

SIMPLE FACTS.

VOL. II.

SIMPLE FACTS;  
OR, THE  
HISTORY OF AN ORPHAN.  
IN TWO VOLUMES.  
BY MRS. MATHEWS.

VOL II.

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## SIMPLE FACTS, &c.

### CHAPTER I.

NOT many days after my adventure with the gentleman with the wooden leg, I saw a letter laying open on the parlour table; I just looked at the subscription, and saw Lord F. This raised my curiosity; I concluded, the contents could not be of a very secret nature, otherwise Lord D. would not have left it so careless; I took it up, and read as follows:—

“MY LORD,

“I was, when I had the honour of writing to you last, one of the happiest of fathers; as I had then a son, who promised fair to be an ornament to me, and to all whom he should associate with. He was such, my Lord, as I wished him to be. I will venture to say, he had not a vice; I think, I may go still farther, and add, he had scarce a foible. Such a son! and the only one too, of an old man just going out of the world, the only hopes of a family of some little note, to be lost to his father, is a matter of no small concern. Your sister’s cruelty has drove him from the world. I received a letter from him, telling me, that all enquiries after him would be useless, as Miss Scot had denied him the opportunity of vindicating his character, which had been, he was persuaded, very much injured, as he had no doubt of her affections. He would, he said, abandon the world for ever, as there was nothing in it worthy his notice, since all his hopes of happiness were for ever lost.— ‘Oh,’ said he, ‘if she should ever, by any fortunate circumstance, be convinced of the injury done me, it is all I wish; but that will never come to my knowledge, as before you receive this, I shall be so far secluded from the world, as to baffle all search.’—His words were too true;—for, on enquiry, I found he had left London, and no one could tell where he was gone.— Oh, my Lord! you, who know what it is to be a father, may, in some measure, judge of my distress on this melancholy occasion. All my hope which now remains is, that he may possibly have taken the road which leads towards the object of his affections; and under some disguise, be in your neighbourhood. If you should be the means of restoring him to his disconsolate father, you will lay an eternal obligation on

MY LORD,  
Your Lordship’s  
Humble Servant,  
F——.”

P.S. I will pledge my honor for my son’s innocence.

The emotions I felt on reading this letter are better imagined than described. How did I repent pledging my sacred word so rashly? Then, I thought he might have made this an excuse to his father for abandoning the world, and living in retirement with his wife; this thought agreed with my reason, but not with my love. I found it in vain to endeavour to reconcile things, as one circumstance confounded another. I thought it best to trust to time, which, I hoped, would unveil those mysteries.

About this time, Sir William Warren came on a visit to Lord D. He appeared evidently shocked at the change he perceived in my looks, which seemed to give him more concern than I thought was natural to him. Whether he supposed I should, from the baseness I had discovered in Mr. Spencer, draw comparisons to his advantage; or whether he imagined I might be inclined to revenge; or what other motive he supposed might induce me to look on him in a more favourable light, I will not pretend to determine; but he actually renewed his addresses to me.

I was extremely surprised, and did not endeavour to conceal it. I looked earnestly at him, and asked, if he supposed I was eighteen months ago, the time he first proposed, incapable of judging of what would make me happy. He looked very much chagrined.—No, Sir William, said I, I should be sorry to suspect myself of so much caprice; and when I tell you, I can perceive no change in either you or myself since that time, the same answer I gave then, may be applied now.

He had not sufficient address to conceal the evident marks of disappointment this second refusal gave him; he only answered, he had flattered himself, time, and a thorough knowledge of him, might have altered my sentiments. I assured him, they remained the same,—and left the room:—and the next morning he left the house, which I was not sorry for, as this had confirmed my opinion, of his being capable of a great deal of deception.

## CHAPTER II.

THE September following Lord D. sent to engage a house for us in town, and the end of that month we set out for London; where we had not been many days before the same young woman who had given me so much cause of uneasiness called again, and asked to speak to me. My servant immediately knew her, and on delivering the message, said, "It is, Ma'am, the woman whom you saw the day before you left Mrs. Hartford's;—would you please to see her—?"—I answered,—by all means,—and ordered her again to my dressing-room.

I was very much surprised at her coming a second time, which clearly proved my mistake respecting her being a partner in Mr. Spencer's retirement. In order not to be taken again by surprize, I stopped a few minutes before I entered the room, to collect myself, being determined not to let this opportunity escape of making myself certain of the truth of her ascertions; but I was soon put out of doubt, on seeing her. She fell again on her knees. "Oh, Madam!" cried she, "have mercy, and forgive a wretch, who has been guilty of such a piece of injustice as must for ever destroy her peace of mind," What can you mean? said I, endeavouring, in vain, to raise her. Whatever is your crime, I will forgive it, only confess what it is.

"How!" said she, "did I dare to abuse you?—Wretch that I was.—I was far enough gone in guilt, without adding perjury to my crimes, although I was, in some measure, forced to it, by a more wicked wretch, if possible, than myself."—And she wept bitterly.

Notwithstanding the reason I had to suspect she had done me the greatest of injuries, I could not help pitying her. "This is," cried she, "too much. Spare your pity, Madam, for those whose innocence entitled them to it. I deserve nothing but the severest reproaches from you.

"I have dared to call myself the wife of a man I never even saw, injured his character, and destroyed the peace of a family, separated two hearts whom Providence seemed to have united, and all for a vile seducer, who only wished to sink me to the blackest of crimes, and then to leave me to a guilty conscience; the upbraidings of which are, indeed, a punishment equal to my wickedness." I turned from her, to pay a tribute of tears to my much injured William. After which, tell me, said I, who was so envious of my happiness as to prevail on you to do this? Heavenly God! what was there in our innocent connection displeasing to thee, that thou shouldest suffer such injustice? But proceed, said I, let me know whose agent you have been in this cruel unjust business. Observing she was in a state which deserved my compassion more than anger, I softened my tone. You have been, I am convinced, said I, prevailed on by some very designing person to destroy my peace. I am not accusing you, but them. "You know Sir William Warren, Madam," said she, Yes, answered I, I do, and believe him the only man in the world capable of such an action. "It was him indeed, who forced me to it.—It was him who seduced me from my disconsolate parents, who are, as I said, farmers at Oxford. He threatened to leave me to beggary if I did not succeed with you in preventing your union with Mr. Spencer. Oh, Madam! what is there not in the power of a man to make a poor girl do, who adored him? I dreaded to undertake such a wicked action: but I, unfortunately, dreaded his displeasure more. He said, 'If the union took place, he should be the most miserable of beings; that I should never see him again; but if I

succeeded, we might all be happy.”

“It is needless to relate the arts he made use of to prevail with me; to my eternal confusion, he did prevail. I succeeded, but too well; my agitation, which was the effect of guilt, your goodness of heart attributed it to another cause, and it favoured the deception. For three months after, Sir William behaved very kind and affectionate to me. He then went in the country, and I have never seen or heard of him since. What will become of me I know not; but I deserve all that can befall me.

“I thought it would a little relieve me, if I came to you and undeceived you, respecting Mr. Spencer, whom I shall pray God to forgive me for injuring.”

I desired her to give me her address, and asked if she was in any immediate want of money? She answered, No. But I feared she was, and pressed her to take some, as I thought it was a pity she should be abandoned to distress, it being evident she was not without principle. She fell again on her knees. “Is it possible, Madam,” said she, “you can still have so much pity for such a wretch as I? What can I say? Indeed I am so distressed with your goodness, I can say nothing; but, as you are so kind, if I could, by your means be restored to my unhappy parents, it should be the business of my life to pray for your happiness.” I asked their direction, which she gave me. I assured her I would do all in my power to reconcile her friends to receive, and treat her with kindness. I insisted on her taking something for her present support; and the poor girl went away with her heart lightened a little of guilt, and filled with gratitude.

### CHAPTER III.

AS soon as I had a little recovered from the agitation this discovery had occasioned, I returned to the parlour to Lord and Lady D. and repeated every circumstance of what had happened, and requested Lord D. to write immediately to Mr. Spencer's father, and make him acquainted with every particular of this treacherous affair, and to assure him, should his son be found, I was ready to fulfil my engagement to him, and that I was determined, should he not be so fortunate, as to discover his retreat, to continue single the remainder of my life.

Lord F. answered, he feared the discovery was made too late, as he had caused advertisements in all the news-papers to no purpose—that he was a miserable old man, yet he sometimes indulged himself with the hopes that the Almighty might hear his prayers, and by some unexpected event, grant him the happiness of embracing his beloved son once more, and he should then leave the world in peace.

It is now two years since he disappeared, and I begin to fear he is dead.—“Two years!” exclaimed Maria “tell me—is he a tall man, with dark hair?” “yes,” answered Miss Scot, with emotion—“Oh!” cried Maria, clasping her hands in an extacy, “it is the same—how happy shall I be, if Providence should have given me the means of restoring your much injured lover—it is the same — the time—the name—his figure—all agree.” “What do you mean?” said Miss Scot, “is it possible you can have seen such a person?” “O yes,” said Maria, “it is the man in the hut, on the hill, near Exeter, John Moor—I am so happy I can scarce tell you the particulars—but I saw him working in a little garden, and was told he had been there about a twelvemonth, which makes it agree as to the time; the initials of his name too, which he had fortunately neglected to pick out of his linen, were W.S.—Oh, Madam!” continued Maria, kissing Miss Scot's hand, “you cannot conceive how happy I am, in being anyways instrumental to your happiness.”

Miss Scot caught her in her arms—“Tell me,” said she “you saw him, did you?” “yes,”—“was he a tall elegant man, with dark eyes?” “yes,”—“and black hair?” “yes, and it was hanging loose about his shoulders,” said Maria. “Had he a beautiful manly countenance?” “yes, working in a garden”—“that was too much,” said Miss Scot, “he is little calculated for such an employment” and burst into tears.

Maria then told her every particular of the man on the hill, and the opinion of the neighbours respecting him. Miss Scot had not the least doubt of his being Mr. Spencer.

Miss Scot immediately sent for Mr. Worthy, and communicated to him the fortunate discovery, which he soon dispatched to Lord F. who joyfully received the tidings, and without a moment's delay sent two servants off express to acquaint his son, his innocence had been, long since, cleared, and that Miss Scot, as well as himself, was impatient to see him. Lord F. appointed to meet him at Bath; where he soon arrived, to the great joy of all parties. It would be too great an attempt to describe the tender affectionate meeting of the two lovers. After the first transports of Mr. Spencer had a little subsided,—“Oh, my Amelia!” said he “what are my feelings, now, compared to those I had when I last saw you. I was then in the agonies of despair,

by your persisting in keeping the cause of my misfortune, a secret." Miss Scot looked surprized, "I have never," said she, "seen you, since the day preceding the fatal plot, which has given us all so much uneasiness." "Have you then, forgot the man with the wooden leg?" said he— "is it possible," said Miss Scot, "you can be the same? That man wore a wig, besides his complexion was much darker than yours." "I should not have succeeded in my scheme, if I could not have metamorphosed myself.—On my receiving your cruel injunction, never to see you again, and a reference to my own heart for the cause: I was, for some time, in a state of distraction; I examined my heart, to no purpose; there was nothing concealed in it, which was it exposed to open view, could lessen me in the estimation of my friends; my actions at the University, on the strictest scrutiny of them, I could not bring under the denomination of crimes, therefore was more at a loss the more I endeavoured to find out the meaning of your letter: I at last determined on seeing Mrs. Hartford, who acquainted me with all she knew of the affair, and likewise that you had left London that morning. We were both of opinion, that the woman, whom she said, had bound you by a sacred vow not to disclose what she had alledged, was hired by some enemy of one, or both of us, to destroy our peace. Despair, at being denied the power of clearing my innocence, and punishing the authors, made me loathe my existence; the sight of my friends became disagreeable to me, and I resolved to abandon society; but before I put my resolution in final execution, I determined to disguise myself in the manner you saw me, and to endeavour to work on your sensibility, by a feigned, but similar story; the success of which I need not repeat.—Oh, my Amelia! with what difficulty did I restrain from throwing myself at your feet, and imploring you to alter your dreadful purpose; but when I found you determined to persist in it, even should your life pay the forfeit—I no longer hesitated to put my plan in execution.

"I set out for Devonshire, that being the greatest distance from all my connections, and there I soon found a little hut which exactly suited the turn my mind had taken, which I have made a present of to the boy who was my steward, cook, and vallet: I had made a vow, never to suffer a woman to enter my habitation:—by what means I was discovered I am still at a loss to know." This was soon made clear to him, and they all blessed the happy event.

He then entreated Miss Scot to give him an opportunity of punishing his enemies, by informing him who they were, and as Miss Scot was well assured Sir William Warren had left England, she considered no ill consequences could arise from it, related every particular.

The young woman was through her means restored to her friends, and a very sincere penitent.

## CHAPTER IV.

ALL things being adjusted, Mr. Spencer pressed for an early day to compleat his happiness. Miss Scot considered they had suffered too much by their separation, started no objection; and they were, to the great satisfaction of their friends, soon united.

Maria was not less happy than the amiable pair on the occasion. She was more than ever adored; they considered her as a superior being, sent amongst them to restore them to peace. Lord F. swore, if he was twenty years younger, his son, should not only have a wife, but a mother, as he was certainly in love; but his love was too great to wish to punish the object of his affections, by imposing an old man on her for a husband. He would, he said, pay his addresses to her in a way, which he made no doubt, would prove more agreeable to her, and love her as his daughter, and he would consider her as such too; she deserved it, as she had restored him to life, by giving him back his son.

Mr. and Mrs. Spencer were to set out in a few days for their seat in the North of England. Lady D. whose health would not permit her to accompany them, entreated her sister to leave Maria with her; and as soon as she was able to travel, she should accompany her down. Mrs. Spencer agreed to this proposal, and set out without her, and Maria went home with Lady D. She was made very happy, in receiving a letter from her Charles, who had written, on his sailing from England, both to her and her brother, in the most tender and affectionate style, which Mr. Harcourt was not less satisfied with than his sister. He was a little uneasy at a letter he received from Lady Palmer, who expressed great displeasure at the conduct of Maria; declared, “if she wished for a continuance of her friendship, she must expect it on no other terms than her bestowing her hand on some respectable man.” A letter from Miss Palmer to Maria expressed pretty nearly the same sentiments. She was very unhappy at this, as she had a sincere love and esteem for both the ladies. Her answer to Miss Palmer’s letter was as follows:—

“MY DEAR MISS PALMER,

YOUR kind letter which I had the satisfaction to receive this morning gave me both pleasure and pain. I should be wanting in gratitude and every proper principle, did I not sincerely rejoice at the welfare of a family to whom I am indebted for so many favours, and who continues to shew such tender concern for my interest. I cannot express the uneasiness it gives me to find Lady Palmer should so ardently wish, or even propose a thing to me, which I cannot immediately gratify. Pray, my dear friend, assure her, I am sensible of the honour she does me, in her kind advice, to which, as far as in my power, I shall ever pay a proper respect. But as I have ever considered the marriage state, without a mutual affection, and something of similarity of sentiments, to be a miserable one, I have determined to remain single until Providence shall think proper to dispose of me to a man I can both love and esteem as I ought. Whenever that happens, I shall not hesitate a moment; but until I have that in my power.—Oh! entreat your kind mother to continue the regard she has ever honoured me with; which were I so unfortunate as to lose, would cause me severe and heartfelt concern. Trusting in her goodness, of which I have had so many proofs, that she will still allow me a place in her esteem, it shall be my constant study to merit both her’s and your’s, which are necessary to the happiness of

“MY DEAR MISS PALMER,  
Your ever grateful, and  
Truly affectionate Friend,  
“MARIA HARCOURT.”

Miss Palmer’s letters to Maria, from this time, were more cool and distant; and in a short time after, she dropt the correspondence altogether. This gave Maria great concern; however, she had the satisfaction to know she had done nothing to deserve their displeasure.

## CHAPTER V.

SIR Richard Harlow still continued his attention to Maria. He was very frequent in his visits to Lord D. She endeavoured as much as possible to avoid him, which he attributed to her prudence. He fancied, if she was once assured he had honourable intentions towards her, her conduct would be very different. He was every day more convinced, she was worthy the shining sphere he intended to raise her to, and therefore determined to obtain the happiness of seeing and conversing freely with her, by openly avowing his disinterested passion.

He pleased himself with the idea of the agreeable surprise she would feel at her good fortune—no wonder the possibility of her rejecting him never once entered his head, as he was so universally sought after by ladies of high rank; he little expected a poor unprotected orphan would have heard of the conquest she had made with indifference; on the contrary, he expected it would not be in her power to conceal the joy she must feel at the prospect of such an elevation. How was he then surprised? when on declaring his love, and the state he intended to raise her to: Instead of the great joy which he expected to see in her countenance, she, without any emotion, coolly thanked him for the honour he intended her, but politely declined accepting it. It is impossible to describe the surprise and disappointment which Sir Richard discovered at this refusal;—he doubted the evidence of his senses. He entreated she would seriously consider his disinterested affection; that he was ready to settle half his estate on her; that he should be the most miserable man existing, if she did not, at least, give him some hopes, that time might alter her sentiments. But Maria steadily persisted in her refusal; which, instead of abating, seemed rather to inflame him the more.—He petitioned and raved by turns.—He at length went so far as to put her in mind of her dependent state, and drew the comparison between it and the envious one he then offered to raise her to.

She rose to ring the bell,—saying, she had given him an answer, and, therefore, must acquaint him she wished to be alone.—He threw himself at her feet.—“Oh!” said he, “forgive the effects of my disordered senses. I would not, for the world offend you; but unless you wish to hear of my death you must give me hopes, that you will, some time or other, make me happy. Let pity, if no other motive can induce you.—Oh, pity my sufferings!—He appeared greatly agitated.—“Let me entreat you, Sir,” said Maria, “if you have no respect for me, to consider what is due to yourself. Let me beseech you to leave me.” “What!” cried he, impatiently, “without your permitting me the poor consolation to think you even pity my sufferings?—I cannot—Miss Harcourt—I cannot.—If you knew the heart you reject with so much indifference, you would not, I am persuaded, wish me to leave you. That heart, since the first moment I saw you, has had no rest. To what,” exclaimed he, “am I reduced! Rejected by the only woman in the world capable of making me happy? Tell me, Miss Harcourt” seizing her hand eagerly, “what part of my conduct is displeasing to you? that I may endeavour to become any thing you like.—My fortune you cannot object to;—but was it twenty times as large, it should be yours. Say what I shall do to obtain you—for mine you must be—or I am the most miserable man upon earth.”

“I make no doubt, Sir Richard,” said Maria, “but you consider a refusal from me as a sort of insolence: but know, that although I am in a state of dependence, I am as much above a mean

unjust action, as you can be, with all your boasted wealth; and was I so mean as to be dazzled with the splendour of your fortune to marry you, without any other inducement, it would sink me so low in my own estimation, I should for ever despise myself. You, I make no doubt, little expected a refusal from me. I confess I consider myself very highly honoured by the preference you have given me; but I did not expect, when I had acquainted you, I never could make a suitable return to your affections, you would so far have forgotten yourself, as to have troubled me farther: but since you oblige me to repeat, what is as disagreeable to me to say as for you to hear, I must tell you again, I never can be your's, and I hope, you will never again, by any vain importunity, lay me under the disagreeable necessity of saying as much."—And she rose from her seat.

He again caught her hand.—“Let me entreat you Miss Harcourt,” said he, “to condescend so far as to tell me what your objections are.—Are your affections engaged?”—Maria answered, he did not conceive it necessary for her to lay open the state of her heart; but if it would afford him any satisfaction to know her objection did not proceed from personal dislike, he was at liberty, if he pleased, to form that conjecture.

“What an unhappy man am I!” said he, “who now will look up to me with envy? What do I profit by having riches and a title?—They cannot give me peace of mind.—How gladly would I exchange my high rank with the meanest subject, possessed of your love.—How have I deluded myself with false hopes!—How flattered myself with the pleasure it would afford me, to raise you to a sphere which many would look up to with envy; and I may, without vanity, say, few would refuse. You are the only woman in the world, I believe, who is superior to the dazzling of riches, and therefore are best entitled to them. To my utter destruction I must love you more than before for this greatness. But tell me, are you so far engaged as no hopes remain for me? Is this envied rival so much my superior? What does he do to deserve you, which I would not undertake?” Maria again entreated him to leave her. “Do not Miss Harcourt,” said he, “drive me to despair.”—In great disorder.—“I cannot exist without you.” A knock at the door greatly relieved Maria. Lady D. returned from an airing, then entered the room. Sir Richard could not conceal his agitation; saluted her in a confused manner, and took an abrupt departure.

## CHAPTER VI.

“WHAT! in the name of wonder, have you done to the Baronet, Maria?” said Lady D. “but I can guess his pride has received a shock he did not expect. Have you really had the resolution to refuse three thousand a year, and a title to the bargain? Upon my word, you are an heroic lass, and deserve to have a monument erected in honour of your constancy. I think, it is a pity you cannot make a transfer of your lovers to those who stand so much in need of them; you would then be as much sought after by the unmarried ladies as the gentlemen; the young ladies then would have no occasion to run away with the husbands of their friends. I am told, Miss Andrews is gone off with Captain D. who has left his wife and five children.”

“Miss Andrews gone off with Captain D.!” exclaimed Maria. “I am really sorry for it. What a pity she should be so indiscreet, with so much beauty as she possessed.” “That,” said Lady D. “was her great misfortune; had she been less beautiful, she might have passed her days in peace, and been respected. But her head was turned with admiration, the inordinate love of which is the dangerous rock where thousands split;

“For praise too dearly loved or warmly sought,  
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought.”

“A beautiful woman, as well as a learned one, if she is not endowed with a good share of sense, is a most unpleasant companion; but when either, are under the government of good natural abilities, they cannot fail of gaining universal love and esteem.”

“I cannot,” said Maria, “comprehend why women should be vain of what they have been at no pains in acquiring, and what, indeed, is given by Nature, indiscriminately, to the deserving and undeserving. But that any woman, who has had the advantage of a proper education, should be so lost to every principle of honour and virtue, as to even listen to a married man, is what most surprises me.”

“A married man,” said Lady D. “has the best chance. Few men of understanding would take such a woman for a wife, therefore, she is most liable to listen to improper offers. She would naturally expect a single man would make honourable proposals, and would be startled at finding them otherwise; but the other, not having it in his power to make such proposals, regrets his unfortunate situation, swears he is miserable, which she readily believes, pities him, and the natural consequences follow.”

Maria enquired, if it was known where they were gone? “No,” said Lady D. “I only heard they went off last night, after the play; I suppose to the Continent. Miss Andrews has five thousand pounds in her own possession; but Captain D. has nothing but his commission. I am extremely concerned for his family, who will, through his indiscretion, be reduced to a state of indigence. What has such unfeeling wretches to answer for, who, to gratify their vicious inclination, forsake all which ought to be most dear to them.”

In the afternoon, Maria received a note from her brother, requesting, if she was not engaged in the evening, she would pass it with him; and she accordingly went. After tea, he addressed her thus: "My dear Maria do not imagine I mean to shake your constancy for Charles Palmer, who I think deserves it; but I must fulfil the promise I made to a gentleman, who applied to me this morning, and requested me to use my influence; but that I declined. It is Sir Richard Harlow; he appears sincerely attached to you; offered whatever terms you or I would propose. I gave him no hopes, knowing the state of your heart." Maria, after thanking her brother for his tender regard to her happiness, expressed her astonishment at Sir Richard's meanness in persecuting her further, after the conversation which had passed between him and her in the morning. She had then given him such an answer as was, in her opinion, sufficient to satisfy any man of the least delicacy, and therefore did not consider it necessary to give him any other; but if her brother pleased, he might tell him her affections were unalterably engaged.

Mrs. Harcourt said something about the romantic notions of young girls, who suffer themselves to be led away, and perhaps injure both themselves and their families, by supposing they are violently in love, before they are capable of judging of what will be to their advantage; that it was ridiculous they should be allowed to act for themselves in those matters, when they had friends who were so much better able to judge of what was proper for them. She had, she said, never interfered in Maria's concerns before; but she could now no longer forbear, as she thought she was acting very foolishly, in refusing such a man as Sir Richard Harlow, who, in her opinion, had the advantage of Charles Palmer in every respect, for the ever distant prospect of being united to him God knows when! besides, she must not expect ever to be received by Lady Palmer, as a daughter, as she was well assured she never would.

Maria was greatly concerned to hear Mrs. Harcourt speak so unfeelingly. She only answered, that if any power on earth could have prevailed to have shaken her resolution, respecting Charles, it would certainly have been Dr. Curtis. As she had withstood the entreaties of him, joined with those of her brother, she should consider him as very ill-treated indeed, if she was so mean as to be allured by the splendour of Sir Richard Harlow's fortune to marry him. Indeed, she confessed, had she not known Charles Palmer, she should have given the Doctor the preference to any man she had ever seen. She had refused him for Charles Palmer, and therefore should not hesitate a moment in as steadily refusing Sir Richard.—Mr. Harcourt was not displeased at his sister's sentiments, which reflected honour to her. But Mrs. Harcourt disapproved them, from not understanding them. Maria was very happy to find her brother had too much generosity to be biassed by his wife, who, she saw, was very much inclined to favour Sir Richard.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Maria returned home, she acquainted Lady D. with Sir Richard's applying to her brother, and expatiated on his meanness in endeavouring to obtain her by such means. Lady D. said if that was the case, he might prove very troublesome. "These young heirs," said she, "are so little accustomed to refusals, they do not know how to brook them; but you are well protected, I think he will not dare to offer you any violence. I shall soon be able to travel, and will deliver you safe to Mrs. Spencer, who writes me word, that although she has her beloved William constantly with her, she wants you to compleat her happiness."

Maria rejoiced at the prospect of soon seeing her beloved friend. She had the sincerest respect for Lady D. yet the tenderness she had received from Mrs. Spencer had deeply penetrated her heart, and she longed to be a witness to her happiness.

Sir Richard had called several times at Lord D's; but Maria had had the good fortune to escape seeing him; he then wrote her a letter, which she, being unacquainted with his hand, to her great confusion, opened and read as follows:—

TO MISS HARCOURT, AT THE RT. HON.  
LORD D——'S.

"MOST charming; but Ah! most cruel of women! may I be permitted to hope you will pardon my presumption, if I once more venture to implore your pity for one who is reduced from one of the happiest of mortals to misery and despair. Though the splendour of my fortune, and all I have on earth to offer, are too trifling to merit your consideration, let that pity, which is an inseparable companion to a mind, such as yours, where sweetness and benignity shine so apparent, plead in my behalf. To that then let me address myself; there alone I rest my hopes, that you will not surely single me out to be made for ever miserable, by denying me the happiness of seeing you. How have I deserved your cruelty? How offended you? Is it by having given up my whole soul to you, that you treat me with such disdain; yet, let me hope you will still hear me. If to adore you is any way to deserve you, my title I would yield to none. No man living can love you more ardently than I do. Since the first moment I saw you you have ever been present to my imagination. My heart beats to tell you of its aching. I loath the sight of those friends who have witnessed my former happiness. Where can I fly for peace, but to her, who is alone capable of restoring it to my troubled breast. You, who are all gentleness, will surely feel a pleasure in giving peace to that heart which must soon cease to beat, if not permitted to pour out its suffering at your feet; whilst it has life it must be most adorable of women!

Your's,

RICHARD HARLOW."

Maria was greatly distressed at having opened this letter. She immediately shewed it to Lady D. and begged her advice; who said, the only way to prevent his troubling her with another, would be, to enclose it, and send it back;—which she did, with the following lines:—

## TO SIR RICHARD HARLOW.

“I little expected, when I assured Sir Richard Harlow it was not in my power to make a proper return to his addresses, he would have known so little what was due to himself, as to have persecuted me farther, and by such a conduct reduced me to the necessity of returning his letter, with the disagreeable repetition of what I have already assured him. When he did me the honour of his personal addresses, my resolution was then unalterably fixed never to be his; therefore I will only add to what I have said before, that his troubling me farther can have no other effect than to render himself odious to

MARIA HARCOURT.”

Having sent this, she expected to hear no more of Sir Richard. Lady D. was now pretty well recovered, and they were preparing for their journey, when Maria’s peace received an unexpected shock. Her beloved brother who had been sent for to make a will for a gentleman who was dying had caught a fever, and his life was despaired of. It is impossible to convey an idea of her distress on this occasion; her brother was dear to her from every tender tie; his gentle treatment, and the kind sympathetic concern he shewed for her happiness, when she all trembling had laid the state of her heart before him, had warmed that heart with gratitude. Add to this, he was her only protector, the only relation who had for some years bestowed a thought upon her; and it is no wonder her affliction at the danger of losing him was more than her tender nature could well support. She was forbade to see him, as his fever was of a contagious nature. She from the agitation of her mind soon became nearly as bad as him; she shut herself up in her room, and spent the whole of her time in prayer, for the Almighty to spare her brother her friend, her only protector. Lady D. entreated her to compose herself, and urged all that tender friendship and religion could suggest, to strengthen her mind, to trust in a merciful Creator, who would, if he saw good, restore him; but not to forget her christian fortitude in resigning to his will, should he, from motives too obscure for our weak nature to comprehend, think proper to take him from her.

Maria clasped her hands, and fell on her knees. “Oh!” cried she, “Almighty and merciful God! I beseech thee to spare my brother. Look with pity on a poor unprotected orphan, who has no other friend, whose protection she can claim. Spare him! Oh, spare my brother!” Lady D’s tears flowed apace, she raised Maria, and took her in her arms. “Be comforted, my sweet girl,” said she, “all who know you will act the part of brother, sister, and friend to you.” Mr. Worthy tapped at the door. Lady D. opened it,—his looks were those of compassion and tender distress,—which Maria observed, and exclaimed, with horror in her countenance, “Ah! he is gone!—Tell me, Mr. Worthy,—am I, indeed, without a friend?” He could not speak. At last, taking her hand, “You shall never be without one whilst I live,” said he. “I see I have lost my brother,” said Maria, “I see it by your generous pity. Oh, Mr. Worthy,” continued she, bathing his hand with tears, “he was the kindest, gentlest, and most affectionate brother ever known;—but he is gone;—I am now an orphan indeed.” Her words became incoherent; her looks disordered. It was judged necessary for her to be put to bed; and Mr. Worthy sent for a physician, who ordered her a composing draught, and desired she might be kept quiet. Mr. Worthy had accounts from a servant, whom he had sent to enquire how Mr. Harcourt did, that he died about a quarter of an hour before; that he had not been sensible since he was first taken ill, but in his ravings had talked much of his sister.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THIS unfortunate circumstance obliged Lady D. to postpone her journey until Maria was recovered; which, for some days, they were in great doubt about. At her intervals of reason, she lamented the loss of her brother in the most pathetic terms. Lady D. considered it best to let nature have its course, and therefore forbore to distress her with unreasonable expostulations. She knew, in the state Maria was in, it would only augment her grief to tell her it availed nothing. She endeavoured, by tender acts of kindness, to call her mind back to its peaceful state. As soon as Maria's fever had a little abated, she perceived, and was pierced to the heart with gratitude for Lady D's attention. She took her hand, and pressed it to her heart, and with her eyes lifted to Heaven, exclaimed. "Father of mercy! forgive me if I have erred in this grief, which my weak nature was unable better to support for my poor brother, whom thou hast thought proper to deprive me of! Oh! deign to look with pity on me, and enable me to continue to act so, as to deserve the kindness of those amiable friends though hast raised up to protect me from the designing people, whom my poor brother feared I might fall a prey to! And thou blessed spirit of the best of brothers, Oh! continue to guard and protect thy sister!"

Lady D. was exceedingly affected with Maria's piety. She appeared more composed, and soon fell into a gentle sleep. She recovered very fast from that time, and in a few days was able to sit up: a tranquil resignation appeared in her countenance, which added to her natural sweetness, she looked something more than human.

Lady D. was sincerely rejoiced to see Maria so well; she strove by every little attention in her power to divert her, and succeeded so well, that in a short time, she was so far recovered, as to acquaint her ladyship, she hoped soon to be able to travel, as she longed very much to see her dear friend Mrs. Spencer.

This gave Lady D. great pleasure; she hoped, as Maria was able to think of her absent friends, the violence of her grief was a little abated; yet, it was evident, notwithstanding the strong effort she made to appear composed, sorrow had taken deep hold of her heart. Lady D. was at a loss how to contrive for Maria to take leave of her sister. She feared, if she went to the house, she would not be able to support the shock she must receive on entering it. It was at length determined for Mr. Worthy to wait on Mrs. Harcourt, to entreat her to come with him in Lord D's carriage, to sit an evening with her. Although Lady D. had prepared Maria for this visit, she, on Mrs. Harcourt's entering the room, fainted. Her struggles were vain, her fortitude, though she had a considerable share, gave way to her tender sensibility.

"Oh, my dear sister," said she, when she was able to speak, "we are two unfortunate creatures; you have lost a kind, tender, and affectionate husband, and I, the best of brother's. But who dare question the Omnipotence of Heaven? Let us, by patiently submitting, render ourselves objects worthy the compassion of that awful Judge, who alone can give us strength to support our sorrows. When I reflect on the many friends he has raised me up, to instruct my infant mind, and protect my dangerous years, I think I do wrong in indulging my grief. But I trust, he who knows the weakness of my Nature, will pity and forgive me."

Let us, my dear sister, though the tie is dissolved which united us, not forget it once subsisted; let the remembrance cement our affections, if possible, more closely. I shall, which ever way Providence may think proper to dispose of me, ever consider and respect you as my sister."

Although as has been already observed, Mrs. Harcourt had not the greatest share of sensibility, she was very much affected with Maria's words; assured her, she should ever love and esteem her, for her husband's sake, and would always be happy to render her every service in her power.

After these mutual assurances of friendship, Maria acquainted Mrs. Harcourt she should leave Bath in a few days, and they embraced each other, and took an affectionate leave.

Lady D. was more than ever delighted with her young friend, and on communicating to Lord D. and her Uncle Maria's discourse, expressed her surprise to find such propriety of thought in one of her years. "Her mind, poor girl," said Mr. Worthy, "has been softened by early adversity. I hope her latter days will be crowned with peace and tranquillity. God grant I may live to bestow her on her Charles, who will, I make no doubt, value her as she deserves. I never was more interested for any person in my life, than I am for her." "She is," said Lord D. "a most excellent girl, and will, I hope, be happy. I wish Sir Richard Harlow may not cause her some uneasiness; I saw him this morning at the Rooms, he seems not to relish the refusal she gave him; he talked of her with great warmth, and enquired particularly whether Lady D. intended to take her with her into the country; I answered yes, Miss Harcourt was now considered as one of our family, and as such, would be protected." "That she shall," said Mr. Worthy, "I have no desire to use a sword or pistol again, but by G—" continued he, with an honest warmth, "I would with great pleasure blow out the brains of any man, who had the rascality to take an unfair advantage of that girl, old as I am." "My dear Uncle," said Lady D. "you would not surely fight a duel for her?" "Would I not," answered he, "but you are mistaken, who is more fit to protect her? She has no relation who takes that charge, and she shall not suffer from the want of one, whilst I live; I am an old man, and cannot expect to have many years to come; my life is therefore of no great value, I have risked it in a worse cause, and should think it well bestowed, were it lost in defending an innocent, unprotected, deserving girl." "Upon my word Uncle," said Lady D. "if I were not pretty certain of Maria's constancy, I should be inclined to believe, from your great warmth, she had accepted you as a lover." "You may call it what you please," said Mr. Worthy, "but I suppose you will not allow it the name of love, without there is a desire of possessing the person. I will confess to you, I think I do love her; of what nature my love is, I leave to the casuist, but I know, to see her happy, would be a great means in making me so. I was not so fortunate as to meet with such a girl thirty years ago, or perhaps I might have felt a different passion, and should not have been now, what is called an old batchelor."

## CHAPTER IX.

MARIA's mind had been so occupied this last fortnight, with the thoughts of her brother, that her Charles had scarce been admitted to enter her head. The morning after Mrs. Harcourt's visit, she was agreeably surprised with the following letter, brought by a ship, which had met that which Charles went in, on their passage.

### TO MISS HARCOURT, BATH.

“IF my most adorable Maria, the prayers of one, whose heart and soul are devoted to you, have been heard, this will find you well and happy; every night do I implore the Almighty to protect and comfort you, and to guard and watch over your innocence, and he will protect you I most confidently believe; he approves our loves, he knows the purity of our hearts. In the morning I repeat my prayer, that he will avert from my Maria every unfortunate accident which is incident to human nature, and endow her with fortitude. Oh, my love! my dear Maria! what does this separation cost me? And so well I know your heart, I suffer more when I think of your feeling the same anxiety for your Charles; but let the thought which supports me to bear it with fortitude, likewise cherish and comfort you. Think, my love, on the happy—happy—time, when we shall meet to part no more;—that is what animates me;—that thought is alone sufficient to enable me to suffer all fatigue; nothing will appear difficult to me, that may any way tend to shorten the tedious absence and hasten the time when we shall be blessed with each other. How do your amiable friends Miss Scot and Mr. Worthy? How happy am I, my Maria is so well protected! It affords me a satisfaction which were I deprived of, my existence would be insupportable. On your safety, my beloved girl, depends all the future happiness of your Charles. What would this world be to me but a loansome desert, were I, by any fatal accident, deprived of you? To you I am indebted for every good principle. Let me look back to the happy time, when my Maria and I walked hand in hand, communicating our innocent hopes and fears to each other. Oh! my love, what a pleasure do I feel, when I reflect, that I never had a thought towards you which I could not with confidence look up to Heaven to support. Let no fears disturb you, my beloved girl; but with me look forward to happiness; such happiness as few are capable of tasting. Before you receive this I shall be at India, when I will write again. The only pleasure I can promise myself in this cruel separation is, in writing to my Maria, and receiving her letters. I think I need not doubt, but she will feel the same; therefore, it will be unnecessary for me to solicit you on that subject. How could I support my existence, had I a doubt of your constancy? It would be impossible: How shall I thank you for the open unaffected assurances you so generously gave me of your love. Oh, my love, how restless and impatient will the days of your Charles be, till he finds some better way than that of words to express the sense he has of your excellence! But the time will come;—yet a life devoted to you will still be too short to repay you. I know not how to finish writing; it is like parting a second time. May every good angel guard and protect you, my heavenly girl, is the constant prayer of your ever loving, and truly affectionate,

CHARLES PALMER.”

“P.S. I have written to your good brother by the same packet.”

Dated at sea, 30 degrees, north latitude, and 10 east longitude.

This letter gave Maria great comfort; she shewed it to Lady D. who congratulated her on the prospect of being united to a man, who, from the style of his letter, appeared to deserve her. “Ah!” said Maria,—the tears gushing from her eyes,—“he may be dead by this time. My poor brother was well a month ago.” “Let me entreat you, my dear,” said Lady D. “to think otherwise; do not give way to such melancholy reflections. Were we constantly to indulge such gloomy ideas, human nature would become insupportable, we should live in continual apprehension for our absent friends; but that kind Providence, who wishes not to see his creatures unhappy, has implanted in our nature a sufficiency of hope to comfort us: we must not neglect to make a proper use of his goodness, lest he in anger deprives us of the power, and leaves us to despair.”

Maria thanked Lady D. for her kind admonitions, and assured her, she would, as far as her weak nature would permit her, profit by them.

The day which was fixed for their leaving Bath arrived. Maria shed fresh tears to the memory of her brother, and then gave her hand to Mr. Worthy, who conducted her to the carriage. Every thing worthy remarked on the road, such as the names of the gentlemen’s seats, and any other circumstances which might entertain, Mr. Worthy and Lady D. pointed out, in order to divert Maria; this was very agreeable to her, and she became sufficiently mistress of herself to appear chearful. After an agreeable journey of three days, they arrived safe at Mr. Spencer’s seat. The joy of Mrs. Spencer at seeing them was evidently checked by the alteration she perceived in Maria’s looks. She embraced her tenderly.—Maria could not conceal the tears, which, in spite of her struggles, made their way down her cheeks.—“When you left me,” said she, “I had a kind brother.”—She wiped her eyes—Mrs. Spencer did the same.—Mr. Worthy coughed, and turned to the window.—Not a word was uttered for some minutes.—Mr. Spencer, taking that hand of Maria which was disengaged, Mrs. Spencer having the other, broke the silence. “Will not,” said he, “Miss Harcourt do me the honor to consider me her brother; you know as my father has adopted you, I may claim that relationship, and you shall find I will not confine myself to mere words. If you ever should stand in need of the protection of a brother, I will shew you, I will, with my life, defend you.” Maria could only thank him with tears, and a look, which spoke more eloquently than words. He pressed her hand as an earnest of what he had said. They then entered on general topics until dinner was announced.

Maria was greatly delighted to see the mutual happiness which subsisted between Mr. and Mrs. Spencer; the respectful lover appeared in his every look and action and the tender, affectionate, and obliging wife was successfully practised by Mrs. Spencer. “Let no one say,” said Maria, to herself, “there is no happiness in this world, after witnessing such as this. What more is the human mind capable of enjoying, than the dear delight arising from the desire of pleasing those we love, and to see our endeavours succeed, to meet a reciprocal return,

“Thought meeting thought, and Will preventing will.”

Happy they! Such it must ever be, where two people meet in each other good sense, good humour, and mutual affection. Possession, instead of satiating, endear them the more. They every day discover new valuable qualities, and their life is one continual scene of delight.”

Maria anticipated the happiness she should enjoy, if it pleased Heaven to restore her beloved Charles. She figured to herself the pleasure it would afford her to pay him that attention she saw practised by her friend with so much success.

The rural situation of Mr. Spencer’s seat was admirably calculated to suit that calm tranquillity Maria’s mind was every day gaining. The house stood in the middle of a wood, with so many pleasing walks, that she was never weary with rambling from one labyrinth of delight to another—cooling breezes—singing of birds—with the charming murmuring of water, are pleasing sounds to a mind just regaining its peace. She spent most of her mornings in these shades, generally accompanied by Lady D. and Mr. Worthy, whose observations, from the knowledge they had of botany and natural philosophy, rendered their conversation both agreeable and instructing. The two lovers, as Mr. and Mrs. Spencer may justly be stiled, were often of their party. Lord D. spent most of his mornings either on horseback or in his study.

Their party received an agreeable addition by the arrival of Lord F. who said, he was induced to set out the instant he heard of their arrival, by the great desire he had of seeing his adopted daughter.

“Well my little girl,” said he, “will you not come and tell your father how you do?” Maria gave him her hand, which he kissed. “It is well my Lord,” said Lady D. “you take sanction under that name, or I should be in fear for you; you would be in danger. I can assure you, no man will be suffered with impunity to use freedoms with Maria; she has a champion ready to defend her;” who replied, he would not turn Knight Errant for such a dulcinea. “By all that is good, I would fight myself, sooner than sit quietly by and see her ill treated. That man who has not decency enough to be kept in order by the sweetness and innocence of such a countenance, I think, deserves to be sent out of the world, as being unfit for society.” “That is exactly my opinion,” said Mr. Worthy.

The next morning Lord F. took an opportunity, when he saw Mrs. Spencer and Maria alone, to present the former with a casket of jewels; saying, he meant to have reserved them until she did him the honor of making him a grandfather, and to have given them by way of an acknowledgement; but as he might not live to see that day, she must do him the honor to accept them now, and he would depend on her gratitude. Mrs. Spencer made a suitable acknowledgement to his generosity, and accepted his present. He then turned to Maria. “May,” said he, “an old man venture to make a present to a young lady without being suspected of having a design. But as a father I think I may beg your acceptance of this little box, as a small token of the obligation and love I bear you, both for your worth, and for making me one of the happiest old men in England.” Maria was so surprised and confounded with this generosity, she knew not how to act, whether to receive or refuse his present. “Indeed, my Lord,” said she, “you distress me exceedingly by over-rating the service I have done you;—it is to Providence alone you are indebted.” “No matter,” cried he, interrupting her, “I hate to be in debt any where, and I do not

see how I can discharge what I owe to Providence better than being grateful to you, whom she has appointed her agent; and my acknowledgment for her kindness, in hearing the prayers of an old man, almost sunk to the grave with despair, shall not stop here. I have enough, and can, without injury to my son, provide for an amiable girl, who is, from misfortune, not misconduct, in a state of dependence. I know William too well," continued he, "to believe he will be displeased at what I have done for you; he will, I know, respect my memory the more." "That," said Mrs. Spencer, "I will answer for."

Maria was again reduced to her usual way of expressing her thanks; having no words any ways adequate to what she felt; tears answered all the purpose; and an involuntary pressure of Lord F's hand, convinced him she had a grateful heart.

As soon as Maria could conveniently leave the room she retired to her own, there to pour forth the effusions of her heart to the great disposer of events. The box contained jewels to the value of five hundred pounds. The satisfaction she received at this unexpected kindness, did not proceed from the value of the present, but that the Almighty, to whose goodness she justly attributed every attention she received, should have raised her up such friends, was what exalted her. "Let no one," said she, "despair or repine at the dispensation of that Power, who seeth best what is proper for his creatures." Her mind was employed in thanksgiving, and prayer, that Heaven would enable her to continue that rectitude of conduct which had endeared her to this worthy family, until the bell summoned her to the dining parlour.

## CHAPTER X.

ABOUT two months after this, Mrs. Spencer, one day, on reading the news-paper and looking significantly at Maria, said, "Here is good news for somebody!" Maria's colour changed. Mrs. Spencer read an extract of a letter from ——.

'Our worthy Governor has appointed his nephew, Mr. Palmer, who lately arrived here, his principal secretary, in the room of Mr. ——, deceased.'

"There is news for you, my dear, your Charles is in a fair way of making a great fortune, without exposing himself to danger." Maria confessed it afforded her great satisfaction to know he had arrived safe; but expressed her surprise at not receiving a letter from him by the packet which brought that intelligence. Mrs. Spencer advised her to write to Mrs. Harcourt, to enquire if any such had arrived, directed to her husband; which she did, and received for answer, that there was no such letter. There was an insinuation in Mrs. Harcourt's letter of the probability of Charles having forgot her; and an earnest request, that she would not be so blind to her own interest as to continue indifferent to Sir Richard Harlow's generous offer; who still adored her. This letter gave Maria great uneasiness; she made no doubt but Sir Richard had gained Mrs. Harcourt over to his interest, and dreaded, least she should have been prevailed on to suppress Charles's letters. She was shocked at the idea of her being capable of such an unjust action; but when she reflected on the forced civility Mrs. Harcourt had shewn towards her ever since her refusal of her brother, she did not think her suspicions were without foundation. She communicated her fears to Mrs. Spencer, who was of the same opinion; but advised her to make herself easy until the next packet arrived, and if she did not receive a letter by it, she might reasonably conclude there was some treachery practised. "We go to Bath," said she, "in October, when you will have an opportunity of judging from Mrs. Harcourt's conversation how she is affected; if you have then reason to believe her unfaithful, you have nothing to do but to write immediately to Mr. Palmer, acquaint him with the death of your brother, and desire his letters may, in future, be addressed to Mr. Spencer." Maria endeavoured to reconcile herself to this disappointment; she considered it could not be attended with any serious consequence, therefore she made up her mind to wait the event patiently.

The remainder of their time in the country was spent in the same rational manner as before described; admiring the beauties of nature; paying and receiving visits from the neighbouring gentry, who were hospitable and friendly. Maria wished it had been consistent with propriety for her to have remained at this peaceful abode until her Charles returned; but fate had otherwise disposed of her. As the time drew near which was fixed for their leaving the country, she every day spent some portion of her time in her favourite shades; there, in earnest thankfulness, did she pour forth in ejaculations the language of her grateful heart to that power who had restored it to peace, and ardently prayed for his support and protection when she should be again exposed to the world.

Lord and Lady D. were to go from Mr. Spencer's seat to London, accompanied by Mr. Worthy. Lord F. said he would return to his mansion, there to prepare for a long journey, this

being the last excursion he fancied he should make in this world. "I have," said he, "lived to have my prayers granted; the happiness I have felt on the occasion is not to be described," and, continued he, "I made a solemn promise, that if Heaven would permit me once more to embrace my son, I would then cheerfully meet death, and be at any time ready to accompany him whenever he should think proper to call for me. I have had some warnings of his near approach, and I do not intend to break my promise; but not to be taken by surprise, I will receive him as a friend, and entertain him in my own house. If, my dear children, I should walk off without seeing you again," taking one of his son's hands and one of Maria's, "you will, William, remember this, my last request, to consider this dear girl as your sister; she deserves all we can do for her." Though he spoke this in a jocular manner, there was not one present but was affected.—Maria's tears flowed plentifully.—Mr. Spencer was unable to make a reply.—Lord F. was satisfied.

These affectionate friends took leave of each other, with a promise from Mr. and Mrs. Spencer and Maria to join them, the spring following, at London. Maria's mind was variously occupied during the journey—the parting with her friends—her Charles's letters—and the thoughts of her deceased brother, depressed her spirits, notwithstanding the efforts Mr. and Mrs. Spencer made to divert her.

As soon as they arrived at Bath, she waited on Mrs. Harcourt; and after paying a tribute of tears to the memory of her dear brother, and some kind enquiries and expressions of tenderness to her sister, she expressed her surprise at not having received a letter from Charles. Mrs. Harcourt appeared evidently confused; but on recovering herself, said, she hoped Maria did not think if any such had come to her hands, but she should immediately have sent it to her; she had no other interest in wishing her to think less of Charles Palmer than what proceeded from her regard to her happiness; he was very young when he made his engagement with her, therefore, it was not an improbable conjecture that he might, as he grew older, see the impropriety of marrying contrary to the consent of his friends; or, indeed, he might be dead. That, Maria answered she was happily convinced, was not the case, as she had lately seen an account of him in the news. "Then," answered Mrs. Harcourt, "you have the more reason to suspect him of inconstancy." She acquainted Maria, her brother, Dr. Curtis, was very well married. "You must," said she, "be now convinced, I have no other motive for wishing you to forget Mr. Palmer than your own happiness." Maria entreated, she would forbear to urge her further on the subject, if she really wished her happiness, declared, that any insinuation against Charles would answer no other purpose than to disturb her peace of mind; but it never would in the smallest degree shake her constancy.

Mrs. Harcourt appeared greatly disappointed. She again entreated Maria to attribute what she had said to the sincere friendship she had for her; but since she was determined to persist, she must take the consequence; this was the last time she would trouble her with her fears.—They parted friends.

Notwithstanding these professions of Mrs. Harcourt, Maria had her doubts of their sincerity. That Charles had written on his arrival at India she had the firmest persuasion; and there was no other way to account for her not having received his letters; she likewise fancied she saw a conscious guilt in Mrs. Harcourt's countenance, which strengthened her opinion and

augmented her fears. She was not displeased at her not having mentioned Sir Richard Harlow, concluding from thence, he had given over further thoughts of her; but on communicating to Mrs. Spencer the purport of the conversation, that lady was of a different opinion. She assured Maria, there was great reason to believe Mrs. Harcourt's silence on that head proceeded from some design. "Sir Richard is not, at present, at Bath," said she, "as I desired Mr. Spencer to enquire at the rooms. Should he come whilst we are here, I would advise you to go very little to your sister's, as I confess, I am fearful she is in a plot against your peace. You must write to Mr. Palmer by the packet which sails next week, and acquaint him with all which has happened.

It cost Maria many a severe and heartfelt pang, to think it would be twelve long months before she could hope to hear from her dear Charles. Her distress on the occasion was doubled, when she figured to herself the anxiety he would suffer from not hearing either from her or her brother. She every day found some relief, in pouring out the sorrows of her heart to him on paper. She had a large packet ready to send off the next day, when Mrs. Harcourt sent to request she would pass the evening with her.

She went with great reluctance, as she was under the necessity of practising deceit which was repugnant to her principles to appear with common politeness.

Mrs. Harcourt paid her uncommon attention; and when Mrs. Spencer's servant came for her, at ten o'clock, pressed her so earnestly to stay to supper; Maria wanted resolution to refuse her. She then sent away the servant; saying, she would send Miss Harcourt home.

After supper Maria expressed a desire that a servant might call her a chair, and she need not trouble him to go home with her. "What occasion have you for a chair?" said Mrs. Harcourt, "it is a fine night, and the streets are clean." Maria fearful, lest her sister should misconstrue her objections to walking, and attribute to pride what was by no means due to it, consented to walk. When she came to the top of Milsome-street, where she had occasion to cross, a chaise with four horses obstructed the way, and as she was turning to look for another convenient crossing, two men seized her and forced her into it; one of the men entered with her. She screamed for help; but the postillions went off with such velocity, it was impossible for any one to come to her assistance. The person who entered the chaise addressed her: "Be not alarmed; no harm is intended you." Notwithstanding the fright Maria was in, she immediately knew him, and exclaimed, "Is it possible Sir Richard Harlow can be capable of such an action as this? Can he be so mean as to take such a shameful advantage? For Heaven's sake!" cried she, falling on her knees, "set me at liberty, and do not bring eternal remorse on yourself; be assured you can never reap any advantage from this step." He endeavoured, in vain, to raise her. "No!" said she, "Here at your feet will I remain till you promise to set me at liberty. Pity me! Oh, Sir Richard, pity an innocent unprotected orphan, and do not render her existence insupportable." "My dearest life," said he,—catching her in his arms, and forcing her on the seat,— "be composed: upon my honor, no harm is intended you." "Dare you, Sir," said Maria, "name honor, when you are acting contrary to the laws of your country, religion, and equity? But before it is too late, Oh! order your postillions to return with me to my friends; they will thank you, and I will pray for you, as long as I live, I will respect you." "Will you," said he, "swear you will be mine? Only give me your honor you will be mine, and I will return with you more happy than any mortal existing; nothing

but despair could have induced me to the step I have taken; but life without you is insupportable;—mine you must be,—no power on earth shall take you from me.” “Think, Sir Richard, on what you do. What happiness can you promise yourself from one you thus force, even were I to consent to be your’s under such circumstances, I never could love or esteem you; our future life would be one continual scene of misery; I should ever consider you as the destroyer of my peace,” and she burst into tears. “No,” said he, “my dearest life, you will thank me for the step I have taken to make you one of the happiest of women. At all events I must proceed, as nothing can be worse than to part with you; even at this moment, cruel as you are, I am happier than it is possible to describe. Oh! Miss Harcourt, think on the love I bear you; attribute this action to its true motive; only endeavour to think well of me, and it shall be the business of my life to make you happy.” “Never!” exclaimed she, “Do not cherish such a thought. Happiness can never more be known to me, if I cannot prevail on you to return with me to my friends. If to see me rendered, through your means, the most miserable woman existing; to feast your eyes on me in the agonies of despair, or perhaps death, will be pleasing to you, then persist, for that is what you must expect.” “Your fate, Miss Harcourt,” said Sir Richard, “depends on yourself, only resolve to be happy, and you will be so. I need not put you in mind of the station you will be raised to, or the many who will look with envy up to you. “Pity,” said she, “would be more applicable. I should, indeed, deserve it, were I reduced to accept a situation which I look on with horror and aversion.” “Have a care Miss Harcourt,” said he, “how you treat me with scorn, by Heaven! I cannot support it. It will drive me to desperation. What is there in me so very objectionable, that I may not presume to hope that time and my tender assiduities will not conquer; however, if I must suffer, it will be some consolation to me, you are a witness to the effects of your cruelty.” “But,” said Maria, “you will surely change your purpose, when I tell you I am engaged by every sacred tie to another.” “A childish engagement,” answered he, “made before either of you were capable of judging of what was right, or what would make you happy.” “No matter” answered she, “when, or how it was made, you have no right to force me to break it.” “I have this right,” replied he, “to prefer my own happiness to any other man’s, who, I am not sure, deserves you more than myself. I am convinced, my existence depends on you, which I cannot be so certain is the case with this much envied rival: however,” continued he, with a resolute tone, “you will do well to forget him, as your future fate must depend on me.” This speech, and the tone with which it was uttered, struck terror to her very soul, and silenced all her faculties; she was deprived the power of utterance, and the remainder of the way vented her complaints by sighs and tears.

## CHAPTER XI.

THEY travelled at a great rate all that night and till about nine the next morning, when the chaise stopt at a genteel house in the middle of a park. An old servant opened the door; Sir Richard handed Maria into a very elegant parlour, where breakfast was prepared; he pressed her to take some, which she declined; but begged he would permit her to retire. He then rang the bell, and a decent elderly woman entered, whom he ordered to wait on Miss Harcourt to her apartment. He again pressed her to take some refreshment. She made no answer, but followed the woman, who conducted her to a very elegant apartment; consisting of a library, dressing-room, and bedchamber; on her entering which, she threw herself on her knees, regardless of her attendant, and implored the Almighty to guard and protect her. The woman looked with astonishment. "I am sorry," said she, when Maria arose, "to see so sweet a lady in distress; but hope you will soon be happy; indeed, you cannot be otherwise with so good a man as Sir Richard; do not be uneasy Ma'am," continued she, "he means nothing but what is honourable, I can tell you as much as that. Ah, he is a good man; many a day have I carried him in my arms and nursed him when he was a child, and a sweet baby he was."

Maria paid no attention to this, but walked the room greatly disordered. The old woman pressed her to take something, till she at length consented to take one cup of tea, which was brought. She then requested to be left alone. The old woman made a curtsy and retired. Maria now finding herself alone, gave vent to her feelings. "Merciful God," said she, "to what am I reserved? Oh, have pity on me, and release me from this confinement. Ah, my ever dearest Charles, could you but see your poor Maria now, what would be your sufferings?—No," cried she, in a louder tone, "he may keep me a prisoner for life, he may kill me, but never will I be his." The old woman who was ordered by Sir Richard to stay in the adjacent room now entered. "Wretch," cried Maria, on seeing her, "leave me; am I to be debarred the privilege to complain." The woman concluding from the manner she spoke, and the colour in her face, she was in a fever, acquainted her master, who entered the room very much agitated. Maria, on seeing him, gave a loud scream. "Save me," cried she, "Heavenly God! save me from that monster, that wretch, who is the destroyer of my peace! but you shall suffer for this," continued she, in a distracted tone. "I have friends who will not let you treat me thus, and I will go to them," walking towards the door; finding it fastened, she burst into tears. "No," said she, "I cannot go; I am a prisoner; a poor unhappy prisoner." Her words became more incoherent; she raved and wept alternately, and soon became totally insensible. Sir Richard exclaimed, he was an unhappy man. He feared to send for a physician lest he should discover the cause of her fever; he therefore trusted to the judgment of his old nurse. Maria continued eight days delirious; during which time she raved against Sir Richard; called on her Charles to come and release her; and sometimes in piteous accents, would she bewail her unhappy fate. Love, pity, rage, and jealousy, took possession of Sir Richard by turns, as he witnessed her distress; then he would curse his obstinacy for having caused her such uneasiness, and swear he would restore her to her friends the moment she was able to travel; the next hour he would die sooner than part with her.

Maria's fever, to the great joy of Sir Richard, began to abate, and the ninth day she recovered her reason. Sir Richard thought it most prudent not to appear; therefore, he contented

himself with staying in the next room, there to inform himself with the state she was in. She looked round, and on seeing the nurse, "Pray," said she, "where am I? and who are you? Ah! I now recollect. Gracious God! why have I recovered my reason? only to be sensible of my wretchedness; but I will not complain; I will strive to bear my misery; the Almighty will not, surely, inflict more on me than I am able to support."—The old woman wept.—"Do you pity me?" said Maria. "that is kind, I did not expect pity here." "Oh, Madam," said the nurse, "I wish I could but see you happy." "That," said Maria, "will never be in this world." She recovered very fast from this time, and in a few days was able to sit up. A faint ray of hope came to her assistance, which cherished her. She endeavoured to persuade herself, Sir Richard might, on seeing the effects of his obstinacy, restore her to her friends; slender as this hope was, it greatly assisted her recovery. Sir Richard had his hopes too; he flattered himself, now the first transports of her grief were abated, she would be inclined to view him in a more favourable light, and on her seeing the impossibility of escaping, reconcile herself to the necessity of consenting to be his. He kept out of her sight for near a week after she sat up; and then, on being told she was perfectly recovered, sent to request she would permit him to wait on her in the library.—She admitted him.

Sir Richard entered with trembling solicitude in his looks, and respectfully enquired after her health. "I still live, Sir," said she, "for what purpose, whether to suffer more wretchedness, or to thank you for restoring me to peace, depends on you, Sir, to determine?"

"You live, my dearest life," answered he, "to bless all who know you. I will not at present mention my hopes; I came purely to congratulate myself, and you, on your happy recovery, and to entreat, you will sometimes permit me the honour of visiting you. Be assured, I will consider every moment you bestow on me as an infinite favour; and that I never will intrude on your goodness."

Maria's hopes of liberty vanished. "Are you," said she, "still determined to detain me? Will nothing but my death cause you to relent?—Must I then look for death as my only refuge?—Well, be it so.—you will then be satisfied." "Your happiness, Miss Harcourt," replied Sir Richard, "depends on yourself. All I ask is, that you will receive me with kindness, and not to drive me to desperation; but consider where you are; and how much in my power." "And can you," said she, "Sir, presume on a power so meanly, so disgracefully gained? How can I see you? How even think of you, after what has passed, without horror and detestation? You have seen me in the agonies of despair, even at the very point of death; yet do you inhumanly persist in detaining me. No, I despise a selfishness such as yours; to gratify your own inclinations, you would sacrifice the happiness, nay, even the life, of her you profess to love, without even one pang."

"Do not," said he, "think so hardly of me as to believe me so insensible; my sufferings have been little inferior to your's; often have I resolved to restore you to your friends; but, I own, I want the resolution for such an action.—I cannot master myself so far,—my fate is finally fixed.—That moment which separates us, is the last of my existence." Maria was struck with silent astonishment.—Sir Richard walked the room greatly disordered.

"Your persisting, Miss Harcourt, in this cruelty," said he, after a long pause, "may be the

destruction of us both; for were I assured of eternal perdition, I cannot consent to part with you.” She trembled, and turned pale. “Then,” said she, “I am lost indeed.” She requested him to leave her, and Sir Richard fearing his stay might agitate her too much, consented.

## CHAPTER XII.

THIS was more than Maria had even feared. The feeble ray of hope which had supported her, now disappeared, and with it all the delightful prospects she had formed of happiness. Nothing remained, but her pledging her eternal vows to a man she detested, or to end her days in perpetual confinement. It was too much; she was surprised at herself how she lived to support it. She now gave herself up to despair, and refused to take nourishment. In vain did her attendant argue the ill effects of her refusal; that it would injure her health; death was her only wish." "But Ma'am," said the old woman, "you seem to be a pious lady, do not you know it is a great sin to refuse nourishment, it is next to suicide, which is never forgiven, neither in this world, nor the world to come." This had the desired effect; she took a little broth.

As Maria was now fully convinced of the impossibility of prevailing with Sir Richard to set her at liberty, she began to consider if there was any possible means for her to make her escape; in order to effect which, she expressed a desire of walking in the garden and sometimes the park, which was granted; but the old woman constantly attended her.

Almost a fortnight had elapsed since her interview with Sir Richard in the library. He had sent often to request liberty to visit her, which she had always refused. When he one day joined her in the garden, and respectfully enquired after her health, she entreated him to leave her; but he paid no attention to her. "Then," said she, "I must shut myself up in my room, for I cannot support the presence of the destroyer of my peace," and was walking with hasty steps to the house. He caught her hand, with a look that struck terror to her very soul, and exclaimed, "But you must, and shall hear me. By Heaven, I cannot support this treatment? therefore, if you have no pity for me, have some respect for yourself, and do not force me, by your obstinacy, to take measures which I never intended." "You would not," said she, endeavouring, in vain, to withdraw her hand, "surely, dare to treat me improperly." "I know not," answered he, "what I may dare to do, if you drive me to despair. Think on what you do, it is yourself you have to condemn, if you meet with treatment contrary to your expectation. Heaven is my witness, I wished to call you mine on honourable terms. I never entertained an unworthy thought towards you, but mine you must be on some terms; therefore reflect on what I have said, and determine your own fate."—She turned pale.—A cold shivering seized her, and she fainted.—He caught her in his arms. "Oh!" cried he, "what have I done. Curse on this tongue for having offended such innocence. Look up once more, loveliest of women, and command me in every thing." He called for assistance, and she was carried to the parlour, where she soon shewed signs of recovery. "My God!" exclaimed she, on opening her eyes, "why didst thou permit my spirit to return to its hateful abode? Oh! why suffer me to live to be thus wretched?" and burst into tears. Sir Richard walked the room greatly disordered, often clapped his hand to his forehead, as in the agonies of despair. He then threw himself at her feet. "Loveliest of women," said he, "forgive what I have said, and attribute it to my distraction; be assured your innocence shall receive no injury from me. Bad as you may suppose me to be, I could not offer an insult to such true virtue. Say but you forgive me! and O! say you pity me! for I am a most miserable man. Permit me to see you, to converse freely with you, I ask no more." She entreated, he would allow her to retire, as her spirits were not equal to the task of hearing more. "Say," said he, "that you forgive me, and you

are at liberty.” “To return to my friends,” said she? “Ah! do not make that request,” replied he, “it distracts me, command me in every thing else, even my life, and I would resign it; but you are dearer.”—She got to the door.—“Will you,” said he, taking her hand, “promise to come down to dinner?” “Not to day.” “Will you to-morrow?” “I do not know.” “Thank you, my angel,” cried he, taking this for a promise, and allowed her to leave the room. Maria’s grief was now too great to find vent; the fountain which used to relieve her on smaller occasions was nearly dried; her heart too was almost shut against hope. Her attempting to escape was impracticable, it being the middle of December, and in a strange country. She fancied if she could make herself a little acquainted with the neighbourhood, she might, when the weather became fine, make a trial; she therefore begged to be permitted to take airings in the chariot, which was readily granted.

Sir Richard sent to claim her promise of dining with him; but she pleaded indisposition from day to day. He then entreated permission to wait on her, and being fearful least he should again grow desperate, she admitted him. He thanked her in the most respectful terms for the honour she did him; assured her of the sincere regret he had felt on having given offence to her delicacy; and begged she would rely on his promise, never more to give her uneasiness that way. Maria only answered with a deep sigh; which was echoed back by him. He took his leave without renewing the disagreeable subject of his passion, which was some small comfort to her.

Two months had she passed in this dreadful confinement without one prospect of an end. The airings she took afforded her no hopes, as she could not perceive a house near his, and it appeared an open desolate country. She gave herself up to despair, and earnestly entreated the Almighty to put a period to her existence. She was under the necessity of sometimes admitting Sir Richard to see her; and as she saw the impossibility of escaping, he became the more shocking to her.

One night, after she had been, as usual, thinking over all the wretchedness of her situation, bewailing her beloved Charles, who she considered as lost to her, she kissed his picture, wept over it, and then imploring the protection of Heaven, she at length fell asleep, and dreamt she saw her deceased brother standing before her, who looked on her for some time with a countenance full of pity, and addressed her thus:— “My poor unhappy sister, I am come to bring you comfort, let not your fortitude forsake you, great happiness is in store for you; but you cannot obtain it without first going to church with Sir Richard Harlow.” He then smiled on her, and disappeared, but the illusion continued. She fancied she went trembling to church, and just as the Minister was going to pronounce them one, an Angel caught her up and carried her off; at that instant she awoke. Though a dream at another time would have had very little effect on Maria, this made a great impression on her. A mind depressed almost to despair catches at any trifling ray of hope, which at another time would pass unnoticed. Certain it is, that from this circumstance, she began to cherish a hope that Providence would, by some unexpected event, afford her relief, and therefore she committed herself wholly to its guidance.

### CHAPTER XIII.

FROM this time Maria grew more tranquil, though she could not account why. If she believed her dream in its literal sense, wherein could consist that promised happiness? "You must first go to church with Sir Richard Harlow." That, of all things was the most shocking to her; but—the Angel's catching her up—afforded her comfort. She appeared so composed, she could support the presence of Sir Richard without that visible horror it used to occasion. It is impossible to describe the joy he felt on observing this change, from which he formed the most agreeable presages. He endeavoured by every possible means to render himself agreeable to her. He never intruded himself on her; but was always thankful whenever she condescended to admit him to visit her. Maria found, by the old woman who attended her, this was not Sir Richard's principal country house, but a kind of hunting seat, which he came to but seldom; that he had but few servants with him then, as he did not wish the neighbouring gentry to know he was there.— "La, ma'am," said she, "it is surprising to me you cannot love him; he is a worthy, good gentleman, and I am sure a handsomer man never trod shoe leather; many a lady's heart has he made ache—bless him." She was running on, but Maria stopped her, by entreating her to be silent. "Mercy," said the old woman, "it is wonderful to me—but to be sure I have no business to speak, I am but a servant, as one may say, but one cannot help one's thoughts." Maria enquired if they were near any town? "No, Ma'am, N—t—h—m is the nearest, and that is six miles." "Have you no neighbours?" asked Maria. "Only Farmer Wills, who rents a farm of Sir Richard about three miles off." This gave her no comfort; she considered her attempting to escape, should she not effect it, which was hardly possible, would render Sir Richard desperate. She therefore gave up the idea.

Thus passed another month of her confinement. Sir Richard began to solicit her to consent to make him happy, and urged the necessity of her fixing as early a time as she could, as the sooner she appeared in the world as his wife, the less her character was liable to suffer from what had happened. Maria remained a few minutes silent—he seized that moment, and throwing himself at her feet—"Now" said he, "whilst you hesitate, let me entreat you to determine on your own happiness and mine; you shall never have cause to repent. Say, loveliest of women, but when you will accompany me to the altar." "Rise, Sir," said she, "and attend to what I am going to say:—If I consent to accompany you to church, whatever cause you may hereafter have for regretting having obliged me to take such a step, you owe to yourself; I stand acquitted, as I call Heaven to witness with what reluctance I do consent.—But something must be done—my character, which is now at the mercy of the world, must be justified; therefore, it will be proper for my friends to be present at the ceremony."

Sir Richard could not contain his ecstasy—he thanked her with the warmest expressions of joy, for permitting him to hope she would be his. "I would wish you, Sir," said Maria, "to moderate your transport, as it cannot possibly be lasting; a triumph gained by such means as you have used, ought not, neither can it, to a mind capable of sensibility, afford any great cause for joy." "My lovely woman," said he, "do not endeavour to damp the happiness I feel, which is inexpressible, by any unkind reflections; were I not fully convinced I could make you happy, I would not have persisted in detaining you. Say, do you resolve to accompany me to the altar?" "I

do," said Maria, "on my honour; there, in the presence of Heaven, to make a vow, which nothing shall ever induce me to violate." "That is enough," said he, "I am now the happiest of mortals.—" "You wish, no doubt, for Mr. and Mrs. Spencer to be present at the ceremony." She answered, yes. "Have you another wish?" cried he, "make it, if you have, that I may have the happiness to gratify it." She said no; only to have as few present besides as he pleased, as she wished it to be private. This he consented to.

He wrote immediately to Mr. Spencer, acquainting him, he had Miss Harcourt's permission to write to him, to entreat he and Mrs. Spencer would do her the honour of meeting her at N———, and begged they would fix on an early day, as his happiness remained in suspense until they would make it certain, by being present at the solemnization of the nuptials of him and Miss Harcourt. Mr. Spencer answered Sir Richard's letter immediately, expressed great pleasure in hearing Miss Harcourt was found, that her friends had suffered much on her account, and she might rely on meeting them the Monday following at the —— Inn, at N ——, at nine in the morning.

Sir Richard was in ecstasy, to think he was so near the accomplishment of his wishes. Maria appeared calm. He greatly regretted the shortness of the time would not permit him to make preparations for her to appear splendid; but she assured him it was her earnest desire to appear in the same dress she wore when she left Bath. She should, he said, have her way; but when she appeared at London, where he hoped she would accompany him the following week, she should outshine the first Duchesses in the Drawing-room. "How," said he, "shall I delight in hearing the admiration you will gain wherever you appear? how feast my ears on your praises?" Maria was silent.

The next morning Sir Richard set out early for N ——, to procure a licence, and to engage the Dean of —— to be in waiting at the Vestry the Monday following. He wrote to the steward of his other country house, which was about twenty miles distant, to provide an elegant entertainment on that day, as he should bring home company.

The morning came so much wished for by Sir Richard, and not unwelcome to Maria.— He was early up and dressed.—About eight o'clock Maria appeared. He could not contain his raptures.—She was perfectly calm.—He thanked her for the composure with which she received him, and entreated her to support her spirits during the ceremony.— "This," said he, "my lovely woman, will be the last trial of your fortitude; all your life, from this day, will be peace and happiness." Maria answered, she sincerely hoped so; and allowed him to hand her to the chariot.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THEY soon reached N——, and stopping at the —— Inn, Maria had the happiness to see Mr. and Mrs. Spencer at the window; they had arrived the preceding evening, in order to be in time.—Sir Richard handed her out, and she run to Mrs. Spencer, who, with open arms, received her. “Tell me, my dear girl,” said Mrs. Spencer, “what has happened to you, where you have been, and if you are here by your free consent?” “My dear Madam,” said Maria, “let me beg of you to suspend your curiosity a little while, and you shall be satisfied.—I am here by my own consent, to accompany Sir Richard Harlow to church.” Mrs. Spencer looked surprised—Mr. Spencer doubted not but Sir Richard, who was in high spirits, had gained an ascendancy over her heart. They now proceeded to church, where the Dean of —— waited to perform the ceremony. Mrs. Spencer watched Maria’s countenance, to endeavour to find out whether she did not do violence to her inclinations; but to her great astonishment, she appeared steady and composed. The Minister began, and read on till he came to— “I charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why you may not be lawfully joined in matrimony, ye do confess it.”

“There is,” said Maria, with great firmness, “an insurmountable one to our union.” Sir Richard turned pale. “For Heaven sake,” said he, “Miss Harcourt, permit the Minister to proceed.” “No, Sir.” Mr. and Mrs. Spencer looked with silent amazement at each other. “What then, Madam,” said the Dean, “brings you here?” “To free myself,” said Maria, “from a wretched confinement, and to oblige this gentleman, in the presence of the Almighty, never more to molest me. It is now above four months since he forcibly carried me from my friends; since which time, I have been kept a close prisoner in his house. He has seen me in the agonies of despair, and at the very point of death; yet did he inhumanely persist in detaining me. I saw no prospect but to remain in confinement for life, or to take this method to free myself. He knew my faith was pledged to another; and that faith I will, whilst I have life, hold sacred. I hope, Sir, you are now satisfied with the propriety of my taking this step, and that I am at liberty to return with my friends.”

The Dean turned to Sir Richard. “Is it possible,” said he, “Sir, that what this Lady alledges is true?”

Sir Richard was so agitated, he could scarce speak; at length, a little recovering himself he answered, he could not deny it; he had long loved her, and was certain it was in his power to have made her happy; that he was driven to despair by her persisting in refusing his addresses; that despair with the advice and assistance of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Harcourt had induced him to take the method she had mentioned to gain her, for which he sincerely begged her pardon; and if she required any farther satisfaction for the uneasiness he had caused her, he was ready to give it. “No, Sir,” said Maria, “only let me be assured I shall never again be molested.” “You may rely on it,” said Sir Richard, “you never shall by me, or through my means.” That was sufficient. Maria then turned to Mrs. Spencer. “Can you, my dear Madam,” said she, “take me again under your kind protection?” “Can I,” said Mrs. Spencer, “yes, my sweet innocent sufferer, and love you, if possible, more than ever.— Come,” said she, “you have nothing farther to do here let us

take you where you will find peace.” They then paid their respects to the Dean, and walked out of church, leaving Sir Richard behind.

To describe the feelings of Maria on finding herself once more at liberty and with her friends, would be a weak attempt. She on entering Mr. Spencer’s carriage fell into Mrs. Spencer’s arms and burst into tears; Mrs. Spencer wept with her, and Mr. Spencer was not unmoved.

“Oh!” said Maria, when she was able to speak, “am I once more with you? I can scarce believe myself so happy; if you knew what I have suffered since I left you, you would be surprized I should live to tell it.” Mr. and Mrs. Spencer did all they could to soothe her; entreated her not to think on what was past, but to endeavour to compose herself. She begged they would leave the town immediately, as she dreaded the chance of seeing Sir Richard; she could, she said, scarce believe herself safe though she was so well protected. Mr. Spencer answered, they should fight well who took her from him; he came determined to protect her, and to see she did no violence to her inclinations; but when he saw with what composure she went, as he expected, to bind herself by such sacred ties, he considered his interference would have been deemed impertinent; “but,” said he, “you are an heroine capable of great actions—who could have suspected you of such a one as this?” Mrs. Spencer confessed she was greatly surprised to see with what calmness she allowed Sir Richard to lead her up to the altar. “I promised,” said Maria, “to accompany him to church, there to make a vow which I never would violate; he fortunately required no more, and my plan, which was the only one that was possible for me to adopt, succeeded.” Mr. Spencer ordered his postillions to proceed on the London road, and to stop at the next post town, where they dined. After dinner, Mrs. Spencer related what past on Maria’s being taken from Bath. “You may, my dear,” said she to Maria, “guess the confusion I was in when Mrs. Harcourt’s servant came, I suppose, by his mistress’s orders; and asked to speak with me. He said, as he was conducting you home, a gentleman was waiting for you at the corner of Milsome-street with a chaise and four horses, and had taken you off, he supposed by your own consent, as you made no resistance. This I knew to be false, and therefore I called Mr. Spencer to him, who threatened to have him immediately taken up, as an accomplice, if he did not confess all he knew of the affair. He then said you did resist, but the postillions went off with such rapidity, it was impossible for any one to come to your assistance. I doubted not but Sir Richard Harlow was the man, and dreaded what has really happened, that he would keep you shut up. I cannot describe the distress I suffered on the occasion; I feared your life would fall a sacrifice; I feared indeed every thing that could happen. I sent,” continued Mrs. Spencer, “the next morning for Mrs. Harcourt, and questioned her, but could get no information; she pleaded ignorance to the whole of the transaction. Come, said I, Mrs. Harcourt, it is in vain to use this artifice, I have every reason to believe you have acted a treacherous part by your sister, or she would not have been so long without receiving a letter from Mr. Palmer. She insisted on her innocence. Well said I, Madam, you will have to accuse yourself with being accessory to an innocent creature’s death, as I am fully persuaded she will not live to be wife to any other man than Mr. Palmer; but if you have any respect for the memory of your husband, I entreat you will let this affair be kept as secret as possible, as I have some hope the wretch who has thus forced your sister away will, on seeing the effects of his action, restore her.”

Notwithstanding Mrs. Harcourt made this promise, I found in a few days it was publicly reported, you were gone off with a gentleman. This gave me the more uneasiness, as I could not contradict it; I was therefore under the necessity of telling the circumstances as they really happened. We all lamented your loss until the letter arrived from Sir Richard, which gave us the satisfaction of knowing you were alive, and we readily set out immediately to meet you." Maria then related all which had happened to her, and they congratulated her on her happy deliverance. As Maria's disappearance had made some noise at Bath, they agreed to proceed straight to London, to join Lord and Lady D. and Mr. Worthy, who were in anxious suspense for her. Mr. Spencer wrote to Bath, to order their servants to meet them in town: they pursued their journey, and the next day they joyfully embraced their friends. Mr. Worthy was in such raptures at the sight of his favourite, as he could scarce contain: they all admired the fortitude with which she had supported herself, and agreed that the stratagem she had used was a master piece of policy. "Let no woman after this," said Mr. Worthy, "pretend to say they are forced to do what is not proper; there is always means to escape dangers, if the will does not, in some measure assent: there is a certain charm in real virtue, which disarms the most licentious libertine, a dignity which gives fortitude to those who are truly so, and enables them to support trials which others would sink under."

## CHAPTER XV.

MARIA finding herself once more safe with her friends, began to reflect on her beloved Charles,—two years had nearly elapsed since she received his Letter:—she shuddered at the idea of what he would suffer from not getting an answer to the letters, which she doubted not of his having sent. On her communicating her distress to Mrs. Spencer, that lady advised her, by all means, to write by the next packet, and acquaint him of the particulars of all which had happened, adding, it would defeat the purpose of her enemies, who might take advantage of the event and represent it in a wrong light; she advised her to send all the papers she had written previous to her being carried from Bath, which Maria agreed to, and the next packet which sailed conveyed to her Charles a full account of all she had suffered. This being done, she found herself more at ease, and could enjoy the society of her friends.

“I was,” said Mr. Spencer, one day after dinner, just as Maria had left the room, “present at a curious conversation this morning, which I would not have missed for a great deal; I would not mention it before Miss Harcourt, for fear of wounding her delicacy. “He had called,” he said, “on Mr. Townly, but not finding him at home, he paid his respects to his Lady; with whom he had to not been many minutes, when the Dean of —— was announced. Miss Harcourt soon became the subject of their discourse. Mr. Spencer enquired what became of Sir Richard, and the Dean told him, that on their leaving the church, he in a state of distraction took a pistol from his pocket, “the contents of which was, I suppose,” said Mr. Spencer, “intended for me had I attempted to take his bride from him,” and was going to discharge it on himself; but the Dean fortunately caught his arm and expostulated with him on the rashness and impiety of such an action; and got him at length to promise to bear his disappointment as became a man. He left the church with a resolution to abandon England for ever. The Dean, Mr. Spencer said, had scarce done speaking when two ladies entered with faces full of news: one of them seized the first pause in the conversation to enquire if Mrs. Townly had heard the extraordinary affair which had lately happened in the North? being answered no, “O,” said she, “Sir Richard Harlow has shot himself dead in N—— church.” “Ah!” said the Dean, “who told you so?” “I had it,” replied the lady, “from very good authority, or I could not have believed it, as the story itself is not very probable; but strange things do happen sometimes. It seems Sir Richard took it in his head to marry some girl whom he had had in keeping four or five months; and she, from some unaccountable whim or other, when they got to church, refused to go through the ceremony. The Baronet exasperated, as well he might, to be rejected by a woman he was indeed doing too much honor to, took a pistol, which he happened to have in his pocket, and shot himself on the spot.”

“And this,” said the Dean, “is true?” “Yes,” answered the lady, “it is certainly true. I was told it by Mrs. Tattle,—who heard it from Lady Racket,—who got it from her own woman—who had it from Lord Nightly’s butler—who saw a letter which Mrs. Loval’s maid had received from her sister, who is married to the sexton at N——, where the affair happened.” “Really,” said the Dean, with a smile, “you have, Ma’am, traced the story to its foundation, the very church; but in order to save yourself the trouble of repeating so many names to get at the sexton, when you tell it again, suppose you say, you had it yourself from the Minister who was present on the occasion.” “That,” said she, “to be sure, would be much better; but how can I say that?” “I will,”

said he, “put you in a way, if you will promise to repeat it verbatim as I give it you.” She promised by an inclination of the head. “Then,” said the Dean, “as I was present at this transaction, being the person who was to have had the honor of performing the ceremony, I think I can give a more circumstantial account of the matter than the sexton has done.” “But did Sir Richard shoot himself through the head or the heart?” asked the Lady, eagerly—for Lady Racket was not quite certain. “I will just tell you, Ma’am, by way of putting you out of pain for the Baronet: he has not shot himself at all; and now you shall have the story in regular order.” The Dean then gave a just account of all he knew of the affair, and ended with a short exhortation for them to do justice to the character of an innocent, amiable young lady, who had acted steadily from a principle of right. The Ladies were as much surprised at the story, the way the Dean had told it, as they were with the sexton’s account.—It was very strange—it was odd, that a girl who was nobody, should refuse to marry Sir Richard Harlow.

Mr. Spencer seeing the Dean both able and well inclined to support Maria’s character, left him, he said, to reconcile the ladies to such an unaccountable action. Mr. Worthy declared, he was not at all surprised that weak minds should have no conception of an action so much superior to what they could be capable of under the like circumstances; that the story was thought strange by such, in his opinion, reflected the more honour on Maria.

## CHAPTER XVI.

MARIA had no inclination to go much into company; she excused herself as often as she could; but Mrs. Spencer would not always take a denial. The family all received cards for Mrs. Townly's rout, and she was obliged to attend. After the company were assembled and differently engaged, she, on looking round the room, caught the eyes of a gentleman who struck her as a person she had somewhere seen, but could not recollect where. He seemed to have the same idea of her, for he kept his eyes fixt on her until she found herself embarrassed, and to avoid his gaze, walked into the other room, and sat down by Mrs. Spencer, who was engaged at a card table.

As soon as Maria had left the room, the gentleman addressed himself to Mr. Worthy, and begged he would have the goodness to inform him who that beautiful creature who just left the room was; adding, she very much resembled a person he once knew; but it could not be the same, as that lady had gone off with Sir Richard Harlow. "Gone off with Sir Richard Harlow," repeated Mr. Worthy, "I must entreat you, Sir, to give it another term. I will never suffer any one to speak in that style of a young lady, whose merit I am so well acquainted with; and let me tell you, Sir, you ought to be better informed before you venture such assertions. A young lady's reputation is a nice point; there is a very material difference between going off and being forced off, and I must beg in future you will make that distinction." "Sir," said the gentleman, with surprise at the warmth with which Mr. Worthy had spoken, "you very much mistake me if you suppose me capable of wilfully injuring any lady's reputation, much less Miss Harcourt's, who is the lady I allude to; and permit me to add by way of convincing you, Sir, of the sincerity with which I declare it, that no one is more concerned for her than some of my nearest connections. If I have spoken contrary to truth I sincerely beg her pardon; but I have been misled by a letter I saw from her sister-in-law, Mrs. Harcourt, who asserted, as a truth, she was gone off; whether Sir Richard would marry her or not was uncertain." "Mrs. Harcourt," said Mr. Worthy "is, an infamous woman, and deserves some very severe punishment. But as you say, Sir, some of your connections are interested for this much injured girl, I think it necessary to give you a full account of all which has happened to her, and hope you will have the candour to undeceive those who have been misled by that artful woman."—This the gentleman promised on his honor.

Mr. Worthy then related every circumstance of Maria's being forced from Bath, with the part Mrs. Harcourt had acted, of her confinement, and the method she had taken to gain her liberty; he only omitted the mention of her attachment to Charles, and ended, with saying, "You see, Sir, this is very different from going off." The gentleman thanked Mr. Worthy for this account; declared she had acted an heroic part; but he made no doubt her affections were engaged; it was a great trial of her constancy, for which he hoped she would be rewarded. Mr. Worthy answered, he sincerely hoped she would, as he did not know a more amiable girl. The stranger assured Mr. Worthy, he felt interested in her behalf, and she might, at some future time, be convinced he was not her enemy; so saying, he wished Mr. Worthy a good night, and left the room.

Mr. Worthy being anxious to know who he was, made the enquiry of Mrs. Townly, who answered, the gentleman who just left the room was Sir Thomas Palmer, of Devonshire. How did

Mr. Worthy's generous heart rejoice in having had so fine an opportunity of clearing Maria's character where it was of such material consequence to her, it should stand in a fair light. He made no doubt but Sir Thomas would in future prove her friend, and that she would, by his means, be kindly received by the rest of the family. After they returned home, he with great joy communicated to Maria and the rest of the family the conversation he had had with the stranger, and the pleasure it gave him to know it was Sir Thomas Palmer. "Courage, my girl," said he, "we have nothing to fear now, we have made the Knight your friend." Maria trembled, she said, to think Lady Palmer's family should have been so vilely imposed on. She had that respect for them, that the idea of their having remained for months under the persuasion of her having acted imprudently, gave her the greatest concern; but when she considered that the mischief, in all probability, might not end there, but that the accounts of her dishonour were sent to her beloved Charles; that thought took such strong hold of her, she fell into a state of dejection. His not having received answers to the letters she was confident he had written, would, she feared, strengthen his belief of those accounts. Often would she fancy he was then trying to tear her image from his heart, as unworthy a place there. "Oh!" would she exclaim, "may some pitying Angel whisper him that I am innocent! Tell him that I have never deviated from the purity of our infant years. He cannot, surely, believe me fallen so low; yet, when he has his mother's authority, and every circumstance unfortunately tended to corroborate the account, what could he think, but that she was false and abandoned?" Mrs. Spencer often surprized her at those distressing intervals, and represented in the strongest terms which argument could suggest the impropriety of indulging such reflections. She might, Mrs. Spencer assured her, rely on it, her Charles would not easily believe any thing to her disadvantage; he would believe any thing sooner, even that his mother had been misinformed; he would rack his imagination to find reasons to believe her what he wished; besides, he would not be many months in suspense, as Maria's letters would reach him soon after those of his mother, if she had written, which might not be the case. "Months," said Maria, "one day, one hour, would be too long for him to support such a thought." She dreaded every thing,—his life, perhaps,—and burst into tears. "Come," said Mrs. Spencer, "I shall really be angry with you if you give way to this melancholy. You who have shewn such noble fortitude under the severest of trials, to sink under those which are only imaginary! It is the privilege of innocence to hope for the support of Heaven: none but guilty minds, such as dare not look up for protection despair: you have every reason to hope." Maria promised to profit by Mrs. Spencer's advice, and endeavour to hope for the best; but notwithstanding the strong efforts she made to appear chearful, there was an evident dejection on her countenance, and deep sighs would often escape her. This gave her friends great concern; they feared she would fall a sacrifice to her imaginations, as all the efforts they made to divert her proved ineffectual. They had some hopes her favourite shades at Mr. Spencer's seat might recall her mind to peace, and were preparing to set out when Mr. Spencer received a letter from Lord F's physician, telling him, if he wished to see his father alive he must hasten to Berkshire, as he did not expect his Lordship to live many days. Mr. Spencer, full of filial duty, set out immediately, but was too late; Lord F. expired a few hours before he arrived. The new honours Mr. Spencer, now Lord F. acquired by the death of his father, did not make amends for the loss of so indulgent a parent. He was exceedingly affected on the occasion.

The late Lord F. had, by his will, left the whole of his estates, real and personal, to his son, with legacies to his old servants and some worthy friends. Maria was not forgotten; to her he

bequeathed five thousand pounds. Lord F. assured her, on communicating the account, he was never more pleased with any action of his father's than with this, which so perfectly agreed with his opinion of her merit. Maria shed unfeigned tears. She had the sincerest respect for his Lordship, who had always treated her with the kindness of a father; as such she lamented his loss.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THEY were again preparing to set out for the North, when Maria, on looking over the East India news, as was her constant practice, to see if she could get any account of her beloved Charles, she to her great surprize, saw an account of the death of the governor of ——; which likewise mentioned his having made his nephew, Mr. Palmer, heir to his great riches. This gave her the satisfaction of knowing he was alive, which, in the state of uncertainty she was in, was no small comfort to her. Her friends congratulated her on the happy event; they all agreed in opinion, it would facilitate her Charles's return, as his end in going was answered. This she was willing to believe, as it was, of all earthly blessings, what she most wished.

They set out for the North, accompanied by Mr. Worthy; but Maria could not divest herself of her fears, that the accounts of her dishonour would have some fatal effect on her Charles, she was fully persuaded, and this lay heavy on her heart. Lady F. with sorrow saw the struggles she made, and to prevent her reflecting too much, never allowed her to pass a moment alone. The efforts Maria made to appear easy, when she was so very much the reverse, instead of having the desired effect, only added greater force to her grief: being deprived of the opportunity to indulge in it during the day, she gave vent to it more fully when she retired to her apartment, where she often spent the greater part of the night in viewing the gloomy pictures her imagination represented before her.—Often would she find herself in the same seat five or six hours after she had entered her room, without having made an effort to go to rest.

This agitation of Maria's mind brought on a slow intermitting fever, with loss of appetite, and other dangerous symptoms, which alarmed her friends. They were the more concerned, as it was impossible to remove the cause of her complaint. Lady F. could think of nothing which could afford her consolation, but the assurance of being reinstated in Lady Palmer's esteem; she was certain that, next to a letter from her Charles, this would tend most to make her easy, and therefore she resolved to write to Lady Palmer, which she did to the following purport:

TO LADY PALMER, AT THE GROVE, NEAR  
T—R—G—N, DEVON.

YOUR Ladyship will, I make no doubt, be surprised to receive this from one, who has not the honour of being personally known to you; but from the dependance I have on your humanity, I have ventured to address you in behalf of an amiable, injured, young lady, who has nobly supported herself under the severest of trials; I trust your Ladyship is fully acquainted with the particulars of Maria's sufferings, as my uncle had the good fortune to fall into conversation a few months ago with Sir Thomas Palmer, and gave him a circumstantial account of them. Her fortitude never entirely forsook her, until she heard you had been misinformed respecting her conduct; but both her health and spirits have gradually declined since that time. She declares she cannot support the idea of your Ladyship's thinking she has acted imprudently, and that the approbation of your family is of the highest importance to her peace. She is in a very alarming state indeed, which is a matter of serious concern to all my family, to every one of whom she is deservedly beloved; to me she is particularly dear—so much so, that the idea of losing her is

more than I can well support. I think I need not say why to you, who cannot be unacquainted with her merit, the praise of which she attributes to the early instructions your Ladyship gave her in pious morality. I write unknown to her; and if you would please to favour her with a line, without mentioning having received one from me, it may prove of more efficacy in restoring her tranquillity, than any means in our power. If you have any doubts respecting the propriety of her conduct, I am so happy as to have it in my power to remove them, as there is not a circumstance respecting her since she left the Grove that I am not intimately acquainted with. Trusting you will attribute my officiousness in writing, to its true motive, I have the honor to be, with the sincerest respect,

Your Ladyship's most Obedient,  
and Humble Servant,  
AMELIA F——.

Lady F——. sent this letter off, and anxiously waited for the time, when it might be answered. She then, to her great satisfaction, received a polite letter from Lady Palmer, thanking her for the attention she had shewn to Maria; and Maria, to her great joy and astonishment, was favoured with a letter, containing the following words:—

TO MISS HARCOURT,  
AT THE RT. HON. LORD F——'s,

L——.

MY DEAR CHILD,

I KNOW not how to write to you, whether to begin with telling you the sincere concern we all felt at the false accounts I received from that woman, who is unworthy to be called your sister, or the pleasure it afforded us when Thomas made us acquainted with the real state of all which has happened to you, which are as great as affecting. Whatever motive induced you to refuse Sir Richard Harlow, I most sincerely hope you will not be disappointed in, as you have proved yourself worthy the most exalted rank; I will go farther and say, so far as remains with me to forward your happiness, it will afford me the highest satisfaction. You will perhaps be surprised at this from me, who have, I confess, wished to see you differently disposed of than I believe your heart was inclined; but, at that time, though I knew your worth, I did not believe the attachment you had formed, was of so serious a nature, and if that had been the case, situated as you and Charles—for I think I may venture to name him—as the person, for whose sake you have refused such high rank, and supported such trials.—I say, as you were both situated, I thought, if you could have been equally happy without each other, it would have been better for you—but I no longer have such a wish; on the contrary, it shall be my earnest endeavour in future to facilitate your union, and will with pleasure receive you as a beloved daughter, whenever you shall think proper to return and put yourself under my protection. Your brother, Joseph, has suffered much from the accounts of your going off. He looked on himself as the cause, and felt the severest remorse at the treatment he had given you. I made his mind a little easy by telling him, how very greatly you had acted, and the many noble friends you had gained by your prudent conduct. He said, he very much feared you would never forgive him, but if you knew how much he had suffered, you would pity him; his wife, who was, I make no doubt the cause is dead. I

shall say nothing of Charles, as I dare say you have had later accounts from him, it being near twelve months since any of our family had intelligence of him besides what the public papers gave. God bless you and continue your rectitude of conduct; and that you may at last be rewarded as your merit deserves, no one more sincerely wishes than your affectionate friend

M. PALMER.

Maria's feelings on reading this letter may be imagined, but they cannot be described. She read it a second time, to see if she had not deceived herself;—she wept;—she gave thanks; which she never failed to do for any kindness she received, to the great disposer of events, and when she had a little composed herself she sought for Lady F. "My dear Lady F." said she, on seeing her, "I am so happy." "What," said her Ladyship, with a smile, "is your Charles returned? for I do not believe any thing else can possibly make you so." "Indeed you are mistaken, I am really happy, and he is no way concerned." "Ah," said Lady F. "let us see how you will contrive to make that out." "Read that," said Maria, "and you will see." After Lady F. had read it, she returned it, saying gravely, "I thought you were a little hypocrite; why, it is all about Charles you express so much joy." "La," said Maria, "do you think it nothing for me to know I have recovered Lady Palmer's esteem?" "Yes, certainly," said Lady F. "in the present state of your affairs, it is of the highest importance to have the sanction of Mama, and what is better, she has not told of your running off, which is the great cause of all this joy." Maria blushed, and answered, she believed Lady F. was right, though she really thought at first she had no other motive for the uncommon satisfaction which this letter had occasioned than what arose from Lady Palmer, independent of her son; but she might as well confess, much as she respected her Ladyship, had not Charles been concerned, it would not have been in her power at once to have freed her from the cruellest of apprehensions; "but," said she, "we sometimes want a friend to give us a true knowledge of ourselves." Lady F. said now the cause of her complaints was removed, she hoped, she should hear no more sighs; her fever would soon go off, and she should see the smiling affable Miss Harcourt. Maria answered, that after what she had suffered from the force of imagination, which had depressed her more than any real distress she had ever met with, she should be careful how she viewed things on the gloomy side, as she was convinced, by experience, the greater half of the troubles of this life were imaginary. She then parted with Lady F. to answer Lady Palmer's letter, which begins the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### TO LADY PALMER, AT THE GROVE, NEAR T—R—G—N, DEVON.

HOW shall I, my dear and much honoured Lady Palmer, convey to you an idea of what I feel, on being assured I again hold a place in your esteem; indeed, it is impossible, as there are no words adequate to the sense I have of your goodness. That you are pleased to restore me to your favour, and to add to your former condescension, that of bestowing the dear name of daughter on me, is so much beyond what I ever dared to hope. I am at a loss to account either for your kindness, or to know how I am entitled to it. To be permitted to acknowledge my love for Mr. Palmer to his dear mother, is too much to be expressed. My heart is ready to burst at the idea; your kindness has filled it too full;—my eyes at this moment overflow with the effusions of gratitude. Much have I suffered from having, as I feared, lost your esteem;—much from having disappointed your hopes of seeing your son settled according to his rank.—Yet could I never bring myself to regret loving him. My heart was his, before my reason was sufficiently strong to point out the inequality of our stations; and when that reason grew more mature, it only served to confirm the choice my heart had made. It shewed me your son's merit in such shining colours, that instead of wishing myself free, in spite of every obstacle my heart exulted in being honoured with his love:—to render myself worthy of which, and your ladyship's esteem, what are the sufferings I have sustained? Had they been years, instead of months, I should consider myself over paid, by being united to Mr. Palmer, with the consent of his friends.

By the same treachery that misrepresented my conduct to your ladyship, I am deprived of the satisfaction of hearing from him; and though there cannot be a more anxious state of mind, than to remain in ignorance of the fate of those who are dear to us, yet I trust that Power, who has inclined his Parent to speak comfort to me, will also protect him to return, and crown us all with happiness. I must not forget to acquaint you with the distinguishing mark of esteem the late Lord F. honoured me with, in bequeathing me five thousand pounds. Indeed I feel oppressed with the favours I daily receive, but I beg your Ladyship will believe me sincere, when I declare none has ever afforded me such sincere heart-felt satisfaction as this last, which you have been pleased to honor me with, which has impressed that grateful respect and love, which can never be effaced from the heart of

My dear Lady Palmer,  
Your ever obliged, and  
most respectfully Obedient  
Humble Servant,  
MARIA HARCOURT.

The same post conveyed to her brother the following lines:—

MY DEAR BROTHER,  
I CANNOT describe the satisfaction I felt when Lady Palmer informed me you still remembered your sister. I am extremely concerned you have felt so deeply for what has happened

to me, as she describes.—Indeed you exaggerate your fault, if it may be called one, in exposing me to the world. If you will only reflect a moment on the events which have happened in consequence, that it has been the means of discovering the retreat of an injured amiable character, who was lost to his friends, and uniting two persons, who were by Providence designed for each other; you will see with me, you only acted a secondary part. The great disposer of events—willed it so. Great as have been my sufferings, I now sincerely rejoice in having suffered; had I never known adversity, I should never have been so thoroughly convinced of the mercies I have received, which afford me comforts beyond the power of words to describe.—Let me therefore, my dear brother, entreat you not to regret what is past, but to reflect on the advantage it is to your sister, to have, with honor, supported her trials; that I have so many friends who oppress me with their favors, and that I hope and trust the remainder of my days will be crowned with peace.

Take a view my dear brother of what has happened in this light—believe me, it is the only true one to account for such events, and you will no longer feel remorse at the part you have acted; and be assured, it has not in the smallest degree, alienated my affections from you. My heart, at this moment, feels an inexpressible satisfaction in being allowed to acknowledge a brother, and wants only to be assured, he is as much at peace with himself, as I am with him, to be perfectly at ease. Do me the favor of a few lines, and you will oblige,

My Dear Brother,  
Your truly affectionate Sister,  
MARIA HARCOURT.

Maria, to the great satisfaction of her friends, soon recovered; she began to look forward to the time, when she might expect to hear from her beloved Charles:—Eight months had elapsed, since she had written; four more would bring her, she made no doubt, the wished intelligence. She received another very affectionate letter from Lady Palmer, but as it contained nothing of consequence to the Reader, it would be unnecessary to give it a place,—One from her brother may be worthy attention.

TO MISS HARCOURT,  
AT THE RT. HON. LORD F—'s,

HOW shall I write—how address you—for I dare not call you sister, as so near an alliance to such perfection makes me dispise myself the more, for being thrown at so great a distance. Oh! Maria, your affectionate letter has, if possible, made me more wretched than I was before; it has shewn me what a wretch I must have been, to expose to the mercy of the world, such amiableness. That the Almighty has protected and raised you up friends, more kind than your brother, though it confirms me in my belief of his goodness, does not lessen my offence. When I heard you were gone off with a gentleman, I instantly upbraided myself as the cause of all which might happen to you:—the vow I had made to my dying parent, occurred to me—what said I must I expect, for having paid no regard to the most sacred of all trusts, that of a helpless Orphan, committed so awefully to my care? Oh! Maria, you have suffered, but you are ignorant of the sufferings which arise from guilt—you never knew what it was to feel the upbraidings of a bad conscience, therefore you can have no conception of what I have suffered. I figured to myself

all which could possibly befall you—you might, for want of that protection I had denied you, perhaps have been deluded by some designing villain, who would abandon you to want. I reflected on the many unhappy women, who though not otherwise ill-disposed, had, from the like circumstances, fallen to the lowest state, to which human nature can be reduced. How could I, with these reflections, rest in peace. I could not—No, I fell into a state of dejection, my rest at night was disturbed—sometimes I fancied I saw you abandoned in the streets, and just as I was going to take you from one who was ready to pay for your hire, I would awake.—At another time, my imagination would represent my deceased mother, standing before me, and with an angry look, upbraid me with the ruin of her beloved child. About this time my wife died, which I looked on as a just judgment. In this state I remained till Lady Palmer received a letter from Sir Thomas, full of accounts, much to your honor. These have been your brother's sufferings. Your gentle heart has forgiven, and even palliated the offence, but that is more than will ever be in his power to do. May that Power, who has made you his peculiar care, still guard and protect you, is the prayer of him, who with shame subscribes himself,

Your truly affectionate Brother,  
JOSEPH HARCOURT.

The distress of Mr. Harcourt, which was so strongly pictured in this letter, affected his sister exceedingly; she wept with pity over it, and determined to shew her brother every kind of attention. She wrote to him, and in the tenderest terms entreated he would reconcile himself to what was past, and as a consolation, to be thankful what he had so much feared had not happened, that she lived, and would never bring reproach on him; beseeched him, as he valued her peace of mind, not to think on her with regret, but to rejoice in her happiness.

## CHAPTER XIX.

LADY F's situation, to the great joy of the family, was such as to oblige her to pass the winter at their country seat. This was very pleasing to Maria, as she had a great aversion to the gay world. The life they led in the country was according to her taste, and she hoped nothing would cause her return to the world but her Charles.

Lady F. was the March following delivered of a daughter, who, Maria, by the request of the family, gave her name to. Before Lady F. was able to leave her room, Maria received a letter from Lady Palmer, acquainting her with Miss Palmer's marriage to a Mr. Cleveland, a gentleman of a good estate, and equally good morals, and that they were to be at London the beginning of April, where she requested Maria would give her the meeting; begged she would prevail on Lady F. to spare her, if only for a few weeks, to indulge Mrs. Cleveland with her company. Lady F. regretted parting with her, but endeavoured to conceal her uneasiness, as she considered it would appear too selfish to prevent her meeting the companion of her youth, and her Charles's sister.

Lord and Lady D. were to pass the spring in town, and had taken a house for that purpose in St. James's -Street: it was settled for Maria to accompany them. She assured Lady F. her stay should be no longer than necessity obliged her to make it, as she could no where find that happiness as her society afforded; then, with a promise to write daily accounts of herself, she took an affectionate leave, and set out for London, where they soon arrived.

Mrs. Cleveland was not yet arrived, but was expected in the course of the following week. They had not been many days in town, when one night, after they had been about an hour in bed, Maria had been counting the days which stood betwixt that and when she might reasonably expect to hear from her Charles, was just fallen into a most delightful dream, when a loud knocking at the door, and a cry of fire awoke her. How was she shocked when she heard nothing but shrieks of "for Heaven's sake save your lives;" and on opening her door, saw the stair-case in a blaze; she gave herself up for lost; she had just presence of mind to slip on a petticoat and a loose dressing gown, and then made an attempt to escape: she saw it was impossible to go down the stairs, as the flames were so violent; she flew to the window, where the danger appeared almost equal. A gentleman passing in a chair, saw her distress, and determined to assist her: he got a ladder, which some of the firemen had brought, ascended it, took her in his arms, and brought her safe down; he then put her into his chair, and had her conveyed to a house in Pall-Mall, where he had once lodged, at a Mistress Motherly's. After he had entreated Mrs. Motherly to take particular care of the lady, he returned to the scene of confusion, to see if he could discover any of the family, to acquaint them where they might find her. He was happy to see the flames were nearly extinguished; was told the fire had happened through the carelessness of a servant, who had left a candle burning on the stairs. He soon found one of the footmen, who was very happy to hear Maria was safe. "I will," said the man, "run and acquaint my lady, as I know the fright she is in about her—and she deserves it, for a better creature never lived; God bless her, say I." He enquired if the family were all safe, and was answered all but my Lord, who had sprained his ankle in leaping too hastily from the window. He returned to Maria, thinking the account of her friends safety would afford her satisfaction; he felt

uncommon concern when Mrs. Motherly informed him she had been in continual fainting fits ever since he left her, and she very much feared the shock would prove fatal to her. He entreated Mrs. Motherly to keep her quiet, and when she was able to understand her, to acquaint her with the safety of her friends; he would, he said, call in the morning, to see if he could be of further service; then wished Mrs. Motherly a good night, and went to his hotel. He found it impossible to sleep, or to think of any thing but this strange lady; he was surprised at himself; it could not be love; no, that was impossible, his heart had been long deeply engaged; yet the sensations he felt bore so strong a resemblance to it as startled him: no, it must be pity. Who would not feel the same for such beauty in distress? He felt a desire to know who she was, which he checked: "What, can that be to me? I will only enquire how she is, and go in search of her who is alone mistress of my heart." He rose early, and walked out; his feet involuntarily carried him to Pall-Mall; he knocked at the door, and a trembling seized him as he made enquiry after her health. Mrs. Motherly answered she had just dropped asleep. "Poor lady," said she, "she has been delirious several times to-night; I sat up with her all the night." Just as she had said this, a footman rapped at the door, and Lady D. entered to enquire for the young lady who was brought from the fire? "She was," she said, "very ill able to come abroad, yet she could not be easy till she saw her: pray, madam, how is she?" "Why, my Lady," said Mrs. Motherly, "she is just gone to sleep. Poor thing, I am sure she has made my heart ache to-night, she has been in such a way." "Poor Maria," said Lady D. "when will she be at peace?" The gentleman started at the name, and turned pale. "I fancy," said Mrs. Motherly, "the young lady is in love, she talked so much about one Charles"—— "Who," said he eagerly; "Charles," answered she, "and the poor creature did so kiss and weep over a little picture which hung about her neck, I have almost cried my eyes out with her." "It is not surely Miss Harcourt," said the gentleman, greatly agitated, "pray, my lady, tell me, Oh, you know not how much I am concerned." "It is certainly Miss Harcourt," replied Lady D., greatly surprized. "Is it possible?" exclaimed he, "that I should be so fortunate as to return just in time to save my Maria from the flames?" "Surely," said Lady D. still more astonished, "I do not see Mr. Palmer?" "Yes," replied he, "I am indeed, that happy man, yet I can scarce believe myself so, till I see my Maria; Oh, my lady, permit me just to see her, I would not, for the world, disturb her." Lady D. entreated him to moderate his transport, and wait for her awaking, and then to allow her to prepare Maria to see him, as she very much feared, in the present state of her spirits, such a surprize would be too much for her: Charles reluctantly consented,—Mrs. Motherly ordered the maid to let her know when the young lady awoke; Lady D. ordered the servant to tell her woman to bring Maria some clothes.— "Am I," exclaimed Charles, "so happy, as to be once more in the same house with my Maria? Have I had her in my arms? My heart was just, it acknowledged her power.—But your ladyship will excuse me, I understood she was with Mrs. Spencer, formerly Miss Scot." "Mrs. Spencer," replied Lady D. "now Lady F. is my sister—Maria is equally dear to us both, and it not being in my sister's power to come to London this Spring, and Maria being engaged to meet your sister, it was settled for her to accompany me," "My sister!" said Charles, "is she then in London?" "No," replied Lady D. "she is not yet arrived, but is expected every day," "and my Maria is in intimacy with her; that is all I wish.—How, Lady D. am I indebted to your amiable family for the protection my Maria has received?" Lady D. answered it was impossible for any one to know Maria and not to love her. Lady D's woman entered with clothes for Maria, and soon after Mrs. Motherly, saying the young lady was awoke and appeared much better; Lady D. laid a strict injunction on Charles not to appear till she gave the word, and then followed Mrs. Motherly to Maria's room.

## CHAPTER XX.

“MY dear Lady D.” said Maria, on seeing her, “do I live to see you again? I last night thought I should never have had that happiness more, but I am still preserved.” “Yes, my dear,” said her ladyship, “you are, and for greater blessings than you expect.” “What do you mean,” cried Maria, eagerly, “are there letters from India?” Lady D. answered if she was certain she would be calm, she would tell her a very agreeable piece of news, but she was almost afraid to trust her with it: Maria entreated her not to fear, for he who had supported and given her fortitude under her misfortunes, would surely enable her to bear the reverse. “Then what will you say,” said Lady D., “when I tell you, your Charles is in England?” “In England!” answered Maria, “then I am blessed indeed, but I fear to believe it.” “There is a gentleman below,” said Lady D., “has a message to you from him,” “From my Charles?” exclaimed Maria, “let me this moment get up and go to him—but what shall I do? I have no clothes,” “Oh,” said Lady D., smiling, “he has seen you almost naked, for it was he who brought you here last night,” “Ah!” said Maria, “I thought he was some good angel, I felt an uncommon emotion in being in his arms, which I could not account for, but really had it been Charles himself, I believe my heart would not have fluttered more.” Charles tapped at the door, “Pray,” said Lady D. “have patience one minute, and you shall be admitted. You must not be surprized,” said she, to Maria, “if you soon see him.” “Tell me, Lady D.,” said Maria, “if he is indeed come—Oh, tell me, where he is, and let me see him?” “He is come,—he is here,” exclaimed Charles, entering the room, “to bless you my love,” “It is—it is my Charles!” exclaimed Maria, and fainted—“I told you how it would be,” said Lady D., “why would you not wait till I called you?” “how could I?” answered he, “when I heard her so enchantingly call on me—Look up my dear Maria, and bless your Charles, this is the last time thy gentle spirits shall be discomposed.” Lady D. and Mrs. Motherly were busily employed in applying hartshorn; Charles held one of her hands in his,—the manly tears dropped from his eyes.

“He is gone again,” said Maria, coming a little to herself—“Ah, it was all illusion.” “No, my love,” said he, “it is no illusion; look up, your Charles is here, never more to leave you.” “Father of mercy,” said Maria, “I thank thee for granting me this moment; it repays me doubly for all my past unhappiness—My dear Charles, this is more than I am well able to support,” and she burst into tears—Charles was unable to speak, he pressed her hand to his lips, and bathed it with tears: Lady D. and Mrs. Motherly wept also—a silence ensued, which after continuing some minutes was broke by Mrs. Motherly, exclaiming, “Ah! may God Almighty bless you both—this is, now, what I call real and true love, the Lord bless us—how many talk of love, who know no more about it than I know of the man-o’-th’-moon.”

After the lovers had a little recovered themselves, Lady D. ordered her woman to come up with clothes for Maria; and Charles retired to the parlour, whilst she dressed. Maria soon forgot her fright, and was sensible to no other feeling than what proceeded from a fulness of joy: Lady D. congratulated her, in the sincerest manner on her good fortune; expressed her admiration of her lover’s person and sentiments. Maria declared the happiness she felt oppressed her to that degree, her heart was ready to burst it was so full. “Is it not strange,” said she “Lady D. that we may be too happy.” “Our nature is such,” said Lady D. “that if over loaded with too great a

proportion of joy, it has the effect you describe; it requires the same steadiness to support excess of joy, as excess of grief—you have nobly bore the one, and therefore will not, I hope, want calmness to support the other.” Lady D. would she; she said, write an account to her sister of Maria’s good fortune, as she supposed she would be too much engaged to do it herself: Maria thanked her ladyship, and then hastened to the parlour, where her Charles impatiently waited her coming. After they had congratulated each other on their happy meeting, Maria enquired if he had received her packet: “Yes, my love,” answered he, “I did, and all the wealth of the East should not have bribed me to have staid after I knew to what dangers you were exposed.—Oh, my Maria what has been my suffering these four years of tedious absence, almost three of which have been passed under the most dreadful apprehensions—Think, what I must have felt, at receiving no answers to the letters which every packet carried for you and your brother, entreating in the most earnest manner, the favor of an answer. By every ship that arrived I hoped to get the wished intelligence, but in vain—I only met with disappointments; often did I resolve to leave India, and at all events to return to England to inform myself with what had happened; then I determined to write again and wait the success, which was no better than the former. In this state of uncertainty, fearing the worst which could happen, I was, when my uncle died, at which time I found myself possessed of more wealth than my highest ambition every aspired to,—it afforded me no comfort;—what pleasure could I find in riches when I had lost the delightful prospect of sharing them with my Maria?—I now determined, at all events to come to England, and as soon as I had settled my uncle’s affairs, I engaged a passage, but to my great joy, three days before we were to sail, a ship arrived which brought the accounts from you. What a variety of emotions did the reading them cause me? Joy, admiration, and resentment seized me by turns—I blessed you, my love—I cursed the villain who had caused you so much uneasiness—I admired your steadiness, and longed more than ever to reward you but that is impossible, though it shall be the business of my life to deserve you. I now saw my wealth with pleasure.—Now I thought it of some value as it would put my Maria in a more exalted state than the one she had so nobly refused. Full of these ideas, I sailed for England; Heaven, propitious to my prayers, granted us a quick voyage, and yesterday evening I arrived at London. A gentleman, who had been my companion during the voyage, kept me to sup with him, and on going to my hotel, fortune kindly conveyed me to my Maria.”

## CHAPTER XXI.

LADY D. now conducted the lovers, to her lodgings and introduced Charles to Lord D. who received him as a brother. Maria communicated to her Charles, the kindness she had received from Lady Palmer, and shewed the letters she had lately honored her with, which gave him great satisfaction. He wrote that day to acquaint his mother with his arrival, and to express his grateful thanks for the kindness she had shewn his Maria, who he hoped soon to have the happiness to present to her as a daughter: he shewed the letter to Maria, and watched her looks whilst she read it; she blushed when she came to the part which concerned herself. "My Maria," said he, tenderly, "will not hesitate in fulfilling its contents, for I cannot, my love, be truly happy till you are mine beyond the power of fortune; let me, therefore hope, the next week will bless me with all I can ask of Heaven." "Next week!" repeated Maria, "mercy," "Yes, my dearest life, why should we put off our happiness one day longer than is necessary, when every moment I am separated from you, appears tedious, and I wish it annihilated, I can only be said to live, when I am with you." Maria felt the justness of his observations too sensible, to object to it, she only regretted not having Lady F. present on the solemn occasion: Charles answered, as his sister was to be in town, she would gladly supply her place, and then, if it was agreeable to Maria, they would set out for Devon, to receive the blessing of his mother; after which, pay a visit to Lady F. Maria gave a silent assent to these proposals, and preparations were made for the following week, to crown their wish.

Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland arrived. The joy of Mrs. Cleveland at seeing Maria, was greatly increased on meeting her brother so unexpectedly. They embraced each other with tears, and mutual congratulations passed. Charles acquainted his sister with the office he intended her in a few days, which she undertook with great pleasure. Maria received a letter of congratulation from Lady F. who added, there was a wish very near her heart, which she hoped Maria would join in. "There was," she said, "a very noble seat to be disposed of, within a few miles of them, and if her Charles did not wish to make her unhappy, which he surely would, if he took Maria from her altogether, he would purchase it." Maria was delighted with the proposal, she shewed the letter to her Charles, who was not less pleased with the agreeable prospect, and immediately determined on making the purchase.

The evening preceding the day appointed to unite this amiable pair, Mr. Worthy arrived in town. He was, he said, determined to be some way concerned in Maria's happiness, therefore he came to take the office of her father—he should, with great pleasure bestow her, as he made no doubt but the receiver would be sensible of the value of the gift. "You are, Sir," said he, addressing himself to Charles, "the only man in the world that I should not think her too great a prize for—I believe you deserve each other, and if there is such a thing as happiness in this world, it must fall to the lot of such as you."—Charles politely thanked Mr. Worthy for his good opinion, and declared he was so sensible of her worth, that it should be the whole business of his life to render himself worthy of her. Maria sighed, and the tear dropped from her cheek.

The next morning they were accompanied to church by Lord and Lady D. Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland, and Mr. Worthy. Maria supported herself with great steadiness; but, when the

Minister came to the part where she had stopped the ceremony with Sir Richard Harlow, she trembled, but had no inclination to interrupt him. Lady D. caught her eye, and smiled. After Maria had a little recovered from the terror, occasioned by the awfulness of the ceremony, a calm satisfaction succeeded in her breast, such as she never before experienced.

## CHAPTER XXII.

FOUR days after this happy union, Charles and his lovely bride set out for Devon, where great preparations were made to receive them. What heart, less susceptible than Maria's, but would feel strangely affected at returning to the country which gave her birth, and where she had received those valuable instructions which had enabled her to support all her difficulties with dignity—Returning too with the object of her affections to meet his mother, was more than her most sanguine hopes could ever have formed; she found it required all her fortitude to support her good fortune.

When they came within about two miles of the Grove, they saw a great concourse of people. The peasants hearing that Charles and his charming Maria were to return that day, had all dressed themselves in their best suits, to come to meet and welcome them. They soon eased the horses of their labour, and went on with loud shouts and singing rustic songs in praise of constancy and virtue.

Though Maria was scarce able to support herself, yet encouraged by her Charles not to sadden the hearts of those innocent creatures, whose countenances expressed the sincerity of the joy they shewed, she appeared pleased with them—Shouts of “long live those patterns of Virtue,” announced their near approach to Lady Palmer, who with Sir Thomas, waited to receive them in the parlour.

On their entering, they unable to speak, threw themselves at her feet—“Bless you both, my dear children,” said Lady Palmer, raising and tenderly embracing them, “may you enjoy that happiness to which your merits entitle you;” they were all in tears. Sir Thomas received them with equal warmth of affection, and congratulated them in the sincerest manner on their happy union.

“There is another,” said Lady Palmer, “who wishes equally to pay his respects, but declares, he cannot support your presence,” “my dear brother,” said Maria, “Oh, where is he?” Lady Palmer then opened the door, and led Mr. Harcourt from the adjoining parlour. Maria threw herself at his feet, “Bless,” said she, “my dear brother, bless your happy sister,” “Oh,” exclaimed Mr. Harcourt, “this is too much, it is I, who ought to kneel, I who can scarce dare to look up to you, you much wronged excellence.” They embraced each other with tender tears. “Do not my dear brother,” said Maria, “mention wrongs—but think on my happiness, which if you do not wish to damp, let me have the satisfaction of seeing you join the general joy.” She by her tenderness, soon in some measure reconciled her brother to himself, and he became chearful.

There was open house kept at the Grove for the country people, for a fortnight, the neighbouring gentry all came to congratulate the virtuous pair, and all rejoiced in their happiness. One circumstance worthy of remark is, on their appearing at church, the Minister, in order to impress his young hearers with a proper sense of virtue, chose his text from the 4th Psalm, and part of the 6th verse.—“*There be many that say, who will shew us any good.*”

He then proceeded to shew the vanity, of expecting happiness from any other source, than a strict observance of religion and morality. He pointed to Maria as an example, he drew her character from the time of her being exposed an helpless Orphan to the world, and expatiated on the many friends the Almighty had raised her up to protect her innocence;—he enlarged on the greatness of her mind, in rejecting that splendour and pomp, which young minds are so apt to be dazzled with; and concluded with observing, that the good, must in the end, meet their reward. Maria's tears flowed most of the time this discourse lasted, and the congregation were all so deeply affected, there was scarce a dry eye in the church. After the service was over, she was led by her Charles through the crowd, who pressed to see them, and offered up prayers for their long life, and continual happiness.

After passing a month at the Grove, they took an affectionate leave of their friends, with a promise to renew their visit annually, at least, whilst Lady Palmer lived, and proceeded to the North, to pay their respects to Lord and Lady F. where they were received with equal marks of esteem. Charles purchased the seat near them, which was their summer residence. Those amiable friends were seldom apart; they spent their time at each other's houses alternately, and enjoyed more happiness than in general falls to the lot of mortals.

FINIS

## ERRATA.

VOL. I. Page 38, line 6, for to suppose, read  
neither can you suppose.

Page 59, line 10, for her mother, read  
his mother.

Page 97, line 7, for in the world, read  
on the world

Page 190, line 2, S wanting in Sir.

VOL. II. Page 69, line 15, for North Latitude,  
read South Latitude.

Page 78, a superfluous p in the word  
indebted.