

STELLA OF THE NORTH.

A NOVEL.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS. LEADENHALL-STREET.

STELLA OF THE NORTH,
OR THE
FOUNDLING OF THE SHIP.
A NOVEL.
IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE, &c.

“Virtue can itself advance
“To what the fav’rite fools of chance
 “By fortune seem’d design’d;
“Virtue can gain the odds of fate,
“And from itself shake off the weight
 “Upon th’ unworthy mind.”

PARNELL.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED AT THE

Minerva-Press,

FOR LANE AND NEWMAN,

LEADENHALL-STREET.

1802.

S T E L L A

OF THE

N O R T H.

CHAP. I.

“Darker scenes obtrude
“Than Fancy fashions in her wildest mood.”
PLEASURES OF HOPE.

ABOUT ten o'clock one night in October, 17—, a loud knocking was heard at the door of an inn situated in the most retired quarter of the small town of Port Patrick, in North Britain.

The landlord, who acted in the double capacity of host and waiter, had, for some time previous to this period, discerned a vessel attempting to reach the shore, in spite of the wind, which happened to prove unfavourable, and greatly retarded its progress. Conceiving the crew had at length accomplished their landing, and flattering himself with the prospect of benefiting by their arrival, he started from the recumbent posture in which he lay reclined on a bench before a well-replenished turf fire, and, hastily stirring it to a brighter blaze, flew to admit the welcome visitors.

The first object that met his view was a tall, military-looking figure, in a blue coat, with a red collar; the latter stood high, and concealed the lower part of his face, while a large hat was so placed as to effect the same purpose above. After casting a cursory glance round the kitchen, he returned to the door, and presently re-entering, was followed by two sailors, bearing an armed-chair. In this homely conveyance sat a female, her head resting against the back of it; her attitude bespoke the last stage of sickness and debility; but her form and features were entirely excluded from observation by the immense quantity of covering in which she seemed enveloped. A woman, apparently past the meridian of life, assisted to support her; and a third sailor carried a travelling trunk on his head, which having deposited on an old-fashioned oaken table near the window, he called to his companions to take time by the fore-lock, and hasten back to the vessel, lest Master *Borus* chopped round again before they reached her; adding, with a significant nod, that wind and tide were not to be detained by a can of grog.

Saying this, he pocketed a shilling thrown him by the gentleman, tossed off a glass of spirits, and snatching up his hat, hurried from the house. After being rewarded for their trouble, the other two men followed his example, swearing, as they shook the landlord heartily by the hand, that he knew the right proportion of whiskey and water better than any man on the coast of Scotland.

Meanwhile the wife and daughter of mine host, having been previously roused from their first slumber, were bustling about to prepare a chamber for the reception of the invalid, upon whom her female attendant seemed exclusively to bestow her whole care. Some proper restorative cordials, said to be peculiarly beneficial in all cases of extreme sea-sickness, were powerfully recommended: these the domestic promised to administer when her mistress was in bed, but declined offering them before that period. Having at length accomplished this point, she declared her intention of watching by the lady through the night, lest the effects of the voyage should again require assistance. The rest of the family therefore retired, and the gentleman was conducted immediately to his apartment.

About an hour had now elapsed from the time of their arrival, and a second was rapidly advancing to its close, when a kind of suppressed noise issued apparently from the chamber of the invalid, and shortly after a door was heard to open softly. The sound of steps cautiously moving overhead succeeded, and in a few minutes more some person seemed descending the staircase. As no bell had hitherto rung, the landlord's daughter, who happened to be the only person awake, did not deem it necessary to quit a warm bed uncalled for; but a gentle tap at her door soon brought her to the threshold, from which she started back, on perceiving the stranger with a candle in his hand. Apprehensions, however, of a personal nature quickly subsided, upon learning that the lady was again extremely ill; and as it was become necessary to have medical advice, he requested that one of the faculty might be instantly summoned.

The girl awakened her parents with this intelligence; and the landlady, who had frequently on their arrival, regretted the absence of the principal doctor in the neighbourhood, then on professional business in a distant quarter of the country, hastened to the invalid's room, reminding the gentleman, as she ascended the staircase, of having already acquainted him with this unlucky circumstance. He listened, however, to her loquacity without evincing any particular degree of disappointment on the subject of it, and only desired her husband would endeavour to remedy the want by procuring any other decent practitioner within his reach.

A messenger was consequently dispatched on this errand, though the chief part of the operator's intended work happened to be performed by dame Nature just as the hostess entered the apartment; where she found the lady delivered of a dead child, to the visible astonishment of both her male and female companion, who, incredible as it may seem, declared such an event was totally unexpected by either of them.

This asseveration was not considered by the landlady in a light favourable to the veracity of the speakers; and suspicious of something wrong, from the preceding silence observed on the real situation of the woman in the straw, she felt inclined to give vent to her sentiments with a freedom of manner not quite acceptable to her hearers, who she over and over again protested could not but have known the true state of the case, and therefore must be looked up to as answerable for the consequence, should any thing happen of an alarming description, all of which could easily have been guarded against, had she been properly consulted on the occasion; a midwife, she said, residing at no great distance, whose skill she could aver, from *experience*, to equal, if not surpass, that possessed by the first man practitioner in the kingdom.

A stern look of displeasure from the gentleman interrupted the remainder of this harangue; but the pause was but momentary—for the surgeon had no sooner made his appearance, and pronounced his patient in danger, than the subject was resumed by the loquacious hostess, who would not have been suffered to continue in the room, had not necessity rendered her presence indispensable. At length it was deemed possible to dismiss her, and she was commanded to retire, though not before the doctor was made acquainted with the supposed ignorance of the strangers relative to what had come to pass.

This piece of information certainly surprised the son of Esculapius almost as much as it had done herself; and the start of astonishment that succeeded, sufficiently shewed his incredulity equalled her own on the occasion.

What passed through his mind was not unmarked by the gentleman; and, though half shrinking from the steady gaze of the surgeon, he repeated his former asseveration (which the female attendant corroborated), in such impressive terms, that his auditor's doubts were considerably staggered, and he knew not what judgment to form on the probable or improbable nature of their intelligence.

Meanwhile the mistress of the house, who, in the language of the turf, had frequently been taken in by less suspicious-looking guests, summoned her husband to a private consultation on the *pro* and *con* merits of the case. A death—a funeral—its attendant expences, were all before her mental vision; it was not that she cared much about the two first articles, provided the last was properly arranged.—No! Mrs. Martin could have witnessed half the extirpation of the human race with all the indifference of a modern philosopher of the Gallic school, if she herself only escaped with part of their spoils: but the longer she reflected on what the strangers had avowed, on the air of mystery that surrounded them, and a certain something that, without being able to define, left an impression on the mind inimical to a favourable idea of their principles, the more was she convinced of the risk to be encountered in proportion as the length of their bill increased, without obtaining some security against the chances that might ensue either in the event of prolonged existence or immediate death. Some casual incidents had already occurred to shew that their departure from the Irish coast had been suddenly undertaken. The very small portion of luggage with which they were provided, likewise increased this good woman's fears; as, in her judgment, it not only bespoke scanty finances, but likewise precluded every hope of indemnification by other means, should pecuniary deficiencies render the detention of their trunk a necessary measure.

Having duly scanned over all these circumstances, she proceeded to enumerate the incalculable losses sustained on similar occasions by the easy temper of a husband who, but for her interposition, would speedily ruin both his poor wife and child, by that eternal and nonsensical propensity to assist others at the expence of his own interest.

Martin, who was really a worthy fellow, had been too long and too well accustomed to what is vulgarly styled petticoat government, to think of contesting the matter with a woman of so selfish a disposition; he, therefore, usually let her talk on without interruption, and not venturing to increase the evil by open opposition, generally contrived to practise in private, what he dared not speak when humanity called upon his exertions in its favour.

The result of this consultation was, therefore, to clear the house of its present guests without delay. Should the lady's death be the consequence of this hasty measure, those to whom she belonged must look to that; as for any thing else, every one had a right to take care of themselves. This, Mrs. Martin said, was the essence of her breed, and according to its dictates she would live and die.

Her husband swallowed a gill of rum and water in silence, and tacitly acquiesced in her sentiments, though resolved to counteract them, if they militated too much against the feelings of his own honest heart when put in execution.

CHAP. II.

“We know not what we fear,
“But float upon a wild and violent sea
“Each way, and move.”

SHAKESPEARE.

DETERMINED to commence her operations with caution, lest the supposed adventurers should prove quality in disguise, and the biter be bit, a circumstance which had more than once occurred before the present juncture, Mrs. Martin watched for the surgeon's departure from the chamber of his patient, and beset him with a torrent of questions relative to her and her companions. These, however, he prudently contrived to evade as much as possible; and where that could not be easily accomplished, the answers she received were so vague and laconic that they rather served to heighten her fears than otherwise.

More than ever alarmed for the future, she resolved at once to conclude the matter according to that mode of proceeding most likely, in her opinion, to prove decisive.

Assuming an air of penitential humility (for Mrs. Martin was an actress in her way), she repaired to the gentleman's door, and softly tapping at it, requested to speak with him.

No reply was obtained to this entreaty. The door stood ajar: she looked in, and perceived the room was empty!

“Humph!” said Mrs. Martin, emphatically to herself—“still with the doctor's patient—and yet I do not recollect that they addressed each other as husband and wife! Curious enough, faith!—But I'll be at the bottom of it, else my name's not Janet Martin, of Port Patrick.”

So saying, she stepped on to the next apartment; when having performed a similar ceremony, the door was gently unlocked, and the female attendant, holding it half open, desired to know her business.

In a voice of fawning servility, she begged leave to enquire if his Honour was in the chamber.

The woman returned an evasive answer.

The question was repeated in other words to the same tune; and the reply proved still unsatisfactory.

Mrs. Martin was not however to be thus got rid of; her passion, never governable, except where interest was obviously in view, began to spurn at restraint: she gave way to the impulse, and suddenly pushing past the servant, rushed into the room. The gentleman stepped from the opposite side of the bed, and sternly demanded the cause of her intrusion.

Mrs. Martin, who prided herself upon being able to see as far into a millstone as most of her neighbours, conceiving she had now discovered rather more than was meant to meet the eye, was preparing to open upon the subject of her remarks in no very pleasant manner, when she was again ordered to explain herself, or retire immediately.

There was something in the manner of pronouncing these words that instantly stopped the flood-gates of the landlady's intended eloquence. She shrunk from that commanding look of conscious superiority so visible in the gentleman's whole deportment, and, fixing her eyes on the floor, remained silent, while her changing colour bore witness to the internal struggle of contending passions which agitated her bosom.

“Leave the room, woman—we want you not!” repeated the object of her terror. He turned to the fireside as he spoke.

Mrs. Martin had not yet accomplished the end of her visit, and to retire as she came, was doing nothing towards the gratification of a curiosity that now reigned more paramount than ever in her mind; she therefore judged it requisite to squeeze out a few tears, and when the convenient sobs that accompanied them permitted her to articulate, proceeded, with all due humility, to acknowledge her offence, deprecate his wrath, and bespeak his attention on a subject, in which he and his family were alone interested.

The gentleman suddenly raised his head from the chimney-piece against which it reclined, and regarding her with a perturbed air, ordered her to proceed.

The lady groaned, while her female attendant advanced to the bed, and whispered her in a low, but tremulous voice.

A few minutes seemed to restore every thing to its former state, on discovering the nature of Mrs. Martin’s communication, which was merely to recommend a sick nurse for the invalid, lest she who at present acted in that capacity should be too much injured by continual attendance to perform the office during the necessary period of her mistress’s confinement.

Apparently relieved by this explanation, though provoked at the secret alarm it had produced, a civil, but peremptory negative was given to the proposition: her own services, which had likewise been artfully proffered, were declined in a similar manner: and at length, finding her company no longer desired, she sullenly withdrew.

The acceptance or rejection of a sick nurse was the criterion by which Mrs. Martin proposed to judge of the “means, or no means” from whence her chance of future advantages were likely to accrue; for, in her calculation of probabilities, it seemed clear as two and two make four, that no person of the least fortune or consequence, could possibly do without that necessary appendage to indisposition in such a predicament. The matter was therefore speedily settled agreeable to her usual mode of conclusions on all occasions of the same description; and she retired once more to the councils of her pillow, in order to procure an hour’s rest, or in failure of that event, to con over the best method of conducting the meditated attack.

In consequence of this determination, a prodigious bustle was heard below on the following morning; the whole house indeed seemed in an uproar, and apprehensive lest the noise should incommode the invalid, the gentleman, who it appeared had spent the remainder of the night in her room, rung to demand an explanation.

The landlord’s daughter answered the summons at the expiration of a few minutes, and informed him, after some hesitation, that a family of rank was expected in the course of the day, who meant to sleep in the inn, and embark for Ireland early next morning; that the noise he complained of was occasioned by preparations for their reception, and as their retinue was numerous, her mother feared it would not be possible to accommodate his Honour and the sick lady at the same time, the apartments now occupied by each of them being exactly those which would be required for the expected guests; and indeed all the rooms in the house were scarcely sufficient for the purpose; but his Lordship had long been a good customer, and paid like a Prince, therefore he must not be disappointed, or put to any inconveniency whatever.

“I beg pardon, Sir—your honour seems displeased; but I only obey my mother,” added the girl, in apparent confusion, “and her commands none of the family dare dispute.”

“D—n your mother!” said the gentleman, in a voice that made the poor girl tremble; then, after a short pause, he desired to see her immediately.

Mrs. Martin soon made her appearance, and pouring forth a thousand apologies for the

message she was under the necessity of sending by her daughter, requested to know his Honour's pleasure.

His Honour's pleasure was to continue in his present lodgings till the lady could be removed with safety.

Mrs. Martin was extremely sorry to say that intention could not be complied with at this juncture.

The gentleman seemed peremptory.

The landlady no less so. Her voice began to swell into a higher key. The lady was disturbed: her nurse intreated the disputants to speak lower. Mrs. Martin heeded not the request, and the gentleman again ordered her from his presence, in a manner that admitted not of further hesitation. Extremely provoked, she flounced round in a fury of passion, and brushing past a table that stood in her way, accidentally threw down a pocket-book, with some other articles that lay near it. The former burst open in the fall, and her eyes were instantly rivetted on the contents. Mrs. Martin's countenance underwent an instantaneous change, as she stooped to pick up a large parcel of Bank notes!

A total alteration of measures speedily succeeded, and the opposition party were now readily permitted to retain their present station.

This concession, however, was not made with more fawning servility on the one side, than received by the other with an air of conscious superiority and contempt. The stranger accepted it rather as a thing of necessity than choice; and determined to quit the inhospitable roof when the convalescent state of his fair companion rendered such a measure no longer dangerous, he dismissed the now obsequious landlady, with the mortifying declaration of his intentions.

The recent bustle speedily ceased on her re-appearance below stairs; order once more arose out of chaos, and the late expected noble travellers were either contented to take up their quarters elsewhere, or, what is still more probable, the whole story was merely a fabrication of Mrs. Martin's fruitful imagination, to serve a temporary purpose, for not another syllable transpired respecting their motions.

The lady's maid, having left the sick room, for a little fresh air in the evening, was met by the mistress of the house, and pressing invited to take a seat at the family tea-table.

Unable to resist her overpowering kindness, and recollecting she had yet a few minutes to spare before her presence might become necessary, the woman complied; and after some preliminary discourse, in Mrs. Martin's usual roundabout manner, when curiosity set her brains at work for its gratification, the following question-and-answer conversation was bandied between her and her guest.

Landlady.— "By the by, I beg pardon, but I think I heard your lady call you.—Bless my heart! this memory of mine is not worth a farthing—see, if I have not forgot your name already!"

"My name is Norris, Madam, at your service."

Landlady.— "Oh, ay! now I recollect—yes, it was just so. And your master's too?—if my memory does not deceive me a second time, you addressed him this morning by the title of Major; but though he may be a military man, I presume that is not his only appellation."

Mrs. Norris bowed, but spoke not.

The inquisitive hostess repeated her question.

Mrs. Norris sipped her tea faster: some of it went down the wrong way, and she was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

In the confusion occasioned by this incident, Mrs. Martin seemed to have forgotten the

preceding interrogatory, for she renewed her battery, by supposing the lady and gentleman were man and wife.

Mrs. Norris coloured, bowed as before, and took another fit of coughing.

“And so,” resumed the landlady, after a temporary pause—“and so you say they are man and wife? I was sure from the first that was the case; for, says I, after what I saw, says I— ‘Who shall presume to—’”

“I know not what you saw, Madam,” replied Mrs. Norris, in some confusion, “but I’m sure I never spoke on the subject; nor can you say I did, with truth: I beg therefore to set you right on that head, in order to prevent future mistakes relative to this evening’s conversation.— But my Lady’s bell rings—I must hasten to her chamber.”

So saying, Mrs. Norris abruptly quitted the tea-table, and left her entertainer completely puzzled to comprehend the meaning of her words.

Provoked, on reflection, to find herself so adroitly baulked of intelligence on which she had reckoned with undoubted certainty, Mrs. Martin’s temper was beginning again to overleap the late prudent boundaries assigned it, when the pocketbook, and all its precious furniture, rose to mental view; and gulping down a large cup of tea, to lay the evil spirit, she succeeded in confining its ebullitions to the domestic circle then present, which merely consisting of her husband and daughter, they listened in respectful silence, till the whispered surmises of a censorious mind were suddenly interrupted by a summons from a newly-arrived guest.

It was on a Monday night when the Major (as we shall now style him), landed with his family at Port Patrick. Early on the morning of the following Wednesday he walked out in quest of private lodgings; which having procured at some distance from the town, the lady, himself, and their domestic took possession of them in the evening of the succeeding day, in spite of the rhetoric exerted by their disappointed hostess, to retain them in her own mansion.

During the period of their short residence in the latter abode, the Major, except on the foregoing occasion, had scarcely crossed the threshold.

This strict seclusion was ascribed to his anxiety on the lady’s account; but though that was now in some degree removed by the pleasing prospect of her approaching recovery, he did not appear to relax in his passion for retirement, and seldom left the house, unless at a very early or very late hour of the day. On these occasions he was usually seen rambling amongst the chasms of the terrific rock which frowned over one part of their romantic little dwelling, or tracing the sea-beat shore, and watching the last rays of a setting sun sinking beneath the gliding wave, resplendently bright with its reflected glories.

Like Hamlet, “man seemed not to delight him;” though it could not be added— “nor woman neither,” since his whole attention was apparently devoted to her who accompanied him, with a solicitude that powerfully marked the interest he took in her welfare.

The small house they now occupied belonged to a widow lady, at this time on a visit to some friends in Ireland: the Hermitage (for so this little spot was called), had therefore been let by a friend, during her absence. The Major paid in advance, and took it for a month certain; but before the expiration of that period it was supposed the invalid would be sufficiently recovered to encounter the fatigue of a longer journey.

To this point they were indeed advancing, but by much slower steps than at first flattered their hopes, for, in spite of all their care, the lady appeared greatly indisposed for several days after her removal. Youth, however, and probably a good constitution, were on her side. The disorder began to take a favourable turn towards the close of the second week; and the little party were congratulating themselves on the prospect of being shortly enabled to reach the place of

their original destination, wherever that happened to be situated, when some powerful, but hidden cause accelerated their motions, and led them to risk the chance of her perfect recovery, in order to hasten their departure from the neighbourhood of Port Patrick.

Mrs. Norris had one evening gone with a message to Martin, who usually made their markets for them, and was standing in the bar with him, when a stranger entered the house, and stopped to give some directions to a servant in the passage. The sound of this person's voice produced a sudden pause in what she was saying. She turned quickly round, to observe the speaker, then started in evident confusion, and abruptly retired to a distant corner of the room, while he walked on to the parlour.

When the door was heard to close upon him, and Martin rejoined her, she instantly repaid the latter whatever was due, or laid out by him, for necessaries on her master's account, and slipping through the back yard, hastened to the Hermitage.

Mrs. Norris, on her arrival, was closeted some time with the Major. At the conclusion of their consultation, he entered the lady's apartment, and she retired to that usually occupied by herself. Each appeared uncommonly agitated; and as the girl who had the charge of the house in her mistress's absence crossed the little passage leading to the lodging rooms, she heard, or fancied she heard, the voice of distress, intermingled with deep and profound sighs. While she yet listened, the door of the invalid's chamber suddenly opened, and Mrs. Norris was summoned to attend her lady.

The Major in a few minutes entered the kitchen, and requested a trusty messenger might be speedily procured, on business that required immediate dispatch. This order being executed to his satisfaction, the man was taken aside to receive his directions, and instantly departed.

By four o'clock next morning a carriage drove to the door. The travelling trunk stood ready corded in the passage, which was presently fixed behind the vehicle; and its owners seated themselves without loss of time. The postillion cracked his whip, and the rattle of the receding wheels soon ceased to reach the weeping girl, who remained for some minutes transfixed to the threshold, listening to the reverberated sound as it gradually died away amongst the mountains.

Solitary and sad, she then entered her now lonely dwelling. The window of the Major's late apartment commanded the most extensive view, and there she placed herself, in order to discover if the chaise was yet visible in that direction; but her hopes were disappointed—it no longer appeared: and after giving a few more tears to the memory of her generous benefactors, she prepared to set the deserted rooms in their former state of arrangement, when something bright, and apparently of value, dropped from one of the beds as she removed the counterpane.

On examination, it proved to be a golden case, containing the miniature picture of a young and beautiful woman; but whether or not intended for a likeness of the strange lady was impossible to determine, for she had constantly appeared in a large cap or bonnet, with a black veil thrown over them, which altogether concealed her features entirely from observation, and even at the very climax of her sufferings, prevented the ingenious Mrs. Martin from gratifying her curiosity, by obtaining a satisfactory view of her countenance, in spite of the many and various manoeuvres put in practice for that purpose.

Nevertheless, the air and *tout ensemble* of the picture conveyed a general idea of the fair fugitive, that pleased the affectionate girl; who, after considering what steps were proper to be adopted for its restoration, soon perceived the impossibility of such a measure, as it was already too late to think of overtaking the travellers; she therefore secreted it in a place of safety, till the return of her mistress should determine its future destination.

CHAP. III.

“No one friendly beam
“E’er gave a glimpse from whom I am descended.”
MAHOMET.

IN something less than six weeks from this period Mrs. Bertram, the proprietor of the Hermitage, returned from Ireland.

The same vessel that brought the Major and his family to Port Patrick conveyed her back, on its next trip, to the Scottish coast. The master’s wife (who was then with him) happened to be an old and favourite servant of this lady, and had partly accompanied her husband on the present voyage, in order to render any service to her former mistress that might be required during her passage home, Mrs. Bertram being usually much indisposed on the water.

The maid at the Hermitage was niece to this woman: and great proved her astonishment, when the latter followed her mistress into the parlour with a child in her arms, apparently not many weeks old, and beautiful as an angel.

At first Sally supposed it might be one of her Irish cousins, as Mrs. Wallace had a sister married in that kingdom. In this idea she was soon undeceived, however. Mrs. Bertram said the infant belonged to a deceased friend of hers, and was henceforth to remain under her protection.

The real state of the case, nevertheless, was as follows.

It may be remembered that the sailor who carried the trunk on the night the Major and his party reached Port Patrick, had hastened from the inn before his companions finished their can of grog. This man repaired to the house occupied by his captain’s wife, in order to accompany her back to the vessel. Mrs. Wallace had expected her husband’s arrival for some time, and being previously prepared for the voyage, instantly attended her conductor.

Already had they weighed anchor, and the wind continuing favourable, were plowing the ocean with rapidity, when the mate abruptly entered the cabin, and, with a look of inexpressible consternation, placed something, wrapped in a piece of old stamped cotton, on the table.

“See,” cried the man, in a voice of affright, recoiling a few paces as he spoke—“see, mistress, what I found in my hammock just now!”

“In your hammock!” repeated Mrs. Wallace. “How came any thing there without your knowledge?”

“Nay,” replied the mate, “that is more than I can inform you; unless the devil, or some of his imps, are turned carriers, and, owing me a spite, flew hither with it.”

“I do not understand you, James,” said Mrs. Wallace, laying aside some check shirts she was finishing for her husband, with much deliberation.

“Look at it!” returned the man, “and then you will just be as wise as myself! The old proverb says— ‘seeing is believing;’ but, faith, in spite of the old proverb, I can scarcely yet credit the evidence of my own senses! All I know is, that in my hammock I found it, here I brought it, there it lies—so examine, and judge for yourself.”

While James was thus haranguing on the subject of his discovery, Mrs. Wallace stepped back for a light, by which she had been working on the other side of the cabin.

She then advanced to the table which was placed near the door, and began to comply with

the mate's request; but before the calico covering was half unwrapped, she started suddenly back, with surprise and dismay impressed on every feature: in the next moment she turned an eye of scrutinizing suspicion on her companion, who, instantly comprehending her meaning, protested his innocence, and swore, if he had no sins to answer for but what her looks seemed to charge him with, he might go to Davie Jones's locker without fearing either death or the devil.

Mrs. Wallace once more resumed the task of enquiry, and proceeded to unfold the bundle.

It contained a poor little infant, apparently on the verge of the grave!

For the space of a few seconds she gazed upon the deserted helpless wretch, with sensations of mingled commiseration and horror. Its feeble voice, scarcely heard, seemed to implore immediate relief. She possessed a kind and benevolent heart, on which the melting cry of misery seldom failed to make a powerful impression. The child, therefore, met with all due attention; and after fluctuating for some time between life and death, the former at length triumphed over parental desertion, and visible symptoms of convalescence were gradually discovered in its late nearly inanimate frame.

It was fortunate Mrs. Wallace had declined going to bed when she first came on board; a circumstance that originated in her solicitude to finish the shirts as soon as possible, and which prevented any further loss of time for the infant's relief.

A consultation was afterwards held with her husband and the mate, on the topic of this very extraordinary incident; but no probable person could be fixed upon as the inhuman parent of the poor baby.

The only female passengers who came with them from Ireland were not supposed likely to know any thing of the matter: the lady had indeed been extremely indisposed during the greater part of the voyage; but sea-sickness was assigned as the cause of her illness, than which almost nothing could be worse. As for her female attendant, she seemed too far advanced in life to incur suspicions of such a description; nor could any of the kind possibly attach to her appearance. Besides, none of the party had ever been seen in the mate's cabin; and so far from quitting their own, not one of the crew were permitted to approach it while they remained on board—a period which contrary winds had prolonged to an unusual length, and rendered uncomfortably tedious.

One thing, nevertheless, was clear—whoever proved the perpetrators of a deed so atrocious, were no doubt capable of denying the imputation when charged with it: chance might therefore effect a discovery at some future period, which an immediate enquiry would only serve to crush in the first instance, by serving to put the offender or offenders on their guard against the certain consequences of a successful investigation.

None of the other sailors were yet informed of what had taken place in the mate's cabin, and it was now agreed to let them remain unacquainted with the whole transaction. Having come to this determination, Mrs. Wallace contrived to keep the child from their knowledge till the vessel arrived in its destined harbour. It was then secretly conveyed to her sister's house, who happened at this juncture to be a nurse, and kindly consented to take it under her care for the present, which relieved its worthy benefactress from her immediate difficulties on a subject of so much importance to its precarious existence.

On the following evening she waited upon Mrs. Bertram, who had been for some time on a visit to a friend in the same place: to her Mrs. Wallace related every circumstance of the story, and concluded by requesting her advice and directions on the occasion.

Mrs. Bertram was her own mistress, unincumbered by any family; but, naturally fond of

children, she felt uncommonly interested in the fate of the deserted being, whose eventful preservation seemed to be the particular work of Providence. She reflected on the unaccountable incident with astonishment, and ordering a carriage, accompanied by the humane Mrs. Wallace, drove directly to the habitation of her sister.

But if interested for the little foundling before she saw it, how much was every sentiment in its favour augmented on her arrival! Mrs. Vere had accommodated it with a decent change of clothes from the wardrobe of her own infant, and the alteration produced by that and other marks of attention, had so considerably improved its appearance, that Mrs. Bertram thought she had scarcely ever seen a more lovely baby.

On a second visit, the ground it had gained in her affection continued to increase; she viewed its little form with additional partiality, and bestowed the warmest eulogiums on the two worthy sisters, for their generous exertions in its behalf, while pecuniary aid was liberally supplied for all necessary demands from a purse ever open to the calls of want or affliction, and requisite instructions given relative to those private enquiries judged proper to be made, in various quarters, on the occasion. All hopes of success in the latter design, however, vanished, on the recurrence of repeated disappointments: prolonged investigation therefore became useless, and discovery ceased to appear practicable.

Mrs. Bertram possessed much genuine sensibility of mind; her feelings evaporated not in the fashionable jargon of those sentimental effusions which are rather the offspring of affectation, than the pure emanations of humanity. Her eyes often swam in liquid anguish for distress which her limited means could not relieve: but where fortune failed to assist the most benevolent of hearts in the service of her fellow-creatures, by advice and the soothing voice of consolation she endeavoured to remedy the deficiency; and the weeping child of Misfortune has found her tears dried, her sorrows diminished, and her mind unconsciously eased of its late oppression, without being sensible at the time that the main object of her application remained unanswered, or that she departed as poor in cash from Mrs. Bertram's presence as she entered.

In the present instance, however, that lady's ability proved happily adequate to her wishes. On the second repetition of her visit to Mrs. Vere's, she caressed the little foundling with increasing tenderness, mused over its helpless state as it lay upon her knee, dropped a liquid witness of the commiseration its forlorn condition inspired, kissed it off from its forehead, and finally declared her resolution to take the sole charge of its future maintenance on herself.

Oh ye who are superabundantly gifted with the means of succouring the wretched—ye who possess the power without the divine, and yet more enviable inclination to do good—ye rich and opulent sons of prosperity, think on Mrs. Bertram, imitate her example—go, and do so likewise!

In consequence of the above determination, Mrs. Vere continued her maternal offices to the baby, while its new and generous benefactress remained in Ireland; and being a female, it was christened Stella, after the worthy Mrs. Bertram.

On returning to Galloway, a change of measures became necessary, and Stella was then brought up by the hand.

When they arrived at Port Patrick, Mrs. Wallace undertook to sound the Martins relative to the mysterious Major and his family; for Mrs. Bertram could not help entertaining some latent suspicion of her *protégée's* claims to protection in that quarter, in spite of all that had been represented to the contrary.

The purposed enquiry demanded much management and precaution. Mrs. Bertram still wished to conceal the real circumstances under which the child had been introduced to her

knowledge, unless some probable chance appeared for ascertaining its claims to parental affection; and that she now almost dreaded to discover, from apprehensions of losing the little creature, who by this time had considerably increased the interest its forlorn and deserted condition first created in her bosom.

Mrs. Wallace, when she commenced the subject that carried her to the inn, was too well acquainted with the landlady's prying, loquacious disposition, not to be extremely careful of dropping the most distant allusion to Stella, or hinting at any circumstance in which she was obviously implicated. Her interrogatories, artfully introduced, and adroitly conducted, satisfied her that no relationship could possibly exist between the parties in question; for it clearly appeared, in the course of their conversation, that the strange lady had actually been delivered of a dead child on the very night of her arrival at Port Patrick; which child Martin himself saw committed to the grave next day: no suspicions therefore could attach to her on the occasion. Neither was Mrs. Norris liable to any of a similar description; for she was evidently too far advanced in life to lie under such an imputation: besides, though her lady was known to have been extremely indisposed during the voyage, she herself gave no particular indication of the kind. So that, in short, all that transpired only served to shew the inutility of any succeeding attempt to accelerate a discovery which time and chance alone seemed capable of producing.

Little Stella, thus unavoidably thrown upon the protection of strangers, proved so far the peculiar care of Providence, that in Mrs. Bertram she found a maternal friend and benefactress, fully qualified to supply the loss of parents, whose barbarous desertion of her helpless infancy had evinced their inability to perform the character assigned them by nature; but whether from a total defalcation of every virtuous principle, or the imperious dictates of hard necessity, could not at present be determined.

Though slightly formed, extremely small for her apparent age, and rather of a delicate constitution, proper management, good air, and ease of mind gradually performed their parts, and progressive time saw her insensibly advance to the more perfect attainment of every personal advantage. Her mental endowments were not less promising; and before the conclusion of her ninth year she was looked upon as a miracle for abilities and knowledge in all the few branches of education that could be procured in a tolerable country school about half a mile distant from the Hermitage.

As Stella thus gradually rose into notice, her benefactress and Mrs. Wallace were equally struck with the strong resemblance she bore to the miniature picture which had been given by Sally to the former, on her return from Ireland.—The same soft blue eyes, the same small, but commanding forehead, an aquiline nose apparently cast in the same mould, similar dimples playing round the most beautiful mouth in the world, a profusion of auburn hair, and a complexion so brilliant that the veins were seen meandering in every direction: her features, however, were on a less scale, and appeared of a description to remain so, even at a later period of life. Indeed the whole figure indicated smaller proportions when the limbs reached their ultimate growth; yet the fine-turned neck and shoulders were alike conspicuous in both, and on every comparison the painting and its animated counterpart visibly approximated more to each others standard of perfection.

Observations of this nature could not fail to produce various conjectures; and Mrs. Bertram carefully preserved the miniature picture, which seemed to have been left by the particular appointment of Heaven, in order to elucidate the present mystery that enveloped Stella's birth, at some future and more propitious juncture.

CHAP. IV.

“Another guest there was, of sense refin’d,
“Who felt each worth, for every worth she had.”

THOMSON.

IN the neighbourhood of the Hermitage a rich and opulent family occasionally resided, with the younger branches of which Stella, in some of her walks from school, had accidentally become acquainted. A private path, leading to the humble seminary, bordered on a quarter of the pleasure grounds, where a pavilion was situated, to which two little girls and their governess usually repaired, to commence the tasks of the day, at an early hour of the morning, when the weather proved sufficiently favourable for the purpose.

There, too, they were commonly to be met with in an evening, freed from the confinement of study, and at liberty to ramble through the plantations, innocent amusement their aim, and health, cheerfulness, content, their constant attendants.

Frequent opportunities occurred, during the latter period, to facilitate the intimacy that speedily took place between these young people and our heroine. Miss Sommers, the governess, was a most amiable and accomplished woman; she had seen much of the world, and quick in discerning merit, as anxious to improve the natural abilities of her fellow-creatures, she was not long in discovering that both were possessed in no trifling degree by the beautiful *protégée* of Mrs. Bertram, whose mind and manners equally interested and charmed her, and whose avidity in the attainment of knowledge was not greater than the gratification experienced by her worthy instructress, while occupied in administering any degree of useful information to the ductile and grateful Stella, who listened to her precepts with the most delighted attention, implicitly obeyed her injunctions, hung upon every word she uttered, and rendered herself mistress of the most difficult lessons with a promptitude and eagerness truly astonishing.

While, by the humane aid of this worthy woman, the hours usually allotted to relaxation and amusement in the pavilion or pleasure grounds, proved thus propitious to the prompt and inspiring understanding of our heroine, her name and abilities were not unknown at the mansion-house. The extent of the latter was frequently mentioned, accompanied by high, but just encomiums on her various acquirements: these, however, were at first either totally unheeded, or merely considered as the giddy effusions of youthful minds on the acquisition of an additional playfellow or new acquaintance. At length Miss Sommers was appealed to as a competent witness of their veracity on the occasion, and her verdict appeared of too much importance to be totally disregarded. Mrs. Ross felt her curiosity excited to see the theme of so much warm panegyric, and the now happy friends of Stella were permitted to invite her to the Grove.

This mark of distinction greatly pleased our heroine, who, though commonly of a mild and unassuming temper, had yet certain lofty traits in her character which constantly instigated a wish to associate with those who were either her superiors in station, or otherwise remarkable for some praiseworthy turn of mind.

With Mrs. Ross, who was a woman of great respectability and goodness of heart, she soon justified the previous favourable impression received of her; and rightly supposing she was now arrived at an age to benefit by higher and better qualified teachers than those under whose tuition she had hitherto chiefly remained, that lady one evening called upon Mrs. Bertram, and

explained the motive of her visit by offering to give the little girl the same chance for improvement that her own daughters enjoyed under the eye of their excellent governess.

A proposal so evidently advantageous for her darling Stella, was received with extreme satisfaction by Mrs. Bertram, and readily assented to with many expressions of grateful acknowledgment: she did not, however, think it necessary to enter upon the particulars of her birth, or to hint at the nature of those ties by which she was bound to the child of her adoption. Her silence on this subject proceeded from no want of confidence in the principles of Mrs. Ross, for that lady bore a most excellent character, but was merely observed on account of a report currently circulated of her husband's decided bias for people of ancient family, rank, and consequence; which report she had reason to believe was but too well founded, and in that case feared it might prove detrimental to Stella, by defeating his wife's good intentions in her favour; or, if such happened not to be the effect of the disclosure at present, it might hereafter draw down his displeasure, should it accidentally transpire that Mrs. Ross was fully, or even partially informed of existing circumstances, which, she must have been convinced at the time, would meet with his unequivocal disapprobation, had he suspected that a poor deserted foundling, wrapped in an old calico rag, was pitched upon as a fit associate for participating in the advantages of a first-rate education with his daughters.

If the real state of the case should therefore be discovered at some future period, Mrs. Bertram thought it best to refrain from acquainting Mrs. Ross with the truth, by which means she would have the plea of ignorance to urge as some extenuation of her offence, provided her benevolent conduct happened to incur the unmerited resentment of a haughty and despotic husband.

As Stella bore the surname of Bertram, Mrs. Ross was consequently permitted to retain the commonly received opinion of her being nearly related to the family of her benefactress.

This innocent deception had hitherto saved the poor orphan many a bitter pang, for her mind was too sensible to insult, and her feelings too acute to bear the "proud man's scorn" and "all the thousand ills that patient merit of the unworthy takes," without suffering the most poignant distress; and it was perhaps from a thorough knowledge of her character in this respect, as much as any other consideration whatever, that induced Mrs. Bertram to conceal previous transactions from her knowledge till such time as the irresistible call of necessity rendered their disclosure no longer practicable, or at least no longer prudent to withhold.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all these precautions, it must be confessed that the now public and daily visits of Stella at Rossgrove, were rather acquiesced in by the master of the mansion, in compliance with the wishes of his family, than originating from any other motive of a more laudable nature.

Be that as it may, she profited rapidly by the indulgence, and in a comparatively short period became a real honour to her good and amiable teacher, Miss Sommers.

A man of wealth, an eastern Nabob, was Mr. Ross; from plundering the innocent natives of a foreign country, he was now plundered in turn by the rapacious of his own. Fond of splendour, pomp, and shew, his retinue was numerous; his horses, his carriages, all were in style; and the vanity of the Scotchman found no small gratification in being thus enabled to display his magnificence in the country of his forefathers, to revisit which he had ever looked forward from the scorching plains of Hindostan, with a degree of ardent expectation peculiar to the inhabitants of that quarter of Great Britain, from whence he had emigrated at an early period of life, in pursuit of what he was now abundantly supplied with.

The mansion-house, prior to his residence in it, had been considerably enlarged, and the

pleasure grounds new laid out in the most elegant manner. His progenitors had, for some generations, derived no small benefit from the timber on the estate; consequently it was always considered as a chief source of emolument, and its preservation particularly attended to: by this means the plantations were in a thriving state, and contributed much to the ornamental, as well as useful beauties of the place, which, in that bleak and exposed part of the coast, derived infinite advantage from the shelter they afforded during the general run of the most favourable seasons.

The family at Rossgrove consisted of the Nabob, his lady, one son, then on his travels, and three daughters; the eldest of the latter was their first-born, and (probably from a resemblance in character and disposition), the decided favourite of her father. Maria and Emma were many years her junior, and, as far as could be judged at their early period of life, infinitely more amiable in temper and manners.

Mr. Ross usually left the country a few weeks before the Christmas holidays commenced, and returned with his lady and daughters to a splendid house he possessed in London.

Such had proved nearly the *routine* of their movements since the family bade adieu to the shores of the East. This winter a change of measures took place equally wise and judicious.

Perfectly sensible that the two youngest girls could not be left in better hands than with Miss Sommers, and rightly supposing they would most likely pay closer attention to their studies in the uninterrupted seclusion of Rossgrove, than amid the gayer scenes of the capital, into which they were yet too young to be introduced with propriety, it was now determined that Maria and Emma should remain in the country with their governess during the three first winters after their acquaintance with our heroine commenced. This was the most fortunate circumstance that could have happened in her favour, and she neglected not to make the most of the opportunity it afforded for mental and personal improvement, the latter of which was considerably accelerated by the aid of a very tolerable dancing-master, who was engaged to teach at several of the most respectable houses in the neighbourhood, from whence he derived a genteel gratuity for his periodical visits.

On the beginning of the fourth season Stella was deprived of her companions: it was then judged requisite to give them what is called "the finishing polish," at one of the most fashionable seminaries in the metropolis. In consequence of this resolution, a separation became necessary between the young people: Stella was therefore parted from her beloved associates; and, what proved yet a greater misfortune, likewise deprived of the personal instructions and advice of the worthy Miss Sommers, whose services being no longer required, was recommended to fill a similar situation in the house of a genteel family near London.

These two events were heavily felt by the tender and affectionate Stella, now on the eve of her fourteenth year. Happily the loss of their company was, however, the principal circumstance she had to regret; for on the score of useful or ornamental knowledge, and every accomplishment that can embellish the female character, few could equal, none easily surpass her: indeed her progress had been so great in all the different branches which fell immediately under the cognizance of Miss Sommers, that her attainments appeared not much inferior to those possessed by her teacher, who frequently told her, with a good-humoured smile, that she doubted not but she would one day find a formidable rival in her young pupil, should subsequent occurrences render the adoption of a similar line of life necessary. As to the dancing-master's province, she had long encroached upon it: a light elastic form, and tuneful ear, gave her infinite advantages in this respect; and her easy movements in the mazy windings of the cotillion, the Scotch reel, or the lively country dance, conveyed ideas of elegance and airy grace personified to every spectator.

Alone ignorant, in a great degree, of the practical part of music which Miss Sommers was not qualified to teach, the few instructions accident had supplied her with, were of too limited a nature to be of much service, though by attention and application she hoped in time to remedy the deficiency that a want of proper assistance occasioned. Already she could play several little airs on a harp, the joint present of Maria and Emma, who supplied her with many of the most fashionable pieces of music, and a number of other memorials of their remembrance by every opportunity that occurred for the purpose. In warbling a “wood-note wild,” or singing with heart-felt pathos the sweet melodious strains of her native land, few could, however, excel her.

Left to the comparative solitude of her early home, she now resolved to devote an hour or two every morning to the acquirement of some further knowledge in this favourite and fascinating science: but though the vocal harmony of Metastasio was easily poured forth in all its native and energetic purity, that which depended on mechanical execution proved infinitely more difficult of attainment than, in the ardour of youthful expectation, she had previously flattered herself would be the case. Her solicitude for this additional accomplishment did not escape the observation of Mrs. Bertram, who had private reasons for encouraging every attempt of the kind.

CHAP. V.

“Serene, yet warm; humane, yet firm her mind;
“As little touch’d as any one’s with bad.”

THOMSON.

MRS. Bertram was the widow of an officer who possessed a small landed property amounting to something about two hundred pounds per annum. The pension that fell to her on his decease, together with this sum, of which he bequeathed her the life-rent, proved for some time the total amount of her annual resources. At length, by the death of a brother, she became mistress of the Hermitage, and having always been particularly partial to that spot, finally fixed her abode in the neighbourhood of Port Patrick. This little place brought her nearly thirty pounds more; so that, upon the whole, she was looked upon as an opulent person in that part of the kingdom. Her pension, as an officer’s widow, however, ceased with her life; and the jointure left by her husband descended, on that event, to the heir-at-law, with whom he had never been on any terms of friendly intercourse for many years previous to his demise.

Of her present annual income nearly thirty pounds was therefore all she could legally call her own; and of that small sum ten had long been appropriated to the use of a distant relative of her husband, from whom she had formerly received some material piece of service. The remainder, left from the rents of the Hermitage, she secretly determined to bequeath Stella, as some future provision against the chance of absolute indigence, though far removed from all pretensions to a competent independency.

Mrs. Bertram possessed no domestic tie, no family connexion in the wide-extended circle of creation, who could have any claim whatever on her finances; of course she conceived herself at liberty to dispose of her own immediate property according as the dictates of inclination might direct; and that inclination leading her to settle it upon the friendless child of her adoption, she obeyed its impulse, by appointing Stella the future heiress of the Hermitage.

This legacy, she well knew, was by no means adequate to the purpose of maintaining her in a state of inactive ease, and any material addition to the sum, from annual savings, happened to be out of the question, for she had several necessitous pensioners, whose yearly demands were nearly equal to the source that supplied them, and from whom the divine sensation of humanity forbade her to withdraw the support they had been accustomed to receive. Stella, she considered, was young, and might possibly still be so at the period of her decease: she was therefore better able to struggle with difficulties, or to surmount them by industrious exertions, than the aged or infirm offspring of want and misfortune.

The idea first suggested in jest by Miss Sommers, of “rivalling her teacher in the governess line,” repeatedly occurred to Mrs. Bertram, as a consideration that might hereafter be of importance, by enabling her *protégée* to provide for herself, when the friendly heart that now protected her from every evil was mouldering in the dust, and no longer capable of dictating that advice she had hitherto followed with so much honour to herself and satisfaction to her worthy benefactress.

To encourage every wish for an increase of knowledge, under this view for futurity, was therefore a maxim Mrs. Bertram studiously adhered to; and her ward being consequently allowed sufficient time for mental improvement, failed not to profit by the kind indulgence.

Mrs. Bertram’s character and conduct were such as to procure her much general esteem;

but the number of those admitted to her more particular friendship was very limited. She happened to be partial to retirement; and a mind well stored with many valuable acquirements drew an inexhaustible fund of amusement from its own resources, without being under the necessity of applying to foreign aid for that purpose.

Every situation in life, however, has its advantages and disadvantages. If Mrs. Bertram was happier in several respects than her neighbours, one great drawback to the comforts she otherwise enjoyed, brought her state pretty much on a level with those apparently less fortunate beings who surrounded her. A constitution, originally delicate, age and increasing infirmities had now rendered considerably worse. This excellent woman seldom indeed experienced the blessings of good health for any length of time through the year; a circumstance which had partly induced her to acquiesce in Mrs. Ross's wish to give Stella the benefit of Miss Sommers's instructions, conscious she was herself unequal to the task of constant application, and those mental exertions such an undertaking required, in her then weak and frequently indisposed condition.

As her *protégée* advanced in life, she found an ample recompence for her benevolence in the filial love, uniform attention, and promising abilities of our fair heroine, whose company was always a sure resource in the day of sickness, when unable to use any exertion for self-amusement from her own individual share of intellectual knowledge.

On all these occasions Stella appeared to find no gratification beyond the limits of her friend's apartment. She was her constant companion; she read to her; she sung, when the invalid was able to bear it; she was, in short, the cheerful administering angel to all her wants and wishes, and never seemed so happy as when her attempts to please or entertain proved thoroughly successful—which, in fact, was generally the case.

Thus situated, between the hours spent with her maternal protectress, and those dedicated to the purposes of education at the Grove, Stella had little leisure to form any extensive circle of acquaintance, even in the early part of her life; and afterwards, when the separation from her young friends took place, Mrs. Bertram's additional complaints left her less time than ever for so doing.

With one or two respectable families, however, she was rather on an intimate footing; and when Mrs. Bertram's health allowed of her absence, that lady insisted on her visiting them, by way of a little relaxation from the confinement of a sick chamber, or the intensity of the application usually bestowed upon scientific pursuits.

Stella, who was naturally of a cheerful disposition, constantly derived some new fund of amusement from these little temporary excursions, with which, on her return home, she exhilarated the spirits of her benefactress, who observed, with infinite delight, that, young as she was, the Hermitage seemed to possess a preference, in her opinion, over every other spot to which she resorted: it was, indeed, a little terrestrial paradise, and well deserving the partiality she evinced for it.

Nearly two years elapsed in this manner without producing any material occurrence. Our heroine kept up a regular correspondence with her late governess, and was not unfrequently gratified by an epistle, or a small memorial of remembrance, in the form of some elegant trifle, from her young friends in London, and occasionally invited to the Grove, when the return of summer brought back its temporary inhabitants from the metropolis.

The latter circumstance did not, however, greatly enlarge the sphere of her acquaintance; for she never was asked to the mansion of wealth and grandeur when any person of rank or consequence happened to be a visitor there.

Stella was now fast advancing to womanhood, and to be looked upon as a fit companion for the rich and haughty Miss Ross, though formerly tolerated in the light of a playfellow to her younger sisters, was not to be thought of: Mr. Ross, therefore, hinted to his lady (who still retained her partiality for our heroine), the great impropriety of familiarizing a little insignificant country girl with that style of society which the ill-judged nature of her education might hereafter induce her to regard with an equalizing eye, very unsuitable to her lowly situation in life, and perhaps even inspire the presumptuous idea of arrogating to her own imaginary merit every mark of condescension derived from the censurable suffrage of superiors to a creature almost of their own creation.

So argued the adventitious pride of birth—so spoke the man whose importance originated in the golden harvest he had reaped with the resistless hand of force, from the legal, but unfortunate possessors, in a far distant region, where the conviction of riches proves certain destruction to the hapless natives, and poverty is considered as the greatest crime their European plunderers can possibly be accused of.

Mr. Ross had no defalcation from the general system of fortune-making in the east, to reproach himself with: there he pursued the same plan so long, so successfully adopted by his predecessors, and had returned to the land of his forefathers a Nabob in every sense of the word.

CHAP. VI.

“’Tis such fools as you
“That make the world full of ill-favour’d children;
“’Tis not her glass, but you that flatter her;
“And out of you she sees herself more proper
“Than any of her lineaments can shew her.”

SHAKESPEARE.

WE have already hinted that Miss Ross was the distinguished favourite of her father. This circumstance, however, seemed productive of no real advantage to the young lady; on the contrary, the evil propensities of her mind (and of these she possessed a tolerable share), had been permitted to acquire additional strength, by the erroneous indulgence of a mistaken parent, in whose opinion she was all perfection.

While Stella was only considered in the light of a mere child, retained as a humble companion to the younger branches of the family, Miss Ross cared nothing about the matter: now, when mental cultivation and personal attractions conspired to render her pre-eminently conspicuous, envy, ever a predominant trait in that lady’s character, marked our heroine as an object of peculiar hatred, by secretly whispering that the lowly ward of the unassuming Mrs. Bertram might possibly become a formidable rival to the first-born offspring of a rich and powerful Nabob, even in the very articles which least admit of female competition—beauty, and its certain attendant, admiration. Indeed it could hardly escape the most superficial observation that the “little insignificant country girl” was already her superior in those adventitious advantages, on the possession of which this high-bred favourite of Fortune particularly valued herself.

Blind to his daughter’s defects, and indulgent to her follies, Mr. Ross soon imbibed all

her prejudices, and Stella gradually incurred his dislike in proportion to the increasing antipathy of her unprovoked and malicious enemy, who seized every opportunity of representing her most innocent actions in the worst point of view. Happily, the mistress of the house was not to be influenced so easily; she knew Margaret's natural disposition, and speedily penetrated the motives of her conduct: Stella therefore still maintained that place she had long held in her opinion, and usually passed the period allotted for her visit in a *tête-à-tête* with her respected patroness, whose declining state of health, about this time, frequently rendered an indiscriminate crowd too fatiguing and oppressive for her strength and spirits: of course, the seclusion she preferred on these occasions made the society of such a companion as Stella extremely acceptable.

When indisposition, therefore, confined her to the limits of her own apartment, our heroine adopted the same mode of conduct observed at the Hermitage, during Mrs. Bertram's illness:—she sung, she read, she assisted Mrs. Ross in any piece of fine needle-work which happened to be in hands at the time; and, in short, endeavoured to soften the painful or tedious moments of distress by every possible means best calculated for the purpose.

While thus occupied in the retirement of a sick room, that lady's affectionate daughter had little objection to her vicinity; on the contrary, it was looked upon rather with a favourable eye than otherwise. One ruling idea governed uniformly the actions of Margaret Ross:—that bloated idol *self* happened to be almost the sole object of her idolatry; and, to gratify its voracious demands, every other exterior circumstance was continually rendered subservient. The visits of the "little insignificant country girl" were therefore passed over in silence, because they relieved her from the necessity of personal attendance, where individual considerations made the semblance of filial duty sometimes a requisite measure, in order to furnish an opening for animadverting on the acute nature of feelings she never experienced, with all the studied grace of fashionable refinement, and the elegant sentimental cant of modern pretenders to sensibility.—Sensibility! hackneyed theme of declamation! now

“More honour'd in the breach, than the observance;”

for, alas! thy effusions are no longer

“Warm from the heart, and faithful to its fires.”

No! its ill-regulated ebullitions are merely sported for the purposes of deception—in order to teach the liquid eye to languish more irresistibly, to spread a voluptuous tenderness over the features, or to afford an opportunity for exhibiting the human form in the fascinating attitude of interesting despondency; while the mental system, which contains that spark of celestial essence that alone connects us with the Deity, is degraded by the disgusting trammels of affectation, and, occupied merely with exterior arrangements, melts not at the touch of real woe, nor secretly harbours that divinely sympathetic emotion which originally emanating from a Superior Being, seems to approximate its possessor to something beyond the common boundaries of mortality.

That air of haughty reserve and repelling coldness of manner that invariably marked the reception of Stella when Mrs. Ross was no longer confined to her apartment, could not be supposed to pass always unnoticed, even by the most superficial observer:—no wonder, then, if the unsuspecting ward of Mrs. Bertram was frequently astonished with a conduct so inexplicable: but conscious of no intentional offence to irritate the passions of another, no

presumptuous behaviour to require humiliation, the innocent object of unmerited dislike ascribed those appearances, which were sometimes sufficiently obvious, to the natural disposition of the father and daughter, whose self-command, she had often remarked, was not much calculated to give them a first-rate claim to pre-eminence in the ancient school of real philosophy.

Thus judging with candour, she became convinced the subject of her frequent surprise could only proceed from constitutional defects, which required more commiseration than resentment: but though such might be the case, she did not find herself at length disposed to encounter the capricious consequences which perpetually resulted from them, and therefore formed the resolution of limiting her visits to the apartment of Mrs. Ross, when that lady found her health in a situation which prevented her from mingling in the society that occasionally resorted to the Grove. In conformity with this determination, all invitations from that quarter were politely declined, unless when the mistress of the mansion happened to be thus unfortunately situated.

Mrs. Ross possessed much good sense, feeling, and humanity: she early remarked the visible superiority of Stella's character, and delighted to increase her store of knowledge by communicating what she herself had attained during her intercourse with the inhabitants of various and distant countries: but her discourse was chiefly directed to the necessity of self-government; the dreadful effects resulting from a want of which, she endeavoured to place in a striking point of view, by relating numerous facts calculated to exemplify her position, and all drawn from well-authenticated incidents in different quarters of the globe. Without a due attention to this single, but important article of conduct, she considered the most brilliant accomplishments of no avail, and liable, on every little start of passion, to be totally obscured, or, at best, only an aggravation of errors, which ought to have been previously eradicated from the mind, if they could not be restricted to proper bounds.

Mrs. Ross had frequent occasion to regret the mischiefs arising from an improper mode of education in the person of her eldest daughter, at the period of whose birth she herself happened to be a very young woman, and too volatile to reflect much upon subsequent consequences.

Various circumstances had indeed occurred to give her mind a more serious turn; but at too late a period to expel from that of Margaret those evil propensities which already had taken root in a soil particularly prepared for their reception, and composed of materials sufficiently obstinate to persevere in rejecting any attempted innovation on its customary system.

All that could therefore be done by the conscious mother was, to guard against similar mismanagement in the junior branches of an increasing family; and this she flattered herself with having partly accomplished, by procuring so able a preceptor as Miss Sommers, though finally obliged to acquiesce in depriving them of that advantage in obedience to her husband's determination of placing them under what was styled *more fashionable tuition*: a determination, however, by no means congenial to her own opinion, and to which she consented with much reluctance.

On the second summer after Maria and Emma left Rossgrove, a regiment of light horse came to be stationed in this part of the kingdom. Many of the officers were men of rank and fortune, whose appearance was prepossessing, and whose whole deportment bespoke their intimate acquaintance with the higher circles of life.

The military, generally considered as an agreeable addition to society in most situations, become doubly valuable in proportion to the circumscribed nature of the neighbourhood, and the superiority of their manners to the inhabitants of those small provincial towns, where a

temporary residence is often assigned them.

Miss Ross, who affected to look with sovereign contempt on the swains of her father's native country, conceived she was never in her proper element unless when surrounded by the gay and gallant heroes of the sword; while they, on their part, shewed no kind of reluctance to partake of the good things with which the Nabob's table was always profusely replenished, nor were backward to repay his favours in that coin apparently most acceptable to the young lady's palate—unceasing attention, and flattery unbounded!

Margaret Ross felt, indeed, a continual inclination for monopolizing the one, and possessed a stomach capable of digesting the other in any form or proportion whatever.

CHAP. VII.

There is a fate in the affairs of men,
Rough-hew them how we may.

ABOUT this period an acquaintance of hers, who had lately been married to one of the corps, but had not yet joined them, was expected, with her husband, to be quartered in the neighbourhood.

Though no particular degree of intimacy had hitherto existed between this lady and Miss Ross, the latter became extremely impatient for her arrival; an event which was no sooner announced, than, with all the ardour of the closest friendship, she hastened to pay her respects, and invite her to the Grove. Here the stranger was shortly requested to take up her sole residence; and her acquiescence with the most pressing entreaties was attended by consequences peculiarly agreeable to her new friend, as it proved the means of creating a much greater intercourse with the corps, some of which seldom failed to accompany Colonel Arabin, when he returned in the evening from head-quarters.

All was now gaiety and amusement under the roof of Mr. Ross. His lady, however, did not appear to gain strength; on the contrary, her complaints became daily more stationary; but she had the best advice that could be procured on the occasion, and every thing which money commanded within her reach. What then signified the total neglect of a fashionable daughter? or how could she be so unreasonable as to imagine people had leisure to bestow on invalids, even though a mother might happen to come under that denomination, when there was scarcely sufficient time for the various and more interesting avocations that hourly engrossed the mind of the thoughtless and unfeeling Margaret? Besides, was there not the humble, convenient Stella Bertram to take the drudgery and prosing uniformity of a sick-room confinement off her hands? Certainly! As the ward of Mrs. Bertram was known to be a particular favourite with Mrs. Ross, that lady's daughter could not reproach herself with any very material breach of the filial duties, while her place chanced to be supplied by a person so much more to the taste of her mother; especially as she had now so many increasing demands on her time and attention.

Human nature is seldom at a loss to find or create an excuse for pursuing the predominant bias of inclination:—Miss Ross flattered herself she had performed wonders in this line of discovery, and secretly applauded her adroit management on the occasion.

But the life of man is said to be full of vicissitudes, and that allotted to his female helpmate seems no less condemned to feel the curse of instability. Miss Ross imagined she had tolerably provided against the weathercock nature of sublunary enjoyments; but wiser and more experienced politicians than poor Margaret, have been suspected of reckoning without their host in cases of higher import.

The range of apartments particularly occupied by her mother was situated at a distance from those assigned for the reception of company, and opened, by a private door, upon a quarter of the shrubbery, which was little frequented, and from whence a winding path led to the habitation of Mrs. Bertram.

It was in tracing this direction that Stella had first attracted the notice of her young companions; it was likewise in this direction she usually reached the dressing-room of their mother, without being under the necessity of appearing to the rest of the family, or encountering the eyes of strangers. Miss Ross had taken an early opportunity of intimating her approbation of this entrance as the most convenient one for our heroine to adopt in her visits to the invalid; and

the manner in which the hint was conveyed, seemed paramount to an actual prohibition of any other mode of ingress. In fact, the matter in itself appeared so totally indifferent to Stella, that she uniformly adhered to the same path, without deviating, or wishing to deviate, from the letter of her instructions.

Nothing therefore was likely to be apprehended from a *mal-à-propos* discovery of our heroine's lovely face, or elegant figure, in these occasional peregrinations to the remote apartment of Mrs. Ross, whose dutiful daughter, absorbed in dissipation, and freed from the shackles of filial attention, though fettered by those of selfish gratification, continued to trace the same thoughtless circle of giddy amusement, till roused from the vortex of delusive pleasure, by a sensation of mortified pride and disappointment, she was at length secretly forced to acknowledge that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" below!

The presumptive heir of Rossgrove still remained abroad, for the double purpose of completing the grand tour, and effecting the restoration of his health, which had lately been somewhat on the decline.

The intelligence transmitted by his travelling companion was far from satisfactory on this subject; and there appeared much cause to apprehend that a constitution naturally delicate, the deficiencies of which had been still farther increased by a free style of living, would not long be able to maintain its struggle for terrestrial existence.

This information gave his mother's heart many a bitter pang, though it was received with the utmost *nonchalance* by her daughter, with whom the young man had never proved a favourite, and on whose demise, if prior to her own, she reflected with much Christian fortitude, so many advantages must eventually accrue, to compensate for the trifling loss of an only brother.

It had been customary to give an entertainment on the anniversary of his birthday; and Margaret, fearful, no doubt, lest another opportunity for celebrating it might not offer, prudently determined to make the most of that now in her power, the period of which rapidly approached.

During the time of her mother's indisposition, she acted, of course, as mistress of the mansion. This happened to be the case at present. No circumstance of profusion or splendour was therefore omitted that could possibly contribute to the vanity of the entertainers, or gratification of their guests. The military received a particular invitation, and cards were likewise sent to all the neighbouring gentry; the regimental band had orders to attend on the occasion, and a dance was to conclude the festivities of the day.

As Stella was enthusiastically fond of music, Mrs. Ross requested she might be with her at an early hour; for though her own health was not in a situation to let her mingle in the expected crowd, she wished her young friend to be gratified by the harmony of sounds Colonel Arabin had provided: besides, it was the commemoration of her son's birthday, and she felt a sensation of pleasure that absorbed every other feeling for the present; and this sensation she imagined, would receive a considerable addition by the participation of a mind so congenial with her own—a mind which had uniformly endeavoured to mitigate her mental and corporeal sufferings by every exertion of affection and gratitude, her limited means, but willing inclination, could devise for the purpose.

This invitation from Mrs. Ross did not, however, meet with the approbation of one whose claims upon the obedience of our heroine were always implicitly acknowledged and religiously complied with.

Mrs. Bertram conceived that lady could not be at any loss for society at such a juncture, as, no doubt, many of the visitors would request permission to pay their respects to her on the

celebration of this event: and therefore the presence of Stella not being materially requisite, it was judged better for her to remain at the Hermitage, than, by risking an accidental encounter with any of the gay, dissipated, young men, then at the mansion-house, subject herself to the chance of forming an acquaintance with those who might imagine her beauty and apparently unprotected condition gave a licence to presume on some very casual interview as an excuse for introducing themselves hereafter to her more immediate notice: a circumstance which would prove by no means favourable to the future views entertained for her establishment in life.

Mrs. Bertram knew that the greatest circumspection of conduct was required for the character of a teacher or governess, in any respectable family. She had frequently remarked, with secret anxiety, the aspiring temper of her *protégée*, and perceived, with astonishment, the easy, but unassuming air of equality visible in her manner, even when in company with people evidently her superiors in rank and fortune. From observations on this natural bias of her disposition, she wisely feared Stella, if permitted to mingle in such an assemblage as was now expected at the Grove, might allow her thoughts to soar beyond the limits of the lot that, in all human probability, awaited her; by which means peace and contentment would for ever be banished from her bosom, and every rational prospect of a comfortable establishment totally done away.

Such were the chief reasons which instigated Mrs. Bertram to withstand the imploring look of poor Stella—a look that spoke powerfully in favour of Mrs. Ross's request.

Another, but more secret motive, enforced the necessity of this disappointment.

The house-steward at the Grove, a gentleman by birth, sensible, prudent, and friendly, on whose representation she could perfectly rely, had mentioned a circumstance in confidence, which led Mrs. Bertram to put a decided negative on the projected visit.

It has already been noticed that when she happened to be in a tolerable state of health (for otherwise no consideration could prevail on her ward to quit the Hermitage) Stella was permitted to attend in the solitary chamber of Mrs. Ross, to which, by the particular directions of that lady's daughter, she almost uniformly entered by a private door. Hitherto this mode of ingress had been pursued agreeably to Margaret's wishes; that is to say, without producing any disclosure of the lovely girl's beautiful features or fascinating form. But

“There is a fate in the affairs of men,
“Rough-hew them how we may;”

and in those of women likewise, as Miss Ross speedily experienced.

In spite of all the caution religiously observed on these occasions, time and chance defeated the low-minded vigilance that thus built its illusive fabric of personal superiority on the basis of that obscurity in which charms, so much more pre-eminently striking, were endeavoured to be kept from public, or even casual investigation.

Some of the officers had one evening caught a transient view of Stella, as she crossed the gallery for a book Mrs. Ross wanted from the library. Of this incident she herself still remained ignorant; but on them it made a deep and lasting impression.

It happened that, Mrs. Ross excepted, none of the family knew of her being then in the house: the domestics, therefore, when interrogated on the subject of her name and usual place of residence, could afford the curious enquirers no sort of satisfaction relative to the fair object of their solicitude. No pains, however, were spared for that purpose; and success would probably have crowned their labours, had not a return of Mrs. Bertram's complaints at this critical

juncture, confined her affectionate companion to the limits of a sick room at the Hermitage.

Some time now elapsed ere she had it in her power to revisit the Grove: but, at length, Mrs. Bertram's illness took a favourable turn, and she insisted on her *protégée* obeying the summons of Mrs. Ross, who had repeatedly requested to see her.

On her arrival, she was informed that two ladies from the neighbourhood had called in, and were then with the mistress of the mansion.

Unwilling to intrude under such a circumstance, she left the house, and walked to a retired alcove in a remote part of the shrubbery, where seating herself, her attention was speedily occupied by a volume of Thomson's Seasons, which she happened to put in her workbag on leaving the Hermitage.

About half an hour had elapsed in this manner when the sound of voices at no great distance reached her lonely retreat: loud bursts of laughter announced the gay and happy votaries of pleasure were approaching. She listened for a moment, and then following the direction of her ear, turned to a small window, in order to discover if she was likely to be disturbed by their nearer vicinity.

From this apprehension, however, she was soon relieved. Miss Ross, with a large party, amongst which appeared several of the military gentlemen, was crossing a walk that wound near the alcove, and presently turned into another, leading to the green-house. Stella felt rejoiced at the certainty of escaping their notice, and immediately turning from the window, was preparing to resume her former studies, when, glancing a look towards the door, the book dropped from her hand, on perceiving a very handsome man, in the military uniform, with folded arms and an air of pensive dejection, silently regarding her, as he leaned against a tree directly opposite where she had placed herself.

Startled and disconcerted at a circumstance so totally unexpected, she suddenly rose, and as suddenly reseated herself, uncertain whether to remain, or, by quitting the alcove, endeavour to make the best of her way to the house; which could not, however, be accomplished without passing almost close to her unwelcome neighbour.

From this state of irresolution she was quickly released by a second repetition of similar sounds to those which had recently alarmed her. The same party again appeared. Her silent companion abruptly started from his position, sighed profoundly, and darting into the thickest part of the adjoining wilderness, instantly disappeared from her view.

Stella instinctively followed with her eyes the direction he had taken. The circumstances of this strange incident seemed to have struck her as something singular, and the look and elegant figure of the unknown were still before the eyes of her imagination, when, on rising to retire from the alcove, she once more discovered Miss Ross and her guests strolling through the western plantation. The voice of mirth and gaiety still broke at intervals on the calm repose of a most beautiful evening. Our heroine paused to observe their motions, and eagerly sought for the form of the stranger almost the happy group; but her endeavours were fruitless—he appeared not in the number, and the mental vision alone presented his resemblance. Having by this time tolerably composed her late agitated spirits, she now bent her steps to the mansion, in expectation Mrs. Ross's visitors would be departed; and found her conjectures in that respect right.

At a late hour she returned to the Hermitage, without obtaining any further knowledge of the elegant stranger, whose form and pensive air still floated on the surface of her memory, with a sensation hitherto unknown to her gentle bosom.

The house-steward, Mr. Benson, accidentally overheard the two officers who saw her

cross the gallery, conversing on the subject; and their subsequent enquiries creating more than a suspicion of their ultimate tendency, he thought it necessary to acquaint Mrs. Bertram with the nature of his sentiments on the occasion. The adventure of the alcove we have related from our own individual knowledge of its authenticity: Stella, either from inadvertency or forgetfulness, or some other cause, had neglected to mention the affair; which seemed surprising on reflection, for every little secret had, till this period, been shared with her kind and maternal benefactress.

Mr. Benson's intelligence was gratefully received by his prudent auditor. It happened to be given a very short time before the approaching birthday, and finally determined her intentions respecting her *protégée*'s motions.

In addition to the above information, she likewise learned that one of the gentlemen who had expressed so much solicitude relative to Stella, was unfortunately a particular favourite with Miss Ross; and even reported to be at this very juncture on the footing of a successful and acknowledged admirer of that young lady, who was asserted to prove too tenacious of her claims on his heart to tolerate any "rival near the throne;" far less the humble Stella, for whom she had long evinced the most decided aversion.

Of her temper and disposition Mr. Benson was sufficiently assured to think the foregoing circumstances of some consequence to the inhabitants of the Hermitage, for whom he entertained the highest sentiments of regard and veneration.

He knew it was totally impossible to say what length the ebullitions of disappointment and revenge might carry the irritated mind of Margaret, if any casual incident occurred to rouse her ungovernable passions: he therefore advised, as a preventative to apprehended evils, that Stella should not even trust to the seclusion of Mrs. Ross's apartment, but, under some plausible excuse, refrain entirely from visiting at the Grove during the expected festivity, lest, in the hurry and confusion of so complicated a scene, some unforeseen occurrence might possibly favour the wishes of the gentlemen, and create much future mischief.

Mrs. Bertram, always the avowed friend of propriety, coincided in the wisdom of this opinion; and Stella acquiesced in the decision, without enquiring into the particular motives from whence it originated, or uttering a single complaint, by which the intrinsic value of the sacrifice could be ascertained.

CHAP. VIII.

“Graceful with hills, and dales, and leafy woods.”

THOMSON.

THE situation of the Hermitage was beautifully romantic: it stood in the centre of an extensive garden, surrounded by a fence of evergreens, thickly interwoven with a great profusion of sweetbrier and honeysuckle. Nearly half the circumference was defended from the bleak north-easterly winds by a semicircular range of picturesque and lofty rocks, partly covered with verdure, and partly with a venerable, though not numerous quantity of trees; while a foaming cascade, rushing from one of the highest points of elevation, dashed over every intervening impediment, and presented a prospect truly grand and magnificently impressive, till, reaching the ground, it afterwards glided gently along in a meandering stream, that encompassed one side of the premises, and finally disappeared in the woods of Rossgrove.

If this charming little spot failed in any particular feature of rural fascination, the deficiency would have originated in a want of timber, had not part of the Nabob's extensive plantations entirely done away the objection, by approximating so closely to the fragrant fence, as to convey the idea of acknowledging but one and the same wealthy master. This circumstance, adding equally to the beauty and comfort of the situation, was peculiarly desirable in a quarter of the country not superabundantly stored with those noble productions of the earth, and which was exposed, during the dreary months of winter, to all the changeable and chilling blasts of an inclement sky.

The predecessors of Mr. Ross, as we have already observed, had indeed paid such uncommon attention to this useful and ornamental object, that even the cynical Doctor Johnson himself might, here at least, have discovered woods and groves worthy of his most fastidious and reluctant approbation.

In a quarter of the stupendous rock, where an intervening projection excluded the ruder traits of the scene, and only admitted a confined view of the precipitous torrent dashing down in a thousand varied forms, an excavation had been made by the hand of Nature, which that of Art afterwards modelled into a delightful little retirement, well adapted for solitary meditation: it seemed indeed to have been the temporary habitation of some religious recluse during the darker ages of the world, when the gloomy reign of superstition held its despotic sway over the reasoning faculties of the mind, and taught mankind to believe that to render themselves voluntarily unhappy was the most acceptable service they could do a good and beneficent Being, whose every action breathes peace and inexhaustible tenderness to the whole human race.

This idea of the place appeared more probable from the particular nature of its situation: for at no great distance stood some fine old ruins, once the abode of a pious and holy community; who, in the profound retirement of such a retreat, seemed to have bid an eternal adieu to all intercourse with the busy haunts of men, and, undisturbed by external objects, here held the even tenor of their way,

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

The grotto, as it was called, looked down upon this fast decaying edifice, which formed a picturesque termination to a view cut through a part of the plantations fronting the east side of

Rossgrove. Stella had adorned it with some elegant shell-work and shining spars: a small old-fashioned press filled a nich in the wall, the lower division of which contained a judicious arrangement of these beautiful articles, and on the upper shelves were a few well-chosen books: an oaken table, two or three chairs, and a kind of sofa, nearly composed the remainder of the furniture: the latter stood in a recess, round which were placed several flowering shrubs in large pots: exactly in the front was a curiously arched casement, which projected considerably beyond the recess, and extending over the stream below, in a bolder direction than the body of the grotto, appeared to hang suspended in the air.

The ascent was by several steps rudely cut in the rock, and the entrance, top, and sides were romantically shaded by some venerable-looking trees, which, from time immemorial, had forced their roots through the crevices of the stone, and continued to “rear their old fantastic form on high,” in spite of the northern wintry blast that frequently roared through their bending branches, and shook their elevated trunks almost to final destruction. This aerial situation presented a commanding view of the Grove, with its proud turrets rising in the midst of the gay and now verdant foliage which surrounded it.

The little chamber was the favourite retreat of our heroine: she had been permitted by her kind benefactress to consider it as her own; and when otherwise unoccupied, an hour or two was usually here devoted to drawing, reading, or any particular study that required uninterrupted attention.

Mrs. Bertram’s house, though not of the largest dimensions, was extremely commodious and well laid out. The furniture was plain, but neat; and every article conveyed an idea of elegant simplicity, which bespoke the inhabitants possessed of superior minds, where judgment and taste alike united to produce the useful and ornamental: the latter, however, owed its existence to no extraneous aid. Of the chief part of it Stella happened to be the architect: she adorned the walls with the most beautiful drawings; the sofa, the chairs, were principally worked by her; and the graceful, airy festoons which hung above the paintings, vied with nature in brightness of colours and delicacy of design. In short, all was strikingly pleasing, and in a style very different from the common run of the neighbourhood, without appearing to deviate, in the smallest degree, from the station in life which their limited finances had assigned them to fill.

The garden was well stored with fruit-trees, vegetables, plants, and flowers of various kinds. These, considering their northern situation, were thriving and productive; for which they were greatly indebted to the shelter afforded by the Nabob’s plantations, and the high range of towering rocks that preserved them, in some degree, from the violence of the storm on that side, from whence it occasionally raged with most intemperate fury. The shrubbery, thro’ which wound a path that led to the grotto, was kept in excellent order, and never permitted to exclude a view of the old ruin, which formed a very picturesque prospect from the upper story of the dwelling. While the wide extended ocean presented one still more interesting and sublime, though further removed from the premises.

At one of the windows from whence the latter object happened to be most perceptible, Stella often watched, with trembling anxiety, the wave-tossed bark, struggling with the warring elements, whose raging spirit seemed every instant fraught with tremendous destruction, and ready to engulf the exhausted, terrified wretches, who, alternately soaring aloft on the high-towering billow, or immersed in the world of waters below, as they rushed, with irresistible speed, from their aerial elevation, saw nothing short of death, in its most horrid form, in every quick, approaching movement of the creaking and dismasted vessel.

Sighs, profound, sympathetic, and sad, burst from the agitated bosom of our heroine, as

her eyes dwelt on the melancholy and heart-rending source of her solicitude; while the total impossibility of administering the smallest aid to the care-worn sufferers, created a sensation of awful and overwhelming resignation, too indefinable for description, too oppressive and terrific to evaporate in words.

Sickening at the too certain conclusion of the dreadful scene, Stella, on all such occasions, felt the inefficacy of human wisdom to ensure the continuance of rational content; else the original lot assigned us by Providence would (in her opinion) have prevented many evils, could we have remained satisfied with our portion of worldly goods, which few people, in one shape or other, are totally deprived of. Grasping at more than is allotted us, we frequently lose the little that might have sufficed for all our wants; and life itself is but too often sacrificed to an immoderate thirst after a delusive and most unconquerable inclination for unceasing accumulation.

When restored tranquillity smoothed the troubled surface of the deep, and the white-sailed vessel, whose bright painted sides gaily glittered in the refulgent beams of a setting sun, glided along her liquid course, unmolested by the furies of the storm, our heroine has figured a thousand charms within the floating fabric; and almost wished she had been one of the happy number who were thus borne, insensibly, to other climates and more propitious skies— expectation seated at the helm, and hope beating high in every breast.

Formed by circumstances, and led astray by every fallacious appearance, our judgments are hasty, our conclusions often rash. The apparently ill-starred mariner, even while struggling with the fiercest blast of the tempest, is equally the care of Providence with those who skim over the bosom of the calmer ocean, and reach their destined port in safety. From the hour of human trial none are, however, exempted: all mankind have their destined portion of evil, and he who feels it not at present, ought to look forward to futurity with fear and trembling.

On the evening of that day set apart for commemorating the birth of a male heir to the domains of Rossgrove, Stella happened to be engaged in one of the foregoing contemplations. The sea proved unusually smooth, the air serene, and a vessel, slowly moving at a distance, seemed to enjoy the voluptuous repose that reigned over every object, as the sunny rays gilded the milk-white canvas with gleams of radiance, or trembling on the waters below, displayed the reflected forms of the bark in innumerable fantastic shapes.

Stella thought the sailors must be happy, for every thing seemed to wear a smiling aspect around them; while a sigh followed the conviction that she herself was at that very moment the child of disappointment and solitude.

A cheerful and well-regulated mind has many internal resources against the casual incidents of life. Our heroine was not of a disposition to renounce one possible good, because another happened to be placed beyond her reach: she shook off the pensive dejection that pervaded her thoughts, and endeavoured to turn them on more enlivening reflections.

This mental effort did not pass unrewarded. Deprived of the musical feast she had secretly promised herself, an unexpected succedaneum offered to compensate, in some measure, for the sacrifice filial duty imperiously exacted. She descended the staircase, and bent her steps to the grotto, in order to amuse herself with giving the finishing strokes to a landscape which had been left but half completed in the morning.

CHAP. IX.

“Where shou’d this music be? i’ th’ air, or earth?
“It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon
“Some God o’ th’ island!”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE sunbeams still continued to play upon the bosom of the ocean, and lengthened the shadows of every surrounding object, as our heroine, unconscious of the pleasure that awaited her, advanced to her favourite retreat.

While slowly winding along the path that led to the end of her walk, strains, soft and harmonious, seemed to be wasted on the evening breeze, which at this period blew directly from the Grove. She stopped to listen, but the sound had ceased. In an instant the well-known grand and solemn march of the forty-second regiment broke, at intervals, upon the stillness of the preceding pause, and absorbed every faculty in immoveable attention. It happened to be a favourite piece of music with Stella, and though much of its beauty was unavoidably lost, from the nature of her situation, yet, in spite of this circumstance, it had never been heard to such advantage before.

Every terrestrial enjoyment, however, has its limited period; and what was derived from the present, speedily terminated. For some time its renewal was eagerly, but unsuccessfully expected. At length she proceeded to an angle of the rocky barrier: again it met her in the seraphic strains of “Lochaber,” and again died away amid the murmurs of the gurgling stream that rushed over some obstructing impediments to its progress, beneath a rustic wooden bridge, on the railing of which she now leaned, solicitous to catch the sweet notes so recently borne on the passing breeze, and which still continued to vibrate on her delighted ear, long after the invisible musician had ceased playing.

Rightly judging that the more aerial situation of the grotto would enable her to hear the melody, if repeated, to greater advantage, she started from her reverie, hastened forward, and ascending the steps with the light and graceful motion of a sylph, took her station at the door, totally unmindful of the unfinished landscape, or any other consideration by which her thoughts had lately been occupied.

She was not mistaken in this idea. A few minutes had scarcely elapsed before her expectations were fully gratified; and she now plainly discovered (what indeed had been previously suspected) that it was the military band at the Grove by which her enraptured senses were thus fascinated.

The shades of twilight gradually spread their grey mantle over the face of nature, unnoticed by the delighted Stella; she marked not their progress, nor heeded the flight of time: all but the present enjoyment seemed to have vanished from remembrance. With some of the music she was well acquainted, and the vocal melody of her harmonious voice, almost unconscious of the exertion accompanied, at intervals, the floating notes, which appeared to skim over the gently waving top of the lower plantations, and stealing up the sides of the rock, imperceptibly died away, or swelled into louder cadence, according to the pleasure of the performers.

During a pause, after warbling one of her native airs with peculiar pathos, a rustling kind of sound suddenly attracted her notice. She stepped from the threshold to discover the cause, but

perceived no living object near her: even the feathered songsters of the woods had retired for the night, except two thrushes, who occasionally answered each other from the neighbouring plantations. The lateness of the hour now, for the first time, struck her, and a sensation, bordering on alarm, throbbed at her heart, which was not lessened by a circumstance that quickly followed: for the low-whispered accents of a human voice conveyed, like the music, on the gentle breeze, seemed to proceed from some quarter evidently at not great distance, but yet not sufficiently near to distinguish their particular import: once, however, her own name, or something similar, struck upon her ear. The impulse of the moment carried her instantly back to the grotto, where, scarcely daring to breathe, she stood agitated and irresolute. At length she softly stole a second time to the threshold, and half concealing herself behind the door, once more endeavoured to ascertain what was, or was not to be apprehended.

While listening in this attentive position, an idea suddenly occurred, which did not appear improbable:—possibly Mrs. Bertram had sent the maid in quest of her. The conjecture was more that feasible: she darted from her hiding-place, flew down the steps, and hastened to obey the imaginary summons with uncommon speed.

Still an impression, verging on something like fear, led her frequently to regard the vicinity with a scrutinizing and anxious eye; but, except the bright streams of light that occasionally gleamed through the trees from the windows of the Nabob's festive mansion, and now and then afforded transient glimpses of the gay and happy groups, rapidly moving to and fro in the mazy windings of the dance, nothing appeared to create any fresh alarm: her apprehensions, therefore, began to subside in the foregoing supposition, when, all at once, they were again renewed by perceiving an unusual emotion amongst some of the thickest parts of the bushes. Stella involuntarily recoiled, and abruptly stopped in the midst of her progress: but presently recollecting herself—

“It is but one of the sheep which has strayed from its companions,” said she: “at any rate, I shall soon be at home.”

Stella did not “whistle” at this juncture “for want of thought:” she certainly attempted to sing, however, though from a very different motive; for, in order to drown too much of that troublesome intruder, the beautiful plaintive air of Roslin Castle was hummed in a low key, as she hurried on with more speed than attention, to her steps, till their progress was unexpectedly impeded by a broken branch which caught her gown on one side of the road; and fear, aided by the increasing shades of night, giving it a mortal shape, she rushed forward, to disengage herself from the grasp of an imaginary being, till, stumbling over a stone that lay in her way, the agitated form of our heroine fell, extended and helpless, on the earth. Her senses fled for an instant, but were quickly recalled by an exclamation uttered in a masculine voice, which burst from some person who rushed from the wooden bridge. Their restoration, however, was but transitory: additional terror and dismay took possession of every faculty, and a second temporary suspension of the mental powers succeeded.

On her recovery, she found herself supported in the arms of a stranger; but concluding the emotion under which she laboured had possibly deceived her, she turned her head in order to ascertain her real situation, and immediately her assistant exclaimed, in accents of surprise and pleasure—“Our fair *incognita*, by Jove!”

Stella again raised her eyes, and perceived another person, whose face, however, was too much in the shade to be easily discerned. He seemed deeply immersed in thought, and returned not any answer to the observation of his companion, but stood rooted to the spot with folded arms, intently gazing on the trembling and agitated Stella.

The moment she was able to move, her acknowledgements were returned, in a low and tremulous voice, for the recent aid afforded her, and the profuse offers of further assistance, which were rapidly uttered by the only one of the strangers who seemed to have the full use of his tongue. The continuation of his services, however, was civilly declined; and she positively refused his ready-tendered arm, declaring herself sufficiently recovered to conclude what remained of her short walk alone.

The latter part of Stella's reply certainly conveyed what might be called rather a broad hint; but though intended to indicate her wish for their absence, it did not suit the views of her new acquaintance to understand it in that light; and, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, he who had been the most active to assist her continued at her side, while his friend, in silence, followed slowly behind, apparently absorbed in a reverie of some interesting, but melancholy meditation.

Though vexed and disconcerted at finding herself thus subjected to the company of strangers at such an hour and place, and uncertain in what light their unexpected appearance might be viewed by Mrs. Bertram, our heroine was under the necessity of submitting to an evil from which she found it impossible to escape. This circumstance excepted, no other cause of complaint remained; for she had been treated with the utmost respect, and the most polite attention, by one of her assiduous companions; while the other appeared to take no concern whatever in any thing that was passing before him. Ashamed, therefore, to evince any further reluctance to the company of a person who expressed so much anxiety on her account, yet unwilling to sanction a perseverance which she could not now help regarding as something bordering on a degree of officious intrusion, Stella walked silently along, merely returning short monosyllables to those parts of his discourse from whence it was impossible to withhold some sort of reply; thus endeavouring to mark, by the laconic nature of her answers, the disapprobation with which she listened to him, and her impatience to conclude an interview already too much prolonged, and commenced under circumstances too disagreeable to be remembered with any great degree of pleasure.

The overhanging rocks under which their path hitherto lay, had, during their course in that direction, prevented them from deriving much benefit from the bright beams of a clear, beautiful moon, which soared in calm, majestic splendour over the frowning mass that enclosed that quarter of the garden. On reaching a more open situation, where the rocks had no longer power to produce this effect, she speedily discovered the military uniform, and the nodding plume that adorned the shining helmet of her unwelcome companion. On turning her head, to glance a look of similar enquiry over the figure of their silent attendant, her eyes met his so earnestly fixed upon her face, that she instantly withdrew them in much confusion, but not before the motive of the hasty survey was accomplished, for he too wore the same garb.

Another discovery, however, and one still more important, originated from this gratification of her curiosity; for she immediately recognised in the mute gentleman's features the very identical person who had formerly occasioned her no small alarm and perturbation at the door of the alcove in the shrubbery.

More agitated than she had ever felt herself on any former occurrence, an unaccountable tremor pervaded her whole frame, and her heart throbbed with such violence, that, scarcely able to support herself, she moved on with increasing difficulty, and almost wished for another offer of the assisting arm, which had been so frequently rejected with the most determined obstinacy.

The foregoing little incident, trifling as it certainly appears, nevertheless produced an evident effect on the hitherto unsocial stranger. He presently stepped forward, and, as if the eyes of Stella had broke the spell by which the powers of language had been suspended, now joined in

the conversation, if indeed what passed could come under that denomination, for the faculty of speech seemed almost exclusively confined to his more voluble companion, who appeared not in the least disconcerted by the silent proofs of inattention with which his female auditor repeatedly honoured him.

Stella now soon understood that her conductors were two of the guests assembled at Rossgrove; and the little she had as yet seen of the world led her to suppose they were persons of some consequence.

At the door of the Hermitage she repeated her acknowledgments, and bidding them adieu in a manner that precluded all further intrusion, abruptly entered.

CHAP. X.

“There’s nothing ill can dwell in such a temple:
“If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
“Good things will strive to dwell with’t.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE escort of Stella were indeed what they had represented themselves—military men, and the visitors at the Grove: they likewise happened to be two of the number who had formerly seen her; but of this latter circumstance she yet remained ignorant.

Many had proved the enquiries set on foot respecting our heroine from the period of her first discovery in the gallery: even Colonel Arabin, though residing under the roof she was supposed to inhabit, had never chanced to meet with the object of their pursuit; and his lady remained either in the same predicament, or pretended to be totally unacquainted with her existence.

Defeated in their attempts for information at the juncture when most ardent for its attainment, and afterwards entirely occupied by a variety of intervening engagements, her image seemed gradually obliterated from the memory of two of the gentlemen, while on that of the third it made an impression, deep, lasting, and indelible. Yet, strange as it must appear, he who was really the most interested person on the occasion, apparently evinced the greatest indifference, and observed the most stoical silence on every introduction of the topic with his brother officers.

The second view of Stella, which he accidentally obtained in the shrubbery when strolling through it with Miss Ross and her party, completed the destruction of his peace, without producing any defalcation in those sentiments of honour and moral integrity, on the possession of which he had hitherto justly valued himself.

The foregoing incident will partly be explained when it is added, that the secret lover of Stella was already the avowed admirer and affianced husband of Margaret Ross, and the identical person alluded to by Mr. Benson, the house-steward, in his communication to Mrs. Bertram.

Major St. Vincent, however, was a man of honour in the strictest sense of the word, and where that unfortunately interfered with the bias of inclination, the latter was uniformly sacrificed to the former; not, perhaps, without some internal struggle, but generally free from every indication of apparent hesitation.

In the present instance, he cautiously adhered to the same conscientious line of conduct; and the motives which dictated this mode of proceeding will, we trust, sufficiently recommend him to the favour of our readers when hereafter acquainted with them.

But it may be asked, could a man of real honour give his hand to one woman, while his heart was in the possession of another? In most cases of a similar description this question may be easily answered: in the present one, general conclusions, drawn from received opinions, will probably prove erroneous.

The evening of the birthday happened to be uncommonly warm and oppressive; a circumstance which the numerous assemblage of guests contributed considerably to increase. Major St. Vincent found it particularly fatiguing, and seized the first favourable opportunity of quitting the room, in order to procure a little fresh air in the shrubbery. In crossing the vestibule,

he was joined by Captain Montague, and, arm in arm, they strolled out together, impelled by the same motive.

Refreshed and invigorated by the gentle and healthy breeze that gave a tremulous movement to the surrounding foliage, they continued to saunter along for some time, inattentive to the path they followed, and solely occupied by the discussion of a professional subject, which had given rise to a variety of different opinions before the company separated in the eating room. At length their progress was suddenly arrested by the rivulet, which, in the direction they pursued, appeared too broad to pass without the aid of other assistance than now offered for that purpose.

Beyond this barrier to their steps the prospect was invitingly lovely. They had formerly passed the Hermitage once or twice by a different road, but the weather proved unfavourable for an advantageous view of its romantic situation, and no subsequent circumstance had occurred to recall it to their memory amidst the hurry of regimental arrangements, and the succeeding engagements that necessarily occupied their time for a considerable period after their arrival in Galloway.

With the owner of this little secluded spot they were likewise unacquainted; for Miss Ross's manœuvres were too successfully conducted to admit of introducing either Mrs. Bertram or her beautiful *protégée* to their knowledge. No suspicion, therefore, arose that the object of so much curiosity happened to be the inhabitant of the very place they were now contemplating with such infinite pleasure, every additional view of which increased the wish for a more minute investigation. The intervening brook merely served as a stimulus to more active exertion:—they followed up the stream; in order to discover a place to cross it, and at length reached the vicinity of the rude steps that led to the grotto. Here, while they paused on the next course to be adopted for the acceleration of their design, the melodious warblings of a female voice, evidently in unison with the military band at the Grove, all at once rivetted them to the spot. They listened with rapturous astonishment, and scarcely ventured to breathe or move, lest the celestial notes, proving the illusion of fancy, should cease to charm their fascinated senses. The seraphic strains seemed to vibrate on their ears from above; and Major St. Vincent first broke the silence, by observing they certainly proceeded from an angel.

“Or rather some charming woman in the form of one,” replied his friend. “But hark! again it floats on the air: and see!” continued he, looking upwards to where the nymph-like form of the lovely songstress was stationed.

“Ah! yes, by heavens, a celestial being!” exclaimed the transported St. Vincent, totally thrown off his guard as he followed the direction of his companion's eyes: “yes, an angel, in faith!”

“Hang celestial beings!” cried Montague, in a gay tone of voice; “give me the human form divine in female shape—the supernatural is not to my taste:—

“I take the body, you the mind,
“Which has the better bargain?”

Follow me, and we'll endeavour to ascertain this point immediately.”

So saying, with a sudden spring he bounded over a part of the fence which happened to be in a less thriving condition in this quarter of the garden; and St. Vincent, equally agile, speedily imitating his example, they soon reached the wooden bridge, where, leaning on the rustic paling, they paused again, to reconnoitre the environs, and reconsider their future plans of

operation.

From this position, a full view of the grotto was easily obtained, and a few minutes had scarcely elapsed before another song from that quarter fixed their eager eyes upon it in attentive silence.

To ascertain whether or not this melody was produced by any person residing in the vicinity, now became an object of some importance.

That the vocal performer was a being of a superior order to the common run of the lower class of the community, admitted not of a doubt; and as they were given to understand that most of the genteeller families in the neighbourhood had accepted the Nabob's invitation to the Grove, they could not comprehend how she who appeared so well qualified to make one in such an assemblage, had not joined the festive group on this memorable occasion. If an inhabitant of the small house they had recently admired, she was not only a neighbour, but the nearest one too, to the Grove. This observation increased their surprise at her absence, which, it was plain, could neither have been caused by her own indisposition, nor that of any near relative; for in that case her mind would have experienced sensations very different from those by which it was now evidently occupied.

Montague was positive there must be some mystery in the business: he protested he could not sleep till he knew whether she had descended from the clouds, rose from the sea, like another Venus, or been merely introduced into the world in a similar manner with themselves. To authenticate this point, and procure a better view of the imaginary divinity, they ascended the eminence in a different and more difficult direction; and it was in the course of their progress that the subject of their pursuit was alarmed by the rustling amongst the bushes, accompanied by the pronunciation of her name, which Captain Montague suddenly recollected was that by which the owner of the Hermitage had once been mentioned to him.

Having tolerably well ascertained the path she must unavoidably pursue in her descent, and unwilling to increase an alarm which they perceived was already sufficiently distressing, they renounced their recent intention of abruptly intruding on her retirement, for which no decent apology could easily be offered, and softly resumed their station on the bridge, along which she must evidently pass at all events.

One consideration, however, chiefly inclined them to adopt this measure:—it was not probable she would be alone in the grotto at so late hour; and one of the gentlemen, it has formerly been hinted, had particular reasons for cautiously avoiding every degree of *eclat* on the occasion.

In the event of our heroine appearing with a companion, it was much easier to escape observation amidst the adjoining thickets, than being under the same roof with her.

The result of this determination has already been shewn, as likewise the subsequent proceedings that sprung from it.

CHAP. XI.

“My life is yours, nor wish I to preserve it,
But to serve you.”

CONGREVE.

MAJOR St. Vincent was the second son of a genteel, and, in some of its branches, noble family, in the south of England, whose veins were more copiously supplied with the honourable stream of ancestry, than their coffers filled with the golden gifts of Fortune. The former had been preserved pure and unsullied through the lapse of many generations, while the latter had suffered much diminution—from a variety of unfortunate circumstances; the chief part of which is foreign to the subject of our history, and therefore unnecessary to dwell upon at present.

But though thus unprovided with adequate means for supporting the pride of birth in all its pristine lustre, splendid expectations, of considerable magnitude, were not wanting to gild the prospect of futurity with brighter colours. The Major's father was nephew to Lord Fitzhenry; and in the event of the latter dying a bachelor, was next heir to the title and estate.

To this period they looked forward as that which was to replace them in their proper rank in life; and, in the meanwhile, they expressed no repugnance to increase their existing consequence, by the union of the young soldier with a woman of respectable connexions, but still larger fortune.

The intended bride was no other than the favourite and first-born offspring of Mr. Ross. At one of the fashionable watering places which that lady had visited in the course of the preceding year, she first commenced an acquaintance with Major St. Vincent, who happened then to be quartered in the neighbourhood.

His tall, elegant, martial-looking figure, dignified air, and highly-polished manners, united to a set of features possessing every trait of masculine beauty and expressive intelligence, soon attracted her attention, and recommended him to particular notice long before the charms of a well-cultivated understanding made any impression on her volatile and indiscriminating mind; though the superior advantages he enjoyed in this enviable respect rendered his company, even at so early a period of life, peculiarly acceptable to the judicious and well-informed few with whom he always endeavoured to associate.

To be regarded as an object worthy of attention by the handsome, the all-accomplished St. Vincent, was considered as a certain passport to celebrity by the fortunate female destined to receive such a mark of distinction: but though the wish to secure it proved nearly universal, the means were rather difficult of attainment.

St. Vincent, though young, happened to be of a more serious thinking turn of mind than is usually met with at his age; yet his temper was ardent, and his passions strong. A certain air of reserve (perfectly consistent, however, with good-breeding) gave to his appearance an idea of mental superiority, that occasionally repressed presumptuous vanity, and kept intrusive familiarity at a distance. The superficial coxcomb and trifling coquette were, of course, seldom at ease in his presence; though the former often affected to be thought on an intimate footing with him, and the latter sedulously sought to obtain some exclusive proof of his attention.

Miss Ross immediately placed Major, then Captain St. Vincent, amongst the number of her particular favourites; and, agreeably to her usual mode of proceeding, determined to be “*aut Cæsar, aut nullus,*” in his opinion. Louis the XIVth of France possessed not a greater rage for

universal dominion than the daughter of the Scottish Nabob; which urged her to set every engine at work to establish her projected empire. St. Vincent's mother and sister, then at the same watering place, soon perceived a partiality which Margaret took little pains to conceal. Her fortune entitled her to rank with the highest circles in genteel life; but report, with its hundred tongues, had more than doubled its actual amount: had it been ten times as much, however, it would not have appeared too great for him to whom these two ladies secretly destined it. They seized every possible opportunity of paying her the most flattering attention, and, by the intimacy that was speedily formed between them, furnished innumerable openings for facilitating an union apparently productive of so many advantages to a beloved son and brother.

Unfortunately, these efforts in his favour did not produce an adequate effect on his side of the question. St. Vincent was uniformly well-bred, and politely attentive to the daily guest and companion of his mother and sister: his heart, however, took no part in the family scheme for his advantage; it remained uninterested by the lady's evident predilection in his behalf, and unaffected by all her blandishments.

In fact, though she might congratulate herself on almost the exclusive enjoyment of his company in the domestic circle, her progress, in other respects, was not of a description likely to bring the ultimate object of her wishes to a speedy conclusion. Margaret, nevertheless, saw matters in a different light—a light more consonant to her vanity. For the first time in her life she fancied herself under the influence of a permanent attachment; and her constant appearance with the St. Vincent family seemed to countenance the current rumour of a matrimonial engagement being on the tapis.

This idea met with no discouragement from the female quarter of the house; by the gentleman, however, it was heard with a degree of indifference that did not even induce him to take the trouble of contradicting it.

In this state were affairs situated when the regiment to which he belonged was unexpectedly ordered to another part of the kingdom.

Somewhat surprised at having yet received no explicit declaration of his sentiments, Miss Ross conceived this circumstance would certainly bring matters to a crisis, by hastening an event so truly desirable. The gentleman, however, proved in no such haste, and departed without coming to the much wished-for *eclaircissement*.

Astonished, piqued, and mortified by a disappointment so totally unforeseen, Margaret received the first intelligence of his absence with sensations not easily to be defined.

At the time when this circumstance happened, a week had yet to elapse before the division to which he belonged expected to quit their present quarters; and in the interim, she had been prevailed upon to spend a day or two at a friend's house in the neighbourhood. To the pressing invitation she received for this purpose, Miss Ross readily acceded, from an idea that St. Vincent, hurt by the implied indifference her departure at such a juncture evinced, would immediately follow, and come to the long-desired explanation. His mother and sister saw the motive of her absence, and secretly flattered themselves with a similar consequence resulting from it. Sufficient leisure would still remain for future arrangements; while, at the same time, they fondly hoped the appearance of a period so limited might possibly conduce to accelerate the grand object of maternal solicitude.

By some manœuvre or another it was found necessary to alter the order of the route; and St. Vincent, of course, marched with the second, instead of the last division, before the unfortunate Margaret suspected the deprivation she was doomed to lament.

But though thus disappointed in a personal interview, still a letter could equally explain

his sentiments; and that compensation might yet be in store for her. Prepossessed with this notion, when the first shock of the moment had a little subsided, she hastened from her lodgings to those occupied by Mrs. St. Vincent, and contrived to introduce the enquiry with an air of affected carelessness, very foreign to the nature of her real feelings on the occasion. Nothing satisfactory, however, succeeded this attempt at dissimulation: a cool complimentary card was all that appeared addressed to her by St. Vincent.

Her frame trembled, her eyes flashed fire, as she ran over the contents. Mrs. St. Vincent and Louisa marked the rising storm with sorrow, and gave a half-suppressed sigh to the apprehended destruction of their hopes. They tried, nevertheless, to exculpate the offender, by resting his defence on the plea of professional necessity, and the well known fact that a soldier's time is not at his own command.

Margaret made no comments on the humiliating subject: she listened to them in silence; but a sullen air of supercilious incredulity pervaded every feature, and bore witness to the internal tempest that raged within her haughty bosom. She seized an early opportunity of retiring from the presence of friends recently so dear to her; and on returning home, hastened to her own apartment, where her former lover's farewell-note speedily underwent a second perusal, which almost as speedily sealed its final destruction: with every mark of contemptuous indignation, it was instantly torn in a thousand pieces, and the mutilated fragments scattered round the chamber.

In the course of the succeeding evening, Miss Ross appeared in the public rooms as formerly. Her dress was more splendid, her ornaments more numerous than usual: wounded pride produced an uncommon flow of artificial spirits; and self-consideration brought her even to mention the truant swain with every indication of the utmost *nonchalance*.

Margaret played her cards so artfully, that though the true state of the case remained dubious with some of her acquaintance, the greater part of the number were completely duped on the occasion; and, what was still more extraordinary, she duped herself! By a constant adherence to the same mode of conduct, the actress became an adept in the part she had undertaken to perform, till habit rendered it easy; and her natural passion for admiration continually hurrying her into the vortex of folly and dissipation, new pursuits every day started up—new objects occurred to occupy the mind, to detach it from useless sensations of regret, and to banish from remembrance all painful retrospections of the past. St. Vincent seemed no longer to retain a place in her thoughts: or if his idea did occasionally force its way on her memory, the same giddy round of amusement was immediately recurred to, and all intrusive reflections were driven from their hold by a double portion of fashionable resources, of which she had always sufficient at command.

The persevering, though concealed endeavour thus made to the extirpation of his image, too plainly proved the strength of the enemy she struggled to dislodge. Margaret repeatedly supposed she had conquered all remains of her former attachment for the now reprobated St. Vincent; and it was not till accident once more threw him in her way, that she secretly acknowledged herself undeceived in this fallacious idea.

CHAP. XII.

“If I boast of aught,
“Be it to have been Heav’n’s happy instrument,
“The means of good to my ill-fated parents.”

ROWE.

MISS Ross, by the demise of a maternal uncle in the West Indies, had received a considerable addition to the fortune settled upon her by the Nabob, when the troops under Colonel Arabin’s command arrived in Galloway. Her vanity, increased by this unexpected accession of wealth, seemed to have imbibed more inflated notions of individual consequence than any hitherto indulged; and on the first intimation of her recreant knight’s vicinity, she fully determined to treat him with the utmost *hauteur* and every mark of the most fortifying indifference, should a wish to avoid the imputation of peculiarity subject her to the necessity of seeing him at the Grove with his brother officers.

This resolution was tolerably well adhered to during the course of the first fortnight: about the end of that period, almighty Love resumed his former station in her heart, and, gradually aided by powerful auxiliaries, seemed to recommence his reign with every prospect of ultimate success.

Previous to the northern march of the troops, St. Vincent had obtained permission to remain a few weeks with his relations, from whom he had been absent for some time antecedent to this period.

On reaching his paternal home, he found a highly-valued father visibly declining in health, and painfully embarrassed in circumstance, while evident traits of dejection and low spirits sat gloomily impressed on the pensive countenances of his other relatives.

The original cause of these distressing appearances was reluctantly explained, to which he listened with sensations of suppressed anguish; which, unhappily, furnished too many additional instances of incurable depravity and boundless extravagance to those already frequently deplored, in the unprincipled conduct of an elder brother.

Colonel St. Vincent (for he was likewise in the army) happened to be one of those characters who prefer self-gratification to the comfort and peace of dearest and nearest connexions; both of which are but too often sacrificed to an insatiable inclination for every vicious pursuit, and every species of expensive amusement. It proved necessary, however, to keep on good terms with their uncle Lord Fitzhenry, whose temper was none of the best, and who had more than once threatened to marry, when any casual intelligence relative to the Colonel’s irregularities unfortunately reached him. The parents of that misguided young man, therefore, anxiously endeavoured to conceal his errors from public knowledge; for the loss of his Lordship’s favour would have involved the whole family in final and irremediable ruin. The prodigal’s wants were consequently supplied with as little noise as possible; till what remained from the purpose was almost swallowed up by the perpetual demands of numerous and increasing creditors; some of whom, upon finding the source nearly exhausted from whence they had hitherto had their claims duly answered, began to speak of adopting more vigorous measures, and even plainly hinted their design of applying to Lord Fitzhenry on the occasion, who, it was supposed, would not permit his presumptive heir to linger out the residue of his existence within the walls of a loathsome prison.

This threat, sufficient of itself to create a serious alarm, was quickly succeeded by an intimation that Mr. St. Vincent himself would certainly be arrested for a debt of some magnitude, if means were not taken to repay it before the expiration of five months from the period assigned for the settlement of the business.

Such was the state of affairs when the younger St. Vincent procured leave of absence to pay a short visit to his father's family.

A drowning person is ready to catch at the first object which bears the smallest prospect of present assistance. The unfortunate Mr. St. Vincent had repeatedly turned his thoughts on every probable means for averting the threatened storm, without deriving the most trifling degree of consolation from the melancholy and futile reflections that occurred on the subject; when the Major's appearance recalled to his mother's remembrance the principal events which had taken place at their last meeting, and gave birth to an idea, that was presently communicated to her husband, as the most feasible means that remained to extricate them from those impending difficulties, the dread of which was rapidly hastening him to a premature grave. This resource was no other than to attempt the accomplishment of the former much wished-for alliance between her son and Miss Ross; the revival of whose partiality for the Major she fondly flattered herself might be easily effected, if he would only agree to sanction the projected design with his approbation and consent.

The strong mind and filial piety of the young soldier was well known to his parents: the first, they were persuaded, would induce him to sacrifice his own feelings, if necessary, for their tranquillity; from the latter every thing was to be hoped, should success crown the measure, and the lady retain her late prepossession in his favour; and of this circumstance Mrs. St. Vincent could not admit a doubt: the father also coincided in the same opinion; and Louisa, when informed of their scheme, was positive no woman could ever totally eradicate an attachment once inspired by such a man as her brother Henry. After several subsequent conversations on the topic, their expectations became more sanguine; and their joint wishes were consequently signified to him in the most tender and affecting terms.

The heart of Henry was perfectly disengaged at this juncture, and though the beauty of Miss Ross might, in some degree, have captivated his senses, her mental endowments (cautious as she had ever been to suppress every reprehensible tendency in his presence) were by no means calculated to secure his affections: he therefore paused a few minutes after the communication.

"It is true my own happiness," thought he, "can never be implicated in such an union; but if that of my beloved parents is at stake—if to me they look for their only chance of comfort on earth—"

He raised his eyes before the sentence was concluded, and met those of the two people dearest to him on earth fixed upon his face with an expression of anxious expectation and agonizing suspense, which spoke volumes to his feelings, and at once determined his conduct.

The sensible and well-regulated mind of this worthy young man was inconceivably shocked to observe the agitation of his parents, when he reflected that on him they depended for the restoration of their peace; but his heart was too full for utterance, and language refused to come to his relief. He gazed upon the trickling drops that chased each other down their pallid, care-worn cheeks for a single moment; then abruptly pulling out his handkerchief, turned to the window, in order to conceal the emotion he could no longer suppress.

His fate was now advancing to a crisis: he saw, he felt this to be the case; felt it too without experiencing any individual satisfaction arising from the conviction on his own account: prompt acquiescence, however, became requisite to relieve the tortured bosoms of those to

whom he owed his birth. An exertion was therefore made to banish every selfish consideration:—he turned from the window, bent one knee before them, seized a hand of each, pressed it emphatically to his lips, then rose, bowed in silence, and hurried from the room.

The distressed parents uttered not a syllable during this scene, which passed with rapidity. Deeply affected by a thousand oppressive sensations, they continued gazing upon each other till the sound of his retiring steps died upon their ear. Mr. St. Vincent then extended his arms, and folding his agitated, weeping wife to his bosom, sobbed aloud, mingling scalding tears of regret with those of admiration and gratitude, for the cruel necessity that forced them to require what was evidently not granted without a secret pang of reluctance.

Such an instance of filial duty from one son seemed almost to compensate for the sufferings entailed upon them by another; and their acknowledgements to Providence were profuse and sincere, for the critical relief thus obtained through his means.

Every thing now soon wore a different appearance under the roof of Mr. St. Vincent. The creditors of the Colonel were prevailed upon to wait a little longer, and the semblance of health once more began to visit the father's countenance.

The temporary forbearance of the principal claimants to whom he stood indebted, was a point of the utmost importance to Mr. St. Vincent, as it prevented any disclosure of existing circumstances from reaching his uncle, whose fortune, having chiefly descended to him by the maternal side, was entirely in his own power to dispose of in what manner he judged most proper: a privilege he frequently threatened to use in favour of some distant relations of his mother's, when any of his nephew's family happened, though unintentionally, to incur his displeasure. The small portion of wealth he inherited from his father was strictly entailed, and would have proved very inadequate to the support of title without the additional aid of the other.

As the final success of their new scheme was still hid in the womb of futurity, and depended on contingencies which could not be yet ascertained, it was agreed that nothing should be said to Lord Fitzhenry on the subject till such time as the sentiments of the lady were first sounded; for the Major seemed far from entertaining any expectations so very sanguine as those adopted by his mother and sister on the occasion; on the contrary, he concluded vanity, wounded pride, and insulted affectation, if she ever had honoured him with any real degree of the latter, had long since probably excluded him from all share in her remembrance. The northern destination of the regiment was considered as a most fortunate incident at this period, and seemed happily adapted to afford opportunities to ascertain this matter, without carrying the appearance of any premeditated design for that purpose.

Mrs. Arabin, who happened to be related to the St. Vincent family, and at this juncture with them on a visit, promised to facilitate their wishes by every possible exertion in her power.

On the second week after this arrangement, Henry St. Vincent escorted that lady back to her husband, and then proceeded with the troops to Scotland.

The parting with his parents and sisters was affecting and solemn: the former, with streaming eyes, pressed him to their hearts, calling him their better angel—he on whom every hope, every prospect of future tranquility depended; the latter clasped their arms round his neck, and sobbed upon his bosom: every look and action spoke sensibility and gratitude for this seasonable relief from the recent terror of apprehended ruin.

In the comparative happiness thus dispensed to others, St. Vincent experienced that internal gratification which the conscious sense of a virtuous deed uniformly bestows, and which, for a certain period, is sometimes sufficiently powerful to absorb every intrusive reflections of a more selfish description.

CHAP. XIII.

“Fondly make a merit of forgiveness,
“And give to Fate a second opportunity,
“If the first blow should miss.”

ROWE.

IT has already been hinted that Miss Ross proved too good a Christian to persevere in harbouring any lasting degree of resentment against the once distinguished, though truant favourite of a former day.

Mrs. Arabin, true to her promise, contributed considerably to the acceleration of this circumstance, and smoothed the way for the Major's reinstatement in the lady's good opinion, by the most adroit management of her temper and disposition.

Inexpressibly flattered by the returning devoirs of the only man who had ever, in fact, found the real way to her heart, every remaining sentiment of wounded pride or displeasure gradually lessened, till at length all recollections inimical to his views were finally obliterated from her memory. Aided, therefore, by the lurking auxiliary he still retained in her breast, united with the friendly exertions of the Arabins, St. Vincent shortly perceived the garrison was ready to surrender on proper terms. As the indifference he felt to this ill-sorted union did not appear likely to subside by a more intimate knowledge of Margaret's character, though the reprehensible parts of it continued to be carefully concealed from his view with the most cautious, but difficult perseverance, he rightly judged that a sacrifice thus unavoidably necessary could not be too speedily accomplished; and, secretly ashamed to find a latent, lingering bias to procrastination frequently intrude on his better intentions, the dictates of filial magnanimity at length determined him to put further hesitation out of the question, by immediately availing himself of her visible partiality in his favour. In consequence of this resolution, Lord Fitzhenry was made acquainted with the future brilliant prospects of his nephew, and every thing speedily so arranged as to preclude any possibility of retraction on his side with honour.

This circumstance was no sooner ascertained than the breast of St. Vincent seemed eased of an oppressive burthen. To know the worst, is said to be some relief: he felt it as such on the present occasion, and looked forward to the ultimate conclusion of the affair with a sensation of stern, persevering resignation, which frequently pervades superior minds when acquiescence becomes requisite in any pressing contingency against which their feelings instinctively revolt; and, in whatever light he considered it, such, in this instance, appeared to be the case with himself, though he could not well account for it.

Margaret Ross was handsome, elegant, accomplished, and rich: what more could be reasonably required?—and from whence originated that inconceivable something, approaching almost to repugnance, by which his heart was actuated on the occasion? Her evil propensities he was yet unacquainted with: of her foibles indeed this could not be said; but human nature is liable to such, and proper management, with increasing years, might effect a beneficial change where confirmed depravity of disposition was presumed to have no footing. Strange then that indifference would not give place to warmer and more appropriate sentiments for a woman to

whose acknowledged preference he was so infinitely indebted! The nature of his feelings seemed to be of that description peculiarly inimical to alteration or amendment, so difficult to define, yet so well expressed by the Poet:—

“I do not like thee, Doctor Fell;
“The reason why I cannot tell—
“But I don’t like thee, Doctor Fell.”

Nevertheless, he entertained no particular predilection for any other woman whatever; and if his bosom did not receive Margaret Ross as its welcome mistress, she had, notwithstanding, no complaint to make of a rival in his affections.

In this manner were affairs situated at Rossgrove, when the accidental appearance of our heroine first convinced the intended bridegroom he had still a heart to dispose of, and fatally removed the veil of indifference from the eyes of the unfortunate youth, which had hitherto somewhat served to support his mind in the ordeal trial he had gone through in the performance of filial duty.

Unconscious, in the first instance, of the real motive that propelled him forward in the path of enquiry that succeeded her discovery, St. Vincent imagined it was merely to gratify the whimsical humour of the friends who accompanied him that he felt stimulated to obtain a further knowledge of the lovely girl they had seen in the gallery.

The incident that procured him a second view of her in the alcove originated in a wish to preserve the nest of a thrush from the depredations of two school-boys, who were preparing to carry off its young inhabitants, when the cries of the parent bird brought him from his party to their relief. It was in returning from the accomplishment of this humane deed by a different path through the shrubbery, that the figure of Stella, in her solitary retreat, unexpectedly caught his view, and fixed him to the spot with sensations of surprise and admiration.

What these might have produced it is difficult to say, had not the voice of his affianced bride roused him from the dangerous reverie to a recollection of his situation, and hurried him from the cause of it.

The investigation into the nature of his feelings that succeeded this unlucky interview, and the conclusion of the self-examination upon which he entered, were equally unfavourable to his peace, and left but little room for individual congratulation on the ostensible score of filial obedience.

Henry St. Vincent, strict in principle and enthusiastic in all his ideas of moral rectitude, was deeply hurt to find that that degree of indifference which had hitherto contributed to preserve him from forming any of those desultory attachments so commonly engaged in by young men in the military line, now no longer existed; and shuddered to reflect that it had vanished in favour of an entire stranger almost at the very moment when he was upon the point of giving his hand at the altar to a woman whom he had publicly avowed as chosen for his future partner through life.

His compliance with the wishes of his parents, their peace, perhaps their very existence, the happiness of his family, his own character in the eyes of the world—all, all was now at stake; and he shrunk from the certain consequences that must inevitably follow the smallest deviation from the narrow and difficult path of propriety.

It was evident indeed that on the manner in which he conducted himself at this critical juncture depended the share of mental ease and respectability he must hope to enjoy hereafter,

and an internal self-approbation, which proves the first of all earthly considerations to a well-regulated mind, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

In a character gifted, like his, with the stronger power of reason, passion is seldom long permitted to act in open opposition to the dictates of morality or honour: it sometimes, however, unfortunately happens that the violence of the one is proportionably great to the energies of the other. St. Vincent fatally experienced this truth, and felt, with deep regret, that the sensibility of his heart had never before been fully called into action, nor placed in a state of warfare with the cooler determinations of judgment.

Restless and unhappy, the sleepless hours of night stole heavily away: but the solitary pillow is often a faithful counsellor. Though astonished to find his feelings so refractory and acute, and shocked to think the influence of the passions could be productive of such an internal struggle, the empire of the latter began to recede before the suggestions of wounded honour; and ere the first dawn of the following morning appeared, a resolution was taken to encounter, with becoming fortitude, the fate necessity had imposed upon him.

The result of this determination was to hasten forward the completion of the task filial affection enjoined him to accomplish, with additional dispatch, and in the interim to avoid every probable chance of any succeeding interviews with her in whom all his secret misery originated.

But though the last-mentioned intention might be, and certainly was, strictly consonant to the rules of propriety and wisdom, it may perhaps be again asked if the wish to accelerate his nuptials with one woman, while his heart was in the possession of another, be equally entitled to come under either of these denominations; or even privileged in any respect whatever to assume the name of an honourable transaction, when interested motives were incontrovertibly the chief, if not sole inducements to the conclusion of a reluctant union with Margaret Ross. With all due submission to the imperial fiat of superior casuists, we think these interrogatories may be answered in a manner highly praiseworthy to Henry St. Vincent.

It has already appeared that his father's credit in the world was at stake before the lady's affections were ascertained to be permanently fixed: now that they were acknowledged to be so, and that she was willing to bestow the means of procuring tranquillity to that father, could any man, possessed of reflection or sensibility, bear to sacrifice the peace of all those who were, or ought to be most dear to him, merely for the sake of indulging a recent and visionary attachment, which, obtained at such a price, would undoubtedly end in bitterness of heart, self-reproach, and probable disappointment, since he remained even ignorant if a reciprocity of sentiment was experienced in his behalf? No: the suppression of his feelings, the victory of gratitude over inclination, were but poor compensations for the wealth and tenderness so generously bestowed upon him: and if that warmth of affection which usually marks a first attachment was unhappily wanting on his side, it became doubly requisite to make up for the deficiency by every act of friendship and attention to her wishes. These, he well knew, could only be gratified by the completion of the meditated union with the person who exclusively possessed her heart; and that heart ought not to suffer for its promptness to furnish him with the power of extricating a much-loved relative from the threatened tempest that still was suspended over his head, and ready to involve every other member of the family in the same ruin.

So mentally reasoned the meritorious and noble-minded St. Vincent. Nevertheless, though the spirit proved willing, the flesh continued weak. The actual performance of the ceremony could alone, therefore, secure him from those returns of irresolution under which he occasionally laboured, in spite of every effort to the contrary; and towards it he constantly looked with mingled sensations of solicitude and reluctance. Henry knew he could safely rely

upon the strength of his principles for conducting him through the allotted path with propriety, when human frailty had no longer any remaining excuse to gloss over the erroneous wanderings of a fluctuating heart, or any illusive pretence for imagining an endless felicity with a different woman from her whose domestic lot seemed henceforth so closely interwoven with his own.

The impatience now manifested by her late philosophical lover for the accomplishment of their union, was received as a flattering proof of increased attachment by the elated Margaret; and his request that an early day might be named for the purpose, acceded to without any very apparent degree of reluctance.

From the moment in which he had reason to suspect the nature of his sentiments for the fair stranger, St. Vincent endeavoured to regulate his actions according to the strictest rules of honour and propriety: if his thoughts, therefore, would sometimes play the truant, and wander, unpermitted by judgment, in the wide and illusive field of imagination, his conduct at least was under the control of prudence, and, barring the accidents of chance, such as he had no cause to be ashamed of.

CHAP. XIV.

“High arbiter
“Chance governs all.”

MILTON.

THOUGH the last interview in the garden of the Hermitage did not serve to lessen the misery and oppression of heart under which Major St. Vincent laboured, yet it was not productive of any alteration in his conduct: the same, or rather a greater degree of caution was observed to regulate all his motions, and in proportion as he became sensible of his danger, he took measures to resist it.

The best intentions, however, may be disappointed, and even rendered nugatory, by the very means taken to ensure their success. The precautions adopted by St. Vincent unfortunately had this effect, and proved the source of fresh mental embarrassments, instead of contributing to remove those which already existed: for had not his solicitude to avoid every subject that led to any knowledge of our heroine’s name or situation prevented a disclosure of these two circumstances, it is probable he would have spared himself the fatal indulgence of listening to her melodious voice, and the subsequent pangs that arose from their unexpected meeting in the garden.

Two evenings previous to that fixed upon for his union with Miss Ross, St. Vincent felt his spirits unusually depressed: but inclined to ascribe this circumstance to any cause rather than the right one, he concluded it was occasioned by overheating himself while exercising a vicious horse, which the riding-master had found difficult to manage in the morning. A little fresh air, however, he supposed might be serviceable; and under this impression he stole, unperceived, from a close and crowded drawing-room, in order to take a solitary ramble in the woods.

Nature happened to be in one of those moods most congenial to the contemplative mind—calm, mild, soothing, and serene. Every surrounding object seemed to feel her influence: not a leaf appeared to move; and the solemn stillness that reigned was only interrupted at

intervals by the evening songs of the little feathered choristers, the drowsy hum of the circling beetle, the faint lowing of the distant cattle, or the shrill whistle of the distant labourer, winding along to his humble dwelling, after the daily toils of the field were over, and the sweat of his brow had furnished the homely board with more than the most voluptuous epicure can frequently command—peace, contentment, sound health, and a good appetite.

With folded arms, and eyes bent upon the ground, St. Vincent pensively moved along. The direction he took was different from that leading to the Hermitage: but though his steps retraced not the prohibited quarter, thought, that uncontrollable something, which cannot always be confined to its mental prison, nor uniformly regulated by the force of reason, insensibly pointed to the peaceful and romantic residence of his bosom's queen.

The sensations produced by the wanderings of fancy, however, were now become more sad than violent:—suspense was upon the eve of becoming certainty, and despair, no longer fed by the illusive suggestions of deceitful hope, dwelt upon the approaching ceremony as the stern decree of irremediable necessity, from whence there remained no possibility of escape; while, on the other hand, the conviction of having acted right occasionally dissipated the melancholy reflections which at times absorbed his mind, and spread a glow of self-approbation over every feature, which made him feel that to persevere, is to succeed in well-doing.

Secretly congratulating himself on the small degree of temporary tranquillity which, on the occurrence of this reflection, pervaded his breast, he pursued his walk, too much immersed in contemplations on the past and future, to remark that he had quitted the nearer plantations, and was crossing a park ornamented with extensive and numerous clumps of trees, through which lay a private path, usually taken by foot passengers who resided on the estate of Rossgrove; when his attention was suddenly roused by a shriek of horror, and which was immediately succeeded by a hollow, growling sound, which murmured from the other side of a thicket apparently at no great distance: the first was evidently the voice of distress, the second threatening danger. He darted immediately forward to the spot from whence it appeared to proceed; but ere it could be reached, another exclamation of terror, louder than the former, burst upon his ear, and in the succeeding instant a female figure rushed from behind some trees in the closest quarter of the thicket, and dropped senseless at his feet.

The cause of her alarm soon became obvious.—A furious bull appeared in view: his glaring eyeballs were fixed upon the prostrate being before him, and the half-suppressed bellowing that sullenly issued from his foaming jaws seemed to announce inevitable destruction, had not timely assistance been at hand for her protection.

Major St. Vincent perceived there was not a single moment to be lost: he caught her up in his arms, and lowering her on the other side of the wall that enclosed the park, instantly sprang after her. Fortunately, the circumstance happened near the verge of the field, otherwise the preserved and preserver might equally have suffered.

Thus deprived of his intended prey, the enraged animal abruptly stopped in the middle of his career, and tearing up the earth with his feet, made the park re-echo with the most tremendous roaring; then, moving on at a quicker pace, sometimes snuffing the air, sometimes running with his nose close to the ground, the terrific sound sinking again at intervals to a sullen murmur: she raised her head just as the late object of her fears happened to be sinking from view on the other side of the wall; but apprehensive he was only recoiling to renew the charge with renovated vigour, she cast a frantic glance on the face of her supporter, wildly clasped her arms round his neck, and, heaving a profound sigh, again fainted on his bosom.

The look, the air, the action, graceful even in the midst of distress and terror, now, for the

first time, flashed with recollected anguish on his heart. With an agitated and trembling hand, he put aside her veil and a profusion of auburn ringlets that, displaced and disordered, had hitherto, in the confusion of the moment, concealed her features from particular observation. Montague happened to turn round at this instant, and the name of Stella Bertram burst from his lips, accompanied by an exclamation of surprise, while he fixed the quick eye of scrutinizing enquiry on his unhappy friend, whose countenance but too faithfully portrayed what was passing in his tortured mind.

Yes, it was Stella Bertram whom he had delivered from approaching danger, whom he now pressed to his throbbing bosom, whose arms were entwined round his neck, whose form unresistingly rested where he would gladly have retained it for ever! Again he removed the luxuriant ringlets, which had a second time escaped from the temporary confinement in which they had been placed by the fingers of her ill-starred lover; and while he gazed upon her pallid, but beautiful countenance, the big drops of half-suppressed tenderness slowly coursed down his manly cheeks, and sighs of better regret issued from a breast torn by the conflict of warring passions, where the late erected barrier of fortitude no longer resisted the enemy it was raised to repel, and the struggle between love and honour seemed equally to preponderate, and equally bent on victory.

At length the magnetic name of Margaret Ross, emphatically pronounced by the sympathizing Montague, recalled his wandering thought to some degree of recollection. He saw, with increasing horror, the precipice on which he stood, and the yawning gulf of infamy that opened before him seemed ready prepared to swallow him up, should the nature of his present conduct lead to error or self-desertion.

St. Vincent started from the humiliating contemplation, and heaving another profound sigh, endeavoured to free himself from her clasping hands; but his emotion became too great to accomplish it, and in a frantic voice he called upon Montague to assist in the painful undertaking, if he did not wish to see his miserable friend start into instant madness.

The compassionate observer of this scene no sooner perceived the original cause of all the present mischief disqualified for any further attempts of a similar and dangerous tendency, than he had flown to a neighbouring brook for some water, with which, having filled his helmet, he hastened back, in order to apply it for the relief of the fainting Stella, when the emotion of her agitated supporter particularly attracted his attention, and drew from him the name of his future bride as the most likely means to give his thoughts a different direction.

Captain Montague had not the same motives for caution as the Major: the adventure in the garden of the hermitage had consequently been followed up by a world of information relative to the history of its inhabitants, with the chief part of which St. Vincent was totally unacquainted.

Though from considerations of delicacy the Major had been prevented from recapitulating the utmost extent of those domestic embarrassments which left him only one line of conduct to pursue, they had long been on too intimate a footing with each other for Montague to remain altogether ignorant of the unfortunate predicament in which he was placed;—he knew enough of his affairs to be convinced they were trying and critical: to rouse him from the dangerous empire of the senses was, therefore, the office of friendship; and its exertions to effect that salutary purpose never appeared more necessary than at this moment, when all that seemed most important to his peace and well being as a man of honour, was evidently at stake. Montague's manners and exterior were fashionable; but his principles were just, generous, and humane; and he acted accordingly.

The contents of the helmet, copiously administered, soon began to operate: Stella gradually regained her mental faculties; and her limbs becoming more flexible, Montague gently unclasped her fingers, and taking the place St. Vincent reluctantly resigned, continued to bathe her temples and hands till such time as her recovery seemed nearly accomplished.

While engaged in this humane employment, his companion, with an air of the deepest dejection visible on every feature, silently observed all that was passing, without making the smallest effort to take any further share in it.

It was not long before Stella now found herself able to return home; and, with the most interesting expression of countenance, the timid blush of modesty dying her cheeks with its finest tinge, she gracefully acknowledged her obligations for the protection afforded her.

A deeper shade of blooming colour became obvious as she turned to address her first preserver in a more marked and energetic manner: her eyes, which she scarcely raised to his face, were instantly withdrawn on meeting his, and fixed upon the ground in evident confusion, while every native charm appeared heightened by the celestial indication of gratitude and sensibility which beamed over her lovely countenance.

In elegant and appropriate language she mentioned the sense entertained of his manly exertions in her favour, and spoke of the pleasure it gave her to find he had not been a sufferer himself by his humanity.

The tone of her voice, the quickly-averted look that retired from his more steady gaze, her dignified, yet truly feminine figure, with the thousand attractions which appeared in every word and motion, all sunk deep upon his heart; but though they throbbed there with painful violence, the powers of his tongue seemed suspended, and the short sentence he attempted to utter in return was too inarticulate to be intelligible.

Stella regarded him for a moment in silence: her heart partook of the perturbation with which his was agitated, but the emotion it produced proved less visible. She wished to be alone, however, and, curtsying to the two friends, was proceeding to the public road, when Montague, perceiving his companion make an involuntary movement to accompany her, judiciously stepped forward, and waving his hand with a repulsive motion to St. Vincent, called his dogs from the park, whither they had rambled; he then strung after our heroine, and insisted upon seeing her to the Hermitage, though she endeavoured to save him this additional trouble by every possible argument in her power.

The truth was, as we have noticed above, she eagerly longed for an opportunity of giving vent to her feeling in solitude and freedom. A degree of unusual languor hung upon her spirits: at first she ascribed it to the effects of her recent alarm; but the look of disappointment and chagrin which unconsciously marked her features as she turned her head once or twice on some frivolous pretence, and perceived the still immoveable form of St. Vincent, seemed to say his presence would have been tolerated with less reluctance, if necessitated to permit the attendance of a conductor. The observations made by Captain Montague on the occasion presently convinced him there was a deeper cause for her apparent dejection than the ostensible one she chose to assign for it.

CHAP. XV.

“The long-expressed hour is come at last.”

DRYDEN.

OVERWHELMED by a multitude of melancholy reflections which successively rose in his mind, St. Vincent, immoveable and sad, mournfully watched their receding steps, till Stella's white dress was enveloped in the shades of night, and distant forms could no longer be discriminated.

He remained, nevertheless, with his eyes still following the direction they pursued, when the animal that had proved the original cause of this unfortunate interview once more caught his notice. A striking alteration had now taken place in his appearance: no longer the threatening, furious assailant, whose formidable voice made the woods re-echo with his roar, whose approaching motions seemed pregnant with probable destruction; but stunned, bruised, and calmed, he appeared to move with difficulty, and slowly wound his way to the distant plantations. The circumstance of his re-appearance, however, produced an unpleasant effect on the mind of Henry St. Vincent: it again called to his mind every recent occurrence, and rousing him from the temporary torpor into which he had sunk, increased the agitation of the moment. He started from the tree against which he leaned, and throwing himself upon the spot which Stella had quitted, gave way to the anguish that swelled his heart almost to bursting. In a character possessed of so much energy as his, every predominant sensation reigns with despotic sway. To sentiments similar to those by which he was now influenced, the Major had hitherto been a stranger; and his brother officers, when rallying him on the topic of that indifference for which he had long been remarkable, frequently prophesied it would one day be expelled by a passion ardent in proportion to the imputed apathy with which they charged him. This prognostication at length was accomplished:—the preceding deceitful calm had vanished in a wild whirlwind of contending emotions: his best founded and most rational determinations were ineffectually formed: instable and contradictory in his conduct, all the ungovernable impetuosity of a first and sudden attachment seemed to throb through every vein at the most unlucky period it could possibly have chosen to render its victim completely miserable.

From a train of mortifying reflections on the fragile nature of all human resolutions, and the futility of dependance on the best arranged plans of terrestrial wisdom, the wretched St. Vincent was first roused by the sound of an approaching rider. He started up, and saw Colonel Arabin galloping past to the Grove, without discovering his vicinity.

To the Grove he now likewise bent his way; and on entering the house, immediately repaired to his own apartment, where he remained till his thoughts were sufficiently collected to appear below stairs.

It is now time to account for the unexpected *rencontre* with our heroine on the side of the mansion.

About a mile beyond this quarter of the domains lived the family of Mr. Adair, in which were several young people, with whom Stella occasionally associated. She had gone to visit them at an early hour in the morning, and two of the ladies accompanied her back to the park gate, where they separated, without suspecting the danger that awaited her in her solitary, but usual walk through the plantations.

Accustomed to the path, and hitherto in all her excursions unmolested by any similar

occurrence, she had already traversed two thirds of her way, and entered one of the closest thickets, before her formidable neighbour was discovered. What followed has been related in the foregoing pages.

Stella had acquainted Mrs. Bertram with the particulars of the interview that took place between her and the military strangers in the garden. It was supposed some enquiries would naturally be made after her health in the course of the succeeding day; and in this idea they were not mistaken. Captain Montague called in the forenoon; but Mrs. Bertram happened to be absent on a charitable visit to a sick neighbour, by whom she was unexpectedly sent for, and consequently saw him not. Thus circumstanced, it was not the intention of her *protégée* to receive him if he appeared at the Hermitage, and the servant was directed to answer him accordingly.

By some misapprehension of the girl, he was, nevertheless, admitted before Stella could effect her escape from the parlour; but though disappointed in this intention, she found little cause for after regret. Montague, lively and animated as he appeared, was yet uniformly respectful in his conduct and address. His manners were extremely pleasing, his mind well cultivated, and his air that of the gentleman and soldier. Stella, in spite of her utmost caution, could not help being pleased with his company and conversation: she gradually relaxed from the reserve which had marked his first reception; and the hour allotted for his visit elapsed unperceived by either, till the clock striking two warned him of the flight of time, and the necessity of departing, in order to attend the arrangement of some regimental business at Wigton, from whence he had not been able to revisit the Grove till the memorable evening when his critical arrival proved of such material importance to St. Vincent and our heroine in the park of the Nabob.

Mrs. Bertram, when informed of Captain Montague's appearance at the Hermitage, expressed no displeasure on the occasion; it was a mere matter of course visit, and expected to happen: neither did any prohibition pass her lips relative to a repetition of it; for, in fact, she imagined she knew Stella too well to suppose she would take upon her to encourage a step of this kind unsanctioned by her knowledge or approbation. Should such an event, notwithstanding, occur, she secretly determined to give it her decided negative, provided it appeared that their intrusive guest happened to prove the affianced husband of Miss Ross—of whose name, as likewise his companions, they were yet ignorant.

No attempt was made, however, to put her prudent determination in practice, for neither of the gentleman had hitherto returned again to the Hermitage.

The very important service Captain Montague had contributed to render her in the park, led Stella to conclude that her late safeguard might once more be introduced under Mrs. Bertram's roof without any apparent breach of propriety: she consequently yielded to his pressing entreaties for that purpose, and permitted him to follow her into the parlour; but finding no one present besides themselves, Stella, after a slight apology for her absence, went in search of her maternal friend, who by this time was labouring under a considerable degree of anxiety on account of her return from Mr. Adair's at so untimely an hour of the night.

A brief relation of the evening's adventure succeeded the joyful exclamation that hailed her appearance; and Mrs. Bertram, her heart overflowing with the warmest sensations of gratitude, hastened down stairs, to pour forth its effusions for the friendly protection afforded her darling Stella. This she did in a manner and style so far beyond his expectations, that her auditor no longer wondered at the superior accomplishments and polite address of his young companion.

Montague, though naturally of a gay, volatile disposition, which sometimes led him

astray from the narrow path of worldly prudence, was yet possessed of many estimable qualities: his heart was benevolent, his temper good; he abhorred every species of criminal indulgence; and, though frequently involved in difficulties, from a great flow of animal spirits, and an open, generous turn of mind, his were rather the frailties incident to human nature, than the vicious depravities that degrade it below the level of the brute creation.

When removed from the vortex of folly, and no longer instigated by emulation to figure in the fashionable circles of life as a first-rate man of the *ton*, few young persons could acquit themselves better, or appear in a more advantageous light. Accustomed to mix with indiscriminate multitudes, he soon perceived that those with whom he was now in company were of a description infinitely above the common level of the country people, and by no means everyday characters.

Pleased to find himself so agreeably disappointed in the appearance and behaviour of the old lady, and still more captivated by the winning graces of her beautiful ward, whose attractive manners seemed to have acquired additional charms by the encouraging presence of her beloved and parental benefactress, Captain Montague displayed that fund of information and good sense, which he really possessed, with so much propriety, and in terms so respectful, that he speedily gained the favourable opinion of his new acquaintance; who, upon discovering he was not the intended bridegroom, at length acceded to his earnest request of being sometimes permitted to call at the Hermitage: after which he departed, highly delighted with so agreeable an addition to the friendly circle of those to whom he was already introduced in this hospitable quarter of the kingdom.

On the third day from this period, Major St. Vincent became the husband of Margaret Ross.

Lord Fitzhenry sent him an order upon his banker for five thousand pounds, as a marriage present, and the Nabob gave thirty thousand more, as a wedding portion with his daughter.

The first sum, with another to the same amount from his wife's fortune, was forwarded immediately to his father. This seasonable supply set the old gentleman entirely at his ease; and there remained a tolerable surplus after paying off all his own and the most clamorous of the Colonel's creditors.

The capability to perform this act of filial duty gave the first pleasurable sensation to the aching heart of the donor it had long experienced, and encouraged him to persevere in the narrow, but consolatory path of moral rectitude.

Miss Ross, now become Mrs. St. Vincent, and at the height of her wishes, seemed to have nothing further to desire: all nature appeared smiling to her view; and her inflated ideas of individual consequence, swelled into greater magnitude than ever, apparently led her to forget that she was subject, like the rest of her fellow-creatures, to the changes of life and the vicissitudes of an ever-varying world.

CHAP. XVI.

“*Helas! vous voyez que je vous suis par-tout!*”

THE second week after the conclusion of the ceremony had previously been fixed upon for a grand field-day of the troops at Wigton, where the remainder of the corps, quartered in different parts of the neighbourhood, were ordered to form a junction on the occasion.

As the officers were all under the necessity of attending this assembling of the regiment, it was proposed to include the bride and her female companions amongst the spectators, and after spending the day at Wigton, to bring as many of the gentlemen back with them in the evening as could be spared from their professional duties at the time. This plan was accordingly put in practice; and the party proceeded in high spirits to the appointed rendezvous.

The Adair family, having received intelligence of the approaching military manœuvres, had prevailed upon Mrs. Bertram to indulge them with the company of their favourite Stella, who having never before been present at any exhibition of the kind, formed a thousand ideal sources of gratification in the ardour of a sanguine imagination, which the occurrences of the day were fully expected to realize.

These suppositions were not entirely disappointed. The troops performed their various evolutions in a manner highly honourable to their commander; and the many-headed multitude who witnessed their well-conducted movement, evinced their approbation by repeated plaudits: all went on in due order, and, but for one unlucky accident, the day would have concluded to the universal satisfaction of the numerous groups that lined the field of action.

Some little cloud is ever rising to overshadow the transient gleams of terrestrial enjoyment—some dark shade to envelop the smiling face of innocent pleasure still approaches, with the sombre veil of disappointment in its train. At present, it is true, our knowledge of futurity is limited and imperfect; but a clearer view into its mysterious regions, without the ability to escape from impending evil, would certainly add little to the real happiness of life; and, endowed with the power of prescience, the end of our creation would probably remain unanswered; since, forewarned of error, and enabled to avoid its pernicious effects, man would soar beyond the boundaries of mortality, and vie with superior beings for pre-eminence of station: a consummation, however flattering to the weakness of human vanity, yet surely by no means “devoutly to be wished,” since He who placed us here “with all our imperfections on our heads,” undoubtedly best knows our proper rank in the world; and as “whatever is right,” so ought we to rest contented with the dispensations of an all-wise and omnipotent Ruler, who must be a competent judge of our allotted powers to fill the transitory portion of existence assigned us on earth, and in whom we live, move, and have our being, amidst the wide extended circle of his works below.

Mrs. St. Vincent, however, was not much accustomed to moralize: what of desirable the world possessed, or, at least, the means to command it, had hitherto been in her power; and she apprehended not any material alteration in the system of enjoyment, while the ability of procuring every gratification remained unimpaired: even the long-harboured dislike entertained for the humble, unassuming Stella began to subside into indifference, when an unfortunate circumstance revived it with additional force, and led her to suspect that even unbounded wealth itself was inadequate to render happiness altogether permanent, or terrestrial tranquillity free from occasional interruption.

Some of the events of this memorable field-day were calculated to teach her both these sad truths; but she received the lesson without benefiting by the moral to be drawn from it.

The various manœuvres of a well-conducted mock-fight had now almost terminated, without producing any accidents of a disagreeable nature which not unfrequently take place on similar occasions; and Major St. Vincent having dismounted, and consigned his prancing charger to the care of a servant, was walking arm in arm with a brother officer on one side of the field, when his eye rested on Captain Montague standing before a group of female spectators, with some of whom he appeared engaged in particular conversation.

St. Vincent, whose looks had for some time wandered over the surrounding multitude, unconscious of the propelling motive that dictated the survey, now made an involuntary stop; and a second glance served to convince him his suspicions were well founded, when the idea of Stella Bertram occurred to his mind as the person to whom Montague was directing his discourse. It proved, indeed, as he had surmised:—Stella, dressed with the most elegant simplicity, and seeming more attractive than ever, soon caught his sight.

He gazed upon her for a moment in silence; then bowing, and suppressing a rebellious sigh, moved slowly along the front of the spectators.

Their eyes, however, had again met, but the glance was transient, though felt through every throbbing vein; and the cheeks of Stella were suffused with the deepest shade of crimson, as she modestly returned his passing compliment.

“That is a devilish fine girl, faith!” observed the officer who accompanied him. “Your bow acknowledged her as an acquaintance—cannot you contrive to rank me likewise in the happy number, by a speedy introduction to her notice?”

“The term of what you style acquaintance has not been sufficiently long to authorize such a freedom,” replied St. Vincent, gravely.

His companion was going to re-urge the request, when he was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. St. Vincent and the ladies of her party, who were crossing the field as the Major spoke.

At this instant a vicious horse broke from the ranks, and, after dismounting his rider, continued to plunge and scamper over the ground with alarming velocity.

The fellow having regained his legs, replaced his fallen helmet, and muttered a few hearty curses on the ungovernable animal, endeavoured to stop his rapid career, and had nearly caught hold of the reins in a corner of the field, when the object of his pursuit suddenly starting back, eluded the accomplishment of his design, and springing past him once more, made the best use of his temporary freedom.

Another soldier now came to the assistance of his comrade, and the terrified spectators perceiving their united efforts only contributed to increase the dangerous rapidity of the horse’s motions, were hastily beginning to disperse, when a partial opening, occasioned by the retreating multitude, presented itself near the spot where Stella and her companion were stationed.

The horse being now hard pushed, and probably seeing no other likely method of effecting an escape from his pursuers, made directly for this gap at a furious rate; and his progress was upon the point of proving decidedly fatal to a lovely little girl, about five years of age, who happened to belong to our heroine’s party, from which she had imperceptibly strayed a few paces distant, when Stella, insensible to those sensations of individual consideration which withheld the nearer relatives of the child from risking their own safety for her preservation, darted from the trembling, agitated group, and at the imminent hazard of her own life, snatched the helpless little creature from approaching destruction.

The panting, astonished animal abruptly sprang aside, and suddenly turning round, was again preparing to bound away, when some of the officers, who had hitherto been occupied in protecting the ladies from the apprehended danger of its approach, rushed forward, and happily secured him before he could make good his retreat.

The field now rang with repeated plaudits on the magnanimity and self-possession thus critically exhibited by Stella, and all crowded round to discover the female who had given so striking a proof of determined courage and innate greatness of mind.

Captain Montague had previously been called away by the quarter-master of his own troop, with whom he was conversing at a distance when the foregoing incident happened.

The burst of noisy applause that now broke forth occasioned a sudden pause in what he was saying; and he hastened to the spot, in order to learn the cause in which it originated. He pushed through the crowd, and discovered Henry St. Vincent supporting a female on the ground, who, herself pale and trembling, was endeavouring to staunch the blood that copiously flowed from the nose of a girl seated on her knee, while the varying emotions which alternately marked her assistant's expressive countenance as he observed a similar stream descend from one of her own temples, betokened the deep interest he took in a circumstance to which she herself, entirely absorbed in her solicitude for the safety of another, paid no manner of attention.

At the distance of a few paces Mrs. St. Vincent was displaying the intense nature of her feelings in a violent fit of hysterics: surrounded, however, by so numerous a train of attendants, that her husband no doubt concluded his aid immaterial on the occasion; for he attempted not to quit his present position, nor even appeared conscious of his lady's indisposition, till Montague, perceiving it was Stella Bertram whom his circling arm supported, and, apprehensive of this circumstance drawing upon him observations on the impropriety of a conduct so unguarded, whispered his disapprobation, and brought him speedily on his feet.

CHAP. XVII.

“Our senses are often the masters of our mind, and reason vainly opposes itself to the liveliness of their impressions.”

GODWIN.

THE surgeon of the regiment now appeared, and effectually stopped the bleeding. That which flowed from the child originated in the blow received by the violence of her fall when first thrown down in the hurry of an attempted, but unsuccessful escape. The wound which had disfigured the face of Stella could not be so easily accounted for, as she was too much agitated by her fears for the little girl to be capable of ascertaining the precise nature of what she suffered herself: it was but slight, however, and probably serviceable in its effects, as the loss of so much blood perhaps saved her, at this critical juncture, from a fainting fit.

No sooner was she raised from the ground, than the voice of applause again resounded through the field.

Hitherto heedless of every occurrence that passed, while her mind was exclusively occupied by the object of her care, our heroine suspected not that for her the re-echoing plaudits were uttered, nor once supposed the exertion of so much intrepidity formed a claim to any uncommon portion of approbation: great, therefore, was her astonishment and consequent confusion when, on raising her head at the noise, she perceived every eye fixed upon her, and heard her name repeated with accompanying expressions of praise and admiration.

Timid and abashed, she shrunk from the oppressive gaze of public notice, and disengaging herself from the supporting arms of the Adairs, retired behind some of the multitude, under pretence of enquiring after the child, who was now under the care of another protector.

Louisa St. Vincent, the favourite sister of the Major, had been invited to Rossgrove on the celebration of her brother's nuptials, and was at this time amongst the number of those who were engaged in the restoration of Mrs. St. Vincent's senses.

Conceiving the Major's presence might possibly prove more conducive to this end than any other circumstance whatever, she hastened to try the experiment by summoning him to her assistance.

At the crisis of her arrival, St. Vincent had only eyes and recollection for one single object in creation; and that object was so far from proving his wife, that he actually remembered not such a connexion existed amongst the number of his late domestic acquisitions.

Though he had resigned his lovely burden to the care of her female friends, he found it yet impossible to quit the spot on which she remained. Absorbed in anxious solicitude for the report of the surgeon, he watched every turn of his countenance, as the latter examined the wound on her temple, with an expression of mute expectation and torturing suspense, that left no room in his bosom for any other subject foreign to the interests that important one created. His eyes and thoughts were still fixed on the spot she had recently occupied, when his sister approached him. Ignorant of any other cause for dejection than the reluctance with which she knew he had commenced his matrimonial career, and flattering herself even that had now vanished before the efforts of reason and the splendid prospects that opened upon his view, Louisa remarked his pensive, unhappy air with a secret pang of anguish she could hardly

suppress. She advanced, however; and fixing her swimming eyes on his face—

“My dearest Henry,” she softly whispered, “recollect yourself! Come,” she added, laying her hand upon his arm as she spoke, “Mrs. St. Vincent is ill—for Heaven’s sake, hasten to her relief, I beseech you!”

The voice and imploring look of this beloved sister vibrated on his heart: he gently pressed her offered hand, and drawing it under his arm, accompanied her whither she pleased to lead him.

Mrs. St. Vincent was upon the recovery when they reached her; but jealousy, resentment, or affectation (perhaps a portion of each) produced another fit. Her husband approached to tender his assistance, and had already taken his seat by her side in the coach, to which she had already been conveyed, when, upon the temporary return of her senses, she repulsed him with a disdainful air, and once more exhibited the modish sensibilities of an injured wife by the extent of her hysterical ravings, which, like the insanity of Hamlet, had matter in its madness.

The astonished husband listened in silence, and at length turned from her with evident marks of disgust.

At this moment the coachman appeared, and beckoning the fellow to approach, he directed him to bring the horses, and proceed with the carriage to the Grove, as his mistress, much indisposed, was at present seated in it, and no doubt anxious to return home.

His mistress instantly countermanded the order, and thanked Heaven she was sufficiently competent to direct her own motions.

The Major bowed, and jumped from the coach, without seeming to notice this spirited proof of intelligence.

Colonel Arabin took him aside, and spoke for some time with much apparent earnestness to his almost silent auditor.

We have elsewhere observed that to a person manly and elegant, St. Vincent united a mind cultivated, energetic, and sensible, with a heart rich in the possession of every grace, every virtue, that could adorn or dignify the human character.

Prior to his unfortunate knowledge of Stella Bertram he was noted for a magnanimity and self-recollection superior to the generality of men of his age; for even at the period of his union with Miss Ross, this young man had but just concluded his twentieth year; notwithstanding which, Lord Fitzhenry’s parliamentary interest, in conjunction with his own personal merit, had advanced him to a rank in his profession which many a gray-headed veteran finds it impossible to attain, unaided by the assisting hand of such powerful auxiliaries.

If any undertaking of difficulty called for his exertions, he was bold and enterprising; if misery, or any description of wretchedness, claimed his commiseration or relief, tenderness and benevolence swelled his bosom, and raised the ready tear into his eye: too open and generous to give offence, he was little apt to be offended; and those individuals who were attached to him from the attractive suavity of his manners (in spite of his natural bias to a serious, but not repulsive turn), and the winning graces of his conversation, in every intercourse of friendship found new and heightened motives to confirm and rivet their esteem. A character of this description, though subject, like all the human race, to occasional error, was yet open to conviction when the ebullitions of passion began to subside, and make way for the cooler dictates of reason.

Colonel Arabin’s judicious arguments, assisted by the rhetoric of Captain Montague, who joined them, produced the desired effect. St. Vincent secretly felt that his wife had some cause for dissatisfaction with his conduct, and the recent displeasure she had given birth to was

speedily turned into another channel: self-reproach filled his breast; he considered himself as the principal culprit, and once more formed the often-repeated resolution of keeping a stricter guard over his actions.

While the two friends of the Major were thus exerting their influence to reestablish tranquillity and good-humour, Mrs. Arabin was no less meritoriously employed in a similar, but more difficult attempt to appease the mind of Mrs. St. Vincent.

Soon after the Major's hasty retreat, she had prevailed upon his angry lady to quit her carriage for the open air, and whispering Louisa to keep the rest of their party at a distance, insensibly led Mrs. St. Vincent to another quarter. She then commenced the chief object of their *tête-à-tête* in the most cautious, yet energetic terms she could devise, for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation, which those who witnessed the late violence of her temper were anxious to accomplish on the Major's account, for whose happiness the whole circle of spectators seemed much interested during the scene that took place in the carriage: the number of these, however, was not great, and, fortunately, all appeared equally eager to bury the transaction in oblivion.

To combat with determined obstinacy, and argue where reason was unattended to by the auditor, was a task that required all Mrs. Arabin's patience and management in the execution. One string alone seemed to vibrate on the wayward Mrs. St. Vincent's feelings: her friend soon perceived she had touched the right key, and pursued the advantage it offered, with some prospect of final success.

The chief part of the foregoing *fracas* had originated in the violence of Mrs. St. Vincent's attachment to her husband, who she imagined had never appeared more strikingly captivating or conspicuously interesting than through the course of this unfortunate day. To think he could bestow the smallest degree of particular attention on any other object than herself, was a supposition not to be borne: that Stella, the long detested Stella, should prove that object, was still more insupportable. Mrs. Arabin ineffectually endeavoured to eradicate this idea, which appeared to have made a strong impression on her mind; and from arguing with her on the topic, proceeded to warn her against pushing her resentment too far, lest her husband's affections should ultimately fall a sacrifice to conjugal discord, and, by rendering her society disagreeable, prove the groundwork of the evil she apprehended, in forcing him to search for that tranquillity elsewhere which his wife refused to afford him at home.

Mrs. St. Vincent started at the bare possibility of an idea which she had, in some measure, already admitted as a bosom guest; and softening by degrees as Mrs. Arabin continued her discourse, she at length melted into tears. A few minutes more completed the triumph of affection over the feelings of wounded pride and apprehended estrangement from a still adored husband.

The temper St. Vincent was now improved favourable to the vanity of his lady, who, though she would rather have submitted to any concession when her passion subsided, than risk the threatened possibility held forth by her friendly monitor, nevertheless received him with an air of haughty condescension, perfectly in character, while secret pleasure throbbed through every pulsation of her heart at so fortunate a termination to an affair which, from the now recollected nature of his looks, and the abrupt manner of his quitting the carriage, seemed to promise a far different and less amicable conclusion.

CHAP. XVIII.

“Let not that devil which undoes your sex,
“That cursed curiosity, seduce you
“To hunt for needless secrets, which neglected
“Shall never hurt your quiet.”

ROWE.

THOUGH no competent apology can properly be offered for such a public display of intemperate violence and unseasonable resentment as Mrs. St. Vincent exhibited on the foregoing occasion, yet justice compels us to acknowledge she had some private and stimulating motives for her conduct; which, though they cannot wholly exculpate, may at least, in a certain degree, extenuate her errors, when the nature of her ungovernable disposition is duly considered.

Stella, it may be remembered, she had taken every precaution to exclude from the Major’s knowledge; and she flattered herself this circumstance had been effectually accomplished, till an accidental discovery took place, on the very morning of the field-day, which fatally undeceived her in that respect, and roused to its climax every dormant passion inimical to our heroine, in her malignant bosom.

While dressing for the projected excursion, several smart-looking girls were observed from her window crossing the park. She enquired who they were, and was answered by her maid, after a cursory survey—

“Probably Miss Bertram and some of her friends going to view the troops: though,” added Jenny, in the following moment, “I think she cannot be one of them neither, as she would scarcely venture that way again, after what happened so lately in the park.”

“And pray what did happen in the park?” asked Mrs. St. Vincent, carelessly turning from the window as she spoke.

Jenny expressed much surprise that her master, and her master’s friend, Captain Montague, had never thought of mentioning the subject; and proceeded to remedy their negligence by giving a most exaggerated detail of the bull adventure, such as she had received it from common report, in the first instance—in the second, with as many embellishments of her own as rendered it almost a new creation, and that by no means of a description to give any very favourable impression of the part performed by Stella in the drama, even supposing (which, however, was not the case) her mistress had been previously partial to our heroine.

The whole harangue was, indeed, but too well calculated to inflame the irritable temper of Mrs. St. Vincent, already, on every trivial occurrence, sufficiently inclined to a jealous tendency, where any defalcation in the affections of St. Vincent appeared to be implicated. Her agitation was extreme; she trembled with ill-restrained rage, and for some time experienced the most agonizing sensations. At length wounded pride came to her assistance, and began to remind her that the man to whom she had recently given her hand at the altar, owed her too many obligations, and must be too much attached to a woman of her merit, fortune, and personal attraction, to wander, even in idea, from one he had evidently preferred to all the rest of her sex, and sanctioned that preference by the most public, solemn, and binding tie on earth.

Those, therefore, who discovered Stella sitting with her husband and Montague at the park wall, and even, shameless creature! leaning her head upon her supporter’s bosom, while his arms encircled her passive form, possibly knew not one of the gentlemen from the other; of course, Captain Montague was far more likely to be the person alluded to than the Major.—Yes,

it must be so! it could not possibly be her dear Henry! The longer she reflected upon it, the less probable it seemed that he would condescend to demean himself by any familiar intercourse with a mere upstart chit—a country girl, whom Mrs. Bertram maintained from charity. Yet still, she thought, he might be sounded at a distance on the subject. The creature was, by some people, supposed to be handsome, and men were apt to be thrown off their guard in such company. Oh! if he could by guilty of—yes, she would speak to him immediately.

After Mrs. St. Vincent had finished this mental soliloquy Jenny was directed to call her master without delay.

Her master had set out an hour ago to join the troops, was the answer returned on Jenny's re-appearance.

"Enquire for Captain Montague then," exclaimed Mrs. St. Vincent, in a voice of impatience: "tell him I must see him directly."

"Captain Montague accompanied my master, Madam."

"He seldom does otherwise, I think," was the reply: "Birds of a feather—"

Mrs. St. Vincent checked her self, and turning to Jenny, asked if she had heard of Stella being visited by any of the officers before or since the park affair.

Jenny answered in the affirmative.

The subsequent question was natural:—

"Was Mr. St. Vincent of the number?"

"It was so reported, Madam."

Mrs. St. Vincent changed colour, swallowed a glass of water, and, after a silence of some length, her dress being completed, joined the party below stairs, with an appearance of mental ease, little in unison with her real feelings.

Predisposed to suspicion by the foregoing communication, she entered her carriage with the secret determination of watching her husband's motions, and endeavouring to discover if he paid any particular attention to the now more than ever detested Stella.

In order to ascertain the actual presence of the latter, and the quarter of the field in which she had taken her station, it was necessary to reconnoitre the spectators; and, for this purpose, she seized an early opportunity of walking round the space where the troops were first assembling from different directions.

As the manœuvres of the day were not yet commenced, some of the officers accompanied the female party in their perambulations. In passing a small group that stood rather more backward than the neighbouring multitude, one of the military gentlemen abruptly exclaimed—

"D—n me! if Montague has not already got acquainted with some of these girls! That fellow is never out of his way!"

They were now nearly fronting those of whom he spoke. Montague seemed deeply engaged in conversation with one of the number, and standing with his back to the Rossgrove party, saw not their approach.

"We must grant him the merit of discernment, however," observed another of the officers, applying his eye to an opera-glass, as he slowly advanced; "for, by my soul, I scarcely ever saw a handsomer face, or more elegant figure than she to whom the happy dog is now addressing himself!"

The ladies involuntarily stopped, to regard the object of an eulogium so pointed, and Mrs. St. Vincent instantly discovered the person of whom she was in search. The flush of indignation spread over her countenance, as she recognised our heroine in the character of Montague's new acquaintance.

“Perhaps” thought she, “his friend the Major may not be far distant: they are noted for being seldom asunder.”

The spontaneous idea had insensibly occurred, and she shuddered lest it should prove but too well authenticated. The event justified her fears; for St. Vincent was discovered making his way through the crowd, as if he had been retiring from that very spot to another quarter of the field.

This was certainly the case; but the cause of it happened to be not exactly what she imagined, for he had passed through the multitude merely to speak with some of the men who were leading about several young horses behind the spectators.

A look of ineffable contempt was now directed to the innocent Stella, who, unconscious of any merited reason for displeasure, respectfully curtsied, as the haughty, supercilious Mrs. St. Vincent stalked disdainfully past her.

To this mark of attentive politeness our heroine received not the smallest similar return from Mrs. St. Vincent. Not such was the case, however, with that lady’s male escort:—the officer who spoke last, being now close to Captain Montague, slipped his arm through that of the latter, and turning him suddenly round, under pretence of speaking on some regimental business, began to discourse with great, though unconnected volubility, while his wandering eyes were perpetually directed to the blushing Stella, who shrunk from the bold stare of curiosity, and retired behind one of the Miss Adairs to avoid his notice.

Meanwhile Louisa St. Vincent having caught a transient glimpse of Montague’s new acquaintance, and eager to procure some intelligence of so lovely a girl, beckoned him and the other gentleman to advance. They bowed to Stella, and obeying the summons, heard Mrs. St. Vincent, as they joined Louisa, reply to an interrogatory on the subject by sarcastically observing that she really knew little about her, but believed she was the person who got a smattering of education while in the humble station of a toad eater to her two sisters, Maria and Emma.

The manner, more than the words, in which this curious piece of information was conveyed, struck the auditors as something extraordinary; and a short pause instantly ensued.

Montague smiled as the lady spoke. It was not a smile of admiration, nor of coincidence of sentiment; neither was it the smile of complaisant credulity, polite approbation, or obsequious applause: no, nothing of the kind appeared: it merely seemed to indicate a superiour, but suppressed degree of information on the subject, well calculated to increase suspicion, if already entertained, or to create it, if otherwise.

Alike ignorant of the previous circumstances which had occurred to discompose her temper, as unconscious of observation at the time, Captain Montague suspected not the effect produced by his smile on the irritable nerves of Mrs. St. Vincent, whose curiosity proved now sufficiently roused to surmount every opposing obstacle in the way of its gratification.

Such was therefore the state of her mind when the incident at the conclusion of the field day took place, and operated to cause a more public display of feelings (equally violent and ill regulated) than, under different circumstances, might possibly have happened.

Perhaps the serious and pensive air of dejection that continued to pervade her husband’s appearance, did not much contribute to the preservation of her late restored cheerfulness; for the small portion of good-humour recently assumed was but of short duration, and once more vanished, like the evanescent impressions of a morning dream, before another event which occurred in the course of the evening.

What that event was, will appear in the succeeding pages, if the reader has patience to peruse them.

CHAP. XIX.

“In ev’ry peevish mood she will upbraid:

“If I but look awry,

“She cries— ‘I’ll not endure it’.”

DRYDEN.

THE female party from Rossgrove dined at the inn with the officers, and the military band played during the time they remained at table.

Stella and her companions happened to be in an adjoining house, from whence, as the tavern windows remained open, the music was heard distinctly.

During the pause in the performance, one of the gentlemen called upon another for a toast.

“I will give you,” replied the latter, “the fair and magnanimous Stella Bertram, provided my right-hand neighbour has no objection.”

“No, faith, none in the world,” was the answer, in a voice she instantly recognized for that of Captain Montague; “But the labourer is worthy of his hire: we will drink her in a bumper, if you please.”

“By my soul, Major, I should be devilishly jealous of that girl, were I in Mrs. St. Vincent’s situation!” exclaimed another speaker, with a loud laugh.

“And why so, Sir?” asked the person to whom he addressed himself, in a stern and serious accent.

“Because you—”

The remainder of the sentence was drowned in the louder voice of Captain Montague, who seemed to be speaking at this instant to some one across the table.

Mrs. Arabin and Mrs. St. Vincent soon after appeared at one of the windows: they seemed to converse in a low, whispering voice—the former, with apparent earnestness, the latter, with an air of sullen dissatisfaction and ill-humour.

Stella, disconcerted by what had previously passed relative to herself, had retired from her first station, likewise at an open window; and being now seated by the mistress of the house at the tea-table, no longer overheard the various topics that were discussed, though near where she was. The Miss Adairs soon followed her example; and good-humoured cheerfulness reigned uninterrupted round the festive board, till the happy group, tempted by the fineness of the evening, departed to take a ramble in the neighbourhood.

A similar proposal had been made by some of the gentlemen at the tavern, in order to visit the ruins of the old castle, which once reared its gloomy walls on the south side of Wigton.

Approaching an angle of the now desolated and gloomy edifice, a voice, singing one of the tunes recently played by the band, caught their attention. The vocal performer seemed to possess great taste, and the strains were warbled in the softest purest style of harmony. St. Vincent abruptly stopped short in the midst of something he was saying to one of the ladies, while Montague contrived to disengage himself from another, and joined him. The rest of the company proceeded a few steps further, and then paused, to listen, for the next song was continued in a much lower key. At length it totally ceased, and again they advanced forward, eager to discover the hitherto invisible musician.

It proved to be Stella, seated under the shade of some venerable-looking trees which half

concealed the remains of an old Gothic arch, on the mutilated, moss-covered stones of which she and her companions had placed themselves, to observe the setting sun, which was now disappearing with uncommon beauty; while at intervals she entertained them with a repetition of the most favourite airs played by the band, and endeavoured to suit her voice to a fine echo that happened to be in the vicinity.

Rays of the bright luminary rested on her form, and seemed to mark her for something more than human, when, from her elevated situation on the mouldering side of the ruin, the refulgent beams, partially darting through the foliage, first gave her to the view of those already charmed with her melody.

Confused and abashed by the appearance of such unexpected auditors, our heroine's distress was augmented when the recollection passed through her mind, like a flash of lightning, that, under circumstances nearly similar, she had formerly been surprised by Captain Montague and his companion: that companion might now make one of the present number, for their uniform announced their profession. She glanced a hasty eye over the group; but either the distance was yet too great for particular discrimination, or her increasing agitation prevented the discovery of him whose image was but too frequently before her mental vision: the song, however, ceased, and she remained silent. Probably from an idea that their approach had interrupted the harmonious strains which seemed so peculiarly adapted to the hour and surrounding scenery; or, more probably still, from a manœuvre of Mrs. St. Vincent, who perhaps recognised, or at least suspected the songstress to be her apprehended rival, the party turned into a different direction, and were soon lost to the view of Stella and her companions.

Persuaded there was no further interruption to be feared from this quarter, she was easily prevailed upon to resume her former occupation in the musical way, which was recommenced by giving them that pretty little air composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron, called, "The Banks of Cree," the words written by Mr. Burns, beginning—

"Here is the glen, and here the bower;"

and had just finished the first line of—

"Wilt thou be my dearie?"

by the same charming poet, when a second stop was put to "the woodnote wild," equally unexpected as the former.

One of the officers darted abruptly past a projection of the ruins, and seizing her hand with the easy assured look of an old acquaintance, gaily swore he would be her dearie to all eternity.

Stella started from her seat, and disengaging her hand with an air of cool contempt, began to descend from her elevated station.

Mr. Jones regarded her for a moment in silence, then followed her steps, and with all the well-bred assurance of high life, protested she must positively proceed with her song, otherwise he could not consent to let her depart so abruptly; after which, again seizing her hand, he attempted to reseat her.

Surprised by such an instance of persevering freedom in an entire stranger, Stella recoiled from his touch in visible emotion. A few seconds, however, afforded sufficient leisure for self-recollection, and with an expression of natural dignity, that awed even impertinence into

forbearance, she coolly requested to know by what right he conceived himself entitled to command her emotions.

Stella, "mild as a morning in May," when properly treated, and blessed with a disposition remarkable for its sweetness and urbanity, possessed, nevertheless, a competent portion of spirit to repress the encroachments of vanity, and assert her own free agency on all occasions like the present. She once more haughtily withdrew her hand, and prepared to retire, when the words "Silly, affected girl!" pronounced in a sarcastical accent, caught her ear. She turned hastily round to discover the speaker, and perceived Mrs. St. Vincent observing her with every symptom of displeasure and resentment on her countenance.

Stella regarded her for a moment with a steady look: her spirits rose against so many proofs of unmerited ill-usage, and conscious innocence strengthened her mind with more than usual firmness.

Mrs. St. Vincent was either unable to bear the expressive eye that now seemed to scrutinize her inmost thoughts, but which hitherto had sunk beneath her own overpowering gaze, or wished to conceal her increasing agitation, for she turned her head, under pretence of speaking to one of the ladies who happened to be a few steps behind the rest of the company.

The first object that at this juncture attracted her notice was Major St. Vincent and Captain Montague, conversing in a low voice, while the direction of their eyes apparently pointed to Stella as the chief topic of their conversation.

In a few minutes they separated: St. Vincent advanced to join his lady, and Montague soon after accosted Stella, whose countenance spoke a very different reception from that which his brother officer had lately experienced. Inattentive to some casual observation of her husband's, who was now at her side, Mrs. St. Vincent emphatically asked one of the ladies if she had ever seen a more affected or forward person than the country girl with whom Captain Montague appeared on so familiar a footing of intimacy.

This interrogatory was evidently intended for more than her to whom it seemed ostensibly addressed: Montague heard it, and cast a glance at the speaker sufficiently intelligent to convince her the source from whence it originated was not totally unknown to him.

Mrs. St. Vincent's face was in a glow: she stooped, to conceal the tell-tale emotion, under pretence of disentangling her petticoat from a briar, and, in the meantime, repeated her question, which yet remained unanswered.

The lady hesitated, and gave an evasive reply.

Louisa St. Vincent prevented another repetition of the query, by eagerly protesting she could not agree with her sister; for, in her humble judgment, the young woman was beauty, sweetness, and unassuming modesty personified.

"Pray, Henry," she continued, looking up at her brother, "is she not the lovely, generous girl, whose well-merited applause resounded through the field this morning, and the same who was toasted at the mess? I was so agitated by Mrs. St. Vincent's indisposition, when she so generously exerted herself in behalf of the child, that my thoughts were entirely occupied, and left me no leisure to bestow my attention on any thing less interesting; but if I rightly recollect, you were an eye-witness to her magnanimity, and can inform me if my present conjecture be well founded."

"No doubt he can," said Mrs. St. Vincent, with peculiar emphasis, glancing a look of particular meaning at her husband as she spitefully uttered the laconic sentence.

Of the insinuation conveyed in these few words, he took not the smallest notice, but turning to his sister, with an air of affected unconcern, briefly answered in the affirmative, and

almost instantly began another topic of conversation.

We are sometimes apt to overdo, where to underdo is merely intended: it was the case at this juncture: the tone of the Major's voice, his abrupt reply, and immediate change of subject, passed not unheeded by Mrs. St. Vincent; again she cast a quick penetrating glance on his face, then whispered some imagined jest to one of the party on the other side, and burst into a hysterical fit of laughter.

Major St. Vincent either chose not to notice the wit of his fair and perverse helpmate, or remarked her conduct with the utmost indifference.

CHAP. XX.

“Form’d to delight, to love, and to persuade,
“Impassive spirits and angelic natures
“Might have been charm’d like yielding human weakness,
“Stoop’d from their heav’n, and listen’d to his talking.”

ROWE.

MEANWHILE Captain Montague had been occupied in describing various parts of the ruins to the Miss Adairs and his friend Stella, who, ever eager to obtain every degree of information, found her self not only instructed by the communication, but likewise highly gratified by such an instance of his inclination to oblige her, at a period too when one of her own sex, whom she had never intentionally offended, seemed sedulously watchful to shew her every make of disrespect and unqualified contempt in her power. Sensible of the debt due to his well-timed humanity, which appeared particularly calculated to do away the bad impression Mrs. St. Vincent wished to give of her character and situation in life, our heroine listened to his discourse with visible complacency, while gratitude displayed itself in every intelligent feature.

Mr. Jones, the now crest-fallen beau, who had recently taken the office of her director in the musical line, and for some time been ineffectually endeavouring to obtain her notice by a few commonplace remarks on the topic of discussion, convinced at length of the inutility of further perseverance, and disconcerted by the repeated rebuffs he experienced, finally returned to his party, swearing the little virago had the spirit of an Emperor in her composition, though to Montague she appeared sufficiently condescending, else he was devilishly mistaken: Stella harboured no sentiments beyond the actual limits of friendly regard from Captain Montague, neither did Captain Montague experience any warmer sensation for Stella Bertram.

Will the same assertion hold good respecting her opinion of Henry St. Vincent? Truth has previously forced us to answer this question in the negative. Yet Stella was innocent of evil intention; for she knew not the real situation of him whose image occupied the secret recesses of her heart; neither was the true state of that heart, or the whole extent of its feelings, as yet fully ascertained by our young and beautiful heroine.

Previous to the commencement of the field-day the name of St. Vincent had never reached her; Montague merely mentioned him by the appellation of his friend, when any casual recurrence to preceding events was occasionally introduced. Mrs. Bertram imagined her *protégée* chiefly indebted to the Captain for her critical preservation from danger; and Stella felt too much agitated and confused, on every retrospection of the past in which the Major was so deeply implicated, to be desirous of dwelling on his particular share in the transactions which had taken place; though her gratitude was by no means withheld from evincing itself in general expressions of acknowledgment.

Thus, from a strange coincidence of circumstances, she suspected not that he who gradually began to occupy her secret thoughts, over which he had already imperceptibly acquired a considerable degree of influence before she was aware of the dangerous intruder, happened to be the destined husband of the proud and supercilious Miss Ross; from whose repulsive manners she shrunk with disgust, and from whom the most unfeeling humiliation and contempt had continually been her portion.

Another circumstance contributed to her ignorance in this respect. St. Vincent had never

called at the Hermitage either by himself or in company with Captain Montague; Stella, therefore, had not met with him, but now and then by accident; and those meetings, though of a nature sufficiently distressing to leave an indelible impression on her own mind, seemed to be either entirely obliterated from his, or herself considered in too insignificant a point of view to be judged worthy of any further attention.

She felt piqued as this idea arose in her mind, and fancied a confirmation of it visible in the conduct of Captain Montague, who apparently avoided every subject which might lead to any introduction of the one, in which she was secretly most interested.

Wounded pride therefore proved, for one, more powerful than curiosity in a female bosom, and instigated our heroine to follow the example thus set by others, of refraining from all enquiry on the occasion.

But Stella, though she might, in some measure, agree with the Poet in thinking that—

“Where ignorance is bliss,
“’Tis folly to be wise,”

was not long permitted to enjoy this negative state of happiness.

Major St. Vincent, always a fine figure, was particularly so on horseback; easy, graceful, commanding, he appeared superior to all who were near him:

“As if an angel dropp’d down from the clouds,
“To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
“And witch the world with noble horsemanship.”

With no less management St. Vincent seemed to direct the spirited motions of a high-mettled charger during the manœuvres of the memorable field-day, in the course of which many admiring plaudits were justly bestowed on his manly, elegant form, and martial appearance, by the gazing spectators, who followed him with their eyes wherever he moved.

To these marks of approbation the heart of our heroine beat responsive; for under the glittering helmet and waving plume, the cherished, but secret object of her daily meditations and midnight dreams was speedily recognised. But by how bitter a pang was this recognition accompanied, when the fatal discovery that he was already the husband of another, succeeded it!

Sickenings at the idea, and now eager to quit the field, the entreaties of her friends alone prevailed to retrain her from retiring. Her spirits, however, were totally fled; she felt no longer amused or interested by the gay scenes passing before her—all nature seemed suddenly obscured to her view; till the dangerous situation of the little girl recalled her thoughts from individual considerations to the more active exertions of humanity, and by changing the channel of gloomy reflection, led her to adopt the semblance of cheerfulness, in order to avoid the jests of her companions, who, ignorant of the officer’s name in whose arms she had been supported when administering relief to the child, already insinuated more than common motives of compassion stimulated his attention to her then situation.

Stella, delicate in her ideas of propriety, and strictly adhering in her own conduct to the notions she entertained of it, where the female character was in any degree implicated, started at this bare surmise, and endeavoured not to confirm it by any inadvertency on her side, with an anxiety and solicitude that increased their desire to tease her, and served to confirm the former suspicions of Captain Montague, who accidentally overheard something said on the subject as he

mingled in the crowd where she stood.

Hitherto at a loss to define the precise nature of those sentiments which had caused her so many distressing moments, Stella now imagined the discovery accomplished. It originated, she supposed, in a presentiment of the unhappiness that awaited her chief benefactor in an union with the haughty daughter of the Nabob; and a sigh of regret followed the thought, that he to whom she owed so many obligations should prove the husband of a woman apparently possessing a mind and manners so unlike his own.

Stella fancied the sigh she heaved was due to the fate of St. Vincent; but it proceeded from a yet nearer source of interest; and while a silent tear dropped on the conviction that his peace was for ever wrecked, his tranquillity fled for ever, the liquid witness of her feelings flowed alike from one troubled source of anguish, and no less evinced her sympathetic solicitude for his future destiny, than the sad, the hopeless certainty that disappointed and probable wretchedness must henceforth be the inmate of her own bosom. The mandate, however, was sealed—the irrevocable ceremony past: why then should she weakly permit her thoughts to dwell on the idea of a man with whom, and his concerns, she was totally unconnected—and a married man, too? Was this mental debility the sole fruit of Mrs. Bertram's advice, of Miss Sommer's instructions?

A brighter red suffused our heroine's lovely cheek, as she asked herself the humiliating question. She raised her eyes to heaven, and again bent them on the ground, as if oppressed by a sense of her own unworthiness. At length the proud, the internal conviction of conscious innocence seemed to invigorate every faculty of her soul, and checked any dormant inclination to commiserate the lot of one whose selfish heart could lead him to make such an election—an election that could only be the offspring of sordid avarice and equally inimical to every prospect of present felicity, as destructive of all future enjoyment through life.

Stella wondered what evil spirit had lately influenced her ideas, and taught them to wander from the tranquil path in which they had hitherto held their even way. Another circumstance likewise puzzled her to account for:—why should Major St. Vincent create any emotion in her breast?—why was her face covered with confusion on his casual appearance—he who had never, but from the natural impulse of humanity, paid her the smallest degree of attention, and apparently regarded her, on all other occasions, in the most insignificant point of view? or wherefore did her tongue hesitate in the performance of its office, when he became the subject of conversation? Was she situated in the same predicament with Captain Montague? Certainly not; on the contrary, unembarrassed, and perfectly at her ease, nothing of the kind was ever experienced in his company.

All this appeared unintelligible to the yet partially enlightened Stella Bertram; and gladly would she have applied for a solution of the enigma to the superior wisdom of her maternal friend, had not some strange restraining sensation withheld her from entering on the painful topic.

Major St. Vincent, however, *was married*; and in these two little words dwelt a talisman sufficiently potent to drive, or to attempt driving him from her thoughts. In a well-regulated mind, early imbued with the principles of religion and moral integrity, virtuous exertions are generally attended with ultimate success; and though its extent may not be altogether consonant to our wishes, we are, nevertheless, certain to derive no small benefit from the reflection, that a governing sense of duty, and a conscientious adherence to what our inward monitor prescribes as the right line of conduct, prove the chief motives of our actions, and the unerring guides by which we direct our fragile steps from the thorny and lacerating path of self-reproach, or galling

retrospection.

Our heroine's comprehensive mind glanced a quick, but reflective eye over these considerations; and she instantly formed a resolution to adopt them as a preservation against the illusive deception of a too tender heart.

This determination was not like that formerly adopted by the then Miss Ross, on the abrupt departure of her supposed admirer, resentment claimed no share in it, and the emotions of wounded pride subsided in the more rational recollection of the deficiency of her title to any other mode of conduct from a man who had never, in the smallest instance, given her the most distant cause to imagine he entertained any particular prepossession in her favour; but, on the contrary, evinced his total indifference towards her by the strongest proof he could possibly give—his marriage with another woman!

The longer these reflections were dwelt upon, the more she became astonished at the self-deception which had been permitted to take possession of her mind, and her resolution proportionably strengthened to resist its future progress.

CHAP. XXI.

“I’ll grow proud,
“As gentle spirits still are apt to do
“When cruel slight or chilling scorn falls on them.”

MISS H. MORE.

IN pursuance of this prudent intention, Stella yielded to the new-formed wish which at this moment occupied her thoughts, and, once more inspired by the innocent gayety of her friends, became apparently gay in her turn; but though this strain of cheerfulness proved rather an effort of the mind than the spontaneous effusions of a heart at ease, neither the company, nor the time, in which it was displayed, was calculated for nice discrimination, or adequate to ascertain its genuine source.

Happy to find herself relieved from insinuations that wounded her self-consequences, and jarred on those secret feelings which she wished to suppress, her spirits, now gradually tranquillized, seemed to have returned to their usual channel; and during a ramble round the ruins of the Castle, she had readily complied with the request of her companions, who were desirous of hearing her sing in that particular quarter of the desolated fabric where the echo reverberated most powerfully.

The unexpected appearance of Mrs. St. Vincent and her friends put an end to this innocent amusement, without compensating for the interruption by substituting any thing as an equivalent in its place. Stella imagined that lady viewed her with an air of more than usual haughtiness, and, provoked by the unceremonious address of the military hero, who seemed to think, like too many of his cloth, that scarlet and cockade authorized any degree of impertinence in country quarters, a conscious feeling of mental superiority, for the first time, inspired her with a spirit of retaliation, that enabled her to look the insolence of wealth and the imbecility of intellect in the face with a steady eye, which appeared to be tolerably understood by those on whom it rested.

This day, the dawn of which was ushered in by expected scenes of pleasure to the inhabitants of Rossgrove and the Hermitage, had finally been productive of chagrin to each of the parties. Mrs. St. Vincent, who, under the semblance of careless indifference, watched every turn of her husband’s countenance, and regulated the whole of her observations by the standard of a jaundiced imagination, fancied she saw a thousand additional causes for dissatisfaction in the conduct of the Major and Captain Montague. The attentions paid by the latter to our heroine she had had several opportunities of remarking in the course of the day: these, however, appeared more the result of good-humoured politeness than any sentiment of a warmer description; and the expression of pleasure that illumined their features, when conversing with each other, was of too open, too unembarrassed a nature, to justify the idea of a particular attachment in either of the respective parties. St. Vincent’s manner and looks were totally different; it was impossible, she mentally said, to overlook this circumstance: he betrayed himself on every occasion where the little presumptuous gypsy was in question.—Mrs. Arabin spoke of his humanity being the sole instigation to his conduct in the earlier part of the day: but she would be glad to know how that apology could possibly be accepted for what passed during the time they spent in the environs of the old Castle, where his behaviour proved equally reprehensible and particular, if it might be judged of by the nature of his looks, and that air of

suspicious caution which is seldom or ever adopted without the internal conviction of something wrong that requires concealment; and never were these appearances more obvious than during the period of dinner and at the old ruins. She saw his defalcation from propensity, not to give it a worse name, in every word and action; while the striking intimacy existing between him and Montague warranted the conclusion that the latter was the convenient confidant of the former, and his willing representative on occasions where he durst not openly shew the insufferable depravity of his own morals. Under an impression so unfavourable to Montague, it cannot be wondered at if her dislike to that gentleman soon equalled the hatred she bore the innocent and unoffending Stella.

The incidents of this eventful day may be considered as an epitome of our progress through life. Replete with fallacious prospects of enjoyment, brilliant hopes and expected pleasure break upon our view in the commencement of our career, and the sparkling eye of youth dwells delighted on the fascinating images which present themselves in the self-created mirror. Reverse the illusive picture, and see what follows. Disappointment, chagrin, sorrow, and despair accompany the decline of life, at the commencement of which the accomplishment of every wish, the indulgence of every gratification, were rashly supposed attainable. But let not the wisdom or goodness of Providence be arraigned, because this best of all possible worlds happens not to be formed exactly to suit the various tastes of those who inhabit it: our task is to conduct ourselves properly through the part assigned us, and to leave the result of the whole to a high and omnipotent Director.

Mrs. St. Vincent was seldom in a happy disposition of mind when the spirit of moralizing seized her: reflection, however, seemed not to be her *fort*; unless when some ideal necessity of an unpleasant description drove her to adopt it, as a last resource, under the pressure of apprehended evils, which perhaps solely originated in the chimeras of a distempered fancy, it was never admitted; and when admitted, scarcely ever productive of any permanent or beneficial effects.

She now returned home, extremely out of temper, of which her husband appeared evidently the cause, for, in spite of every wise determination, the irritable nature of her disposition proved too powerful for total suppression.

The mind of Major St. Vincent was not more at ease, though differently affected; and there were moments when he was mentally forced to acknowledge that the sacrifice made to parental tranquillity was infinitely greater than previous appearances rendered probable.

As for poor Stella, that degree of fortitude recently evinced, and which, in the ardor of youth and sanguine expectation, was considered as a fixed principle of action, gradually disappeared; her spirits failed her, her look became dejected, and it soon cost her no small exertion to retain the bare semblance of composure during the remainder of her short visit in Wigton. On the succeeding evening she bade her friends at that place farewell, and, accompanied by the Miss Adairs, they took the road to their respective habitations.

These young ladies, one excepted, parted from her at a small distance from their own house; Charlotte persisted in seeing her a little beyond it.

The evening was far advanced before they reached the last plantation that lay nearest the Hermitage; she insisted therefore that her companion should either return immediately, or, proceeding onward, remain with her till the following morning.

To comply with the latter request happened not to be in her power at the present juncture; of course, they parted; and Stella, who had hitherto restrained her tears with difficulty, now unobserved and alone, permitted them to flow without interruption.

Apprehensive of alarming Mrs. Bertram by the traces of sorrow still visible on her pallid cheeks, though the first gush of solitary anguish had somewhat subsided; and solicitous to conceal the real state of her heart from that worthy friend, before whom she could not muster sufficient courage to assign any satisfactory cause for her uneasiness, far less disclose the genuine source of it, she turned from the path leading directly to the door, and opening a small gate, of which she always kept a key, entered a covered walk on the opposite side of the garden, that wound in a romantic direction to the grotto.

The conflict of internal anguish, more than the fatigue arising from her late excursion, insensibly overpowered the agitated frame of our heroine. Her first intention was, to reach the grotto, and remain there for a few minutes, till the acquisition of more composure enabled her to meet the enquiring eye of Mrs. Bertram; but, weak and weary, she threw herself on one of the stone seats near the bottom of the ascent, and resting her head on her hand, sunk into a profound reverie.

The elegant figure of Henry St. Vincent, manly, dignified, and graceful still returned with fatal perseverance, and swam before her mental vision—that St. Vincent, whose intrusive image, sad and recent experience had now taught her, was, alas! become too stationary to be easily eradicated from her heart!

“Wretch!” cried the weeping Stella to herself, “is he not a married man—the husband of Mrs. St. Vincent? Oh why can I longer doubt the nature of my feelings? Why have the events of this ill-omened day opened so culpable a source of self-reproach and misery? Why was I not sooner made acquainted with his engagements at the Grove? But fool—presumptuous fool, that I am! what difference could that information have made in my situation? Would a man in his rank of life have bestowed a thought upon one in mine? Ah, no, no! Now indeed I bitterly feel the justice of Miss Ro—I mean Mrs. St. Vincent’s animadversions on the impropriety of that superior mode of education I received under her father’s roof. Why was I taken out of the humble station allotted me? Why were notions instilled into my young and ductile, but too aspiring mind, calculated to remove the distinctions of birth, and mist of ignorance, and to give the reasoning faculties a wider range to ascertain the extent of their original powers?”

But, good Heavens! am I indeed become so ungrateful a being as to dare arraign the wisdom of those for whose indulgent kindness I ought to feel so infinitely indebted? Have not the favours heaped on me, now repining, enabled me to rise above the malice of Fortune, and bestowed that source of intellectual enjoyment which the world cannot take away, and which, by the mental equality it creates, gives the lowly inhabitant of the cottage a compensation for wealth, sometimes the only advantage possessed by those who vainly conceive themselves pre-eminently exalted above their fellow-creatures?

“Ah! but,” continued Stella, “has not that very circumstance proved the bane of my peace? Yes, I have already said it has! In this one individual instance, better had it been for me had I remained in the rank I was originally destined to fill: then, perhaps, I had never raised my thoughts beyond their proper limits, never formed my estimate of happiness by objects too exalted for attainment.—And yet, riches excepted, let me ask myself in what I am so much inferior to the uninformed, supercilious Mrs. St. Vincent. Humility would probably answer, ‘In every thing;’ but Justice gives a different decision.

“Yes, conscious worth whispers a proud superiority in mental endowments, which at times raises this swelling heart above the low-minded indignities of the unfeeling, capricious Mrs. St. Vincent! Let me then retain this enviable distinction by continuing to respect myself, by remembering I have not, nor ever can have, any legal claim upon the husband of another.—But

is it indeed possible? Have I given way to such an idea, even for a single moment? Unworthy Stella! weak, erring girl! hasten to regain thy own approbation by a less reprehensible mode of proceeding; endeavour to exclude from thy thoughts the fatal cause of the evil; once more try to persevere in well-doing, and the merit of good intentions will at least be thine.”

The sincerity of our heroine’s determination on this subject was speedily ascertained in a manner she little expected at the time.

END OF VOL. I.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.