, that he himself was the person who had indiscreetly repeated a transaction that had proved so very fatal to her: But it could now no way afflict her, as she persuaded herself that every thing on earth, but the memory of the Prince of Cleves, was now become a matter of indifference to her; and therefore, whether Nemours was unworthy or otherwise, could be no longer of any consequence to her.—That he had been the cause of all her sorrows, she was but too well convinced; and though it might be possible he was innocently so, she was certain she felt the greatest repugnance at the very idea of ever beholding him again.

Many months were now elapsed since the death of her husband; the violence of her grief was abated, but a settled melancholy had seized upon her spirits, and her health continued to decline.—Madame Themines came to Paris to make her a visit of some days. She endeavoured to amuse her by little histories and anecdotes of those she had left behind her at the Castle of Chambort; she told her much of her uncle de Chartres and many others. As for Nemours (said she) he is worse than ever, he scarcely speaks, his looks express only melancholy and distress; he seldom appears amongst us; one would imagine some heavy misfortune had befallen him; something of importance certainly engages him often in town; he is continually making excursions hither. He set out the day before me to Paris: have you seen him?"

Madame de Cleves did not find herself as insensible to this conversation, as she thought she ought to have been.—She only replied, "that she saw no company but her relations and very intimate acquaintances, of which number the Duke de Nemours happened not to be one."

Some days after Madame Themines had left her, she went abroad to look for a particular kind of mourning silk; and having gone through several apartments at the merchant's house, and seen a variety of pieces without meeting with what she wanted; she perceived a room shut up, and asked if it contained any more. The merchant told her "that apartment was very whimsically occupied. A person who had the appearance of a gentleman, though very plain, had, he said, offered any terms for the key and possession of that room, for an hour or two at any time he himself chose in the day.—All the use that I perceive he makes of it, continued the Merchant, is to look out at the windows, which I have observed he constantly does, though there really is not any beautiful prospect, or any thing particular to be seen from them."

As Madame de Cleves recollected that these windows were directly opposite to her house, though at a great distance; she could not help, at the same time, remembering what Madame de Themines had said of Nemours's being in town, and an idea immediately occurred, that this extraordinary person was no other than himself.

This thought interested her too much to allow her to seek further for the purchases she intended to make.—She hastened home, and failed not to observe the windows, which really looked to those apartments she chiefly used. A thousand uneasy sensations, that had long been forbidden to exist in her heart, now asked not permission to resume their place.—She became less dejected, but more unhappy than she had been for many weeks; but was unwilling even to question herself upon this change.

It was her usual custom to take an airing every evening in her carriage, and she generally drove to a retired garden, a very little way out of town, where she sometimes alighted and walked half an hour before she returned. She happened one evening to choose a different path from any she had done before, and saw at the end of it a little arbour, that was entirely new to her. As she came nearer she perceived a person seated in a melancholy attitude, so lost in meditation, that she was at one of the entrances, before he turned towards her, and she saw the countenance of Nemours. She stopt, with no small surprise, and would have retired; but the steps of herself and the women that attended her, had so interrupted the reverie of Nemours, that he started from his seat, and waited not to see who they were that had disturbed him; without so much as lifting his eyes from the ground, he bowed and withdrew at the opposite side.

Madame de Cleves stood fixed till he was out of sight. What an effect did this incident produce in her heart? She seated herself in the same place where she had just seen him: His dejected features, his absent air, the constancy and delicacy of his love, rushed upon her mind, in their strongest colours. It was many months since she had seen him. She had thought she could have beheld him with total indifference; but she found that she had judged most ignorantly of herself.

She now allowed him for a time entirely to occupy her thoughts; no other idea interfered. "Is he not worthy," said she? "Is he not amiable? Did not our hearts involuntarily unite? Does he not forsake the whole world, and every pleasure that once

allured him, on my account? Can I be insensible to such a passion? Does duty or virtue now forbid me to love him? Surely no.”

Such sentiments, so favourable for Nemours, had never before warmed her breast: How delightful did they now seem! she dwelt on them with so much pleasure, that had not her women reminded her it was late, she would not have been sensible how much longer than usual she had been abroad.

On her return home a very different turn of thinking succeeded to that which had for a while restored something like peace to her bosom.—“Good Heaven! exclaimed she, what delusive phantoms of happiness did my mistaken heart create, only to make me on reflexion still more poignantly miserable? Is it possible I could, even for a moment, so far forget myself, as to suffer that error which has caused all my misfortunes, and has ever been the source of perpetual sorrow, again to find a place in my heart?—Weak and unworthy woman! Whom didst thou plead for? Him, who in a great measure occasioned the death of the worthiest and best of men? What man! Thy husband.—No (continued she) never! Never, Nemours, without being criminal in the highest degree, could I unite myself to thee. Farewel then for ever to the thought! I have only one path to pursue; carefully to avoid thy presence, and as much as I can, to banish thee from my mind. This I will certainly perform, as a duty I think myself bound to, let the execution of it be attended with what difficulty it may.”

She had seen Nemours more than once at the windows of the merchant which looked to that apartment she most generally occupied; she therefore changed it for another. The severity of this conduct made him extremely unhappy; tired of an uncertainty that kept his mind in perpetual agitation, he determined by some means or other to see her, and be assured of her sentiments from herself.—“It was proper (said he) that I should respect her situation and her grief. I have done so, but I will not allow that tenderness to be erased, which I am convinced she once felt for me.”

He then acquainted the Viscount de Chartres, her uncle, with his passion and intentions; and the intelligence was most favourably received by his friend, who approved of the alliance, and promised that Nemours should certainly see and speak to her some evening at his house.

Though she had now been long a widow, she lived so extremely retired, and still gave way to so melancholy a turn of mind, that it was with the utmost difficulty, and a promise that she should not be encumbered with much company, she complied with the pressing invitation of de Chartres.

Soon after she came to his house he acquainted her with his design, and immediately introduced Nemours, who impatiently waited her arrival in the adjoining room. She would have withdrawn, had not Nemours held her hand at the time her uncle quitted it. It is not easy to express the sensations of each at such an interview.

“Will you, Madam (said he) pardon the method I have taken to procure a moment’s conversation with you, a favour you have so cruelly and obstinately hitherto avoided to grant me?” “I ought not to pardon you, Sir (answered she) you forget my melancholy situation. An address, such as my uncle has acquainted me with, can by no means be agreeable to me, at this time.” “Hear me, Madam, I beseech you (said Nemours) accept this address whenever you may judge it more proper; I submit to whatever conditions you please, with transport; only condescend to let me see and speak to you. This, Madam, I entreat for your own sake; and to prevent extravagancies I cannot avoid, although they should offend you. It is impossible you can be insensible of a regard which, though till now unuttered, has influenced every hour of my life since I first knew you: For Heaven’s sake, Madam, let not that virtue which adorns you, be mixt with a rigour that disgraces it. Your heart and soul are full of tenderness, appear not then to be inexorable. If sufferings can recommend my love, already have I had such, as passion less ardent, less true than mine, must have perished from.”

Madame de Cleves was most sincerely affected by this speech of Nemours, delivered with every advantage it could possibly receive. Willing to declare to him her heart, yet overpowered by a thousand fears, after some pause she determined; and turning upon him eyes full of timid tenderness, — “Alas! Sir (said she) what can you hope from me? I never can reward your love; you deserve a happier fate than it is in my power to bestow. Yet, as I think you merit the utmost sincerity, I will tell you, with a frankness not usual, perhaps not allowable, in a woman, that I am truly sensible of your regard. More, Sir, will I say: My heart returns it: to any other man but yourself it were unsafe to speak thus; but the delicacy of your mind I am well acquainted with: You will judge for me as you ought, and be convinced how very highly I regard you, when I treat you with such ingenuousness. My heart is not insensible to merit, or to tenderness; but however powerfully it may feel them, it is impossible they should ever draw it from its duty. I acknowledge your worth: I love and admire it. But you are not, my dear Sir, ignorant of the many unfortunate circumstances I have lately experienced: You cannot then wonder at or blame me, when I say I return, but never can reward, your love.”

“Long since (said Nemours) have I flattered myself that you did not hate me. Shall I confess to you, Madam, that I heard, and at times interpreted in my favour, your confession at Coloniers? a confession so extraordinary, so uncommon, that did so much honour to your own heart, and now gives so much transport to mine. I appeal to you, Madam, did I presume on this circumstance? did I not make you the greatest sacrifice I could do, that of avoiding to speak to you, because I knew you wished it to be so?”

“Recall not to my mind, Sir (said she, interrupting him) scenes that must renew a grief never to be effaced. I did indeed fear you were too well acquainted with the matter you have spoken of. I acknowledge the delicacy of your conduct. I can now, without a crime, confess it won my warmest esteem. It deserves from me this tribute, and I freely give it to you from my heart, however otherwise weak, yet incapable of deceit. You have merited and possessed its affection, an affection that it was not in my power to suppress; that on my own account I wished not to suppress, since it never caused me to deviate in the smallest degree from that conduct which my situation prescribed.”

“This acknowledgement, Madam, from your own mouth (replied Nemours, with transport) is the greatest of all earthly blessings.” — “Stop, Sir (said Madame de Cleves) do not let me in the smallest degree mislead you. I wish you indeed still to think so; and I find the utmost pleasure in repeating to you the sentiments of which you are worthy. But be assured, Sir, I never shall proceed one step beyond this confession. Rest content with my affection; it is and ever will be yours, but will never influence me to depart from those rules my duty and my conscience dictate.”

“What duty, Madam! (interrupted Nemours) Good Heaven! by what fallacious arguments do you impose on yourself! You never can regard me: it is impossible, if you are thus ruled by prejudices so pernicious to your own peace and my happiness. Do not drive me to despair by continuing these tormenting and groundless opinions. No, Madam, while you speak thus, I can never suppose myself otherwise than indifferent to you. It is in your power to make that duty and virtue you revere, consistent with every kind and gracious wish in his favour who adores you. Are you not, Madam, in every sense at liberty?”

“Your arguments (said Madame de Cleves) bring not conviction. Alas! my dear Sir, the thoughts I have declared to you are not the offspring of a moment; they are serious—repeatedly considered—fixed—unalterable. —Most true it is, that I sacrifice an affection equally tender with your own, but in which I could taste no felicity, while inconsistent with the higher duties of my life. I cannot enumerate to you all the reasons I have for this conduct; they are yet too distressing to me, and never more shall we converse on a subject which has already been attended with consequences so fatal, as not to be remembered without horror. Had the Prince of Cleves fallen by your hand, it might have made some difference in the eye of the world, but scarcely any to the peace of my own bosom; since I am well convinced your behaviour and our affection put a period to his life.” Her tears flowed plenteously at this expression.

“Ah, Madam (said Nemours) what a dangerous phantom of duty have you raised to prevent our happiness! Will you permit a vain caprice to prevent you from rendering only justice to him you say you love? —Why was I by an accident made to hope I had a share in your affection? Or why did this last prospect of felicity appear to my delighted view? Is it only to make me doubly wretched by its disappointment? Do I love the most estimable of woman? Have I found in her every thing that can make a mistress adorable; every thing that can endear the tender and valuable name of wife? Is our affection mutual? Is all this offered to my hopes; and is it the only person on earth who can make me happy? Is it you, Madam, that dash from me with un pitying hand, every blessing that awaits me? Is it you, Madam, and you alone, by whom my felicity is obstructed? —You seem to have forgot, that you have distinguished me—or rather you have never done so, you have but deceived yourself and only flattered me?”

“Alas, Sir (said Madame de Cleves) it is the reality of that fatal distinction you doubt, that opposes so powerfully our happiness, and paints to my imagination the severe reproaches I should ever make to myself were I to be united to you. —You will allow I

could not make you happy, when I tell you my own reflections would render myself continually miserable.” — “You never loved, Madam: (said Nemours) Your scruples are not dictated by reason; they will serve only one purpose, which is to distract me.”

“You do me the utmost injustice (replied she) nothing is further from my inclination than to give you a moment’s pain; I meant the contrary when I declared to you the real sentiments I feel for you, which I little thought any chance could have occasioned me to repeat to yourself. —I never more shall do so: Judge more candidly of me then for once, and suffer me further to disclose to you my whole heart. A thousand, thousand obstacles oppose our union; they are such as ought to reconcile you to my determination: those hardest to be surmounted you have already heard, attend now to others. With blushes I confess, that the idea of being no longer loved by you, appears to me so dreadful a misfortune, that had I not invincible reasons founded on my eternal peace, it would not be in my power to expose myself to an evil I should so sensibly feel. I know that I am free, and that you are so. —It is not the censures of the world I fear; but I have not vanity enough to expect a miracle in my favour. —The Duke de Nemours was said to be professedly a man of galantry, before I knew him. Your heart, Sir, has experienced many passions, mine never knew but one; what anguish then would the smallest appearance of indifference cost me? The Prince of Cleves was perhaps the only person capable of preserving the attention and passion of a lover, for a wife. It was my ill fate not to reap the felicity I should have done from such a circumstance. My regards for you may make me unhappy, as I am; but they cannot blind me so far as to make me run a hazard of making both you and myself miserable.—You possess all those qualities that can attract. —You will be loved as often as you seek to be so.—I have said too much to conceal from you, that I have felt the pangs of jealousy.—Madame Themines's letter convinced me my mind was capable of suffering in the severest degree that tormenting passion; this worst of evils would inevitably poison the peace of both. A lover may be reproached, but shall a husband be so, for an error so common, and so little thought blamable in the gay world, as an attachment to another?—Your heart is susceptible, and it is always in your power to render yourself pleasing. I might perhaps fancy you loved another, though you did not, and a thousand circumstances of my past life would upbraid me with my own weakness, and make me doubt your affection, from my own unworthiness.—I should find no consolation in my own bosom to support me under such afflictions; they appear so terrible to my imagination, it is impossible I should ever think of encountering them: They very much strengthen other reasons of still greater consequence, and make my resolution unchangeable.”

“If you really loved, Madam (said Nemours) it would be utterly impossible you should dictate such resolutions to yourself; it will be still more so, that you should follow them.—On this I yet build my hopes.—It is more difficult, madam, than you suppose, to resist the power you have to bestow happiness on him who loves you, and whom you say you love.—Did virtue, duty, or propriety of any sort, forbid your choice, I should believe you would persevere in your present determination; but not one of these oppose our union, and you can never persist in a resolve so fatal to us both—A resolve that is inconsistent both with your reason and your heart.”

“I am aware (said Madame de Cleves) of the task I have undertaken, and mistrust my own strength in the midst of my firmest resolutions.—The respect I feel for the memory of my husband, would not perhaps be sufficient to determine me, were I not assured that it is out of my power to render your life happy. Powerful motives would oppose my own happiness; judge, then, Sir, if, in such a situation, I could add to yours.”

Every argument that love and reason could suggest, assisted by all the warmth and tenderness of an ardent affection, were offered by Nemours; to all which Madame de Cleves was by no means insensible.—Her tears and visible agitation bore testimony to the conflicts of her mind.

“Alas, Sir (said she) why did such uncommon and fatal circumstances mark our regard for each other?—Why was you of all others made the cause of my still recent misfortunes? Is it not too visible, that Fate, by such invincible obstacles, meant for ever to separate us?” “There is no obstacle, Madam (said Nemours) not one. You alone obstruct our happiness, by imposing upon yourself laws that neither reason nor virtue command.”—“It may be possible, Sir (replied she) that these laws exist only in my own imagination; but to my misfortune they there appear indispensable. You cannot yourself more ardently wish that time may erase them, than I do. The Prince of Cleves’s death cannot yet have lost its melancholy influence on my mind. It is not very long since I experienced this severe affliction. Were I even more at ease under such a circumstance than I really am, I should certainly not think of listening to any address, till so gloomy a remembrance were, by a greater length of time, effaced. I entreat you, then, Sir, by that power you say I have over you, seek not to visit me, or mention to me by any means this subject till that change I earnestly wish (for both our sakes) may possibly be effected. I must now quit you. You will not be displeased when I tell you I leave you in possession of my heart; it has been only yours; it will remain so, however my fate may dispose of me: and now farewell, (said she) I am almost ashamed of this conversation.”

She hastily withdrew her hand, which he had long held; nor was it in his power to prolong her stay. Tears streamed down her face, as she passed through the rooms, in one of which de Chartres waited for her; distress was so visible in her countenance, that he ventured not to say a single word; but taking the hand she offered, led her to her coach in silence.

Nemours was almost as little able to speak to him on his return. After some time he made him acquainted with the result of their interview, and the extraordinary sentiments of Madame de Cleves. Notwithstanding the natural timidity of love, he agreed with de Chartres, that it was impossible but time must accomplish his wishes.

His friend persuaded him it would be necessary to acquiesce with her desire of neither writing to, or visiting her for a time, lest her too rigid notions might occasion her to make her resolutions public and irrevocable.—Nemours therefore determined to attend the court, without seeing Madame de Cleves. He entreated de Chartres often to visit her, whilst he remained at Paris, and furnished him with a thousand arguments to urge in behalf of his wishes.

Madame de Cleves was astonished when composed enough to reflect calmly on the scene she had quitted. Alternately she blamed and applauded herself for the sincerity with which she had spoken to Nemours. She examined with grief those reasons which the remembrance of her husband's death, and strict propriety, alledged in opposition to her happiness. With sorrow she found them too powerful to be conquered. On the contrary, when she considered the softer feelings of her heart, she wondered how an union with Nemours could be compatible with regret of any kind; but ever afraid to indulge in the smallest degree the latter ideas, the former were rendered so habitual to her mind, that they became a part of it, and though they could not destroy or conquer that tenderness that was a native of her soul, they always kept it in subjection. De Chartres often came to see her; he urged with the utmost warmth the cause of his friend; but her determinations were not to be shaken. "You, my dear uncle, (said she) know my history, it is a melancholy and unfortunate one. Heaven marked me out a path of sorrow only. I will without murmuring obey its decrees, in following what is no doubt for wise purposes ordained me; my fault has been, and will continue to be my punishment. I can accuse myself of no other crime, but that affection for your friend which I have been unable to subdue. It never was so painful to me, as it now is. I am conscious that it is in my power to accept the hand of Nemours. This, at one time of my life, I should have thought the highest felicity: Yet I dare not, either for his sake, or my own, avail myself of what appears a circumstance so greatly in my favour. Ah, Sir, could I possibly know peace, even in the bosom of your friend, when I reflected, which I certainly should do, that the affection I indulged caused his death who fondly loved me; whose behaviour to me was too generous, not to leave the most lasting impressions upon my gratitude and remembrance, who deserves from me at least a conduct less blameable than to affront his memory, by rewarding that passion which deprived him of his life?—Alas, my dear friend, these are insurmountable obstacles.—Fate has allotted me a duty more severe than others, but I will never depart from it.—My happiness (if I have a right to use a word so foreign from any thing I have yet experienced) is connected with it; and I am fully convinced, that of the two miseries I am reduced to the hard necessity of choosing from—that of refusing the Duke de Nemours is the least.—My mind would continually reproach me, did I accept him; this I am sure of. Possibly it may applaud me for difficulties I sustain in adhering to that virtue it reveres."

These arguments were too deeply rooted in her breast to be altered by any thing de Chartres could offer against them.—He was obliged to leave Paris, but continued the subject by letters; in one of these Nemours ventured to write a few lines.

Madame de Cleves found herself so tenderly affected by the warmest protestations, and the kindest sentiments, from the hand and heart of him she loved, that she immediately forbid her uncle to write to her any more; and added the strongest asseverations that she would no longer answer him on the subject which had occasioned their correspondence.—De Chartres knew it was needless to persevere; and Nemours himself made it his request, that she should be left to herself, till time and her own inclinations should determine in his favour.

A thousand tormenting anxieties still disturbed the mind of the unfortunate Madame de Cleves.—The Court was expected to return soon to Paris.—Could she then, however retired, avoid seeing Nemours? The constant idea that it was possible, would subject her to continual inquietude. The memory of her husband, which was the strongest support of her resolutions, was in danger, she considered, to be obliterated by the presence of him she was thoroughly convinced she truly loved. She began to fear lest she might be induced to act contrary to those rules, which she still persuaded herself ought to guide her conduct; she determined, therefore, if possible, to put it out of her own power to recede from that duty she had prescribed to herself.

Having a large estate near the Pyrenées, she resolved to retire thither, and pass the remainder of her life in solitude. It was not long before she put her design in execution. Having settled some business necessary to her departure, she set out on her journey a few days before the Court was expected to return.

She wrote to the Viscount de Chartres, acquainting him with her determination, and beseeching him not to suffer her to be disturbed in her retreat; assuring him, that such a proceeding from himself or his friend would be extremely cruel; as it would render that task, which was now inevitably to be performed, a thousand times more painful and difficult, without answering any other purpose. Nemours was half distracted at this intelligence.—Had she avoided him from hatred, it would, he thought, have been more supportable.

The fatigue of mind and body that Madame de Cleves sustained during her journey, threw her into a violent and dangerous illness.—De Chartres was informed by her attendants of her situation.—Nemours's grief proceeded to the utmost extravagance; he dispatched frequent messengers, in her uncle's name, to enquire into every circumstance of her danger or recovery; at length he was informed that the violence of her disorder had yielded to the goodness of her constitution; but that a languishing weakness still preyed upon her body and her mind.

The near approach of death which she had experienced, had indeed painted to her imagination every worldly prospect in a more faint light, than she thought they could possibly have appeared in. The fatal stroke she had now escaped, she reflected would certainly return; and from her languid state, she persuaded herself it was not likely to be far distant. Every engagement of life seemed weaker, from these reflections; her late situation convinced her how necessary those resolutions, which had cost her so much pain, were to her eternal peace; she found that Nemours would sometimes obtain a place in her thoughts, but it was such a one as was scarcely inconvenient to her, and she congratulated herself on having conquered entirely that passion which had occasioned all the misfortunes of her life.

As soon as she was able to leave her chamber, she retired to a nunnery, under pretence of changing the air, without declaring her intention of trying a kind of life which she believed would be more agreeable to her than any other. Though her mind was really now much more at ease than it had ever been since she had seen Nemours, yet she

determined never to subject herself to the dangerous presence of him who might possibly again overthrow that degree of tranquillity she had with so much difficulty attained.

Nemours, who had constant intelligence of Madame de Cleves, without her knowledge, felt the weight of her last retreat, and clearly saw the importance of it; he prevailed upon the Dauphiness to write to her; and remonstrated against this last step she had taken. He prevailed upon De Chartres to go to her; but both their entreaties proved equally vain. She saw her uncle, but told him she no longer found any difficulty in adhering to resolutions that all along appeared to her to be those alone she could with propriety pursue; that she should not, she believed, pass her time entirely in the convent, but should certainly never quit that part of France she was then in.

Nemours waited the return of De Chartres with extreme impatience—he was not yet to be repulsed; but contrary to every advice of his friend, undertook himself the journey from which the other had so unsuccessfully returned. Madame de Cleves was equally surprized and afflicted when she heard of his arrival, and received a message from him. —She obstinately refused to see him, but was at length prevailed upon to read one of his letters, which she thus answered.

“It is most unkind of you to disturb that peace which I have so dearly purchased, or seek to draw me from that path which, however difficult, is yet by Heaven allotted for me.—My resolutions, you know, have never been weak; blame me not when I say, I never more will expose myself to the danger of seeing you.—I have for ever renounced the world; every thing, but yourself, that it contains, is become perfectly indifferent to me.—My duty and my peace, I am convinced, would have been equally injured, had I listened to the suggestions of my affection for you.—They both strongly opposed our union; besides which, there is nothing beneath Heaven that now appears worthy of my consideration.—My late dangerous illness has brought me much nearer the grave, than you imagine; I rejoice in the prospect; no other thoughts now employ my mind, but those which this promised release may occasion, except my sincerest wishes for your happiness.—I have now no worldly hope, but to be assured that your heart is equally reconciled to that hard fate which separates us, as is hers who writes to you, and who bids you with affection, and the most fervent prayers for your peace, eternal in this world—farewel.”

Nemours, grieved to the soul at her perseverance, yet answered the letter; but Madame de Cleves would not see his messenger, nor allow any thing relative to this faithful and unfortunate lover again to be mentioned to her.

He returned to Paris, with a heart oppressed with grief, without the most distant hope of ever again beholding a woman he loved with the most constant, delicate, and ardent affection; yet that woman still living and returning his love.—Time and absence abated his affliction, but never totally extinguished his passion. Madame de Cleves lived some years afterwards.—She passed six months of every year in the convent, and the other six at her own house.—She was a pattern of virtue and piety.—Beloved, respected, and

admired, by all who knew her, throughout her whole life; which though short, has left us innumerable examples of almost inimitable fortitude and virtue.

FINIS.