

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.

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S T E L L A

OF THE

N O R T H.

CHAP. I.

“Know the joy thy triumph brings is short;
My fate, (if the Gods govern) or, at least,
My mind’s beyond thy reach, and scorns thy malice!”

ROWE.

FOR a short time a temporary alteration now took place in the sentiments of Mrs. St. Vincent; who, after the discovery at the grotto, began to imagine she had been rather too hasty in the opinion previously formed of her husband’s conduct, and the imprudent share Stella was supposed to have in it.

That the real character of the latter was at length fully ascertained, appeared, however, no longer doubtful; and a conviction so consolatory to the feelings of Margaret, proved a source of no small exultation.

What, the favourite of her mother—she who was tacitly held up as a miracle of perfection, capable of affording an example, not merely to her equals, but even to her very superiors—in short, the immaculate *protégée* of the sententious prosing Mrs. Bertram, and the late tremendous object of her own jealous apprehensions—had this paragon, then, actually forfeited all claim to the ill-judged praise so erroneously, though so copiously bestowed upon her conduct for virtues to which she was a stranger, and prudence which it was now evident she never possessed? The incontrovertible disclosure of so fortunate a circumstance was almost beyond her hopes. Thank God, the Major had escaped the artful snares visibly spread to entrap him by this little presumptuous, unprincipled wanton:—but this was, no doubt, to be entirely ascribed to her own more conspicuous and irresistible attractions.—So thought Margaret; and the idea was too pleasing not to be indulged.

A slave perpetually to the existing impulse of the moment, she now became equally solicitous to evince her attachment to the Major (for whom all her former affection speedily returned with renovated force), as she had hitherto been occasionally studious to pique him, by the fictitious appearance of a preference for Mr. Jones; who soon found himself reduced to his natural state of insignificancy, and apparently considered as of no further use in the part which, she fondly flattered herself, was henceforth reserved for her to perform.

Characters of every description have their allotted scene of action in the world: many members of the Privy Council, whose abilities were much on a level with those possessed by the discarded Lieutenant, have been reinstated in favour even when their final dismissal from office seemed no longer equivocal:—the sequel will, perhaps, show that Mr. Jones proved equally fortunate.

Surprised at this change, so new and unexpected in the manners of his wife, St. Vincent at first could scarcely credit the reality of a metamorphose so totally incomprehensible: on his side, he was not sensible of affording the smallest cause for the line of conduct thus suddenly adopted, by any alteration in his own: common civility, and some degree of polite attention had

ever been paid her;—those he considered her invariable due from a man whose pecuniary situation, if not his domestic one, was so greatly benefited by her alliance; and these she continued to receive as usual, though accompanied by apparent symptoms of increased coolness and simulated respect. St. Vincent, who conceived himself too well acquainted with her disposition to be mistaken, ascribed the new system of proceedings entirely to caprice, that inexhaustible source of her general manoeuvres; and under this idea treated it accordingly. She still persevered however; till at length, willing to believe she wished to remedy some of those errors he had particularly reprobated, and solicitous rather to encourage the work of reformation, than crush its first laudable efforts by an ill-judged adherence to his former frigid indifference, St. Vincent somewhat relaxed in that point; and a greater portion of tranquillity proved the immediate consequence in the family circle of Rossgrove.

This condescension on his part appeared another proof of the injury done him by the tenor of her recent suspicions; for it seemed to shew that the evils of which he had frequently complained, sprung not from any deficiency in the article of affection on his side, but rather originated in the capricious perverseness of her own behaviour, which repelled his supposed tenderness, and irritated his mind against her, by a mode of conduct totally inimical to the feelings of a fond husband, or the sentiments of a man of honour.

In the premature judgment of this superficial casuist, the above circumstances would never more be productive of similar effects; because, so Margaret said, and so she firmly believed at the time, they would never again be resumed, and consequently would no longer interfere to the prejudice of her future happiness.

Stella, the hitherto detested Stella, was henceforth out of the question, for had not she herself been a witness to the extent of her infamy in another quarter?—After a discovery so conclusive, a proof so undeniable of her criminal connexion with Montague, it would appear the climax of folly to injure her husband, her dear St. Vincent, by any further imputation of such an improbable nature—no, it was impossible to act in a manner so ridiculous and unjust. She had seen the child whose existence was formerly whispered to be enigmatical, and the same opinion continued to be still entertained—she had seen it now with her own eyes, and likewise observed the indecent familiarities that passed between its parents; for was not Montague admitted to the greatest freedoms, even in the very face of day, without the least apparent reluctance on the part of his abandoned paramour?

“Oh fool! fool!” continued the charitable Margaret, “fool that I was ever to suppose such a man as St. Vincent would degrade himself by harbouring any degree of partiality for a being so profligate, so lost to all sense of virtue and propriety!”

For some days the enthusiasm of reformation and reparation operated in an equally violent degree: but all extremes are liable to change, and enthusiasm either in love or religion, the most so of any;—Mrs. St. Vincent’s soon reached its climax.

The first fortnight this second edition of the honeymoon was nearly expired, and Margaret, to the wonder of her astonished husband, still continued to act the reasonable woman; when a sudden stop was put to the further performance of the comedy and the *dramatis personae* resumed their natural characters.

“Lord bless me, Madam!” cried Jenny, bursting into her mistress’s dressing-room one evening, with a countenance brimful of intelligence, “was ever the like heard?—I declare I am quite dumfounderfied at the bare idea!”

“And pray what is this mighty wonder that has *dumfounderfied* so wise a woman?” asked Margaret, without taking her eyes from the Major’s picture, to which she was affixing a superb

gold chain.

“Nay, Lord, Madam, only guess!—For my part I should never have thought of such a thing: but people now-a-days pay no manner of regard to right or wrong, except as it suits their own convenience.”

Margaret put the chain round her neck, admired it and the miniature as she alternately examined them before a large mirror, and humming a favourite air, seemed to view her own figure with no small degree of complacency, without appearing to recollect the presence of the consequential personage who impatiently waited to be delivered of her important intelligence, but waited in vain.

Now Jenny’s capability on the subject of retention was not of a first rate description, unless the communication happened to implicate any part of her own character, and in that case she could be secret as the grave; neither was Jenny a very noted proficient in the art of forbearance when report enabled her to extend the circle of human frailties through the augmented medium of repetition: perceiving, therefore, that her mistress was far more disposed to continue absorbed in self-contemplation, than solicitous to learn her intended information, Jenny ventures once more to renew the topic, by exclaiming in a drawling accent—

“La, Madam, how beautiful! how heligant! how every thing that is fine!—But I wonder your La’ship has not a little more curiosity.”

“Curiosity! for what?” said her La’ship, carefully adjusting her handkerchief as she spoke— “why so, pray?”

“Lord, Madam, cannot you guess?”

“Me guess!—how should I guess?—Has my *ci-devant* friend, Jones, taken the lover’s leap?”

“Worse, Madam!”

“Has Major St. Vincent challenged him, and received a bullet in return?”

Jenny had nearly said, “Worse, Madam!” again: but though her lady spoke in a gay, jesting voice, she knew the length of her present tether too well to outrun the constable; and therefore gulping down the nearly-committed mistake, suddenly checked herself, and meekly replied, she hoped it was not come to that yet.

“What is it come to then?—Prithee have done with this nonsense, and tell me at once.”

“Nay, dear Madam, do but guess.”

“Has Captain Montague’s ghost appeared at the grotto, and the Lady of the Hermitage flown to the original’s arms for shelter from the apparition of her dearie?”

“Madam!” cried Jenny, looking round with an expressive glance of terror, as if she expected to see something supernatural approaching to seize her.

“Has Captain Harcourt persuaded you to run off with him? He was rather sweet upon you last night in the passage I thought.”

“Me, Madam!—Surely,” said Jenny, colouring violently, “your La’ship cannot think that I would go off with any man! No, it is worse, far worse than even that!”

“The deuce it is!” cried Mrs. St. Vincent, with a smile. “But come, I will guess again.—Has the virtuous Miss Stella Bertram produced another bantling, and fathered it upon the Parson of the parish?”

“Worse, worse still, Madam!”

“Indeed!—nay, then I am able to guess no farther: so the mighty secret must remain untold, unless you chuse to speak more intelligibly.”

“Well, Madam,” replied Jenny, who by this time was as impatient to explain as the other

was to listen, "you shall now be obeyed:—but prepare to hear wonders. Mrs. Tomkins says—nay, you will scarcely believe me, Madam; but if I stand here, it is truth I speak;—Mrs. Tomkins informs me Miss Bertram is actually to attend your mother to Devonshire in the character of a companion!—Knowing what we know, Madam, can any thing equal this, pray?"

Mrs. St. Vincent turned hastily round, and stared at her for a moment in mute astonishment.

"Yes, indeed, Madam, you may well look surprised: it is truth, however, I assure you:—'For,' says the housekeeper, 'marry,' says she—"

"What signifies what either you or the housekeeper says," abruptly interrupted Mrs. St. Vincent: "I must see my mother instantly:—is she up?—is she awake?"

"I cannot tell," muttered the waiting-maid in a sullen accent; who, in consequence of being pretty deep in several of her lady's secrets, ventured now and then to take a little more freedom of tongue, than the other was always inclined to grant her; "for you know, Madam, it signifies not what some folks say."

"Impertinence!" retorted Margaret, sharply;— "Begone!—I insist on immediate obedience: inform my mother I must speak with her instantly.—No, stay, stupid animal, and slow as a snail!—I will go myself."

She brushed past the still sulky Jenny, and hurried to the chamber of Mrs. Ross.

CHAP. II.

“Speak of me as I am: nothing extenuate,
“Nor set down aught in malice.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THAT lady had just left her bed, after an hour's repose, as was customary with her of late in the evenings: Mrs. St. Vincent, therefore, entered immediately on the subject of her present visit, by abruptly requesting to know, if it was really possible, as reported, that she meant to take Stella Bertram to Devonshire with her.

Mrs. Ross answered in the affirmative.

“Good God, Madam! you are not in earnest, I hope?”

“Why not, Margaret?—Can I have a more eligible companion, or one that performs all the incumbent duties of her station with more uniform propriety?”

Margaret smiled contemptuously, and repeated the last word with a significant emphasis.

“Yes, *propriety*, Mrs. St. Vincent!—Can the term be better applied than on the present occasion? In my own family it cannot you well know.”

Margaret reddened at this home touch: but where a fact is too obvious to be refuted, true wisdom consists in not making the attempt; she therefore merely answered—“This young woman must not, however, accompany you, Madam.”

“Must not!—Who shall prevent her?—Not my own children surely?”

“No, Madam, you will save them that trouble, I dare say, when you know her story; which, if you will give me leave, you shall do immediately.”

“Proceed then, and let us hear it.”

Margaret did not much admire the humour her mother happened to be in this evening. Of late she seldom possessed sufficient spirits to contest any matter long with the violent and overbearing temper of a daughter, whose total inattention to almost all the filial duties of a child had been notorious for a considerable length of time: to find this ill-treated parent now capable of so much exertion, at a period too, when it was so little expected, and still less desired, rather disconcerted the first attempts of this predetermined impartial historian. She commenced her narrative of *positive* facts, however, after a pause of very short duration; and gradually warming in the progress of the communication, failed not to heighten every apparently aggravating circumstance with all the additional colouring a censorious and malignant mind could bestow. She then concluded the whole farrago of intermingled truth and falsehood, by sarcastically enquiring if Mrs. Ross still retained her former opinion of the girl's passion for *propriety*, and persevered in her design of taking her for a companion to Devonshire.

Though accustomed to her daughter's violence of temper, and thoroughly acquainted with her natural bias to misrepresentation, Mrs. Ross could scarcely command her usual portion of patience to the end of this curious recital; and it was only with the utmost difficulty she restrained herself from giving vent to those sensations of indignant resentment which repeatedly rose to her lips at the idea of so vile an aspersion being thrown upon the hitherto unsullied character of her young, and as she yet believed her, innocent favourite. Experimentally convinced, however, of the inutility of reason, and the still vainer attempt to implant the divine principles of mercy and forbearance in a soil so inimical to their culture, she refrained from entering at length on the subject, or exerting herself to refute what she knew was previously determined to be maintained; and merely replied that her opinion and intentions remained in

every respect the same.

“Then, Madam, you are stubbornly deaf to conviction, to truth, and the dictates of your late valued system of *propriety*,” said Margaret, with a strong expression of impatience on every agitated feature.

“Your share of the two latter, Mrs. St. Vincent, is, I much fear, infinitely too small to supply my supposed deficiency in any article of the kind:—as to the former, when error is adopted as the obvious rule of conduct, and depravity scorns disguise, conviction must follow of course.—You are welcome to apply this observation where your feelings tell you it is most suitable.”

Mrs. St. Vincent burst into tears, and by that means evinced her comprehension of the foregoing allusion.

Mrs. Ross knew they were not the tears of penitence or reformation, and permitted them to flow unnoticed. She took a volume of Blair’s Sermons from a table, on which leaning her elbow, she seemed to be entirely occupied by the contents of the book.

Margaret’s pride now came to her assistance on perceiving her mother’s total inattention to the late subject of discussion: she hastily wiped her eyes, and again inquired if no further regard was to be paid to the nature of so important a communication—a communication so critical in its consequences to the respectability of her mother’s appearance either at home or abroad.

Mrs. Ross raised her eyes from the page before her, and fixing them impressively on the face of her adviser, observed that the case, in her opinion, required no investigation.—“However,” added she, coldly, “I shall, nevertheless, mention it to Mrs. Bertram when we meet again.”

“You had better mention it to Captain Montague,” retorted Margaret, with quickness, and then flounced out of the room with the air and look of a fury.

Mrs. Ross followed her with her eyes, and a deep sigh burst from her bosom as the incorrigible Mrs. St. Vincent pulled the door to with violence after her. The latter threw herself on the sofa in her dressing-room, and again burst into an hysterical fit of tears.

At this instant Major St. Vincent entered the apartment, and, thunderstruck at the scene that presented itself, requested an explanation.

Roused by the sound of his voice, and flattering herself with conjugal support on the occasion, she suddenly raised her head from the arm of the sofa; and labouring under the dark influence of spite, disappointment, envy, and malice, instantly entered upon the subject of her mother’s reported cruelty, and the cause in which it originated.

Totally thrown off his guard by the virulence of her language, and the volubility with which it was uttered, indignation succeeded to astonishment; and recoiling a few paces as the first energetic epithets bestowed upon poor Stella vibrated on his feelings, St. Vincent emphatically exclaimed—

“Stella Bertram vile, profligate, abandoned!—By Heaven, you wrong her!—I could stake my salvation on the purity of Stella Bertram!”

The scene that followed beggared description. St. Vincent was of too firm and manly a character to retract from what he had once said, particularly when he believed himself in the right. The former suspicion entertained by Margaret, returned with additional force; and the frail bond of peace and confidence, thus once more snapped asunder, the matrimonial breach soon became wider and more disjointed than ever.

There was a time when the enraged Margaret would have flown to her father, and poured

her complaints in the ears of parental affection: that period, however, no longer remained within her reach; for the Nabob had set out the preceding week to join his son at Montpelier, whose declining state of health required his presence, and seemed at this crisis to threaten the most serious consequences.

Indeed, her influence, even in that quarter, had rather declined of late. Since her marriage every evil propensity seemed to be freely indulged as it rose in her mind, and her passions permitted to reign with the most unbounded licence. Where obvious distinctions are made amongst the children of a family, it does not always happen that the particular favourite is uniformly the most grateful or deserving of the ill-judged partiality; on the contrary, the reverse is more commonly the case: and the weak injustice of the parent is but too often rewarded by the neglect and inattention of the very being for whom probably the other more worthy members of the domestic circle were constantly and totally overlooked.

Something too similar to this had occasionally occurred between Mrs. St. Vincent and her father prior to her union with the Major. After she became a wife, her overbearing and insolent spirit, as we have already observed, seemed more than ever to spurn at all restraint; and Mr. Ross frequently found, to his cost, that caprice and ill-humour, like death, levels all distinctions: his allotted share indeed of each was not small when the perverse fit happened to be upon her; and that, on a moderate average, could not be reckoned at less than two-thirds of every day in the week.

Conviction from self-experience is generally found pretty conclusive: and the Nabob's portion of the latter proved tolerably sufficient to establish the former. He now began to perceive some few errors in the character of his once all-perfect favourite; which led him to suspect she was not quite superior to her fellow-mortals, as he had formerly been willing to imagine.

From the Monarch to the beggar human favour is unstable, and naturally apt to change its object when provocations arise, and those who ought to remain the governed, attempt to become governors. In consequence of the foregoing discovery, Mrs. St. Vincent's power over her father's affections declined; and in proportion to the magnitude of the aggravating circumstances which daily took place to estrange him from his usual bias to this misguiding daughter, the disposition and character of the Major rose in his estimation, till it nearly reached the climax of favour once so unworthily attained by his wife; who now found, to her no small surprise and displeasure, that, in matters of domestic disagreement, her complaints appeared gradually less and less attended to; while St. Vincent, on the contrary, seemed to be the idol set up by her father as her substitute in his good opinion.

The sudden departure of the Nabob was therefore viewed by Margaret with the most philosophical degree of indifference; and the cause of it, so far from being considered a misfortune, appeared as little interesting to her feelings as the separation from this long indulgent, but much-mistaken parent: for Margaret still retained her former prudent manner of judging on the occasion, and looked upon the certain advantages which must necessarily accrue to herself by the death of an only brother, as fraught with a sufficient number of consolatory reasons to prove a full compensation for the event which produced them—an event alike common to all the human race, and therefore not to be deplored as an individual distress.—So thought Mrs. St. Vincent; and, under similar circumstances, Mrs. St. Vincent was by no means singular in her opinion.

CHAP. III.

“A grateful mind
“By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
“Indebted and discharg’d.”

MILTON.

A WEEK now only remained till the commencement of Mrs. Ross’s journey was to take place: during this period, as likewise that which succeeded her immediate altercation with Margaret, the latter gradually reinstated Lieutenant Jones in all his former rights and privileges, and, apparently indifferent to the future notions, sentiments, or conduct of her mother and husband, affected to carry matters with a higher hand than ever.

Perceiving, however, that no particular notice was taken of any part of her proceedings, and irritated to find herself of too little consequence to draw their attention, she once more determined to try her strength in another attempt to shake Mrs. Ross’s former resolution relative to our poor heroine.

In this undertaking she was equally unsuccessful as before. Mrs. Bertram, under the solemn seal of secrecy, had already entrusted that lady with the true state of the case; and the part it appeared Stella had acted in it, raised her character higher than ever in the eyes of her worthy patroness, who (now more at liberty to follow the bent of her own inclinations since the departure of the Nabob) no longer made any difficulty of avowing her steady adherence to every former arrangement, and her unalterable design of being accompanied by Stella—a design which at one time seemed rather to meet with the disapprobation of her husband, in consequence of his daughter’s distorted representations; but to which afterwards he tacitly ceased to give any very marked opposition, on observing the strong desire Mrs. Ross expressed for the society of her young friend during the period of her residence in England: preparations were accordingly made for their departure, in spite of this second effort of Mrs. St. Vincent to prevent our heroine from attending her mother.

Under the pretence of avoiding every probable cause of exasperating Mrs. St. Vincent, Stella had earnestly entreated to be spared going to the Grove, unless at those particular periods when her unrelenting enemy was engaged with the rest of the family on visiting parties in the neighbourhood: this request Mrs. Ross reluctantly acceded to on perceiving her solicitude on the subject; and Stella, of course, felt herself relieved from the many apprehensions which continually haunted her imagination relative to any further interviews with the Major.

A day or two previous to their intended departure, Mrs. Bertram took an opportunity of recapitulating all the circumstances particularly connected with her first introduction to her knowledge; and requested her above all things to be particularly attentive to the preservation of the miniature picture, which she now meant to confide to her care, as it was strongly impressed on her mind, though she knew not how to account for it, that this painting was some how or other connected with her birth, and might possibly in the end prove materially useful in the elucidation of that hitherto mysterious affair.

After a short pause, she proceeded next to hint at the uncertainty of life, and the increasing vicissitudes to which every human being is, in various respects, liable during their chequered progress through the chances and changes of the world.

“We may, and we may not meet again, my dear child,” continued this truly good woman, regarding her auditor with a look expressive of the utmost compassion and tenderness as she

addressed her. "All events are in the hand of a wise and over-ruling Providence: of course, what he orders must be best; and it is our unquestionable duty to conform, without repining, to the high dispensations of his omnipotent will. Your prospects, my love, are but of a limited nature: from the station you are going to be placed in with Mrs. Ross, unforeseen advantages may possibly accrue, and subsequent benefits I hope be derived as it will render you more competent for the lot I have long mentally assigned you to fill; and to do which with propriety, some knowledge of the world, of genteel life, its habits and customs, is absolutely necessary. At any rate, however, should our prospects on this head prove fallacious, you have still a maternal friend, and a home ready to receive you, while God Almighty sees fit to permit my continuance on earth. If the allotted term of existence happens, nevertheless, to expire before your return (as I have already said, every thing of this nature is uncertain, and therefore ought to be guarded against,) I have done all in my power to secure my beloved child a small resource in the day of trouble, (and the most prosperous are not exempted from such) by bequeathing the Hermitage, and the few acres I can call my own, to her future possession. In this drawer the papers belonging to it are all deposited: here, my love, you will find the deed of settlement, which constitutes you mistress of the Hermitage and its little domain:—see, Stella, the parcel is sealed, and lies in that corner.—Nay, my child, weep not! Why should what I have said cause so much emotion? Does the drawing of a will sign our mortal sentence, or discoursing upon it accelerate its final execution? This is a weakness I hoped you were superior to, and am grieved to find myself mistaken. Dry up your tears, my love; we have yet, I trust, many happy days to spend with each other."

Stella, who had hitherto wept in silence, now suddenly rose, and throwing her arms round Mrs. Bertram's neck in an agony of grief, emphatically exclaimed, while her words were almost inarticulate from the violence of her emotion—

"Oh my dearest mother! blame not your Stella if she protests against quitting you! You are ill—I am sure you think yourself ill;— under an impression so dreadful, how can I possibly leave you?—Oh my more than parent! command me not from you, but permit me to remain at the Hermitage! What is Mrs. Ross, what the whole world to me, when put in competition with the obligations I owe my earliest, my best, my ever-generous benefactress?—No, indeed, indeed I must not quit you, my mother! Oh! allow your Stella, the object of your bounty—allow her to discharge part of her immense debt, by dedicating her sole attention to the protecting, maternal friend who sheltered the helpless foundling from the consequences of that fate to which the less humane authors of her existence seemed to have consigned her!—Say, my mother, only say—'Stella, I grant your request—you may remain with me!'"

Mrs. Bertram attempted not to speak for several minutes, during which they continued locked in each others arms. At length she disengaged herself from the still weeping Stella, and, solicitous to dispel her apprehensions, strove by every possible argument reason could suggest, to calm her fears, and inspire better hopes respecting her future prospects in life. The fortitude of our heroine seemed, however, to have lost its firmness; and it was not without much difficulty that something like a faint degree of composure at last shed its placid influence over her soft features, and illumed them with an appearance of returning tranquillity. Stella never shone more interestingly beautiful than on similar occasions: duty, gratitude, friendship, and affection seemed to blend in forming the celestial expression of her mild and pensive countenance—a countenance at all times uncommonly lovely, but which constantly derived additional charms from any recent exertion of sensibility, of active benevolence, or the softer effusions of that passion which had lately taken possession of her breast.

Mrs. Bertram's rhetoric, though seldom so long in producing the desired effect, was sure of carrying every thing before it in the end: Stella finally consented to relinquish her own wishes in compliance with those of others; and, silent and sorrowful, set about the disagreeable task of packing up the few articles of dress prepared for her journey: these, though plain, were neat and genteel, perfectly appropriate to the situation she was going to fill, without encroaching on the sphere of her superiors, and such as Mrs. Ross could not but approve.

At the earnest request of Maria Campbell, Stella prevailed on her maternal friend to indulge her with a sight of the child before she herself left the Hermitage. This petition would probably have remained unattended to at any other period than the present; but sensible of the magnitude of the sacrifice made by our heroine to please her, Mrs. Bertram thought it would be hard to refuse so trifling a favour—and a favour too, from whence her *protégée* could only at best derive a secondary degree of gratification, since it was merely in compliance with the unfortunate mother's eager solicitations she had ventured upon asking it.

The gentle and feeling heart of Stella was extremely affected by this interview: she found herself, however, amply compensated by the temporary happiness it bestowed on poor Maria, and the repeated assurances received from her of her resolution to pay the most unceasing attention to the wants and wishes of their mutual benefactress during our heroine's absence.

When she went to pay her last visit at Woodside, a similar act of friendship was requested, on Mrs. Bertram's account, from that worthy family; every individual of which readily promised to call frequently at the Hermitage, and do every thing in their power to supply her place on all possible occasions.

As her young friends accompanied her part of the road back, they mentioned a circumstance which appeared incomprehensible to our heroine, who was yet ignorant of the imputation thrown upon her character by Mrs. St. Vincent, which Mrs. Ross and Mrs. Bertram had mutually agreed to conceal from her knowledge, as the inutility of such a vile communication was obvious, and could serve no earthly purpose, the inhuman one excepted, of tormenting its innocent victim.

Margaret, enraged and unusually irritated by the manner in which her intelligence had been received by her mother and husband, and particularly provoked at the incredulity which marked their opinion of her veracity relative to what she asserted having seen in the grotto, had flown in the first ebullition of passion to Mr. Adair's; where, unwilling to prove too explicit in her enquiries, lest the friends of Stella should take the alarm, and be upon their guard, the wary Mrs. St. Vincent attempted, by every insidious artifice in her power, to ascertain the extent of what they knew respecting the conduct of our heroine with St. Vincent and Montague. Not conceiving it possible she could have any particular reason for such an investigation, and by no means comprehending the precise meaning of her dark and mysterious hints, they carefully avoided every thing that alluded in the most distant degree to the Major, as a subject on which they were not competent to speak; while the manner in which the other gentleman's supposed partiality for their absent friend was tacitly acknowledged, confirmed Margaret in her suspicions of both. Though feelings of delicacy were imagined to prevent them from dwelling on the infelicity of a husband in the presence of his wife, she departed perfectly convinced that it was not for nothing he stood up in defence of Stella: and the success of her mission would speedily have been detailed alike to the Major and Mrs. Ross, had not the former left the room in evident displeasure on her attempting to recommence the hackneyed subject; and the latter positively prohibited her from presuming to mention it again in her presence.

CHAP. IV.

“Oh soft Remembrance! airy sprite!
“Thou second life of bliss and pain;
“Exquisite sense of keen delight,
“Who giv’st our feelings back again!”

FOX.

TO account for this part of Margaret’s conduct lay not within the compass of our heroine’s abilities: the curiosity expressed by her companions on the subject consequently remained ungratified; and after hazarding a few conjectures on the probable and improbable import of the whole, their thoughts gradually reverted to the approaching separation about to take place between them. This topic proved sufficiently interesting to absorb every other for the short period they were now together; and at length they parted after many reciprocal professions of friendship and remembrance.

The heart of our heroine felt uncommonly heavy when the much-loved associates of her youth retreated from view.

“One melancholy task is now over,” said she to herself as she entered the garden: “what would I not give to have those that remain equally so!—My mother, my dearest mother, why dwells this oppressive presentiment of evil in my bosom when I think of the approaching event?—Oh! could I only be permitted to continue at the Hermitage, how happy should I be! But, alas! your Stella is not privileged to follow the bent of her inclinations!—Poor, friendless, and unknown, she must yield to the hard law of necessity, and quit her first, generous benefactress, perhaps to meet no more!”

A deluge of tears interrupted all further utterance; and, unable to suppress her emotions, she hastened to the grotto, lest Mrs. Bertram should happen to discover her present distress, and decidedly censure what she would style another proof of mental imbecility.

To our poor heroine, who had never been ten miles from home in the whole course of her life, the journey before her seemed an undertaking of considerable magnitude, and the separation from those she loved scarcely less than eternal: the grotto—that spot in which so many hours of her existence had been spent, unmolested by the intrusion of the world, and where innocent pleasure proved her constant companion, till the arrival of the troops in Galloway mingled her cup with the tincture of human vicissitude and secret sorrow—that grotto was soon, likewise, to be far distant from her view!

The tears of Stella flowed afresh at the sad ideas which rose in melancholy rotation as she silently yielded to their force, and permitted the sensibility of her nature to a temporary dominion over the suggestions of reason and the cooler dictates of her better judgment. She regarded every object around her with a degree of interest never before experienced, and almost persuaded herself she should see them no more: every favourite shrub seemed to court her attention—every bird to sing in a more plaintive note; and, from the threshold, recollection assembled the festive group once more in the drawing-room of the Grove—once more they appeared in the windings of the mazy dance, passing the spacious windows in quick succession—and again the fascinating strains of the military band reverberated on her ear: the transition was easy to what followed—and the visionary forms of St. Vincent and his friend Montague instantly floated before her.

Stella sighed profoundly over the retrospective scenes that imagination portrayed in the

most impressive colours; and in the fulness of her heart supposed herself the most wretched of human beings.

Thus, in the absence of real evils, are we ever prone to create fictitious ones; and sensibility, that criterion by which the young and untried mind is apt to determine the standard of earthly perfection, overwhelms its possessor with a thousand ideal distresses, unknown to those less fastidious, unrefined mortals who consider the unavoidable misfortunes of life sufficiently oppressive without the additional load of “airy nothings,” so industriously cherished for the laudable purpose of self-formed misery, by the ill-judging few who have never experienced the pang of actual anguish, or suffered affliction beyond the illusive boundary of mental vision.

The moon already shone with uncommon brightness before Stella could tear herself away from her favourite retreat: the night, however, was not yet too far advanced to prevent the execution of a little excursion she wished to accomplish before it entirely closed in. She felt a strong inclination to bid Sally Thompson and the child of Maria a last adieu. The shortest and most unfrequented path to the house of the former wound past the ruins of the old Abbey. It was gloomy and solitary: but the usual road lay considerably about, and convenience prompted her to adopt it without further delay: she therefore obeyed the impulse of the moment, and descending from the grotto, bent her steps towards the farmer’s habitation.

In the course of her progress, it was necessary to cross a quarter of the venerable fabric that led to a vaulted gate-way through which she must pass. As she walked hastily along, the reverberated sound of her footsteps seemed uncommonly loud; and her heart began to beat in proportion as an apprehension of something, she knew not what, took possession of her mind. Almost convinced she was not alone in this forlorn and dismal looking spot, she stopped once or twice, uncertain whether to return or proceed, and anxiously listened to discover if her fears were really well founded, or merely the effect of imagination. The owl, however, which now circled over her head, and then rested on the northern turret, appeared to be the only living thing near her. At length she reached a private passage, cut through a part of the rocky barrier that on this side inclosed the little possessions of Mrs. Bertram: at the end of it was a strong close-made door, which from time immemorial had belonged to the proprietors of the Hermitage, and gave them a right to a footpath leading to the parish church, across a field of the Nabob’s, on whose domains it opened: but that gentleman chose to dispute the legality of their claim to this privilege; and therefore, rather than contest the matter with so powerful an opponent, it was never publicly insisted upon, nor used, unless on some particular occasions similar to the present. The key of this door, however, remained with the inhabitants of the Hermitage, who kept it in a little adjoining recess, formed for that purpose in the rock; from whence Stella now removed it, in order to effect her intended design: but on applying it to the lock, her astonishment was extreme to find that already occupied by another, exactly the same in every respect with the original one in her hand.

A circumstance so perfectly unaccountable renewed the recent apprehensions of our heroine; and she now almost encouraged the idea that something like the whispering of human voices, which at one time seemed to proceed from a retired corner of the building, was not entirely the creation of mental alarm, or ideal supposition, as she had then endeavoured to persuade herself. Impressed with this notion, she hastened forward, eager to conclude a walk which, in her present opinion, had never appeared so long before.

She found Mrs. Wallace with her niece: the child, however, happened to be asleep on her arrival; but in a few minutes it awaked; and Sally, having wrapped it up so as to prevent any evil consequences from its exposure to the night air, accompanied her aunt and Stella to the vicinity

of the private door. The latter had previously mentioned the strange incident of the key; and her companions, no less surprised than herself by an event so totally incomprehensible, determined to assist her in ascertaining the cause, if possible, of a circumstance so alarming and suspicious.

While they were conversing on the subject, and had nearly reached the spot where the intended investigation was to commence, the infant began to cry, and the party stopped to soothe it. Stella, who was naturally fond of children, and particularly attached to this one, was not the least active in her efforts on the occasion: indeed, more than one motive now urged her to make the attempt; for she feared they might be overheard by the unknown owners of the key, who, conceiving themselves discovered, might effect their escape before it proved practicable to ascertain who they were; an event, in every point of view, highly requisite to the safety of the Hermitage and its inmates, who undoubtedly could not be expected to enjoy their usual state of tranquillity while thus rendered liable to intrusions from such a mysterious neighbourhood.

In this part of North Britain it was customary for smugglers to conceal themselves and the produce of their contraband trade in situations similar to the present. No one spot on the habitable globe could be better calculated for that purpose than the ancient ruins of the old edifice:—it had more than once been occupied by such tenants; and the companions of Stella thought it likely to be in the same predicament at this juncture.

While they whispered their conjectures on the subject, and our heroine was at intervals fondly caressing her little favourite, the key was heard to turn in the lock. They started at the sound, and, without allowing themselves leisure to reflect on the road probable to be taken by those who were about to approach, suddenly retreated behind the nearest bushes, and awaited the result in silent apprehension.

Their suspense was not, however, of long duration. A man and woman passed cautiously through the door: their conversation was low, but apparently of an interesting description, and, as they advanced nearer, appeared of a nature not very favourable to the character of the female, whose delicacy seemed not of the most refined kind, and little apt to be hurt by the unequivocal style of her companion's language, or the occasional freedom of his treatment during several temporary pauses in their progress.

CHAP. V.

“Here matter new to gaze the Devil met.”
MILTON.

THE strangers were now, by slow degrees, advancing to the very identical spot where the three females had attempted to conceal themselves, and from whence they ventured not to move a single step, lest a discovery of their retreat should prove the consequence; when the whole system of caution hitherto observed was speedily rendered abortive by the child, who once more began to cry, in spite of every effort used by Stella and her companions to keep it quiet.

The man and woman at first instinctively recoiled at the sound; and while the latter uttered a faint scream, her comrade rushed suddenly forward in order to ascertain the real cause of their alarm.

Mrs. Wallace instantly perceived the inutility of any further attempt at concealment; and whispering her companions, endeavoured to assume an air of composure as she stepped from their hiding-place, and seemed to be merely intent on the road they were pursuing.

In consequence of this mode of proceeding, they were necessitated to pass close by the woman, who apparently eyed them with no small degree of interest almost from the first moment of their appearance, for the impulse of fear had quickly given way to what is commonly supposed more powerful in the breast of a female; and curiosity now usurped every faculty of her soul.

Stella happened at this instant to have the child in her arms: but they had scarcely passed the strangers, before she began to tremble violently; and finding herself unable to bear it any longer, after a silent pressure of her lips on its forehead, she turned round to replace it on the bosom of its faithful nurse.

The moon at this period emerged from behind a flying cloud which had partially obscured it, and darting its beams through the surrounding foliage, they rested directly on the lovely features of our heroine, who suddenly raised her eyes at an abrupt exclamation which burst from the unknown, and perceived, to her utter astonishment, that unknown now almost at her side, and no other than her inveterate enemy's maid Jenny.

This girl was soon recognised by the rest of the party; but, with the person who accompanied her, Stella alone was acquainted: hitherto he had kept behind, evidently watching their motions, till the above-mentioned exclamation brought him from the rear, and Lieutenant Jones stood confessed to view.

It has been said that there are men who would rather face the mouth of a cannon than incur the merited contempt of a virtuous woman: minds of this description cannot be altogether void of some good qualities; for those who experience the sensation of shame, shew thereby that they are capable of reformation. The magnanimous Mr. Jones, however, was superior to such little weaknesses where the possibility of retaliating his accuser's imputation with safety was supposed to be practicable. Under circumstances different from the present, he had perhaps stole away, and permitted his companion to manage for herself in the best manner she could: but Stella Bertram was conceived to be fair game;—her conduct by some had been represented as highly culpable—by others as rather somewhat suspicious: it is true, the very small number who chose to put this construction on her actions, were mostly confined to the precincts of Rossgrove; but it was exactly there where the military hero's chief consequence was supposed to center:

wherefore he flattered himself with possessing the certain means of invalidating any testimony she might feel disposed to prefer against him, either now or hereafter, by the easy and simple mode of recrimination, which her conduct had apparently enabled him to pursue, and which, he wisely judged, would be sufficient to render whatever she might report, to his prejudice of this night's adventure, of little or no avail, from the evidence he could produce of her own profligate character; since the caresses she lavished on the child, the visible agitation she suffered on being discovered with it, as likewise the hour and solitary spot chosen for the parting interview, all spoke strongly against her, and fully corroborated the opinion previously entertained by his friend Mrs. Vincent of her criminal intercourse with one, or both of the admirers so repeatedly assigned her.

Conceiving himself, therefore, pretty well secured against the event of consequences, and feeling the malignant triumph incident to little minds, when an opportunity of mortifying those they are secretly forced to acknowledge their superiors, is unexpectedly obtained, Mr. Jones advanced to the charge with a tolerable portion of assurance, and a full determination to wound the two men whom he privately detested, but dared not openly attack, through the medium of an innocent, defenceless girl, erroneously marked down as the favourite of both.

This manly and meritorious design was further strengthened by a recollection of the various benefits usually derived from what is vulgarly called "taking the first word of fighting." But though the foregoing resolution, in the existing state of affairs, was a wise one, and the ideas from whence it resulted passed rapidly through his mind, the scheme happened, nevertheless, to be rendered abortive by the more active oratorical abilities of his female coadjutor, whose genius for mischief was not inferior to his own, however strong might be the bias of his natural disposition for that sort of food which the mistress and maid seemed to swallow with an equal degree of avidity.

Mrs. Wallace and her little party, relieved from the apprehension of more dangerous neighbours, and feeling no inclination to interrupt a *tête-à-tête* so ill calculated for the eye of observation, were proceeding on their way, when it occurred to the former that some inquiry was requisite respecting the appearance of the additional key, the real owners of which it seemed a matter of importance to ascertain; she therefore turned round, and stopped nearly opposite the gentleman and lady to make the necessary investigation: but the latter, bursting with malice, ill-nature, and impertinence, which she was determined not to lose so favourable an opportunity of venting, instantly commenced the attack with a volubility so impetuous, and a torrent of abuse so incomprehensible, that Mrs. Wallace, perceiving the impossibility of making herself heard, at length ceased to attempt it; and remarking, with much astonishment, that the rhetoric of the speaker was chiefly addressed to Stella, she fixed a look of surprise alternately on each, in expectation of procuring some solution of a scene no less new than unintelligible.

Her curiosity, however, remained ungratified; for our heroine happened to be equally unenlightened with herself, and little could be gathered from the accuser, whose broad hints were alike thrown away on the listeners, as they merely ascribed the virulence of her language to her *mal-à-propos* appearance and the fear of exposure, to which a discovery so critical had subjected her. Nevertheless, still solicitous to comprehend some portion of an harangue so nervous, so voluble, and apparently so pointed, the silent group attempted not to move from their present position, actuated by a wish to solve the mystery, and an increasing desire to hear its conclusion.

Jenny, who, like most of the frail sister-hood, was extremely apt to forget her own errors in the laudable anxiety by which she was generally stimulated to propagate those, true or false, saddled on her neighbours, so far from harbouring any alarms originating in considerations of a

personal nature, or supposing herself liable to censure from the recent discovery, actually behaved as if she imagined no blame could possibly be attached to her share in the adventure, and seemed to think the black spots in her own character whitened in proportion as she bespattered the moral principles of another; till at length, almost breathless, and nearly exhausted with rage, on observing the cool and rational conduct of those she wished to provoke, and the inutility of all her endeavours to irritate their passions, she paused perforce; and Mrs. Wallace immediately seized the opportunity of renewing her inquiry relative to the key.

“The key!” resumed Jenny, with an additional shade of colour, and a look that conveyed the idea of a momentary recollection of something she wished rather to remember in any other person’s conduct than her own:— “what have I to do with your paltry keys?—Do you take me for a jailer’s wife, or the ‘Squire’s housekeeper?—Marry, come up! people are wonderous ready to forget themselves now-a-days!”

“It is indeed a common case,” returned Mrs. Wallace, dryly, “and too frequently met with in all ranks and conditions of life.”

The manner in which this remark was delivered drew a sort of half-smile half-sneer from the Lieutenant, which seemed to grate upon the feelings of his companion, who turned short upon him, and abruptly requested to partake of the jest, if he knew where it was to be found.— “Though, perhaps,” she added, with a look, full of malice, directed to Stella, “Miss Bertram there may furnish you with one some nine months hence, if the leavings of your brother officers proves not too hard of digestion.”

The sneer of the Lieutenant became more obvious as he emphatically replied, that the experiment she alluded to had already been made in another quarter, and produced an effect exactly similar to that she hinted at.

“I would have you to know, Sir,” retorted the enraged Abigail, who only in part comprehended his meaning, “I would have you to know, Sir, that I am meat for your masters.”

“So Captain Harcourt informed me,” said Jones, significantly; “but if such is the case, I hope *you* have no objection *my* being of *equal service* to your mistress.—What say you, Miss Bertram? A fair exchange is no robbery, you know: and you likewise know, that when wives are agreeably occupied, husbands have more leisure on their hands to pursue the bent of their inclinations with impunity. But come, my girl,” continued the incorrigible coxcomb, turning to Sally Thompson, and making an attempt to uncover the child, “let me see the little bantling; I am famous for my skill in physiognomy, and will tell you at a single glance whether the Major’s star, or the Captain’s, acquired the ascendant at its formation.”

“You had better,” replied Sally Thompson, provoked at his undaunted impudence, and retreating as she spoke, “you had better have consulted the stars on Mrs. St. Vincent’s opinion of your visit to the old Abbey, and the danger of leaving a false key in the door on occasions where concealment appears so necessary.”

The Lieutenant gave a loud whistle, and stepped back with an air intended to shew not only indifference, but derision.

Meanwhile Jenny, who had now recovered from a flood of tears, produced by the taunts of her ungrateful paramour, whom she no longer seemed to regard with an eye of affection, once more prepared to rehearse a second part of the same story; but in the present tumult of her mind, not clearly understanding the conclusion of Sally’s speech, and supposing the truth remained no longer problematical, she fell into the snare her own precipitancy had woven; and Mrs. Wallace soon became convinced that the key had been obtained for purposes not very creditable to the character of Mrs. Jenny and her occasional associates, who, no doubt, found the unfrequented

walk that led to this place, and the solitary seclusion of the place itself, alike favourable to the *tête-à-têtes*, which happened to prove of a description too critically dangerous to venture upon under the immediate roof of her mistress.

Such is usually the fatal effects of a wanton disregard of appearances in our superiors, that it not only renders them personally contemptible, but likewise extends the baneful influence of example to the lower classes of the community; who, glad to find an excuse for the secret depravity of their own hearts, endeavour to flatter themselves with the idea, that errors may be pardoned in the low, the ignorant, and the humble, when they are practised by, and too often shamefully tolerated in those who ought to know better and act differently.

Yet, so great is the force of prejudice, and so strange the inconsistent nature of our feelings, that Mrs. St. Vincent would certainly have dismissed Jenny from her service, had the enormity of her conduct been fully ascertained, or even suspected by her; though her own proud defiance of the world's opinion, and her consequent mode of proceeding with Mr. Jones, had probably encouraged the girl to act in a manner very different from what she would otherwise have dared to venture upon, if situated under circumstances more inimical to the free indulgence of reprehensible inclinations, and better calculated to inspire the light and superficial mind with some degree of reverence for the precepts and practice of the truly good and virtuous members of society, in whatever station they happened to be placed.

Mrs. Wallace, who harboured not the smallest desire to become a reformer, and had now satisfied herself as to the owners of the key, felt no further inclination to prolong an interview from whence no gratification of a pleasurable description could possibly be derived; and therefore, after a short, but energetic admonition to the frail Jenny, she and her companions again advanced forward to the passage through the rocks; while the former, sullen and for a wonder, silent, took the road to Rossgrove; at a convenient distance from which the Lieutenant thought proper to effect a retreat, and the lady was consequently left to conclude her evening adventure alone.

CHAP. VI.

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all!”
SHAKESPEARE.

TO account for the hatred and virulence displayed on every occasion against our heroine by the Abigail of Mrs. St. Vincent, might be judged superfluous when it is recollected that people of Jenny's description generally adopt the principles and mode of conduct practised by their superiors, or at least such as they suppose most likely to find favour in their sight. In the present instance, this line of proceeding had certainly proved the chosen one, independent of any other stimulus whatever; but a circumstance yet more powerful, had operated at an early period of their acquaintance to fix the vain and vindictive Jenny an irreconcilable enemy to poor Stella: and though our heroine was herself ignorant of the nature of her offence, it happened, notwithstanding, to be of that kind which is most acutely felt, and most keenly resented, by the party doomed to smart under its influence. In short, Stella had been considered in the light of a successful rival by the disappointed maid of Mrs. St. Vincent, who, from the moment this idea took possession of her mind vowed eternal war and detestation against the unconscious object of her secret aversion.

The schoolmaster of the parish was a young, smart-looking man, and, being designed for the church, had received a better education, and mingled with a genteeler circle of associates than the generality of those in similar circumstances usually do in Scotland. From his first arrival in this part of the country, Jenny had marked him down as a certain victim to her charms; and no pains being spared to effect this purpose, she conceived herself rapidly approaching to the crisis of her wishes, and already in fancy saw the magic badge on her finger that was destined to place her in the honourable station of a clergyman's lady, when the unfortunate face and figure of Stella Bertram destroyed all the illusive visions of matrimonial felicity, and totally eradicated the enraged Abigail from the thoughts of him whom she had hitherto erroneously accustomed herself to consider as her own. It is true, the young man ventured not to disclose his sentiments to her rival, from a supposition they would be rejected in his present dependant and humble station; but his astonishment proved too obvious for concealment when the object of it appeared in view; and, by those acquainted with his predilection in her favour, it was generally understood he meant to offer himself when his expectations for futurity were accomplished by the attainment of a good living.

Highly provoked to find her hopes disappointed, and herself thus unexpectedly deserted, Jenny, eager to recall the truant affections of her fickle admirer, formed the common, but frequently dangerous determination of either attempting to rouse his jealousy, or, if that were found impracticable, indemnifying herself for her recent loss elsewhere by commencing another serious flirtation, under similar views, with a serjeant in the light horse, who appeared to be infinitely less fastidious in his taste than his predecessor, and who had more than once evinced no reluctance to become the rival latter.

Every married soldier is generally supposed a single man if his wife do not fill a corner of the baggage cart: the serjeant was exactly in this predicament; for, though already a husband, the absence of his lady allowed him to claim the military privilege, from time immemorial, of bachelorship. Jenny, however, it must be confessed, was totally ignorant of this circumstance, and her former lover Mr. Johnstone, the schoolmaster, discovered no inclination to make her

more *clairvoyant* on the subject; neither did he appear to feel much interested in the progress apparently made by the knight of the halberd in the fair nymph's affections. This latter circumstance was observed by her with increased bitterness; and either the ardour of revenge, the instability of female sentiments, or the secret pleadings of a beginning inclination for her new admirer, operated so powerfully, as at length to render the office of the Priest no longer necessary to the attainment of his views, even if clerical assistance could have been obtained in a legal manner without let or molestation from the first proprietor of his hand and heart.

The serjeant, however, like many other gentlemen of the cloth, piqued himself on this *honourable* mode of proceeding in similar cases, and seldom mentioned the extent of his success to more than half a dozen confidential friends at most: and as those might naturally think themselves at liberty to speak of his adventures to others under the same restrictions, his good fortune was generally pretty well known in a very short period after its accomplishment.

In regard to the present affair, a little more caution was deemed requisite; for it did not appear quite certain how far the Major might think the seduction of his wife's maid a laughable incident; and, should he take it in a different light, as was invariably the case when such things came to his knowledge, he knew the man he had to deal with sufficiently to dread the consequences: Jenny's secret was therefore supposed to be cautiously preserved; and from gratitude, as she protested, for his attention to her character, his prudence was repeatedly rewarded according to the petition he preferred for that purpose.

But the greatest warriors and the wisest politicians should never be too certain of the ground they stand upon: security often proves a broken reed to those who confide most in its dangerous protection, and, in conjunction with success, frequently produces the very evil it was supposed to prevent. Secrecy and opportunity had hitherto gone hand in hand with their wishes; and even the schoolmaster himself, though he still retained a distinguished place in her bosom, began to be occasionally excluded from remembrance. This temporary exclusion, however, seldom lasted much beyond the term of her existing interview with the serjeant; and her remaining inclination for the one commonly resumed its former station when the absence of the other left the infatuated girl more at leisure to reflect on what she had once hoped to have been, and what she now was. Nevertheless, those fits of galling retrospection were not of a description to reform or amend: of one consequence alone they were constantly productive, and that was an additional portion of hatred and resentment against poor Stella, whom she invariably considered as the original source of all her misfortunes and succeeding misconduct.

There is not, perhaps, in the whole self-consolatory system so liberally resorted to in all such situations, a more useful or convenient auxiliary than what is usually known by the name of a *scapegoat*: our heroine stood exactly in this rank of serviceable beings, and never failed to be most unmercifully burthened with the entire weight of Mrs. Jenny's disappointments, and the long train of *et ceteras* that followed. But while the load happened to be unconsciously borne, the bearer suffered little; and therefore the other was left at full freedom to take advantage of her rival's ignorance in order to lighten her own mind at the expence of one so detested.

Unluckily, it was yet found possible to augment that detestation, though even Jenny herself at one time imagined such a circumstance next to impossible. The case was this:— security and success gradually began to render the lovers more careless and inattentive to the chance of discovery; and in one of her solitary walks near the pavilion, Stella accidentally stumbled on the happy pair, who, as she passed the lower windows of the bathing-room, were observed to be seated amidst some of the green-house plants in the opposite corner.

So little, however, did our heroine suspect the truth, and so very distant was she from

forming any uncharitable conclusion on the occasion, that she ventured not even to look a second time, in order to ascertain the identity of the parties; but, supposing it might be some of the guests or family at the Grove occupied in examining the plants, and fearful of catching their eye, she made the best of her way from the spot, lest the Major, or Mrs. St. Vincent herself, might be of the number; for of its extent she was likewise ignorant, as the intervening foliage prevented a full view of it, and might conceal persons from the observation of those standing without.

Stella, however, escaped not with equal impunity: she was perceived by Jenny, and her accidental appearance was immediately marked down to the score of premeditated design: the consequence was natural; and our heroine henceforth became the innocent object of her unceasing abhorrence, calumny, and abuse on every opening that occurred to vent her spleen and disappointment; for she doubted not but the knowledge she afterwards suspected Mr. Johnstone had acquired of her proceedings, was obtained through the medium of this hateful rival, to counteract whose fatal influence she had been driven to adopt those measures which had finally effected her complete destruction, together with the total overthrow of all her ambitious dreams of future pre-eminence, and the power of lording it over her present equals in the character of a Minister's wife and the mistress of a parsonage house.

Nevertheless, after the rumoured attachment between Stella and Captain Montague began to gain ground, and the removal of that part of the regiment to which the serjeant belonged put a conclusion to her intercourse with him, she once more ventured to persuade herself that Johnstone was not, as she had suspected, quite so well informed of certain circumstances, as her former fears had represented; and even at times entertained the idea of making a second attack on his heart, under the impression that our heroine must now be for ever expelled from it; though in her conscience she could not help believing her free from the imputed guilt thrown upon her character, as she knew from good authority, however averse to acknowledge so much, that her late rival was not only in perfect health at the period of her supposed confinement, but even absent on a visit at Woodside, where, instead of being an invalid herself, she was occupied in attending on one who actually was so.

This piece of intelligence, so material for the re-establishment of our heroine's character, was not, however, even permitted to reach the ears of her mistress; for the rancor she harboured against the former happened to be too greatly gratified by the effects of concealment, to allow of its promulgation.

As her attachment to the serjeant had concluded with his absence, she almost dreaded lest the same should prove the case with Stella and the Captain, and her now premeditated reconciliation with Johnstone be rendered abortive from the revival of his hopes in that quarter. No wonder then, if actuated by this irritating apprehension, and provoked, at the same time, to find she had once more committed herself to the person she considered as the chief bar to her schemes, by so critical and *mal-à-propos* an appearance with Jones, rage took entire possession of her breast, and threw her off her guard: Jenny considered not that she herself was the original cause of so many misfortunes, nor once reflected that her own misconduct, and not the officious interference of another, proved the principal cause of every succeeding mortification.

CHAP. VII.

“He knows too well
“Your beauty and your worth: your lover comes not
“To offer insults.”

PHILIPS.

ARRIVED at the door leading to the old ruins, Stella bade a last adieu to Sally Thompson and her little charge, and soon after reached the Hermitage with Mrs. Wallace.

Farmer Thompson happened to be from home when our heroine visited his wife; and as his road lay past Mrs. Bertram's, he called on his return to enquire after the family.

Something, it appeared, had occurred to amuse him, for his features exhibited evident traces of risibility. Mrs. Wallace remarked this circumstance, and enquired the cause.

It seems he had encountered Mrs. Jenny at some little distance from the Grove; but though he accosted her with much civility, she appeared extremely sullen, and scarcely deigned to notice him. Thinking she might possibly be ill, he turned back, after having passed her, to inquire if that were the case; but before an answer could be obtained, which she was visibly in no great hurry to grant, one of the footmen hastily approached from the shrubbery, and, in a surly accent, said she was wanted by her lady, who had been at home for some time, and was exceedingly out of humour at her long absence.

The disconcerted Abigail heard this intelligence with visible emotion; and after muttering something about people never knowing their own mind, said she understood her lady purposed remaining to a much later hour at Mr. Stewart's, where she had gone to spend the day.

“A later hour!” repeated the messenger; “Why, what the devil, do you take the present for an early one?”

“Oh gemini!” exclaimed the trembling Jenny, looking at her watch, “what shall I do? who could have imagined it was this time of night?—I shall be scolded and huffed, and huffed and scolded, till one of us is out of breath, and the other out of patience.—Let me run—let me fly!”

“I will bear your watch for you,” said the fellow, who had been eyeing it as she spoke; and snatching it suddenly out of her hand, added—“that you may run, that you may fly so much the lighter!—I wish I could support your character as easily; but *it* has already run and fled beyond my ability to follow.”

“Insolent puppy!” retorted Jenny, with an eye darting fire, and a heightened complexion, “how dare you thus presume to insult me?”

The footman, with an air of the utmost *sang froid*, continued to examine a trinket that hung on the chain of the watch, while rage at first prevented the lady from thinking of any thing but the provoking words he had uttered: almost immediately, however, she recollected herself, and attempted to regain it with a degree of eagerness that indicated the importance of the acquisition.

“Yes,” resumed the man, holding it beyond her reach, and still continuing to observe the trinket with the most irritating perseverance, “yes, you shall have it instantly; but first let one take a better view of the fine new bauble you have got:—if I am not mistaken, my sly Madam, this is the very identical thing I saw a certain gentleman purchase in Wigton lately;—yes, dn—me if it is not!—Faith, Jenny, you're a complete one!—I suspected as much, however, and

supposed “High Life below Stairs” would be acted as soon as your lady left the Grove, in spite of some people’s pretended indisposition as an excuse for not accompanying her. You recollect the green bed-room scene?—Egad, I rather entered a little too soon, I believe:—but well, well—

Jenny’s rage seemed to increase at every word he spoke, and her recent anxiety to obey the summons of her mistress appeared totally absorbed in something that yet more nearly interested her feelings. Her tormentor, however, visibly enjoyed the storm he had raised, and the evident amusement it afforded the farmer: he therefore still withheld the watch, and evaded her repeated efforts to force it from him, at the same time inquiring, with a significant wink, if the evening air had removed Mr. Jones’s headache.

Jenny knew nothing of either Mr. Jones or his headache.

“Ah ha, my girl!” cried Thomas, “say you so?—It won’t pass, however: John saw you turn the corner yonder, and he likewise saw you were soon followed—Serjeants or Lieutenants—hey, Jenny?—all fish that swims in the sea—hey, Jenny?”

The “hey, Jenny?” was accompanied by a familiar chuck under the chin.

“Insolent puppy!” again cried the furious Abigail, “take that for your impudence!” and a sound box on the ear gave additional force to her rhetoric.

She snatched the watch from his hand as, stunned by the blow, he recoiled a few steps; and pouring a fresh volley of abuse on her antagonist, of which Thompson himself got a share for not rendering her any assistance, she flew from the spot, and hastened home as fast as her legs could carry her.

By the foregoing detail of the farmer, who laughed several times very heartily during the repetition, it was evident that Jenny’s late interview with the Lieutenant was not the first of the kind; and greatly as Stella always disliked this man, her abhorrence of him was considerably increased, from the conviction of his duplicity and total want of principle when self-gratification or vanity happened to be the prevailing passion of his mind; and she secretly wondered how a woman in Mrs. St. Vincent’s superior station of life, could encourage the attention, or even tolerate the presence of a character so truly despicable in every point of view; a character too, which must appear to particular disadvantage when opposed to that of the all-accomplished, elegant, and manly St. Vincent. So thought our unexperienced heroine; but she was not qualified by the nature of her education to judge of such cases, nor competent to appreciate the convenience of an extensive influence over one of those *come-and-go* beings, so useful and necessary in the numerous arrangements of a fine lady’s ever-varying vocations.

At length the hour arrived that was destined to remove her from the Hermitage; and about eight in the morning she repaired to Rossgrove.

Stella knew that Mrs. St. Vincent seldom left her chamber till the forenoon, according to her less refined notions, was pretty far advanced; any accidental interview with her, was not therefore to be dreaded; and as for the Major, she had previously understood he was to go from Mr. Stewart’s (where they dined) to Wigton. Such had once, indeed, been his intention; but on second thoughts, he changed his mind, and returned to the Grove, in order to accompany his mother-in-law, who considered him as the first of beings, a stage or two on her journey. Great, therefore, proved the dismay of our heroine when, on quitting Mrs. Ross’s apartment, she met them at the door; and after a low bow to Stella, he conducted the old lady, who leaned on his arm, to her carriage.

For this rencounter poor Stella was totally unprepared; and the agitation that seized her trembling frame, almost deprived her of sufficient strength to descend the staircase. The Major,

in one respect, was more fortunate: he knew of the companion Mrs. Ross had chosen, and consequently had not the additional load of surprise to struggle with: but though he evidently strove to suppress his feelings, and was master of more time to reason himself into the necessity of mental exertion, it was clear the effort cost him no small trouble, and the gradual shade of deepening melancholy that overspread his pensive features, spoke the arduous trial of the moment; which, nevertheless, he was determined to surmount with propriety.

Some trifling mistake in the arrangement of the luggage, occasioned by the inadvertence of their attendants, obliged Stella to remain stationary at the door of the carriage several minutes after Mrs. Ross had entered it. Major St. Vincent, in the interim, was occupied in giving directions to his servant, who appeared with a led horse, which till this moment had either been overlooked by Stella, or passed in the hurry of her spirits for one on which some one of the domestics was to attend them. She now, for the first time, perceived it was the well-remembered charger of that gentleman; and glancing a quickly-withdrawn look over his dress, saw he was prepared to make part of their escort.

Thunderstruck by this conviction, Stella grew sick at heart; the colour forsook her cheeks; and after an ineffectual effort to recover herself, she was forced to lean against the panel of the carriage for support.

Mrs. Bertram's first intention was to have walked with her *protégée* to the Grove, in order to witness her final departure, and bid a second adieu to the kind friend under whose protection she was now placed; but an affecting scene which had passed between her and Mrs. Ross in the morning, had rendered her unable to put this design into execution: in consequence of which, Mrs. Wallace was deputed as her substitute. That good woman happened at this period to be assisting the domestics; when, on turning round, she observed the condition of her young friend, and uttering a faint exclamation of surprise, flew to her side.

Mrs. Ross was speaking to the house-steward at the opposite window, and neither heard nor saw what was passing near her. St. Vincent, however, did both, and reached her almost as soon as her female companion. Stella had not quite fainted away: the sound of his voice vibrated on her ears, and roused her to instantaneous recollection. She raised her head:—the look that was fixed on her pallid features now speedily suffused them with the deepest shade of crimson; and, without appearing to notice his evident anxiety, she hastily averted her face. In doing this, her eye glanced upon the windows of Mrs. St. Vincent's apartments, who she discovered observing their motions from the interior of a sash at which she had placed herself; while Jenny, who stood more behind, seemed to be answering the remarks of her mistress with a consonant degree of Christian charity and meekness.

Stella regarded them for a moment with a sensation of mingled astonishment and distress not to be defined: the latter, however, began to acquire the ascendant over the former. She silently wrung the hand of Mrs. Wallace, declined the offered assistance of the Major, and suddenly rushing forward, sprang into the coach with a degree of agility she could not have supposed possible before the attempted exertion.

A laugh, intended to be heard, reached those who stood on the outside. St. Vincent directed his eye to the quarter from whence it proceeded, and quickly perceived the cause in which the latter part of Stella's conduct originated. Mrs. St. Vincent and her companion, apparently appalled by the expressive and indignant look of reproof that succeeded and seemed to speak a language they equally understood, now withdrew to a greater distance from the window, and the Major stepped immediately into the carriage; when, every thing duly arranged, and Mrs. Ross having concluded her conversation with Mr. Benson, the postillions were ordered

to proceed.

CHAP. VIII.

“Are these things then necessities?—

“Then let us meet them like necessities!”

SHAKESPEARE.

THAT St. Vincent purposed attending them a short way on horseback Stella had already seen enough to believe; but that his design was to enter the carriage never once occurred to her thoughts, and of his doing so she remained for some time ignorant, till Mrs. Ross, supposing her evident distress proceeded from the recent separation with her friends at the Hermitage, and solicitous to detach her mind from painful recollections, said something calculated to change the tenor of her contemplations; when, removing the handkerchief which had hitherto covered her face as it lay reclined and half concealed from observation in a corner of the vehicle, the first object that met her view happened to be the one she least wished to encounter.

Self-dependant, and henceforth so situated as to stand or fall by the nature of her succeeding conduct, Stella seemed almost instantly to feel what the respect due to her own character and future peace demanded: she saw herself placed in a situation critically delicate—a situation that certainly required the utmost prudence and circumspection, but which the stronger energies of her mind whispered could only prove dangerous by her own consent, or the censurable want of proper mental exertion.

Stella had never till this moment known the extent of her inward resources: she now flattered herself they would prove equal to the trials she was destined to struggle with; for that such were in store for her appeared too evident, if, as she suspected, Major St. Vincent were to remain with them any length of time.

St. Vincent, whose heart but too deeply sympathized with her feelings, and who wished to relieve her from the casual observation of Mrs. Ross, artfully contrived to turn the conversation and subject, in which our heroine was not supposed to be interested, and consequently not expected to join. This considerate manoeuvre afforded leisure for further reflection, and produced the desired effect: she found her fortitude return, and her resolution to act with circumspection and propriety strengthen, and secretly congratulated herself on the ability she felt to meet the trials which might await her with becoming resignation and magnanimity.

Necessity is a harsh teacher, but commonly makes wise scholars: like experience, though unpleasant at the time of trial, it repays us by a subsequent benefit, and is often the cause of producing superior traits in characters that, unimpelled by its imperious dictates, had possibly never been called into action, nor obtained the well-deserved meed of applause for their noble sufferance under its stern decrees.

Apparently actuated by a sense of these truths, St. Vincent seemed studiously assiduous to avoid every mark of particular attention calculated, however distantly, to occasion Stella the smallest uneasiness. Reassured by a mode of proceeding of which her own heart fully taught her how to appreciate the value, Stella endeavoured to evince her sense of it, by forcing herself to take some part in the conversation when any topic happened to be mentioned in which her participation seemed to be expected, or opinion required; and she acquitted herself in a manner so highly honourable to her character, her judgment, and the education she had received, that St. Vincent, who had never before seen so much of her, nor enjoyed any opportunity of hearing her

speak on subjects which are usually supposed beyond the reach of her sex and years, felt the restraint he had imposed upon his conduct more than ever painful, though more than ever necessary, from the increasing admiration and respect with which she hourly inspired him; while she, on her part, could not help remarking all the merit, the worth, and various accomplishments of his mind, as different circumstances developed them to her view: but none struck her more strongly than when his filial attention to Mrs. Ross, which every possible opportunity that occurred powerfully portrayed, was brought into competition with the total and unnatural neglect of that lady's daughter even at the very moment of her separation from a valuable parent, with whom, as appeared from the present state of her health, she was perhaps destined to meet no more.

Though distressing recollections could not be easily suppressed as the carriage drove past certain parts of the park and shrubbery where accident had formerly brought them together, and though the timid, quick-withdrawn glance and down-cast look of Stella betrayed the secret force of memory, no less than the pensive, but more steady eye of St. Vincent, from whom, as contemplating the well-remembered scenes, a profound sigh more than once escaped, which greatly affected Stella, who but too readily comprehended the cause; yet the firm-rooted principle of conscious integrity established in their bosoms gradually surmounted the pang of acute sensibility, and enabled them, to appearance at least, to assume an air of composure, the true value of which could only be known to those superior minds who, like themselves, had experienced the severe necessity of affecting a temporary triumph over the softer feelings of the heart.

Mrs. Ross bore the journey to Newton-stewart* tolerably; well, but on quitting the coach, she found herself too much fatigued to proceed any further at present: it was therefore agreed to remain here till the following day.

Soon after their arrival, Stella, who was peculiarly partial to moonlight scenes and the still hour of evening, placed herself at a window of the inn from whence the different windings of the river could be seen to most advantage: a similar turn of mind had drawn St. Vincent likewise to the window, and he leaned against the side of it, apparently absorbed in a deep and profound reverie.

"It is the Cree," replied the landlord, in answer to a question addressed to him by Mrs. Ross, "it is the river Cree, Madam, which is navigable for small vessels to within two miles of the town: there is a handsome bridge over it; and in its mouth, in Wigton bay, there is a valuable salmon fishery."

The man continued his information a few minutes longer, and then retired to give orders for supper.

The name of this river was not unknown to either of the silent moralizers now occupied in gazing upon its meandering course; but neither of them took the smallest share in the foregoing account of it, nor seemed disposed to put their thoughts into language: these, however, if the varying colour of the lady and the ill-suppressed sighs of the gentleman might be interpreted according to appearances, wandered not far from the stream before them; or rather from the spot where the former had once accompanied the name with strains of vocal harmony, which still seemed to vibrate on the heart of the Major no less than the accompanying circumstances did on that of our heroine.

The Major at length starting from his musing attitude, traversed the room with a hasty,

* Now Newtoundouglas.

irregular step; after which he placed himself at the back of Mrs. Ross's chair, and resting his arms upon it, began to speak on the first topic that occurred in conversation: in the interim Stella had sufficient leisure to regain her late assumed air of tranquillity; and the party sat down to supper, without appetite perhaps for the meal before them, but, nevertheless, not more unhappy than usual.

"I think," said Mrs. Ross, when the cloth was removed, "my dear Stella, there is a beautiful little air, composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron, called "The Banks of the Cree," which, if I mistake not, I have formerly heard you sing: the words I believe are by Burns: do you recollect it, my love?"

Stella meant to have said "Yes;" but the word somehow or other was not quite ready; she therefore only bowed.

"Are you acquainted with this little song, my dear Henry?" continued Mrs. Ross, addressing herself to the Major.

"I once had the pleasure of hearing it, Madam, and admire it extremely," replied St. Vincent, in an embarrassed and hesitating manner.

He glanced an expressive look at Stella as he spoke, and saw her eyes fixed upon the floor, while a deep and conscious blush betrayed her recollection of the period to which he evidently alluded.

"I have ever been enthusiastically fond of music," resumed Mrs. Ross; "sick or well, it is always acceptable to me.—Will you, Stella, indulge me then?—I should like to have "The Banks of the Cree" sung on the very spot which may be called its birthplace:—the chief residence of the composer is situated near this town—I shall point it out to you as we pass it to-morrow: meanwhile pray oblige your impatient auditors, and commence the task requested of you."

Stella said something about a "head-ache;" but the sentence was uttered in too low a voice to prove intelligible: Mrs. Ross imagined it conveyed her acquiescence, and seemed to expect her to begin immediately; while the Major poured out a glass of wine, and presenting it with an unsteady hand, his looks bearing testimony to the inward perturbation of his mind, and his words scarcely articulate, entreated her to try its effect in procuring them the wished-for indulgence.

The secret pride of our heroine and every gentler feeling of her bosom were roused from their recent state of torpidness by the idea that the very appearance she wished on all occasions to avoid, had now become so conspicuous, as to require the encouraging support of the individual from whose observation it particularly behoved her to conceal every reprehensible bias in his favour, or every circumstance that even bore the semblance of such a bias. Actuated by this impression, she instantly assumed an air of dignified self-possession, and politely declining the offered wine, as unnecessary to his purpose, began "The Banks of the Cree" with her usual grace.

St. Vincent observed her for a moment with the most fixed attention; he then poured out a bumper of Madeira, and hastily swallowing it with an avidity of which he seemed perfectly unconscious at the time, threw his arm over the back of the chair, and resting his head upon it, remained in that attitude some minutes after the melody of her voice had ceased to be distinguishable. Mrs. Ross, however, without noticing this circumstance, soon called for his plaudits on the occasion; which were given in a style that sufficiently evinced his approbation.

A few moments more had scarcely elapsed before he remarked, or pretended to remark, the look of fatigue Mrs. Ross was now supposed to exhibit, and urged her to retire for the night. Candles were consequently ordered, and our heroine followed her to her chamber; where,

anxious to ascertain the terms of Major St. Vincent's attendance, she endeavoured to procure the information so ardently desired without attracting the observation of that lady, or creating her suspicions on the interest the inquirer took in a solution of her question.

Stella's questions were at first so managed, that for some time she remained unsatisfied; for Mrs. Ross, not conceiving their ultimate tendency, frequently replied in a manner totally foreign to the wishes of her auditor: at length, however, success crowned the round-about measures of our heroine; and she learned that Dumfries was at present the destined place of separation.

While the chambermaid was conducting her to her own apartment, Major St. Vincent's servant appeared at the door of one they were passing, and requested another candle for his master's chamber, who had walked out, he said, and, from what he told him, might not possibly return for some time.

As an additional reason to accelerate Mrs. Ross's retiring, St. Vincent had hinted at the drowsy nature of his own sensations; that he should, therefore, have walked out this time of the night, especially after such an intimation, appeared extremely inconsistent and strange to Stella. The circumstance dwelt upon her mind; and feeling no inclination to sleep, she seated herself at the window of a small dressing-room which opened into her chamber, and from whence the nearest parts of the surrounding country, assisted by a bright moon, were still in a degree discernible. Here she continued till all in the house were apparently sunk in repose, and the bustle of the day entirely subsided: it was therefore natural to suppose St. Vincent had returned to his chamber; and though curious to know if that were really the case, yet, as it appeared totally impossible to ascertain the fact any more than to account for the cause of his late ramble, she began to think it high time to retire to bed, without persevering to fatigue herself any longer by a foolish desire to develop what ought to be of no consequence to her.

She now slowly retired from the window, and was just closing the shutters, when she perceived the shadow of a man on the opposite side of the street, a little below the inn. For a few minutes more she remained immovable, being as it were rooted to the spot. He advanced to the door; and she soon found her idea that it was the Major justified by his nearer approach.

Though Stella concealed herself behind the shutters as much as was convenient to admit of observing his motions, he either discovered her figure, or, attracted by the partial shade of light which appeared at the opening from her candle, concluded she was still up (for he previously knew the direction of her windows): he stopped before them for a few moments. She saw him fix a stedfast look on the spot where she stood; she even fancied his sighs were sufficiently audible to reach her ears at that distance.

At length, apprehensive, from the time he continued stationary, that he had discovered her in her watchful position, and no less shocked at the appearance, than terrified by the construction a conduct so particular could not fail to draw upon it, our heroine suddenly closed the shutters, and retired to the other side of the room.

Feet were soon after heard softly descending the staircase: she concluded it must be his servant, for the door of the inn was quickly unlocked, and two people plainly advanced along the passage leading to the bedchambers: another door now closed, and all again seemed buried in silence. In about ten minutes more the servant retired to his own bed; and Stella, hearing the clock strike two, hastily undressed, in the hope of obtaining a few hours repose before she appeared in the presence of some of her fellow-travellers, whose scrutinizing eyes she greatly feared would discover, from her languid looks, the manner in which the chief part of the night had been passed.

CHAP. IX.

“My conscience is of courtly mould,
“Fit for highest station:—
“Where’s the hand, when touch’d with gold,
“Proof against temptation?”

GAY.

BESIDES Mrs. Ross’s own maid, another female attendant made part of their travelling retinue. The latter occasionally assisted the former: she was a good-tempered, obliging girl, apparently much attached to our heroine, and fond of being near her when opportunities offered for that purpose. Of these, however, few had hitherto occurred; and Ann conceiving such might prove the case for some time longer, if she were not more fortunate in her endeavours to the contrary, now determined to lose no time in attempting the accomplishment of her design.

Not much accustomed to travelling, fatigue had sent her early to bed on the preceding evening: but next morning she entered the chamber of our heroine a very short time after quitting her own; a piece of attention Stella would willingly have dispensed with, as it awaked her from an early slumber, the first she had been able to obtain since her retreat from the windows. Ann, however, entertained not the smallest suspicion of having caused any greater evil, than apparently rousing her from a long and profound repose, similar to that she had herself been enjoying.

The mischief, nevertheless, was done, and it appeared cruel therefore to say any thing on the subject. Weary, languid, and unrefreshed, she prepared to leave her bed; while Ann, full of all she had heard and seen in the course of their journey, continued to detail a thousand uninteresting circumstances with a degree of persevering prolixity and ridiculous minuteness that defied the utmost patience of attention in her auditor: the thoughts of the latter consequently recurred to the strange and unaccountable ramble of the Major; and though the sound of the speaker’s voice was still heard, the import of her discourse was no more heeded or known than if she had not been present.

“And now, Miss,” continued the girl, who at length had seemingly brought her narration pretty near a period, “do not you think it was the oddest and queerest thing you ever heard?”

She repeated this question a second time before Stella seemed sensible it was addressed to her: the latter then started from her reverie, and inquired, with the look and voice of one who was ignorant of the foregoing topic, to which it alluded, what she meant.

“Mean, Miss!” cried Ann, with a vacant stare of surprise; “why surely what should I mean, but the very thing you have just been listening to? and, for my own part, I really do believe every word he said: Mr. Donner is a pretty sort of man, and would not speak a word that is not true of his master for the world; besides, Miss, we all know that the Major—”

The conclusion of the sentence touched a chord that instantly vibrated on the feelings of her companion: she became suddenly all ear; and Ann soon found herself under the necessity of re-commencing that part of the subject connected with what she had last said. This task was not considered as any great punishment, for the girl dearly liked to hear the sound of her own voice; and Stella, in due time, was given to understand that the very circumstance on which she herself had been intently thinking, happened to be the same Ann had recently alluded to.

It was the late and mysterious absence of St. Vincent from the inn which Donner had

related to this girl, for whom the man had long entertained a partiality, though he frequently sported with her credulity. Stella, though she died to learn all he had reported on this topic, yet feared to ask for the gratification of her curiosity, as it appeared plain Ann knew little beyond the mere fact of her master's unaccountable ramble; an event of which she would probably have remained ignorant, had not Donner (who supposed her previously acquainted with it from something she mentioned, that seemed to imply as much) been led to name the incident before her.

In the course of Ann's imperfect intelligence, Stella more than once imagined that she was deeper in the fellow's confidence than she chose to acknowledge; and the hesitation of the girl, which proceeded from a wish to recollect every thing that tended towards the marvellous, and to represent the Major's secret excursion in the most wonderful point of view, seemed, in the eye of trembling suspicion, to cover some information she feared to give, lest the displeasure of her auditor should be incurred by a greater degree of explicitness.

It was, nevertheless, certain that Ann, in the simplicity of her heart, had repeated some hints dropped by Donner, which were not perhaps intended to come round again: these, it is true, proved rather unintelligible to her, but were perfectly comprehended by Stella, and served to convince the latter that the state of the Major's mind had not been totally unobserved by his servant. Yet the substance of what transpired on the subject, appeared equally as applicable to any other woman as herself: and though St. Vincent was not accused of evincing a propensity to the fashionable vices of the times, it was not, nevertheless, far from improbable, considering the unhappy nature of his domestic engagements, that the former predilection in her favour might have been superseded by a later preference for some woman in the neighbourhood of Newtonstewart, possessed of easier principles or superior attractions to those he had discovered in Stella, and whose character he might wish to preserve free from the degrading stigma usually attached to the conduct of her who is observed to admit the attentions of a married man.

To some transaction of this kind Donner evidently alluded; though from the mysterious manner in which he had expressed himself, his words admitted of more than one construction. This circumstance led Ann to conclude there must undoubtedly be a degree of the wonderful in the case; and her avidity for further information rose in proportion as the idea of such a thing gained ground. The fellow perceiving this notion had taken hold of her mind, did not attempt to remove it, but had amused himself at the expence of her curiosity, by the addition of a thousand ridiculous incidents, the sole creation of his own prolific imagination.

Stella again sunk into another reverie much as she had condemned herself for harbouring the smallest partiality for St. Vincent, still the possibility that now occurred of a change in his former sentiments, sat by no means so easy on her mind as she had supposed would be the case while assured of the contrary. Discontented and unhappy, she requested to be left alone; and the girl, after teasing her with innumerable questions on the cause of her apparent dejection, at length reluctantly retired.

Under the severe discipline of a reproofing, yet refractory heart, she continued in her own room till summoned to the chamber of Mrs. Ross, from whence, though much against her inclination, she afterwards accompanied that lady to the parlour.

St. Vincent was leaning on the mantle-piece when they entered: his eyes seemed fixed on vacancy, and his whole appearance bespoke the deepest mental abstraction. Their approach was not at first perceived; but the voice of Mrs. Ross, who happened to say something to Stella, speedily recalled his attention, and he instantly advanced to meet her.

After the usual compliments and inquiries of the morning, having conducted her to a

chair, he placed another for Stella; and seating himself between them, began to discourse on the subject of their journey, and other topics of general conversation, with an air of more apparent gaiety and cheerfulness than had hitherto been visible in the general tenor of his behaviour.

Stella felt no inclination to follow the example thus set her: his averted looks, however, as he continued talking to his mother-in-law, left her at leisure to reflect on a mode of conduct so new and unexpected; and her thoughts again reverting to the nature of Ann's late intelligence, she gradually began to conclude a total change had really been effected in his sentiments, and that the uncommon flow of his spirits proceeded from the attendant success which had crowned his wishes with the object of their present pursuit.

In spite of the conviction afforded by her cooler judgment that this very event was the happiest thing that could possibly befall her, Stella was not able to restrain a sigh, which forced its way to the ears of St. Vincent: it seemed to possess some irresistible magic, for he suddenly became confused, and all at once stopped short in the middle of a sentence which he was still solely addressing to Mrs. Ross: in the next moment his eyes were turned upon Stella with a look of acute anguish; which, nevertheless, escaped her notice, from her being wholly absorbed by her own reflections, and therefore unconscious of St. Vincent's emotions. Instantly recollecting himself, he pulled out his watch, observed the morning was far advanced, expressed surprise at the apparent tardiness of the waiters, and abruptly retired, in order, as he said, to hasten the preparations for breakfast.

Stella, whose post it was to officiate on these occasions, happened to be seated at the table before his return; and from the attention required to the ceremonies of the tea-table, little leisure remained for further contemplation on surrounding objects. St. Vincent's former cheerfulness, however, seemed partly to have vanished—at least, it was now much less apparent, and frequent fits of silence occasionally seized him; but the instant he became sensible of this circumstance, his late adopted mode of proceeding was immediately resumed; and Stella, as she poured out the tea, found her hand sometimes arrested, and her eyes irresistibly fixed in astonishment on the varying inconsistencies which continually marked his conduct, and forced themselves upon her notice.

During their journey this day, Mrs. Ross several times complained of an uncommon degree of lassitude and fatigue. The bleak and mountainous track of country they had to pass probably produced this effect: it was therefore determined to take up their quarters for the night at—, where was an excellent inn, offering every accommodation they could possibly desire; and the necessary orders were accordingly given on their arrival for that purpose.

As the travellers reached this place at an early hour, Mrs. Ross retired to her chamber immediately after dinner was over, in order to obtain an hour's repose; during which the landlord, who attended them in person, had been repeatedly questioned relative to the gentlemen's seats in the neighbourhood, some of which the Major previously understood to be extremely beautiful. The information now received confirmed this idea; and when the ladies retired, a resolution was hastily formed of visiting one or two of those he had heard principally admired. Mine host was therefore requested to apologize for his absence from the tea-table, without mentioning the particular cause in which it originated; and the evening proving uncommonly inviting, he set out on foot, as most suitable to his purpose.

St. Vincent was peculiarly pleased with a very fine place in the vicinity: the surrounding grounds were laid out with much taste, the gardens well stored with a great variety of the best fruit-trees, and the house was modern, large, elegantly furnished, and commodious; in short, every thing conveyed an appearance of good order, of regularity and peace, for Virtue still held

her residence there; and neither religion nor common decency had as yet been outraged by the bold and open introduction of daring depravity, or the intrusion of its almost equally unprincipled supporters. If, as the old proverb tells us, “the receiver is as bad as the thief,” what are we to think of the mean sycophantic beings who chuse to degrade themselves in the most unequivocal manner, by countenancing with their presence the unblushing votaries of acknowledged adultery, because the chief culprit was in the possession of twelve thousand pounds per annum?—and twelve thousand pounds per annum might be expected to afford a tolerable portion of loaves and fishes in return for the total disregard they had shewn to their own character, in the, no doubt, disinterested solicitude evinced for the re-establishment of appearances, by which none but the wilfully blind could possibly be duped in the smallest degree, and which not even the erring parties themselves seemed anxious to preserve, if their real sentiments could be properly ascertained by the persevering and undisguised effrontery of their general mode of proceeding.

Indeed, to such a length have the timeserving worshippers of Mammon sometimes carried their venal adoration, that the same man has been known to cringe and fawn on the very person he had previously exerted every endeavour to render infamous in the eyes of the public, though no one circumstance had occurred to alter or do away the stigma of imputed guilt it was found necessary to load her with, except that the trifling article of self-interest lay now on the other side of the question, and was, of course, supposed to be implicated in a change of measures.

Characters of the above description continually act with the most glaring impropriety: it is not the dictates of moral rectitude, it is not a sense of right or wrong, by which their motions are commonly regulated—no: worldly propriety is the idol they look up to; and whether possessed of virtue or vice is considered a matter of no consequence as long as the power of bestowing the good things of the earth happens to be within their reach.

Hence, though friendship or compassion may be the ostensible pretence, sordid avarice is, in fact, the principle of their views; and those from whose imaginary interference in pecuniary matters serious consequences have been weakly apprehended, are held up to observation as proper subjects of detestation, as wretches who ought to be hunted from society, that their oppressors may safely enjoy the fruit of their iniquity free from the dread of refutation, and be enabled to retain the ability of continuing to poison the public mind by a long catalogue of exhibited, but supposititious errors, which never existed except in their own corrupted creative fancy; while, at the same time, the avowed adulteress, or the once well-known impure, is attended, countenanced, and attempted to be introduced into notice with the most barefaced and indefatigable industry, even though the actual presence of their spurious offspring affords a damning proof of certain guilt beyond the utmost effort of human impudence to palliate or conceal.

Similar motives naturally produce similar effects; wealth purifies every gradation of vice in the eyes of the mercenary in proportion as self-interest or poverty is supposed to obscure the good qualities of those from those whose influence we have any thing to fear, or from whose inability to serve us we have nothing to expect.

CHAP. X.

“Nature here
“Wanton’d as in her prime, and play’d at will
“Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
“Wild above rule or art.”

MILTON.

“To be good is to be happy.”

ROWE.

AFTER taking a cursory view of one or two other places in the neighbourhood, for the evening was now too far advanced to admit of a much longer absence from his companions, St. Vincent retraced his way back to the inn, and at a short distance from the town perceived Stella before him, who was returning from a solitary walk curiosity had led her to take in the vicinity.

Absorbed in one of those meditating fits in which she frequently indulged when alone, he had already reached her side before his approach was even suspected.

The voice of the Major, though manly and commanding, possessed, at the same time, a harmonious softness which rendered it peculiarly insinuating, especially when his mind was in that frame, to which it had latterly often inclined: this happened at the present juncture to prove the case; and Stella felt more than usually disposed to become a listener, when (her first surprise being over at a meeting so unexpected) he began to discourse on the objects which had recently attracted his attention. The manner in which he described them, and the whole tenor of his remarks, though extremely interesting, had hitherto been entirely confined to the beauties of inanimate nature; but, at length, digressing from this subject, he insensibly found himself dwelling upon the probable happiness experienced by the proprietors of the charming place he had first visited, and the felicity congenial minds, legally united, must enjoy amidst scenery so enchanting, with a fortune so enlarged, that the power of dispensing good seemed continually within their reach, affording a rich resource of rational pleasure by the conviction that others were rescued from misery, corporeal or mental, and restored to a state of comparative ease, through the benevolent exertions of a well-directed sensibility to the misfortunes of their less favoured fellow-creatures.

As he proceeded to deliver his sentiments on these topics, and feelingly drew the picture of those enviable beings who, all in all to each other, while conversing together, seem to forget the whole creation contains a single inhabitant beyond their own little circle, where

“All seasons, and their change, all please alike,”

Memory suddenly held up its retrospective mirror to his view, and the distorted contrast which it exhibited of his own situation, seemed at once to paralyze the mental faculties of the late animated speaker: his voice ceased to vibrate on the ear of his deeply-affected auditor; and the sad and solemn pause that ensued appeared to be reciprocally occupied by the same interesting ideas.

Stella felt this impressive silence ought to be broken, for her heart too faithfully portrayed what was passing in that of her unhappy companion. The effort, however, proved unsuccessful, for the powers of language refused to second it: she therefore renounced the attempt, and walked on at a quicker pace.

At length St. Vincent's mind became more tranquillized: he had lagged behind, to conceal the interior anguish of his soul; but soon again joined our agitated heroine, and was just beginning to speak, when Ann, who had discovered the direction taken by Stella on quitting the inn, appeared in view, and hastily advanced to meet her, with a message from Mrs. Ross, importing her wish to see her immediately. The presence of a third person proved no inconsiderable relief to the distressed Stella, and she opposed the motion made by the messenger to retire, by requesting the aid of her arm, under pretence of having over-fatigued herself by the length of her walk. St. Vincent in a faltering voice requested the preference as her supporter.

The accent in which he addressed her was but too expressive of the present state of his thoughts, not to reach her throbbing heart, though the offer was modestly declined, with a quick-withdrawn glance, such as apparently produced an additional degree of anguish in him to whom it was directed; for, abruptly striking his forehead, he uttered an exclamation of despair, succeeded by a profound sigh, and suddenly turning into another path, instantly disappeared from her view.

During the time of supper, he seemed absent and inattentive to the numerous enquiries made by Mrs. Ross on the subject of his recent excursion, the particulars of which, it was pretty evident to some part of the company, he seemed by no means inclined to repeat: the outlines, however, were given: and the hour of separation for the night at length arriving, was secretly hailed as a seasonable relief from the painful restraint and apprehended observation experienced by the narrator and his late companion.

As Mrs. Ross complained of a feverish sensation, together with an unusual degree of lassitude, it was settled, on the following morning, to remain in their present quarters till such time as she found herself more able to bear the fatigue of travelling again.

After breakfast St. Vincent recollected some professional business which required his presence at —— before he returned to Rossgrove: his original design had been to take that place in his way back from Dumfries; but the unexpected delay which the above circumstance occasioned, produced a change of measures; and he now formed the resolution of riding there in the course of the forenoon, as it was only a few miles distant, and consequently he could easily accomplish whatever was to be done, and join the ladies again in the evening.

Stella considered this arrangement in the light of a desirable relief from the painful necessity of being forced to meet him at meals, unsupported by the presence of Mrs. Ross, who had previously declared her intention of keeping her room through the principal part of the day; and as she continued too unwell to receive him there during the greater part of it, his absence was not likely to be so much felt by her as, under different circumstances, might possibly have proved the case.

The business which carried him to —— being concluded at an early period, and the weather proving quite favourable, one of the officers quartered at this place proposed a walk to ——, the seat of a noble and very amiable family in the vicinity. As St. Vincent had never seen this terrestrial paradise, though Fame had been loud in its praise, no less than in that of its beautiful and highly-accomplished inhabitants, he therefore readily assented to the scheme, and proceeded to put it in immediate execution, the distance from —— being but inconsiderable, and the road good.

But scarcely were they arrived at this romantic and enchanting spot, before the Major's companion received a hasty summons from one of the serjeants, requesting his speedy return on some recruiting business that required the utmost dispatch.

Left thus unexpectedly alone, St. Vincent wandered about the pleasure-grounds as fancy

or inclination directed his movements.

In crossing a walk that lay in the vicinity of a small, but elegantly constructed pavilion, the sound of a guitar arrested his attention: the music seemed far beyond any thing of the kind he had hitherto heard, and the voice that accompanied it was truly seraphic. Absorbed in the luxurious indulgence of the moment, he had stood for some time immoveably fixed to the spot, and fearful almost to breathe, lest a single note of the floating harmony should be lost, when an old grey-headed domestic appeared advancing to the place from whence it issued, with a letter in his hand.

On perceiving a stranger, whose intelligent countenance evinced the most striking expression of admiration and delight, the man suddenly stopped, and then respectfully accosting him, requested to know if he wanted a message conveyed to my Lord, or any of the family. St. Vincent, still solicitous to catch every strain, slightly bowed without speaking, and motioning with his hand for silence, continued to listen with the same air of eager fascination he had at first exhibited. The man seemed to participate in his feelings, as if deeply interested in whatever appeared connected with the noble and worthy house to which he belonged; and insensibly approaching nearer, his features beaming with a look of peculiar satisfaction that defied every prohibition to the contrary, softly whispered in the ear of the Major that it was Lady —— he now heard.

“Every body,” continued he, “says she plays and sings like an angel, and I am sure she is as good as the best that ever was in heaven:—but indeed, Sir, I know not any difference amongst them; for if ever there were angels on earth, I think in my conscience they are all equally so. And as for the young gentlemen—why, Sir, his Lordship’s heir, God bless him! knows every thing under the sun; besides, he is so amiable and condescending!—and then his brothers, Sir—faith, neither sea nor land, I believe, can furnish their superiors. You may credit me, Sir; for these grey hairs, silvered over in their service, bespeaks our acquaintance of a tolerable date—Michael has known them long—”

St. Vincent, who always felt particularly gratified by listening to the language of the heart, now felt its magic influence in all the force of genuine nature; and a temporary pause in the music having taken place, he regarded the garrulous old man with an air of benignity that seemingly encouraged him to proceed, for he immediately resumed his eulogium on the character and merits of his patrons in the following terms of panegyric, though in a lower voice than he had hitherto spoken.

“It is true, Sir, my Lord is sometimes a little passionate or so, but then we are seldom sufferers on those occasions, for he is as generous as a Prince, and would not intentionally injure a worm; indeed he has the best heart and disposition in the world: all his dependants love him and regard him as their friend and benefactor:—to be sure he may be happy, if any person can be so on earth; for he has the finest family, and the loveliest woman to his wife, in Scotland—and that, Sir, your honour knows, is a wide word.”

The national pride of the Caledonian seemed gratified by this idea; he appeared some inches taller, and an air of exultation sat conspicuously triumphant on every feature.

“Pray, my good friend, what may be the extent of the Earl’s family?” asked the Major.

“Five sons and five daughters, Sir.—Old as I am, I hope yet to see the young ladies all Duchesses, and my young masters the greatest men in the kingdom, next to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, God bless him!”

St. Vincent could not refrain from smiling at the faithful creature’s laconic method of arranging the future destiny of this noble family; neither could he entirely suppress a sigh at the

recollection that real happiness, so far from being included in what he supposed its climax, was probably more distantly removed from the higher circles of life than their inferiors generally permitted themselves to imagine. That such, however, was not the case here he had soon additional authority to confirm; for in a few minutes after his late companion left him to deliver the letter he had in his hand, (a circumstance apparently for some time over-looked in his eagerness to dwell on the eulogium of his benefactors) a gentleman, whom St. Vincent recollected to have once seen at Rossgrove, advanced from one of the other walks, and joined him. With the Earl and his family this person seemed well acquainted; he was, besides, better qualified to be a competent judge of their merit than the Major's first informant, whose gratitude might be supposed to bias his opinion in their favour: nevertheless, the account he now received only differed in the mode of expressing it, for the matter-of-fact part entirely coincided with that given by his predecessor.

Charmed with the good and amiable character this family possessed, St. Vincent felt a strong inclination to become known to them; and his new acquaintance, who was then on a visit at the house, undertook to gratify this wish, after having quitted him for a short period to mention his intention to the family.

His Lordship, who neither liked Nabobs, nor the means by which their immense wealth was usually acquired, had never yet paid his respects at Rossgrove, and, from the general character of its present master, seemed every day less disposed to do so.

Major St. Vincent's name was not, however, totally unknown to him, for he had more than once heard it mentioned in terms highly honourable to its possessor: but at this time he happened to be from home; and the intimation was therefore given to the ladies, most of whom were then in the pavilion. A polite message was immediately returned; but before the bearer could accomplish its delivery, Lady —— was seen issuing from the door, accompanied by three of the most elegant and lovely girls the Major had almost ever seen: they entered the path in which the two gentlemen were standing; and the latter, supposing their intention was to join them, instantly hastened forward in order to pay their respects. St. Vincent was received in the most pleasing manner; and an hour spent in their society fully corroborated all that had been previously reported in their favour.

When he quitted this terrestrial paradise, and parted from its charming inhabitants, whose benevolent hearts and all-accomplished minds seemed to place them, even more than their distinguished station, in the rank of superior beings, St. Vincent could not help stopping on the last eminence from whence their retiring forms were still visible, and continued gazing after them as they returned from conducting him to the vicinity of the high road, till their white garments no longer appeared amidst the trees. At length the fragrance of the honeysuckle and sweet-briar, which every where shed their united perfumes round this enchanting abode, ceased to regale his senses; and as he retraced his steps back, a musing melancholy, almost approaching to something of a prophetic tendency, gradually took possession of his mental faculties, and, in spite of every effort to exclude the officious intruder, persisted in conjuring up to view the too probable vicissitudes of futurity in store for the now happy group—the thousand evils that flesh is, sooner or later, heir to those evils, which all the human race, in one shape or another, are destined to encounter, and against the overwhelming influence of which, neither virtue, wisdom, rank, nor riches have been found altogether competent to protect the devoted victim of misfortunes.*

* Alas! these presentiments time and death have, since the above period, but too faithfully verified!

CHAP. XI.

“A gen’rous mind, though sway’d awhile by passion,
“Is like the steely vigour of the bow,
“Still holds its native rectitude, and bends
“But to recoil more forceful.”

BROOKE.

HAD Mrs. Ross found her health equal to the attempt, she would certainly have endeavoured to indulge the strong propensity she felt, from the Major’s recital on his re-appearance at ——, to commence an acquaintance with the amiable family in whose praises he was no less warm than eloquent; but the case proving otherwise, she was forced to enjoy at second hand that pleasure which a personal intercourse must have considerably augmented. As for Stella, superior to every sensation of presumptuous competition, or the mean instigations of an envious mind, she listened with the most delighted attention, and secretly wished, since the narrator was destined to marry on a footing of equality, that his lot had been cast at —— instead of Rossgrove: in that event, she persuaded herself, her feelings would have been very different on the occasion from what they were at present; his happiness must then have afforded a constant theme for contemplations of the most gratifying nature, and compassion could not have existed to heighten other sentiments in his favour.

The enthusiasm of disinterested affection glowed in her bosom, and tinged her cheek: in the ardor of self-exultation she felt her soul rise above individual considerations, or the boundary of that limited rank in life apparently assigned her by the mysterious circumstances of her birth: for a few moments the pride of conscious worth seemed to have annihilated worldly distinction, that intellectual merit might have room to act in its proper sphere, and be enabled to display its genuine lustre, unfettered by the adventitious advantages possessed by the rich and powerful sons of prosperity over their less fortunate fellow-creatures: but bitter recollection soon returned with all its train of mortifying attendants; and the mental vision of happier scenes gradually vanished before the sad conviction of existing circumstances.

Mrs. Ross, finding her disorder somewhat better before St. Vincent’s return in the evening, and afterwards conceiving herself so far recruited by a good night’s rest as to be able to continue the journey, on the following morning they recommenced it at an early hour, and reached Dumfries without encountering any further interruption.

Here they found Captain Montague, who had been previously acquainted with their motions, ready at the King’s Arms to receive them: the pleasure that beamed on his intelligent countenance was not inferior to that experienced by Stella on the occasion, who was herself once more restored to the society of a friend so highly valued, a man for whom she harboured the warm, but innocent affection of a sister.

Solicitous to obtain some account of the inhabitants of the Hermitage, Stella promised him, on separating for the night, to be in the sitting-room by eight o’clock next morning. She found him already waiting for her appearance; and as the Major had walked out on quitting his chamber, sufficient time was obtained for the expected information before the remainder of the party arrived to interrupt the communication.

The usual and natural cheerfulness of Montague’s disposition, it has formerly been mentioned, had of late undergone some change, partly from the peculiar circumstances in which

he had unfortunately involved himself, and partly from occurrences of a domestic description, the leading events of which had long been supposed consigned to oblivion, till incidents of a more recent date recalled them again to remembrance, and spread an occasional expression of sorrow over his features on every recurrence to the painful subject. The eyes of Stella, and the mournful air with which she regarded him when under the influence of this secret distress, could not always escape his notice: he saw her delicacy, however, would not allow of asking any questions, and determined at length to reward her forbearance on the first favourable opportunity that offered to second his views.

Mrs. Ross proposed remaining in Dumfries for a few days; but St. Vincent's departure was fixed to take place on the third morning from their arrival. That period now rapidly approached; and in proportion as it did so, the spirits of the Major sunk, and his dejection became more apparent. Stella, too, was not without her secret struggles; but the watchful eyes of Montague, she feared, were upon her; and this apprehension added considerable force to her exertions for the recovery of that degree of fortitude she had long determined to maintain.

On the night preceding his departure, Mrs. Ross finding herself too much agitated to appear in the sitting-room, took a solemn and most affecting farewell of this favourite son-in-law in her own chamber. The pang of separation seemed, indeed, mutually experienced; for the Major instantly left the inn, and was afterwards seen in one of the most retired walks, absorbed in a train of melancholy reflections, from which he did not appear anxious to free himself.

Montague, who happened to be ignorant of this circumstance, and supposed him still with Mrs. Ross, was extremely surprised to find the case otherwise; and would have set out in quest of him immediately, had he not been prevented by Donner, who informed him his master had left orders to say he purposed returning shortly, and in the interim wished to be alone.

Stella, who sickened at the idea of her share in the parting scene yet to take place, would gladly have escaped it by remaining with Mrs. Ross; but this indulgence was not allowed her: and she found herself most reluctantly under the distressing necessity of adjourning to the supper table, where she and Captain Montague were already seated before St. Vincent re-appeared. He spoke not on his entrance; but throwing his hat on a sofa near the door, drew a chair opposite to Montague, and leaning his elbow on a corner of the table, seemed entirely unconscious of his present situation, till roused from his reverie by the friendly voice of the Captain, who insisted upon helping him to something on that side of the table. The supper, notwithstanding all the efforts of Montague, proved uncomfortable and ill attended to; and the parties, though solicitous to prolong it from a certain temporary relief which the presence of the servants seemed to afford, yet secretly rejoiced when it was over.

The few days passed by St. Vincent and Stella in each other's company, had produced too many opportunities for discovering the worth and merit of their respective characters, not to rivet the attachment previously existing between them more closely than ever; and though they mutually adhered, with the utmost possible strictness, to the line of conduct self-prescribed for their behaviour, yet the dearly purchased heroism, on which they sometimes privately congratulated themselves, was more than once on the point of yielding to the superior force of human weakness, and a keen sensibility of heart almost too acute to struggle with: a strong sense of moral rectitude, joined to the innate delicacy of a well educated mind, and a proud consciousness of what was individually due to themselves, not merely in the opinion of the world, but, what appeared of infinitely more importance, in that of their own, nevertheless sustained them in the midst of the severest trials, and ultimately crowned their endeavours with the most valuable of all rewards, the certain approbation of their own upright and uncorrupted

hearts.

This night appeared fraught, however, with more than a usual demand on their fortitude; for it was the last, in all human probability, they would spend together for a great length of time; nay, perhaps for ever!—This idea, which their better judgment taught them to suppress, perpetually intruded itself on their thoughts, and imbittered every passing moment that seemed to bring their hopes and fears nearer a final termination: one pause continually succeeded another in the broken and disjointed conversation attempted at intervals to be maintained; and either wearied out by the ineffectual exertions of friendship, or insensibly giving way to the private chagrin that at times preyed upon his mind, Captain Montague at length appeared equally infected by the same inclination to mental abstraction and occasional taciturnity which his two companions had repeatedly evinced.

An observation of this circumstance brought our heroine to a just recollection of her critical situation. While he continued to speak, she imagined herself not called upon to take any very particular share in the discourse, and her thoughts were consequently left at leisure to dwell on subjects which interested her more nearly than those he introduced. Now the case was altered; for he who had hitherto chiefly supported the conversation, no longer took any principal share in its continuation; and she seemed to have no remaining choice but either to endeavour at supplying his deficiencies, or render herself liable to probable animadversions, against the chance of which it was absolutely requisite to guard her conduct with the utmost precaution and persevering attention.

Influenced by a motive so laudable, she turned to Captain Montague, and addressed some common-place, trifling inquiries, she knew not well what, respecting Dumfries and its inhabitants. At the sound of her voice, unsteady and faltering, St. Vincent suddenly started from his musing posture, and expressively regarded her for a moment in silence; then pouring out a bumper of wine, swallowed it, and again resumed his former attitude.

Disconcerted by this behaviour, but not entirely overcome, she speedily recommenced her design, and called upon the still silent Montague for his opinion on the foregoing subjects, who, apparently pleased to gratify her wishes, quickly relinquished his late bias to contemplation, and entered upon the subject Stella seemed desirous to inform herself of with his usual promptitude to oblige.

Of the town and its inhabitants he spoke in high terms of praise; but neither the beautiful situation of the former, nor the well-known sociable hospitality of the latter, on which he discoursed with apparent satisfaction, seemed long to interest his female auditor, who, having accomplished her scheme of escaping the chance of particular observation, by diverting its probable source into another channel, again became absent, silent, and inattentive.

In the ardor of energetic description, this change was not at first perceived; and he produced a copy of some lines written by Mr. Home, author of the tragedy of Douglas, which he recommended as a proof that that gentleman's sentiments coincided with his own on the occasion: they had been composed as far back as the year 1756, at a period when no inconsiderable degree of traffic in the tobacco line was carried on with Virginia; to which circumstance the poet alludes, and which, in fact, nearly comprised the sum total of all the commercial industry then practised in that part of the country. The lines were as follow:—

COMPOSED ON DUMFRIES

BY MR. JOHN HOME.

“Sweet is thy seat, Dumfries! by nature fine,
“And Art hath made its pleasing graces thine.
“But let thy streams in other numbers flow,
“And other verses with thy beauties glow:—
“Thy people’s manners my affections move;
“They win my numbers, who engage my love.—
“Industrious are thy sons, yet free and fair;
“Though busy, cheerful, and though wise, sincere:—
“Fair are thy maids—too fair for hearts like mine:
“Careless, they please, and charm without design;
“By sense conducted, neither fond nor coy,
“And made for modest love and sober joy.
“Flourish, Dumfries! may Heav’n increase thy store,
“Till Griffal* sink, and “Nith† shall glide no more!”

* A well known mountain in Galloway, not far distant from Dumfries.

† The river that flows by Dumfries, on the beautiful and romantic banks of which stands a part of the town.

CHAP. XII.

“Parting is such sweet sorrow,
“That I could bid farewell till it were morrow.”

OF the foregoing verses, the three last lines but two seemed to strike St. Vincent as particularly characteristic of her who individually occupied so much of his thoughts: he requested to read them himself; and during the perusal, his eyes were frequently turned upon our heroine with an expression of the keenest sensibility.

Stella almost equally wished and feared to quit the room at the usual time of retiring; but a message from Mrs. Ross soon decided her wavering motions.

The most critical moment of her existence seemed now arrived; and the manner in which she conducted herself during the short, but trying interval that yet required mental exertion, appeared the crisis of her fate, the touch-stone by which the future tenor of her days was to be marked either with cheering intellectual peace, or self-merited condemnation, according as the nature of the succeeding step she was upon the point of taking should be managed.

To escape the ceremony of a formal farewell was what she particularly wished to accomplish; but how to do so, without rendering herself liable to the charge of impoliteness, or the yet more distressing suspicion of the real situation of her mind, seemed difficult to determine.

Hesitating and irresolute in what way to proceed, she rose from her chair, while the varying colour of her cheek and her humid eyes, as they timidly glanced round the table, portrayed the agitation of her bosom, in spite of her solicitude to conceal it from observation.

Montague saw and felt for her situation; he likewise saw that the fluctuating resolution of St. Vincent could scarcely maintain its ground against the propelling influence of the moment, and that he seemed on the point of advancing to address her. Apprehensive of the consequences to both, their considerate friend instantly stepped forward, and seizing the hand of the trembling Stella, led her to the door, where the servant waited her approach with a candle.

“I shall do myself the pleasure of breakfasting with you to-morrow, if not prohibited,” said he, in a quick accent.—“Good night, *ma douce amie!* may your slumbers prove sound, and your dreams as agreeable as I wish them!”

Stella slightly curtsied, but attempted not to return any answer, for the power of articulation was not then at her command; nor did her conductor appear to expect it, as he left her immediately, and she heard the door of the parlour abruptly close behind him on his re-entrance.

Stunned and surprised at the unlooked-for rapidity by which her late dreaded difficulties had thus been suddenly terminated, our heroine remained for an instant immoveably fixed to the spot, till the servant, who, in the supposition she followed him, had already reached some distance, accidentally perceiving his mistake, retraced his steps to inquire if she waited for any thing he could procure. Roused by the sound of his voice, she cast a last sad look at the door, and motioning with her hand for him to proceed, followed in silence.

“You have then parted with the Major, my love,” said Mrs. Ross, addressing her with tears in her eyes: “is my dear Henry in better spirits than he seemed to be in at the period of our separation? His emotion affected me deeply.”

“So did it me, likewise,” thought Stella.

“Alas!” continued Mrs. Ross, without waiting for a reply to her last inquiry, “why is it

not in my power to make him as happy as he ought to be? — it pains me deeply, Stella—the sad conviction pains me more that I can express, that such a soul as St. Vincent possesses should be rendered miserable, as is but too surely the case, by the ill starred connexion he has formed in my family. Of the giddy, the misguided Mrs. St. Vincent I wished to have spoken to him, but the subject was evidently too distressing for his feelings: and perceiving he strove to evade my design, I forbore to press it from motives of delicacy, the value of which he apparently knew how to appreciate. Another affliction is likewise continually before my eyes: should my mortal career be, as I have too much reason to apprehend, rapidly advancing to a close, what then is to become of my poor Maria and Emma? or who shall guard them against the dangerous influence of example so cruelly set them by an elder sister?”

The scalding tears of maternal anguish flowed faster as the latter reflection intruded itself; and those of Stella, previously ready to burst forth, now accompanied them without restraint, as kneeling by the pillow of the invalid, she pressed her emaciated hand to her lips with all the mute, though emphatical eloquence of silent sorrow and heartfelt commiseration.

Though young in years, the strength of her mind far surpassed that which commonly belongs to so early a period of life, and had long taught her to support the wavering fortitude of the unhappy, rather than endanger its firmness by a weak and useless acquiescence in the inclination human nature generally experiences to indulge in what is called the *luxury of grief*. Such participations are frequently more calculated to soften, than nerve the breast against the attacks of misfortune or unavailing regret, and on most occasions ought to be carefully avoided. At present, however, her own seemed the victim of both in too great a degree to speak that consolation to others, which she no longer possessed wherewith to support herself.

Mrs. Ross was the first who recovered some portion of composure, and kindly apologized to her young friend for causing her, as she imagined, so much distress.

“Rise, my child,” said she; “let us speak, and, if possible, think no more of this unworthy Mrs. St. Vincent. Good and evil are more equally dispensed by the wise Arranger of terrestrial events than we are sometimes willing to allow. I ought to be grateful for the blessings I enjoy, and they are many, without weakly repining that my lot, like that of all my fellow creatures, has a tinge of the bitter in it: from some quarter or another the black cloud must come, to compel us to withdraw our thoughts from earthly attractions, and remind us of our dependance on a wise, just, and unerring Benefactor, who will not load us with more than we can bear; but who (as our own interior conviction fully ascertains) never meant us for perfect beings, and therefore assigned a mingled lot of pain and pleasure for our portion, in order to prove the necessity of a thorough reliance on his superior judgment, and our inability to conduct ourselves without the aiding hand of a more omnipotent director, who best knows in what way the rod of correction is required, and the form in which it may be most beneficially applied. It has long been my opinion that happiness and misery ought to be considered in a comparative point of view; and if this axiom is established, say, Stella, have I any right to complain? It is true, my first-born child has disappointed my hopes, and imbittered every prospect of earthly felicity; yet, granting this to be the case, has she not likewise been the means of procuring me such a son as St. Vincent? and am I not then indebted to her for an acquisition so valuable?—Oh yes, surely I am! Henceforth I will try to fix this circumstance in my memory, and aided by so persuasive a recollection, endeavour to think of her with less acrimony than I have hitherto done. Let us, in the meanwhile, persevere in what is right ourselves; and while we receive the good things of this life with gratitude, learn to make the most of them; submitting, at the same time, to the course of worldly vicissitudes and worldly sorrows as necessary and, no doubt, proper attendants on humanity!”

The substance of Mrs. Ross's discourse, together with the leisure it afforded for self-recollection, nearly restored the wounded mind of our heroine to a state of tolerable tranquillity. Still, however, a visible degree of dejection marked her looks and accent; and Mrs. Ross secretly reproached herself for being the cause of this appearance, and exerted her whole strength to dispel it. After some further conversation on different subjects, they separated for the night, equally disinclined to sleep and disposed to solitary moralizing.

When Stella entered the sitting-room next morning, her eyes were swelled with weeping, her face pale, and her whole appearance languid in the extreme. Montague almost started at her altered looks; and gently taking her hand, gazed at her a few moments in expressive silence. Stella, whose soul revolted at the idea of meriting compassion on such an occasion, felt her late colourless cheeks instantly glow, for the manner of her companion spoke too legibly his sentiments to be mistaken in their signification. She snatched her hand from his with unusual quickness, and the tea equipage being just then brought in, seated herself at the table, where, having speedily introduced some common-place topic of discussion, she followed it up with a steadiness and resolution that did her infinite honour in the eyes of her companions.

The first sensation of embarrassment thus got over, every succeeding moment rendered her situation easier: fortunately for her feelings, the friendly heart who saw her motive, knew how to appreciate a conduct so meritorious, and seconded her wishes so well, that the intellectual conflict she suffered was sooner subdued, than, under different circumstances, would probably have happened. No notice, however, was taken of St. Vincent's departure; nor his name introduced in any respect whatever.

The weather had rather been unfavourable from the period of their arrival at Dumfries, which was the chief cause that protracted the continuation of their journey, Mrs. Ross not chusing to move till an alteration for the better took place. The same reason that produced this determination likewise operated to confine Stella to the house, and consequently prevented her from viewing the numberless beauties of the surrounding country. This circumstance was not, however, much regretted before the departure of Major St. Vincent, as it did away the chance of meeting with him out of doors; and while he remained within, it was easy to escape from his presence, either by keeping her own room, or that of Mrs. Ross, from which, on his entrance, she commonly retired. Nevertheless, it was not without infinite reluctance this line of conduct was pursued; but a just and delicate sense of propriety overcame every other sensation, and the approbation of her own mind proved ever a precious reward for the struggles by which it was obtained.

When under the necessity of appearing at meals unsupported by the company of Mrs. Ross, Captain Montague's presence proved a seasonable relief to her spirits. This incomparable young man, who, as has been observed, generously entered into all her feelings, endeavoured to spare her, as well as his friend the Major, every possible difficulty within the reach of his ability to avert: now that the latter no longer demanded his exertions, they were of course all directed into one channel; and the restoration of our heroine's peace would not have remained unaccomplished, had his efforts been crowned with the success they so well merited.

CHAP. XIII.

“Some sullen influence, a foe to both,
“Has wrought this fatal marriage to undo us.”

ROWE.

ACTUATED by an irresistible inclination to give the history of his domestic troubles to his young and fair companion, whose very voice, no less than her form and face, continually presented the living portrait of an unhappy mother to his view, Montague had more than once been upon the verge of commencing the distressing communication, when a sense of filial delicacy rendered the attempt abortive, and repeatedly compelled him to silence.

One evening had now only to intervene before Mrs. Ross and her *protégée* commenced the prosecution of their journey: the weather had become more propitious to their wishes; and the latter, accompanied by Captain Montague, set out to see the ruins of the collegiate church of Linclouden, in the vicinity of the town.

In the course of this delightful ramble, the conversation accidentally turned on subjects which led, in some degree, to the very one Montague felt so frequently inclined to relate; and conceiving himself at this period more equal to the task than he had hitherto been, they seated themselves on a stone in the interior of the building, where, after a short pause, he spoke as follows:—

“When my acquaintance first commenced with you, my sweet friend, I had but lately quitted the gay scenes of London and its neighbourhood; where, absorbed in a constant vortex of folly and tonish dissipation, sober reflection was excluded from the order of the day, and every recollection foreign to the great business of pleasurable indulgence, drowned in the existing rage for fashionable pursuits, or obliterated from the tablet of memory by occurrences more congenial to the taste of the giddy and frivolous, though high bred circles, with which my situation in life entitled me to associate.

“Domestic incidents, however distressing, are but too apt to be partially effaced from remembrance under such circumstances: I had experienced some which occasionally were felt with the keenest sensibility; but too young and volatile to retain any constant impression of misfortune, my mind easily yielded to the force of example, and the temptations that daily surrounded me; and every trace of the past was continually buried in the more fascinating enjoyments of the present. Time, and absence from the great theatre of attraction, however, have at length supplied the early want of mature judgment, and, united with other events, gradually given a more serious cast to my character.

“My father happened to be heir to a handsome and extensive landed property in the south of England; and a considerable sum of money in the funds was to descend to his younger children, provided he married with the approbation of an uncle, who had always declared his intention of settling it upon him on the aforesaid condition.

“By an unfortunate and secret attendance on the orgies of the gaming table, the family estate was discovered to be extremely involved on the demise of my grandfather, who had long contrived to indulge this favourite, but dangerous propensity unsuspected, or at least unascertained by those nearest and most deeply interested on the occasion.

“Naturally of an independent disposition, and strict in his notions of moral justice, my father was no sooner acquainted with the real situation of his affairs, than he adopted the advice

of those more competent from their time of life, to form a right opinion on the succeeding steps he ought to pursue in such a predicament. His paternal fortune was all he had to look to during the existence of his uncle; and therefore, after putting matters in a train to lessen the incumbrances, and finally clear the estate, he obtained an appointment to a place of considerable emolument on a foreign station, and departed almost immediately to take possession of it.

“The commencement of my father’s new prospects was not so fortunate as the rectitude of intention by which they were undertaken seemed to warrant; for his health began to decline, and he soon found himself under the necessity of retiring to the country for its re-establishment.

“At no great distance from the principal town where he had hitherto resided, were a number of rural retreats, surrounded by extensive woods, composed of many different kinds of trees which never lose their verdure, but look green at all times of the year: these, irregularly mingling their variegated branches, appear in gay confusion, forming the most delightful groves and cool retirements, well calculated for excluding the intense heat of a burning sun from the languid traveller, unaccustomed to its fervid influence. My father surveyed several spots of this description, and at length fixed upon one in the vicinity of the seacoast, which appeared almost a terrestrial paradise; and the small house he selected for a temporary residence, was only separated from three or four more by intervening plantations of the cedar, the *lignum vitæ*, and the mahogany trees.

“Having one evening rambled further from his abode than usual, he found himself insensibly near an old ruinous-looking habitation in the centre of a grove, which, from its venerable appearance, spread an air of solemn grandeur over the space it occupied, that interested his feelings, and gradually led him forward, in order to take a more particular survey of the whole.

“The fabric, now fast crumbling into a confused mass of rubbish, seemed once to have been extensive, and still exhibited some few remains of former magnificence. As he stood silently musing on the effects of time and chance, unmindful that he himself was not exempted from their overwhelming influence, a snake, probably irritated by his near approach, which apparently interrupted its repose, made a sudden dart forward, and before he could spring aside, wounded him in the leg, and then hastily retired beneath some neighbouring brushwood.

“My father stood at first irresolute what step to adopt for the best in so dangerous an emergency: to return home required time, and his leg already began to exhibit alarming symptoms—what then was to be done? No human being probably inhabited the mouldering edifice; of course, assistance was not to be expected from that quarter: every passing moment became more precious, for every passing moment increased the difficulty of a removal in proportion as the pain he suffered grew more acute.

“In this state of tormenting anxiety, a rustling sound caught his ear. Apprehensive of a second attack from some venomous reptile or wild beast, against which he possessed no means of defence, even had the nature of his wound permitted him to attempt it, he began to conclude the termination of his earthly existence was at length arrived; and perceiving no means of escape whatever, if impending evil happened once more to be threatened, he placed himself against the bole of a large tree, firmly resolved to await the conclusive blow of that destiny he was shortly doomed to encounter. With no small difficulty, however, this design was, accomplished, for he could now scarcely make a foot; and the pain speedily augmenting to a height too dreadful to support, at length deprived him of all sensation: he sunk on the ground in a fainting fit, totally unconscious of the past, and alike unmindful of the present or the future.

“When my father recovered from this state of insensibility, he found himself laid on a

bed in a small, but well-furnished room, and attended by two females, whose skilful assistance had considerably lessened the swelling in his leg, and greatly alleviated the very acute agony he had lately suffered.

“Before his curiosity could be gratified on the subject of his present situation, and the humane aid thus seasonably afforded him, a young woman, of the most fascinating appearance, entered the room, and delivered a paper to one of the others, who, after raising her head to examine the contents, put her tongue to a powder it contained, in order to ascertain its potency: she then mixed it up with something else already in the room, and applied the whole to his leg, rubbing it with both her hands from the knee downwards, with a degree of persevering exertion that fully evinced the accident he had met with was considered in a serious and alarming point of view. The indefatigable operator on this occasion was a negro woman, and her companions seemed to be Europeans.

“My father soon learned that to the younger of the latter he probably stood indebted for the prolongation of his life, which had been effected by a critical discovery of his condition as she was returning home from a visit on the other side of the grove.

Several days elapsed before he was permitted to quit the friendly roof of his benefactors: his own domestics were, nevertheless, informed of his safety; and the negro assistant faithfully attended him with the usual application during the time he remained under her care.

“Every apprehension of danger on his account was now at an end; but one still more formidable fatally succeeded. Julia, the young and beautiful Julia Cramond, had inflicted a yet deeper wound on my father than that which he had received from the snake. He applied for a remedy to the cause in which this fresh disaster originated; but less charitable than the kind negro woman, Julia gave a positive negative to his request.

“Mr. Cramond, the proprietor of my father’s present abode, which almost joined the old ruins already mentioned, happened to be from home when the wounded stranger was discovered by his daughter, and conveyed by her direction to the house.

“This gentleman possessed much good sense, and a tolerable knowledge of the world; but his predominant passion was avarice, and its influence proved frequently so great as to obscure his every other good quality. Mrs. Cramond happened to possess a very lofty opinion of high birth; she herself was descended from an ancient family in Scotland, whose rank had long survived the less honourable, but more useful article of fortune; and though she had condescended to accept an untitled husband in consideration of other advantages, it was the first wish of her heart to hear her daughter addressed by the superior appellation of my Lady. An incident capable of bestowing this envied distinction was not, however, likely to occur in this quarter of the world; and several years being yet to elapse before the situation of their affairs would permit their return to Great Britain, their only daughter was strictly prohibited from entering into any engagements inimical to the future views of either of her parents, for her establishment in the matrimonial line.

“A few days subsequent to my father’s accidental introduction into the country residence of this gentleman, letters had arrived from England announcing his accession to a Baronet’s title, as male heir to a distant relation then dead: of this circumstance the ladies were yet ignorant when Mr. Cramond returned. Though personally a stranger to his guest, they were, nevertheless, known to each other by sight; and the lucrative situation my father possessed, proved an object of no less consideration in the eyes of his new acquaintance than his late acquired title, when discovered by chance, did in those of Mrs. Cramond. The declaration of my father, therefore, who happened to be too much in love to rest satisfied with the first refusal of the lady, was

joyfully received, and the continuation of his addresses unconditionally authorized by the parents of Julia, when applied to for their sanction. His health, too, now gradually returned; the wound in his leg was entirely cured: and though his former occupation demanded personal attendance elsewhere, he still contrived to find leisure sufficient for the purpose of visiting at Mount Cramond.

“Though ever an acceptable guest to the principals of the family, she, for whose favourable opinion he was chiefly solicitous, seemed not to second either their wishes or his own. Cold, reserved, and frequently surprised in tears, yet always listening to what he said with polite, though silent attention, Sir Charles knew not what judgment to form on appearances so inexplicable, nor could all his entreaties prevail upon her to grant him any satisfactory explanation on the occasion. In time his assiduities, however, were no longer refused; and if a verbal consent was not actually obtained, he was tacitly at least permitted to consider himself as a favoured lover. At length, at the earnest request of my father, who had ineffectually applied to Julia on the subject, Mr. Cramond announced the consent of his daughter to their union on the following Thursday; and preparations were accordingly set on foot for the celebration of the ceremony, which took place at the appointed time.

“Two days after the consummation of this event, Sir Charles received a letter from that uncle on whose approbation of his proceedings so much depended. The contents of this epistle proved a thunder-stroke to the now happy husband; for they informed him of his being affianced to a lady of rank and fortune in England by the friendly exertion of this gentleman in his favour; and concluded with a positive assurance, that accordingly as he fulfilled or disappointed his expectation on this occasion, was his future dependance on his friendship and good offices to be estimated.

CHAP. XIV.

“Ah, gentle pair! ye little think how nigh
“Your change approaches, when all these delights
“Will vanish and deliver you to woe!”

MILTON.

“SIR Charles, who, in the ardour of passion, had either forgotten, or wilfully overlooked the former knowledge he possessed of his uncle’s intentions, happened to be in company with Mr. Cramond when this intelligence reached him; and as the impression it made on his countenance was too obvious and striking to escape that gentleman’s notice, he laid the whole affair instantly before him, and entreated his advice in respect to his future conduct in this business.

“Mr. Cramond mused over the unexpected communication for some minutes in silent meditation. If evil threatened to turn the beam on one side, a considerable portion of good existed to counterbalance it on the other: a very short delay might have rendered his views for his daughter abortive, had this unlucky epistle arrived two days sooner; as the case now stood, she could not be unmarried again—of course, nothing was to be feared on that account; and perhaps every apprehension on the score of pecuniary disappointment might yet be done away by a little adroit management—at least, it was certainly worth a trial. So reasoned Mr. Cramond; and the natural disposition of the man spurred him on to make every possible exertion, in order to avoid the practical part of my great-uncle’s declaration.

“Fortunately, the necessary arrangement of some domestic occurrences had prevented the publication of the marriage for some days: in the present state of affairs, no circumstance could have happened more opportunely; and therefore, as the old gentleman could not live for ever, so Mr. Cramond justly observed, it was agreed to conceal his nephew’s union with Julia till such time as the former was fairly gathered to his forefathers; a consummation most ardently wished by this able politician. Meanwhile it was easy for Sir Charles to produce a thousand ostensible reasons for prolonging the term of his residence abroad; without entering into any particular discussion of his uncle’s intentions as to the nature of the future destiny supposed to be in store for him.

“This, with some other accompanying arrangements, was therefore speedily settled; and Lady Montague, of course, remained in her father’s house, under the lately renounced character and name of Miss Cramond.

“In the opinion of some married women this would not have been judged a very eligible situation, when rank and increasing riches entitled them to sport an establishment of their own: to my mother, however, such a consideration appeared not of the smallest importance; on the contrary, she acquiesced in the determination with an air of apparent indifference, calmly declaring that all places were alike to her; and the general tenor of her conduct at this period sufficiently evinced she spoke truth.

“Mrs. Cramond, under pretence of bad health, now constantly resided at their country residence; where her husband likewise spent most of his time, when the nature of his commercial occupation permitted of his absence. It need scarcely be added that my father pursued the same plan: but as many of his countrymen were inhabitants of the same place in which his abode was chiefly fixed, he was forced to act with much caution, lest accident or design should discover his secret, and waft it on the wings of rumour to his native shore.

“Three years had already elapsed in this manner, and the fourth commenced, when Mr. Cramond’s health, which had latterly appeared much on the decline, afforded serious cause for apprehension; and as his lady had also been frequently indisposed in the course of the last twelve months, he determined to follow the repeated advice of his physicians, and try what effect a sea voyage and an European climate would now produce on their debilitated constitutions.

“The aforesaid period had given birth to two sons in the family of Mr. Cramond, of which I happened to be the youngest; and how to dispose of our mother and her infant charge, hitherto concealed from the knowledge of the world, was a question of no small difficulty to determine. Some months, however, were yet to intervene before my grandfather’s affairs could be finally wound up; and, in the interim, it was not unjust to suppose the adjustment of this circumstance might likewise be accomplished in one way or another.

“This expectation was soon realized, in consequence of an incident as little looked for as were the effects which finally resulted from it.

“My father received private intelligence that, as his movements were known to be watched by a secret emissary from England, it behoved him to act with more caution, and visit seldomer at Mount Cramond.

“Astonished at the nature of an intimation, the source of which he found it impossible to discover, Sir Charles once more applied to his father-in-law as his never-failing counsellor in all cases affecting pecuniary concerns; for there seemed but too much reason to suppose his uncle had got some hint of his matrimonial situation, and commissioned one of his acquaintances, of which he had several in this part of the globe, to observe and report the proceedings of his nephew.

“Alarmed by this idea, which appeared to have probability for its foundation, various schemes were alternately adopted and renounced, in the hope of averting the consequences of a discovery.

“At length Mrs. Cramond mentioned one, which she said was first suggested by her daughter:—it was, to take the latter with them to England, where, her maiden name being still retained, she could appear in the character of a single woman, and the children might be produced to the world as the orphan offspring of a relation committed to the guardianship of Mr. Cramond.

“This proposition was not quite to the taste of my father, who, though he saw his wife much seldomer than proved agreeable to his wishes, yet could ill brook the thoughts of a total separation, which, in that event, must inevitably take place for some time.

“But a man who is either involved in debt, or forced to be the artificer of his own fortune, must comply with existing necessities, without arrogating to himself the envied privilege of chusing his destiny. New demands, unforeseen as unexpected, had recently been made on the family estate in England; and to add to this unpleasant circumstance, several speculations in which the Baronet had engaged, and which, on their commencement, promised the most profitable conclusion, had ultimately disappointed his expectations in almost every respect.

“Mr. Cramond’s avidity to provide against future circumstances of this kind, was not less ardent, than his solicitude to repair those which had already taken place: should the latter be found impracticable, the ability of my great-uncle to afford a sufficient indemnification for the loss, was too well known to be overlooked with the smallest degree of prudence or common sense. A proper attention to self-interest, Mr. Cramond averred, ought to be the first consideration of every rational being: to avoid incurring the old gentleman’s displeasure was a thing Sir Charles, therefore, certainly owed himself and his family. No alternative of course

remained—a separation appeared the most likely means of providing against an evil so formidable; and the result of the whole ended in my mother and her sons' accompanying Mr. and Mrs. Cramond to England.

“At the period of our embarkation from the West Indies, Lady Montague had not yet completed her eighteenth year, though upwards of three years a wife. Her eldest son was about two-and-twenty months old, myself not more than eleven.

“Arrived in England, my grandfather fixed his residence in a retired part of the country, at a considerable distance from the metropolis. But the benefit expected to be derived from his native air did not by any means answer the idea previously formed of its success: the liver complaint, to occasional attacks of which his wife had long been liable, daily gained ground; and medical assistance proving of no avail, Mrs. Cramond expired in less than two years after we reached Europe.

“In the third year after this event took place, a military gentleman, who, with his regiment, had been stationed for some time in the West Indies, from whence the corps was but recently returned, arrived in the neighbourhood of our abode, and frequently called at the Lodge. As my grandfather's health seldom permitted him at this period to quit his chamber, my mother usually received their visitor alone, and often walked out with him for a couple of hours at a time. At length the family at whose house he abode, left their country residence: but though he accompanied them to Town, and the distance was great, still this circumstance did not prevent his occasional appearance at the Lodge, where he gradually became a great favourite with my grandfather.

“Another year now passed away without any material occurrence taking place. In the spring of the second, part of the regiment to which this officer belonged; happened to be quartered in the vicinity; and his visits at the Lodge again became frequent.

“At length the route arrived; and about a week before the first division was to march, an incident occurred in our family that nearly brought Mr. Cramond to the grave, and proved the commencement of much domestic misery.

CHAP. XV.

“Farewell, remorse! all good to me is lost:—
“Evil, be thou my good!”

MILTON.

“MY mother, who had latterly evinced a particular partiality for moonlight walks, left the house one evening at a late hour to indulge this favourite inclination: she was accompanied by her own maid, an elderly woman, who went from England at an early age, for the purpose of waiting upon her some years after her birth, and had remained ever since that period in the service of her young mistress, by whom she was extremely beloved.

“A situation near the sea had been recommended to Mr. Cramond, after the death of his wife, in preference to any other whatsoever; and the Lodge, exactly answering the description of the place he wished to procure, it had been immediately taken, and the family removed to it without loss of time.

“This rural retirement lay upon a bold, romantic coast, within a very short distance of the ocean, but sheltered by extensive woods from the violence of those occasional tempests which are sometimes experienced in the neighbourhood of the sea. A covered path through the trees, led directly from the east side of our habitation almost to the edge of the water; where, on the verge of a small bay, stood a little bathing-house, neatly fitted up. Hither Lady Montague, whose spirits had become very indifferent for some time, often resorted at the making of the evening tide, in order, as she said, to observe the reflection of her favourite planet upon the smooth expanse of the deep, or to walk along the rugged surface of some precipice, and listen to the pensive, monotonous sound of the coming wave, before it dashed against the rocky barrier by which its further progress was limited.

“In little more than three quarters of an hour after she quitted the Lodge, her maid returned to the house; and meeting one of the servants, mentioned the cause of her being sent back as originating in a headach, on which account her Lady had insisted on her leaving her, in order to procure a remedy.

‘I shall, nevertheless, attend her again the instant I am better,’ continued the woman; ‘therefore no other person need supply my place, for so my Lady positively commanded: and at any rate you know she is as often unaccompanied as otherwise on such occasions.’

“The girl to whom she addressed herself, readily assented to the truth of this circumstance, which, as it frequently happened, created no particular degree of surprise in the present instance.

“Time passed on, however, and Lady Montague appeared not: it grew late, and her lengthened absence began to assume a serious aspect. The domestics were alarmed; and the girl who had been spoken to by her maid, repaired to the chamber of the latter to discover if she had joined her mistress: this was so far from proving the case, that she found her fast asleep in bed; from which, nevertheless, she instantly started with every appearance of horror and dismay on hearing the cause of their apprehensions; and accusing her late headach, the effects of which, she said, had made her oversleep herself when she ought to have been with her Lady, she hastily joined the other domestics, who now proceeded in different directions in quest of the absentee.

“In vain was every spot searched in the neighbourhood, not the smallest circumstance was discovered by which she could possibly be traced, and despair gradually succeeded to the

first ardor of pursuit.

“The question of what was next to be done, now resounded on every side. Mr. Cramond had retired for the night soon after she quitted the house; he was probably long since asleep: and having of late been in a convalescent state, his servant feared a relapse would prove the consequence of such distressing intelligence if abruptly communicated. Under this apprehension, the advice of my mother’s maid was adopted, and they agreed to refrain from disturbing him till the result of their renewed labours afforded something of a more satisfactory nature to direct their further motions: this they flattered themselves would certainly prove the case previous to his usual hour of waking; and again their enquiries were recommenced in every quarter.

“But success still continued equally wanting to their wishes, and disappointment attended every attempt to discover my mother. The morning had already dawned on their fruitless efforts, when a countryman at length arrived to inform them that a small vessel, supposed from the coast of France, had been seen hovering at no great distance a short time after the night closed in; but whether with hostile intentions, or merely in the smuggling line, he could not pretend to determine, though, in his opinion, the former appeared most likely: and Miss Cramond had, no doubt, fallen a sacrifice to their rapacity, in the expectation of receiving a handsome sum for her liberation.

“In confirmation of this idea, the speaker produced a pocketbook found on the beach, which was soon recognised for her property: this, the man averred, had certainly been offered to the ravishers by their terrified victim, as a temptation to release her; and, in the agitation of the moment, must have dropped from her hand.

“Lady Montague’s maid eyed the narrator of this very improbable story with a varying colour, and an air of much anxiety; she then glanced a look of scrutinizing solicitude on his auditors, who apparently coincided in his sentiments on the subject: after which, having claimed and obtained the pocketbook in right of her mistress, it was judged proper to acquaint Mr. Cramond with the whole of this mysterious and most unaccountable incident.

“To describe the scene that followed, is impossible; suffice it to say, that though my grandfather gave no credit to the absurd supposition of the countryman, his sufferings on the occasion were not less acute, for the evil appeared equally irremediable: indeed infinitely more so, since he fully persuaded himself that, in stepping over some of the projecting rocks, her foot must have slipped, and herself been instantly precipitated into the ocean below. The shock naturally produced by a conjecture so dreadful, proved too much for his enfeebled constitution to sustain; and after again ascertaining the inutility of further enquiry, his former disorder returned with additional force, and rendered him unable to quit his bed for several succeeding weeks.

“During the two first of these, Captain Ormsby (the gentleman before mentioned) spent every moment he could possibly spare from his professional duties with the unhappy father, and strove by every means in his power to mitigate the acuteness of his misery. The division of the troops to which he belonged, happened to be the last in the order of the march; and this circumstance furnished him with more leisure to obey the calls of friendship than could otherwise have been procured.

“It was not without difficulty, however, that the poor old man could be brought to listen to the necessity of acquainting Sir Charles with the melancholy event which had taken place: for in the first effusions of his grief, the secret of his lost child’s matrimonial union had transpired, and reached the ears of the friendly Captain, at least so the latter informed him; and though my grandfather could not recollect the circumstance, yet neither could he positively deny it, because the state of his mind was such as to disqualify him for retaining any knowledge of what he might

or might not have said during the first paroxysms of parental affliction. To assert a falsehood was not, however, to be thought of: and as concealment in this quarter, therefore, appeared no longer practicable, Ormsby was soon made acquainted with the whole transaction; and at length brought Mr. Cramond to coincide in his opinion on the propriety of immediately writing to Sir Charles. The fatal letter was accordingly dispatched to my father; and the Captain on the following day bade adieu to the house of mourning.

“Though in a very early stage of life when this sad, this ever-to-be-regretted affair happened, I yet retain a perfect recollection of my unhappy mother: this circumstance may possibly, in a great degree, be owing to the constant view of several fine portraits of Lady Montague which had been taken to send to her husband. The small miniature which I saw at the Hermitage was certainly one of these; for I well remember there were two of that size and similar appearance, amongst the number; one of which my grandmother usually wore during her lifetime, the other was intended for my father: the hair of the head, and the whole style of the painting, were of too striking a nature to be easily mistaken; and if worlds were in my power to bestow, I would freely give them to develop the mystery of its unaccountable discovery in that quarter of Great Britain.

“Of our mother,” continued Captain Montague, “my brother and myself were particularly fond; and even at this distant moment,” he added, deeply sighing at the painful images memory conjured up to view, “I still in idea see her lovely form before me, and feel the warm tears distilling from her eyes, drop upon my cheeks as she strained her quickly deserted children to her palpitating bosom, and kneeling by her pillow, attempted to implore that protection for their helpless youth she dared no longer ask for herself.

“Oh God! never—no, never shall I forget the transactions of that fatal night, nor the fearful astonishment her words and manner created in our minds!—Diabolical villain! infernal monster!—but do not be alarmed, Stella; I will endeavour to command my feelings if possible, and restrain execrations but too well merited; for are not the errors of a beloved, yet reprobated mother implicated in the same curse that issues forth to blast her unprincipled seducer, the abhorred, the infamous Ormsby?”

Though Stella was partly prepared for this discovery, she could not help being strongly affected when her companion reached the end of the last sentence: he himself appeared no less so; and a pause of some minutes ensued, which neither seemed disposed to interrupt. At length Montague resumed the task he had undertaken, and continued his narrative as follows.

CHAP. XVI.

“I know thee brave;
“Of such the time has need, of hearts like thine,
“Faithful and firm.”

BROOKE.

“THE first violence of our grief for the supposed death of my unfortunate mother had scarcely begun to subside, when her maid, under the pretence of bad health, requested my grandfather’s permission to retire from the Lodge. Though extremely unwilling to part with her, his consent was at last reluctantly obtained; and after receiving a considerable sum of money, which she preferred to the annuity he offered her as a remuneration for the time spent in his family, she departed from the house, to reside in future, according to her own account, with some relations in the north of England.

“In the course of the following two years and a half, nothing occurred worth troubling you with. Mr. Cramond’s health was in some degree restored, and Frederic and myself placed at a celebrated academy in the neighbourhood of the metropolis; near which our grandfather likewise took up his residence.

“Towards the end of that period, an estate that lay within a mile of his abode happened to be on sale, and was soon after purchased by my father’s uncle, who in a short time came to live in the mansion-house.

“Though the first intelligence of this circumstance rather startled Mr. Cramond, a very little reflection served to convince him it was a matter of no consequence, for we still retained the fictitious appellation by which we had been known since our arrival in England; and as he himself was now the only person in Great Britain, my mother’s maid excepted, who knew the real state of the case, scarcely any chance of discovery was to be feared.

“Reassured by this conviction, he shrunk not from an accidental interview which took place very unexpectedly with Mr. Howard in the course of a forenoon visit at a gentleman’s house in the neighbourhood. At the same house they were afterwards invited, though unknown to each other, to spend the day; and before the company separated in the evening, each became so far pleased with the conversation and manners of his new acquaintance, that a friendly intercourse was immediately established between them, which appeared equally agreeable to both parties.

“At length the Christmas holidays restored my brother and myself to our parental roof; and two days after our arrival, Mr. Howard called to enquire after my grandfather.

“Even at this early period of our lives we were tolerable horsemen: Mr. Cramond, kindly indulgent to our bias for manly exercises of every description, had furnished us with two beautiful little animals of the New Forest breed; and when Mr. Howard entered the parlour, Frederic and I were amusing ourselves with making them perform a thousand different manoeuvres in a small field fronting the windows, from whence our grandfather was observing us with an air of the most delighted attention: so occupied, indeed, was the good old man with the objects before him, that he heard not the name of his visitor announced by the servant who preceded him, nor was even sensible of his nearness, till that gentleman, after approaching the nearest window, and discovering the cause of his friend’s temporary fit of abstraction, suddenly turned round, and demanded to whom these young men belonged.

“At the sound of his voice Mr. Cramond started, and in spite of his efforts to the contrary, felt a considerable degree of embarrassment; but on a second repetition of the same question, he replied they were his nephews, (for in that light we had hitherto been represented) and were lately returned from school to spend the holidays with him.

“Mr. Howard, after this information, regarded us a few moments longer in silence. My horsemanship had the good fortune particularly to please him; and when we entered the room after the conclusion of our forenoon exercise, I was honoured with several distinguished marks of his approbation in a degree superior to my brother.

“Insensibly from this day we acquired an increasing interest in his heart; and our next vacation from the academy was passed, at his particular request, in the habitation of our new acquaintance, who frequently regarded us with a degree of scrutinizing attention that inspired his elder visitor with no small portion of apprehension for the consequences.

“One incident which took place in a short time after this period, nevertheless, somewhat allayed his fears on our account. The lady formerly mentioned by Mr. Howard as affianced to my absent father, had set out on a matrimonial excursion to Gratna Green with a gentleman of her own chusing. This gentleman happened to be a low-born adventurer of infamous character; and as her own conduct soon shewed her principles to be similar to her lord and master’s, our uncle repeatedly congratulated himself, in Mr. Cramond’s presence, on the happy escape of his nephew Sir Charles Montague, from the ill-sorted fate he had prepared for him; and as fresh instances of his intended niece’s depravity reached his knowledge, he became gradually weaned from every wish to interfere in the future domestic arrangements of my father; who, he often declared, would have rendered him completely happy had he made him the great-uncle of two such boys as Frederic and myself.

The sensations of Mr. Cramond on such occasions may easier be conceived than described; and in the effusions of parental tenderness, he augured the most happy effects from the daily augmentation of Mr. Howard’s friendly attachment to his nephew’s unacknowledged children.

“The blind Goddess Fortune loves a train, and seldom smiles or frowns without a lengthened succession of followers, good or bad: at present she appeared to be in the former mood, and apparently disposed to adopt us as particular favourites.

“My brother in process of time was removed to one of the Universities; while, on the contrary, my predilection for a military life became so strong, that Mr. Howard, at my earnest request, was prevailed upon to intercede for Mr. Cramond’s acquiescence to my wishes—a compliance the latter seemed extremely averse to grant; but at length, overcome by the importunity of his friend, willing to gratify him at all events, and partially reconciled to the measure by the certain conviction that it was sanctioned by the approbation of my advocate, who otherwise was not of a character to have spoken on my side of the question, permission was granted me to follow the bent of an unconquerable inclination; and at the age of sixteen, my father’s consent being previously obtained, I commenced my military career with all the ardor of a young and sanguine mind, which conceives itself in the certain road to future glory and never-ending fame.

“Mr. Howard, much gratified by having carried his point, and considering himself as the sole medium through which my wishes could possibly have been crowned with any certain degree of success, seemed now more than ever interested in my future destiny; and, finally resolved not to leave what he had engaged in half done, he declared his determination to accompany me on my first visit to the Colonel of the regiment, who had given directions for my

immediate attendance upon him in London.

CHAP. XVII.

“High arbiter
“Chance governs all.”

MILTON.

“WE were just finishing the last stage but one from the metropolis, and the evening was already pretty far advanced, when the carriage was suddenly stopped by a couple of highwaymen, one of whom held a pistol to the breast of the postillion, while the other, with the most horrid imprecations, abruptly burst open the door on the side next Mr. Howard, and presenting a blunderbuss, threatened instant destruction if his pecuniary demands were not speedily complied with.

“As he spoke, the deadly instrument was raised to the head of my uncle, and his finger already upon the trigger evinced a positive determination to be quickly and exactly obeyed. I saw there was not a moment to be lost. Mr. Howard’s agitation prevented his keeping pace with the villain’s impatience, whose watchful eye glancing on all sides, immediately discovered my intention: he turned the muzzle from his first destined victim; we fired at the same instant; part of the contents of his blunderbuss lodged in my shoulder, mine entered his heart, and he dropped upon the ground, uttering another volley of curses, accompanied by a deep and hollow groan.

“The report of fire-arms once more resounded in our ears: it was from the fellow who stood at the head of the horses; but the postillion escaped uninjured: and his late dreaded antagonist, on perceiving the fate of his comrade, speedily quitted the field of action, and made good his retreat, before our servant, who had been detained behind by his horse losing a shoe, could arrive to assist in securing the fugitive. Previous to his appearance, I had myself sprung from the carriage to lay hold of the ruffian, and followed his steps, till the quantity of blood that issued from my wound rendered me unable to continue the pursuit. Mr. Howard, apprehensive for the consequences, had likewise quitted his seat to observe my motions; but being too infirm to overtake me, the servant was supporting me back from the ineffectual attempt, when I found myself suddenly clasped in the good old man’s arms, with a degree of warmth that sufficiently spoke the nature of his feelings.

“In the interim the wounded man had shewn some symptoms of life; and the postillion, who stood over him during our absence, proposed having him removed to the nearest house, until such time as his real situation could be properly ascertained. A cart, which at this period opportunely approached, was immediately hired for the purpose; Mr. Howard’s servant accompanied it, while we proceeded to the conclusion of our night’s journey.

“After procuring a surgeon to dress my wound, which had previously been bound up in the best manner existing circumstances would admit, and now upon examination pronounced not dangerous, my uncle waited upon a neighbouring magistrate of his acquaintance, to whom he related the foregoing affair. This gentleman declared his readiness to save us all the trouble that could possibly be avoided on the occasion; and in consequence of this assurance, we fully expected to reach the metropolis at an early hour on the following day.

“On this subject, however, it was found we had reckoned without our host. I was unable to travel long before the time for our intended departure arrived; and the end of the week was nearly closed ere my removal appeared either safe, or even practicable.

“During this juncture the friendship, attention, and anxiety evinced by the kind Mr.

Howard, are not to be described: indeed they far exceeded in magnitude the cause that called them into action, for I had done nothing but what any other person in the same situation would have performed with an equal degree of readiness; and the reflection that I had saved a worthy man from destruction, more than sufficiently repaid all he supposed himself indebted for.

“At length we reached London; and my convalescent state being now ascertained, Mr. Cramond, who, from humane considerations, had hitherto been kept in ignorance of my condition, was finally informed of the whole transaction, accompanied by the warmest encomiums on my conduct, and a positive assertion that to my successful exertions in his favour, the writer was solely indebted for the prolongation of a life which, differently situated, must have fallen a sacrifice to the barbarous rapacity of his daring assailant.

“Pardon me, Stella, for my prolixity on his subject: I should not so far have encroached upon your patience, had not the consequence of this event entitled it to a greater degree of minute attention than would otherwise have been bestowed upon so common an occurrence.”

“Proceed,” replied his auditor, with a smile: “however lightly you may chuse to treat this business, it has already so completely terrified me, that some indemnification of a pleasant nature is certainly due; therefore let us have it quickly.”

Montague bowed, and resumed his story.

“The contents of Mr. Howard’s letter almost equally gratified and alarmed my grandfather—gratified, to find that gentleman’s former predilection in my favour was now become too confirmed to be easily removed—and alarmed, lest my situation should be worse than represented, and a pious fraud practised to keep him easy in the event of any casual rumour unexpectedly reaching him. Under this impression, his health being tolerably restored, he lost no time in relieving his apprehensions, by immediately setting out to join us in the metropolis.

“The meeting that took place between the two old gentlemen was such as might be supposed, warm and affecting; and that with my grandfather and self no less so. The former had for some time harboured so strong a wish to disclose the degree of relationship I stood in to Mr. Howard, that he was now more than once on the brink of mentioning the whole affair; but the intelligence seemed so important, on account of further losses recently sustained by my father, that fearful of the manner in which it might be received by his uncle, he forbore to speak on the subject, until the sanction of Sir Charles, to whom he had written, could first be obtained.

“Unfortunately, during the delay occasioned by my recent confinement, Colonel Philips had left Town; and ignorant whither to follow him, I was forced to wait till his address could be procured.

“This circumstance prolonged our residence for a fortnight in London. At the expiration of that period, I received orders to join him at Dover; and, accompanied by my two highly esteemed companions, who insisted on proceeding with me, my journey thither was speedily accomplished.

“Mr. Howard possessed many acquaintances in this part of the country—Mr. Cramond none: while the former, therefore, happened to be engaged abroad, the latter, who declined all new society that could possibly be avoided, usually occupied himself in finishing a written detail of those circumstances which had occurred in his family since the first introduction of Sir Charles Montague at Mount Cramond. This statement of facts had been occasionally preparing for some time, and was intended either to refresh his memory when the particulars of the various transactions were required, or to be presented in its present form, and left to relate what he ardently wished to be spared a verbal repetition of. One copy was designed for Mr. Howard, the other for Frederic and myself, who were now to be speedily informed of events which our time

of life rendered us fit to be entrusted with.

“Some recording spirit, prophetic of approaching evil, surely guided his hand in the task he had thus critically undertaken to finish. Alas! how blind are we to the future! and how little did I suppose that the delay caused by the preservation of one dear relative, should ultimately prove the means of sending another to his grave, by conducting our steps to the coast of Kent at this most inauspicious juncture!—The ball of the highwayman missed its intended victim, it is true; but the arm of a much more atrocious villain unhappily succeeded too well in a work of destruction, without affording me the envied satisfaction of reflecting that my interference had proved equally successful in a cause still nearer to my heart—a cause that deeply interested every filial, every grateful sensation inherent in human nature, and yet chills the blood in my veins when imaged circumstances of the past start from the tablet of memory, and point to a venerable parent consigned to a premature grave for the crimes of—whom?—a daughter, and a mother!—Oh God! preserve my burning brain from the fatal effects of so horrid a recollection!”

The agitated Montague struck his forehead with violence, and starting from the side of the trembling, weeping Stella, darted past a projection of the ruins, and in melancholy solitude continued to pace over the mouldering monuments of former days, where the ashes of the saint and the sinner alike lay mingled in one promiscuous mass of confusion, and every surrounding object bore witness to the fragile nature of human exertions, the vanity of earthly pride, and the instable tenure by which our highest hopes and most favourite enjoyments are sometimes rashly supposed to be rendered fixed and certain.

CHAP. XVIII.

“If thou tell’st the heavy story right,
“Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears!”

SHAKESPEARE.

STELLA, though extremely solicitous for the continuation of a recital that deeply interested her feelings, yet intreated Montague, on his return, to postpone the remainder of his communication for the present, under the idea that he was too much agitated to proceed with any degree of ease to himself. But, however grateful for the considerate motive that dictated this proposal, he declined profiting by it; and soon after reseating himself, again proceeded.

“The principal inns in Dover are commonly too much crowded and too noisy for the accommodation of those whose health is not sufficiently strong to encounter those circumstances with impunity: Mr. Cramond’s, though infinitely better of late than usual, happened nevertheless to be so circumstanced; and we therefore removed to a more retired and tranquil situation than that we had occupied on our first arrival.

“My grandfather and I were at this time alone; for as that part of the regiment to which I belonged, was to remain some time in its present station, I tarried in Dover, the two gentlemen having agreed to continue with me: Mr. Howard was now on a visit in the neighbourhood.

“We were sitting by ourselves on the second evening of our residence in this new abode, when Mr. Cramond appeared more than usually thoughtful: the idea of his lost daughter seemed frequently to recur; and he expressed an uncommon degree of anxiety to discover if I still recollected several circumstances he now mentioned as particularly indicative of her tenderness and attachment to Frederic and myself. On this subject I presently satisfied him, for the remembrance of her was too deeply engraven on our hearts, young as we then were, to be easily erased; and I concluded this assurance by protesting, with emphatical warmth, that had Miss Cramond been in fact our own mother, I did not believe we could possibly have loved or respected her more sincerely.

“Softened by the nature of our conversation, and totally thrown off his guard by the animated and energetic manner in which I spoke my sentiments on this interesting topic, the old man suddenly burst into tears, and falling on my neck, exclaimed, in broken, disjointed sentences—

“Oh my beloved boy! the dear, the sainted Julia Cramond, the ever regretted child of my affection, was indeed thy mother!”

“Confounded, and greatly agitated by intelligence so strange, so unexpected—

‘Oh God!’ I cried, ‘my mother, say you?—Why then, ah! why was the gratification of knowing this, of learning our affinity to the dear departed saint and yourself concealed from our knowledge until a watery grave interposed to tear us for ever from the arms of maternal affection?—But can it be possible! are we indeed your grandchildren, my much respected friend and benefactor?—Tell me all—say, by what appellation is our father distinguished? lives he, my dear Sir?—Oh satisfy the solicitude of filial curiosity!’

‘He lives, my son; but his name must not yet pass your lips:—Sir Charles Montague was the husband of my poor girl, and your father.’

“Soon after the commencement of our discourse, stifled sounds of distress had more than once produced a pause in the conversation; they seemed to proceed from an adjoining room,

between which and that we occupied there was apparently but a very thin partition. Before the conclusion of the last sentence, they increased and became more audible. As it finished, a deep and hollow groan was distinctly heard; and immediately something fell upon the floor with a violence that caused us involuntarily to start from our seats, and rush to the apartment in which this unaccountable circumstance appeared to have happened.

“Oh Heavens! what was the unexpected discovery that ensued!—Stella, it begs description: let me then briefly mention, that on the floor of the chamber we entered lay a female figure totally deprived of sense or motion, who, long ere a partial restoration of either could be effected, was recognised by her unfortunate and now dreadfully agitated father and son for the Julia Cramond, the Lady Montague, supposed for such a length of time the inhabitant of a watery grave!

“The eclaireissement that afterwards took place, proved no less distressing than disgraceful; for it appeared that an attachment had existed between my unhappy mother and the villain Ormsby previous to her marriage with Sir Charles Montague, which, upon being discovered by Mrs. Cramond, had been discouraged in the most unequivocal terms, on account of a total want in the two necessary articles of birth and fortune; and it was only in consideration of her daughter’s implicit obedience to her desires, that she consented to conceal the knowledge she had obtained of the foregoing affair from my grandfather.

“Naturally too timid and gentle to contest any point, however interested in its accomplishment, with parents who had constantly required, and uniformly experienced the most unconditional compliance with all their wishes, my mother yielded to the storm she dared not resist, and tacitly accepted the offer made by Mrs. Cramond. Ormsby, nevertheless, was not to be so easily renounced: too well he knew his influence over the heart of his predestined victim; and though she determined to avoid his presence after her marriage with my father took place, still he found means, apparently without design, to throw himself in her way, and through the medium of his emissaries, gradually became master of all that happened at Mount Cramond.

“My grandmother, who knew the sacrifice her daughter had made to filial duty, and judged of its extent by her faded cheek and dejected air, fearful of some untoward accident from the unprincipled and secret perseverance of the vile Ormsby, whose conduct she had privately watched, became at length anxious to quit the West Indies and return to England. In this wish she was seconded by her on whose account a change of scene had first appeared desirable.

“Virtue, and that degree of respect every woman ought invariably to preserve for herself, were by this time, alas! found too weak to resist much longer the powerful bias of an erring inclination, and a too tender heart! this fatal conviction was, therefore, no sooner ascertained, than she secretly prayed to be removed from the threatened danger, while a retreat could yet be accomplished with honour. The voyage, as already mentioned, took place; and though neither her spirits nor happiness returned in consequence thereof, a conscious sense of having acted with propriety shed some small portion of occasional tranquillity over her reflections, which was further increased by the presence of her children, for whom she had always evinced the most unbounded affection and tenderest regard.

“Here had the affair rested, it would have proved well, and much misery in that case been spared to each of the parties; but, unfortunately, the regiment to which Ormsby belonged received orders to sail for Europe, and my grandmother’s death having smoothed the way to a renewal of his diabolical machinations, they were consequently commenced, and again carried on with but too much success. The situation of the Lodge lay convenient for the predetermined execution of his purpose: a small trading vessel was hired to second it; and my mother, finding

herself in a state that must soon publish her infamy to the world, in an evil hour consented to deceive her aged parent, and desert him and her once idolized children for the degrading society of an artful seducer, a base and unprincipled scoundrel, with whom self-gratification was the chief object in view, and the misery entailed on its hapless victim considered as a matter of no comparative importance.”

Again Montague’s voice indicated extreme agitation, and again he started from the side of Stella; but hastily resuming his seat, thus proceeded:—

“The villain Ormsby’s family had formerly resided some time in Ireland, and he was well acquainted with many parts of that country: to that kingdom, therefore, he took her, as most likely to furnish the surest means of concealment, and hoped to reach a safe retreat ere the time of his companion’s confinement should arrive. In this hope he was, nevertheless, finally disappointed, as their intended progress was retarded on the evening of his landing by the inability of my mother to proceed forwards for several days. About the time she appeared able to recommence their journey, apprehensions of an imaginary pursuit seized her conductor; and misled by the impulsive force of a guilty conscience, he again embarked in a vessel ready to sail for Scotland. Lady Montague was shortly after delivered of a child, which survived not its birth; and long before the re-establishment of her health was effected, a second alarm of a similar description, obliged them again to change their quarters.

“Their next route was to Wales, where they procured a small retired habitation. From this place the Captain occasionally joined his regiment; but on succeeding to a small property in the West of England, entirely quitted the service; after which they settled for some years in France.

“Two daughters saw the light during their abode on the Continent, where they were at the time of the fatal encounter with Mr. Cramond and myself at Dover. This very unexpected meeting was occasioned by some pecuniary losses, owing to the dishonesty and failure of a person who happened to have the chief part of Ormsby’s little fortune in his hands; and they were now on their way back to France, whither the fugitive had fled, in order to discover his place of concealment, and endeavour to obtain restitution, if possible to procure it, of what he had defrauded them.

“With this view, Ormsby had left my poor infatuated mother, to secure a passage in one of the packetboats, only a very short time prior to our taking our place by an adjoining fireside in the same house they occupied. Having some business to transact afterwards about six miles from Dover, his return was not looked for before the succeeding morning; and in the interim my grandfather’s voice being recognised by his daughter, the discovery I have mentioned ensued.

“The foregoing particulars were partly collected from the broken and unconnected information of my unhappy parent, but still more from her attendant, who proved to be the identical woman so long employed about her person, and the same who left the Lodge, under pretence of bad health, soon after the supposed premature death of her mistress. Apparently ashamed of her share in the transaction, or, what was more probable, seized with a temporary fit of remorse for her ingratitude to so good a master, she now seemed uncommonly eager to make some atonement for the past, by the explicit nature of her present communications. Yet my grandfather visibly listened to her with an air of suspicion, that plainly evinced the small degree of confidence he placed in her recital, the observation of which more than once disconcerted the semblance of sincerity so artfully assumed by this able historian.

“Meanwhile the consequences that resulted from so affecting an interview, had nearly proved fatal to both parties: my mother was again seized with a succession of fainting fits, attended with the most alarming symptoms; and her father, unable to sustain the contemplation

of her sufferings, was at length conveyed to his own chamber more dead than alive.

“My heart is not surely composed of the softest materials; for though deeply torn, though bleeding almost at every pore, still the sensation of indignant resentment, of propelling revenge, reigned predominant over every other passion; and I sedulously watched for the return of the succeeding morning, destined to witness the merited punishment of a villain by the hand of the woman’s son he had so greatly injured.

“My poor grandfather, suspicious of my secret intention, grasped my hand in his, and as I assisted in supporting him to his room, solemnly adjured me, in the most affecting language, as I valued his future peace and happiness, to remain by his pillow, and upon no account whatever to leave the room, without obtaining his previous permission. My tongue refused to signify the requested acquiescence with his wishes; and had not a burst of tears relieved the anguish of my bosom, I think I could scarcely have survived the conflict that throbbed tumultuously through every vein. The good old man restrained the violence of his own sorrows, to gaze on me for a moment; and raising himself in bed, again wrung my hand in sad, expressive silence.

“The morning was fast approaching to its first dawn, ere sleep, that usual deserter of the unfortunate, came to his aid. This circumstance had no sooner taken place, than an indistinct bustle in the house seemed to indicate the return of the vile Ormsby. Every word recently uttered by my grandfather instantly vanished from my memory, and starting from the side of his bed, I stole softly to the door: this I immediately closed; and then, no longer apprehensive of restraint, rushed along the passage, actuated by a full determination to take a deadly revenge on the object of my fury.

“The first person I encountered was Lady Montague’s maid, who held her mistress’s door half open, evidently in the act of watching who approached. Speedily satisfied on this subject, the discovery was no sooner made, than she seemed disposed to retreat further into the chamber, and close the door: this I prevented, however, by stepping up to her, and sternly demanding to know if Ormsby had yet returned. She assured me in the strongest terms that he was still absent; and, with seeming earnestness, entreated me to retire, or at least speak lower, as she dreaded disturbing her Lady, who was only just fallen into a light slumber, from which the smallest noise would undoubtedly rouse her, and probably produce the most alarming consequences.

‘Tell me first,’ cried I, ‘from whence proceeded the bustle I overheard below stairs. If not occasioned by your rascally master’s return, in what else could it originate?’

‘Really, Sir,’ replied she, ‘it is not in my power to account for every accidental occurrence that may happen in a public inn, where travellers are arriving and departing at every hour of the night. Mr. Ormsby, however, you may be assured, had no earthly concern in it whatever; so pray retire, for I tremble lest Lady Montague suffer from the effects of your being here.’

CHAP. XIX.

“Oh Heav’n! that such resemblance of the Highest
“Should yet remain, where faith and realty
“Remain not!”

MILTON.

“WHILE I stood irresolute whether or not to comply with her request, Mr. Cramond’s servant, who, half asleep and half awake, had been dozing in a corner of the room at the time of my leaving his master’s pillow, happened to perceive I was absent from my late station, and trembling for the effects of my rashness and his own inattention, instantly followed my steps, in order to prevent the apprehended evil from taking place while a possibility of evading it yet remained.

“The faithful, affectionate fellow conceiving himself justified by existing circumstances in the adoption of a little art, speedily effected my return, by intimating Mr. Cramond’s misery, when he awoke from his short and unrefreshing slumber, on discovering my departure. Silent and disappointed, I permitted myself to be conducted back to his chamber; but not before a positive promise was extorted from William to give me immediate intimation of Ormsby’s appearance.

“My grandfather was asleep, however, when I re-entered the room, and his man affected to express no less pleasure than surprise on the occasion: nevertheless, he afterwards confessed the whole transaction was a contrivance of his own to meet the exigencies of the moment. In the mean time, satisfied with the promise I had obtained, and having no idea that any inclination to sleep could be experienced at such a period and under such circumstances, I threw myself into an easy chair near the bed, and, no doubt, overcome by mental exertion and bodily fatigue, before I was aware, sunk unconsciously into a temporary state of oblivion.

“From a short and unexpected sleep, I soon awoke, but not before the broad face of day illumed the apartment. My grandfather, whose sleep had proved transient, interrupted, and unrefreshing, appeared at this moment once more insensible to the power of misfortune. I listened to discover if I was right in my conjecture, and having fully ascertained this point, stole again softly to the door. William met me at the entrance: his looks bespoke some important intelligence; and conceiving it could only allude to the circumstance of Ormsby’s return, I was rushing impetuously past him, without allowing myself time to make any enquiries, when he suddenly stopped me with the very irritating and astonishing information, that my mother, accompanied by the wretch I so ardently longed to meet, had quitted the house upwards of an hour before my accidental interview with her maid, who I now found had purposely remained behind to mislead enquirers, and by that means secure them from the danger of a too speedy pursuit.

‘And where is the infamous woman now?’ cried I, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion and disappointment.

‘Gone, Sir, to her superiors,’ the man replied; ‘she followed them in a very short time after you spoke with her.’

‘How came her villanous employer to return so much sooner than expected?—and why did you not give me timely notice of this circumstance, according to your promise?’

‘The woman, it seems, Sir, sent a messenger with a note to Mr. Ormsby; which doubtless

brought him back so quickly. As to the latter question, I can only say that, not suspecting any thing of the kind, I was not prepared for the event that succeeded, consequently could not guard against it.'

"I was going to ask why he had not guarded against it, agreeable to my directions; but the mischief was already done, and could not now be remedied, unless by an immediate attempt to overtake them.

"The moment this idea occurred, I gave instant orders for the means of accomplishing it. But here my wishes were again frustrated, either from the real or pretended inability of the people in the house to throw any light on the route taken by the travellers, whose steps they positively averred were totally unknown to them: and after several ineffectual efforts to surmount the various difficulties I had to encounter on the occasion, all the information I could procure ended in learning, that a vessel had sailed for some part of the Continent early in the morning; but to what particular quarter no person could possibly conjecture with any degree of certainty.

"To conceal this painful intelligence for any length of time from Mr. Cramond, was soon found impracticable; and the fatal conviction it brought with it, of Lady Montague's innate depravity and total want of principle, proved a fresh stab to the already deeply-wounded bosom of her poor old father. From this moment he rapidly declined; his health seemed to have suffered an irreparable injury, and his spirits entirely deserted him.

"On the second evening from the departure of my unhappy mother, Mr. Howard rejoined us. The alteration that had taken place during the short time of his absence, in the situation and appearance of my grandfather, was too striking not to create the utmost surprise and alarm: and the latter, finding himself gradually weaker, at length conceived the moment at hand in which the long-concealed secret respecting our affinity to that gentleman ought to be divulged. Under this impression it was divulged; and the evidently desperate condition of the speaker failed not to have its due weight with his astonished auditor in dispelling all idea of intentional imposition, or casual mistake, through the whole of the very unexpected communication.

"Happily for me the hold I had already obtained in Mr. Howard's affection was too firmly established to be easily shaken; otherwise it is hard to say how my grandfather's confidential intelligence might have been received, since the visible irresolution he evinced in the course of the recital, and the apparent emotion of his mind, did not at first promise so favourable a conclusion to the business as afterwards proved the case. In short, a plain, unvarnished tale, aided by the force of previous friendship, finally triumphed over pride and prejudice; and in spite of the infamy attached to my mother's character, Mr. Howard at length acquiesced in the wishes of his expiring friend. My father's ill-starred union with Miss Cramond was forgiven, in consideration of the consequent misery it had caused him; and the offspring of that union were henceforth permitted to address their relative as the acknowledged children of his nephew Sir Charles Montague.

"Mr. Cramond breathed his last sigh in my arms exactly ten days from the period of a disclosure, the successful termination of which seemed to afford his departing spirit the only remaining degree of satisfaction it could now possibly taste on earth; and in three months after his decease, my uncle followed him to the grave, having first nominated me his successor in a will made expressly for the purpose, which contained, besides a few other trifling legacies, one of considerable amount to my brother, with several very valuable family jewels.

"The grief and regret experienced for the loss of two such valuable relatives was fully as deep, I believe, as any hitherto felt by a young man at my early time of life; and you, Stella, I

think, will credit me when I solemnly aver, that the great pecuniary advantages derived from these melancholy events, were so far from appearing in the light of a compensation for recent deprivations, that I would most willingly have yielded them up to the last farthing, if by so doing the much lamented death of friends so esteemed could have been prevented, and myself restored to their society.

“But though my sorrow, as I have said, was perfectly sincere, I pretend not to aver it proved more durable than that usually experienced by those who have only numbered the same years. At the time of life I had then attained, the first sensation of grief is commonly rather violent than lasting: mine gradually subsided; and though an affectionate, a tender remembrance of their goodness and worth can never be totally eradicated from the tablet of my memory, my mind, nevertheless, became shortly more tranquil, and insensibly reconciled itself to circumstances of irremediable evil, the final accomplishment of which neither human wisdom nor human strength can avert when the decisive fiat of mortality commands the vital spark of existence to finish its earthly career, and soar from corruptible to incorruptible regions of never-ending happiness and peace.

“At first I ascribed this comparative state of mental ease to insensibility, to want of thought, to want of natural affections, and a thousand other causes, which were all reprobated in turn, on account of the supposed effect they produced. At length I discovered that progressive time was the great cause of the whole, aided by the wise construction of the intellectual faculties of the mind, which are so ordered by a superior hand, that every thing shall work for good and useful ends; and grief, after a stated period, yields its place to the more active and necessary demands of the different stations allotted us to fill through life.

“Possessed of a fortune that might well be termed affluent, uncontrolled master of myself in the moments not devoted to professional duties, I plunged ere long into every species of juvenile folly and dissipation. Alas! could the worthy Mr. Howard have looked up from the grave, how differently would he have appreciated that mistaken confidence in my imaginary prudence which had led him to constitute me my own guardian, when subsequent events proved I was so ill qualified for the task of a self-director!

“In the midst of this wild career, the admonitions of St. Vincent, my early friend, occasional companion, and ever judicious adviser, were not spared, to effect a change in sentiment and proceedings so little congenial to his own. But temporary and transient proved the work of reformation: nor did the dangers and difficulties which were frequently encountered during the course of our abiding on the then hostile shores of America, so entirely damp this propensity for fashionable pursuits, as to prevent the mind from recurring to the same giddy round of idle indulgence on my return to Europe: even the attractive charms of Louisa St. Vincent, for whom I nevertheless experienced an attachment no less ardent than sincere were at first found inadequate to wean me from errors, venial perhaps, when my time of life and other circumstances are duly considered, but, notwithstanding, still highly censurable, in as much as my cooler judgment was not remiss in furnishing repeated intimations of disapprobation on the subject, although the too ready means of indulging confirmed habits continually plunged me into situations similar to those so recently condemned, on every succeeding opportunity that occurred.

“Soon after my arrival in your part of the country, several incidents happened to give my mind a more serious turn: with one of those, my dear Stella, you are already sufficiently acquainted; and to you my obligations on the account are infinite. After the foregoing confession of the nature of my former conduct, you may probably form conclusions not very favourable to

the sincerity of that contrition you have more than once witnessed for my part in the fatal affair which took place at Green-Bank. If suspicions of this description, however, really exist, believe me, my sweet friend, you wrong me much: of premeditated seduction, I repeat, I am, and ever have been innocent; I abhor, I reprobate the idea of such a thing, and would not be guilty of it for worlds. But pardon me, Stella; I trust assurances on this head are unnecessary to you; at any rate, they must prove superfluous, since what I have now said is but a renewal of former assertions to the same purport.

CHAP. XX.

“Instead of rage,
“Delib’rate vengeance breath’d, firm and unmix’d.”
MILTON.

“THE more regular and rational mode of life which a happy necessity obliged me to adopt in the less fashionable and less dissipated circles of Galloway, afforded a greater portion of time for those serious reflections which the energetic and manly admonitions of St. Vincent had frequently, though transiently, led me to encourage: and—shall I confess it? temptation being now almost beyond the likelihood of appearing, to deceive or mislead, I felt my good resolutions gradually strengthened, and every intellectual faculty acquire additional force, accompanied by a certain degree of mental tranquillity, to which I had long been a stranger, but which now insensibly gained ground, and filled my bosom with sensations of the most agreeable nature.

“Otherwise situated in point of society, lassitude and *ennui* would probably have been the consequence of a change so sudden as that I had lately experienced, from the unlimited pleasures which on every side court acceptance amid the gay and dangerous allurements daily occurring in the metropolis, to the dull, unvaried, monotonous scenes of a distant provincial residence, where the corps to which I belonged formed the most prominent figure in the scene, and supplied the chief source of public and private amusement.

“The presence of Louisa St. Vincent soon confirmed the alteration, of which her brother’s constant precepts and example, in conjunction with my recent introduction at the Hermitage, had already laid the foundation.

“Had the first and latter of these circumstances taken place at an earlier period, I might probably have been spared much subsequent pain on account of the ever-regretted transaction with poor Maria Campbell: and yet, when the minutia of that business is fairly estimated, I may justly be permitted to say that self-reproach ought not wholly to attach to my—However, we will change the subject if you please; it cannot be agreeable to you, and never occurs without distressing myself extremely.

“Blest with constant and uninterrupted opportunities for entertaining her who had long been in possession of my heart, and enjoying every advantage that could be obtained from the friendship of the Major, and my inestimable, though new acquaintances at the habitation of good Mrs. Bertram and her amiable Stella, a new creation seemed already opened to my view; and I turned my eyes with increasing astonishment on the frivolous scenes, the degrading pursuits formerly adopted with as much eagerness, as if they alone contained all that was desirable, all that was praiseworthy on earth.

“In the midst of this pure and new-born felicity, or rather soon after its commencement, my father arrived in England; and eager to see this hitherto unknown parent, to whom I ardently longed to be introduced, I procured leave of absence from Colonel Arabin for that purpose; and the day of my intended departure was already fixed, when intelligence reached me, the nature of which produced a sudden change of measures, and rendered the projected journey then unnecessary.

“You recollect I formerly mentioned that Mr. Cramond had drawn up a written detail of domestic occurrences, one copy of which was designed for Sir Charles, before the fatal interview with my mother took place at Dover: what happened subsequent to that incident was afterwards

subjoined, at the particular request of the poor old man, and the whole forwarded to Jamaica, in order to make the Baronet master of what it appeared proper to acquaint him with.

“My father and Ormsby were personally, though slightly, known to each other while the latter remained in the western hemisphere; and the events that succeeded his return to Britain, of which Sir Charles had by the foregoing means been informed, were not of a description to efface any remembrance he might yet retain of so infamous a character; on the contrary, they rather served to rivet his face and figure more forcibly on the memory of this unfortunate husband, who, on his first landing at Falmouth, felt every single particle of forbearance instantly desert his mind on hearing the name of the unprincipled destroyer of his peace pronounced by some person, in an angry tone of voice, as he entered the inn to which he had been conducted on quitting the vessel. My father rushed to the room from whence the sound seemed to issue, and in the following moment discovered the cause of all his sorrows engaged in an altercation with another man, whom he had never before seen.

“The consequence of this very unlooked-for encounter may be easily imagined.—They fought; and Ormsby received the well-merited reward of his criminal conduct from the hands of him he had so deeply injured:—he fell! His wound was declared mortal; and the surgeon who attended him, gave it as his positive opinion that he would never see the dawn of another day.

“The expected result of this affair obliged his antagonist to think of his own safety. Sir Charles, who, under other circumstances, would have stood his trial, and firmly submitted to the decision of a British jury, found himself utterly unequal to the task of sustaining the mortifying recapitulation of domestic grievances, the sarcastic remarks, and galling rumours of recollected error and subsequent guilt, attached to every remembrance of his unhappy wife’s too culpable conduct, which he doubted not would soon be in common circulation, as is usually the case on such occasions, and which, however groundless, seldom fail to fix a stigma on the certainly blameless husband of her whose character in this respect remains no longer enigmatical.

“Actuated by the impulsive sensations of suppositions so repugnant to his feelings, and still further instigated to the measure by the solicitude and advice of two very particular friends, who were his fellow-passengers from the West Indies, he stepped on board a vessel at this critical juncture quitting the harbour, and, without enquiring her immediate destination, proceeded on the voyage, apparently indifferent on what quarter of the wide extended world he was next to be landed.

“His two friends were severally requested to acquaint my brother and myself with the circumstances of the foregoing transaction; and Frederic, who was but recently returned from a residence of some years on the Continent, happening to be more master of his time than, as a military man, I could pretend to, speedily followed our father’s movements, after procuring all the knowledge that could possibly be obtained of the vessel’s course, and the port she purposed making.

“It is but lately that my unceasing enquiries after them have been successful. They are now together in a safe situation; and the last intelligence I received from Frederic, mentions my father’s intention of returning to Jamaica. Happily, my fears on their account are, I trust, over, though they have long kept my mind agitated and uneasy, ignorant of their motions; for a considerable period elapsed before the confidential friends of Sir Charles could afford me the smallest satisfaction on the subject of either his or his son’s final destination; a circumstance peculiarly distressing at the time, as a series of tempestuous weather had succeeded their embarkation, which seemed to threaten the actual existence of the evils my busy imagination had created in order to torment me. I dare say the hints which frequently escaped me on the arrival of

the letters those gentlemen favoured me with relative to this painful topic, and the evident emotion every disappointment produced, cannot be yet totally effaced from your memory.”

Stella assured him he was not mistaken in this idea; and added that she had often sympathized with him in secret, without venturing to take the liberty of probing too deeply those wounds which he apparently wished to conceal from her knowledge.

To this Captain Montague replied, that it was not merely to her he declined entering on the detail of domestic events; for it was a theme he had hitherto cautiously avoided alike before every individual whatever who remained ignorant of the transaction.

“Indeed,” added he, “while Ormsby existed, and Lady Montague persevered in continuing a connexion so inimical to her peace, so disgraceful to her character, my soul shrunk involuntarily at the mortifying recollection of the freedom from justly merited chastisement enjoyed by one of the culprits, and my own unfortunate affinity to the other; and though frequently desirous to speak with you on these degrading occurrences, I continually shuddered at the thoughts of their introduction. Ormsby, however, is now in his grave; and whatever may have been the atrocity of his conduct, I war not with the dead. As for his erring companion, I am yet ignorant of her fate: that penitence and prayer may have succeeded to a criminal perseverance in guilt, I would gladly persuade myself is the case. I know her generous, but much injured husband and his son will not let any opportunity escape of discovering her retreat, and mitigating her afflictions, provided they are not caused by crimes of too heinous a nature, and merit any degree of indulgence. On this score, therefore, my mind is now become tolerably easy; and in this state the affair at present remains.

“Thus, my dear Stella, have I concluded the task of family historian, and related the principal incidents which have long caused me many a heartfelt and secret pang. Pardon me, however, if I add, that had I previously found you really implicated in the recital as—shall I say it? the child of her you so greatly resemble, which, in conjunction with the mystery enveloping your birth did not appear totally impossible when every attendant circumstance was duly weighed, I could in that event have almost overlooked the errors of an unhappy parent, and thanked her from my heart for the compensation afforded me in the acquisition of such a sister. Nay, even at times I still catch myself indulging this favourite supposition—a supposition strengthened by the apparent coincidence of circumstances, which I often mentally strive to render compatible with my wishes on the subject; but which, it must be confessed, generally eludes all my attempts for the purpose of actual conviction.”

Stella sighed as the flattering images thus suggested alternately rose and vanished from her view.

“Alas!” thought she, “no such good fortune is in store for me!—The unknown, the unacknowledged Stella dares not, after the lapse of so many years, hope to meet with a brother so truly worthy of her warmest affection, so well calculated to advise and protect her from evil.—Yet, Oh God!” she mentally murmured, “how desolate, how unconnected with her fellow-creatures, must be that hapless being who is even reduced to the humiliating condition of regretting that she is not the spurious offspring of such a woman as Lady Montague!”

While these mortifying reflections rapidly passed through the mind of our heroine, her companion seemed equally absorbed in his own ideas; and the silence now observed by the respective parties remained uninterrupted, till the wild, discordant voice of an owl, perched on one of the half-decayed turrets above them, broke the spell of abstraction, and recalled their attention to the late hour, and the lengthened time of their absence from Mrs. Ross.

Stella, languid and dejected, willingly accepted the offered arm of her military escort, and

casting a farewell glance over the venerable pile of ruins, under the walls of which she had sympathized in the sorrows of a much-valued friend, proceeded back to Dumfries; where, no further impediment occurring to retard their progress, their journey was again commenced at the appointed period.

It may here be proper to remark, that the foregoing information relative to Captain Ormsby's decease, proved erroneous, and was rather meant by his medical attendant to create a high notion of his own professional abilities, by the subsequent cure that was effected, than a real state of the case; for though the wound he received was certainly dangerous, it by no means proved mortal; and in the course of a few weeks he once more sailed for the Continent, which had only been quitted in order to settle some pecuniary affairs with the person whose failure had formerly brought him and his female companion to Dover. This circumstance, however, was not discovered by the son of the latter for upwards of two years from the date of his recent communication to Stella.

Captain Montague accompanied Mrs. Ross and her young friend as far as Carlisle; from whence, having seen them depart on the following morning, he returned immediately to Dumfries.

CHAP. XXI.

“Of those who sleep in dust so cold,
“For ever hid from human view,
“Shall many a tender tale be told,
“For many a tender thought is due.”

THE weather favoured the travellers, for it was now become uncommonly good; and Mrs. Ross bore the fatigue of her long journey much beyond the expectations of our heroine, or any of her domestics.

The situation previously chosen for them in Devonshire was commodious, romantic, and beautiful; and they were no sooner settled in their new abode, than Mrs. Ross, who was impatient to see her two younger daughters, and had promised to send for them when she reached Bellefield, directed Stella to write to them immediately on the subject. This commission proved too agreeable to the latter not to be executed with alacrity. But the pleasure experienced by their mother and friend on the prospect of a meeting so ardently desired, was speedily and cruelly damped by the disappointment that succeeded; for the answer received in return, informed them that Maria had lately been extremely indisposed, and was then confined to her bed with every symptom of a feverish complaint, which for some time past had been very frequent in the neighbourhood.

Extremely alarmed by this intelligence, our heroine was again directed to write to the governess of the school, requesting that Emma might instantly join her mother at Bellefield, lest she should catch the infection from her sister, and, like her, become unable to reach Devonshire for some time.

Before the end of the following week, this second letter was answered by Emma in person, whose joy at meeting with her mother and old companion Stella, seemed equally great with that experienced by themselves on the occasion.

The accounts received of Maria's situation for several succeeding weeks proved so very unfavourable, that Mrs. Ross at length formed the resolution of sending our heroine to attend upon her. As Emma could now supply her place at Bellefield, this determination was not supposed to interfere much with the other arrangements of that lady; and every former apprehension on the subject of infection having happily subsided, Stella departed, in compliance with the wishes of maternal solicitude.

She found the poor girl even worse than her fears had represented: weak, sick, and emaciated, every day seemed fraught with her final sentence; and Stella awaited the too certain approach of that sentence with a sensation even more oppressive to her feelings than she imagined could have been endured by herself under circumstances of a similar description.

While overwhelmed with anguish, and scarcely able to suppress the starting tear that seemed continually ready to burst forth from the restraint in which she strove to keep it, a lady of a most prepossessing appearance entered the chamber of the invalid, and approaching the bed where Stella was then supporting her sick friend, apologized in the warmest terms of regret for her unfortunate absence in the country at so critical a period, and in the language of genuine goodness, expressed the utmost solicitude to prove serviceable on the present occasion.

For two dreadful days Maria had ceased to speak above a faint whisper, and even that was now become nearly inarticulate, and required an exertion she appeared no longer able to

command. At the sound of the stranger's voice, she half raised her languid head from the bosom of Stella, and extended a bloodless, feeble hand for the acceptance of the former, while a transient gleam of something like pleasure illumined for a moment her pallid features, on which the seal of death had already fixed its decisive mark.

Stella, hitherto totally inattentive to every other object except that which chiefly occupied her thoughts, now turned her eyes from the face of Maria to that of the speaker, which, on examination, seemed not entirely unknown to her; and as she continued to gaze upon it, her heart began to palpitate with a sensation at the time perfectly unaccountable. The visitor, nevertheless, appeared neither to notice her nor her emotion, but silently grasped the cold hand of the poor invalid, while an unconscious tear trickled down her cheek as she bent over her helpless form, and contemplated the ravages of sickness on her young and once beautiful countenance; then heaving a deep sigh, and retiring a few steps from the bed, she conversed in a low accent with one of the attendants, and soon after left the room, evidently much affected by the hopeless condition of the dying Maria.

In a little time the latter dropped into one of those heavy, dozing slumbers, occasionally interrupted by convulsive startings, to which she had of late become subject. Stella then softly replaced her head upon the pillow, and quitting her situation behind it, knelt at the side of the bed, from whence she watched her looks with the most tender anxiety.

In less than an hour a servant entered with a small basket of very fine grapes, accompanied by Mrs. Mortimer's best wishes, and a hope that Miss Ross would find them refreshing.

"And who, pray, is Mrs. Mortimer?" enquired Stella, without appearing to take much interest in the question she asked.

"I cannot exactly inform you," replied one of the teachers who was then present: "however, she is the lady who called here lately, and I think must be in some manner connected with poor Miss Ross, for she has latterly seen her pretty often, and seems particularly solicitous for her recovery."

"I do not recollect meeting with her before," said Stella; "and yet her features are familiar to me."

"She has been absent in the country from the period of your arrival till now," answered the teacher.

As Stella had never heard of such a person, she conceived her idea on the subject erroneous, and ere the lapse of another hour, scarcely remembered she had even seen her.

In the evening, however, Mrs. Mortimer again returned. Our heroine at this juncture happening to be placed more in her view, attracted her notice in a manner so strikingly obvious, that it was easy to perceive she observed her with no inconsiderable degree of interest.

Supposing her one of the boarders particularly attached to Maria, she merely enquired her name of the teacher; and having learned it, addressed Stella in the most flattering terms of approbation on the tender and unremitting anxiety she displayed in behalf of her companion.

The affecting manner in which she spoke, the sound of her voice, and an undescribable something in her whole appearance, altogether struck Stella so forcibly, that, low spirited, and unable to command her feelings, she burst into tears, and hastily retired to a distant corner of the chamber.

Mrs. Mortimer gazed after her for a moment in silence, but checked the first impulse that inclined her to follow and renew the recent topic: she spoke of her, however, with additional kindness; and after giving some further directions relative to the invalid, and conversing a short

while with the governess below stairs on the probable melancholy event now fast approaching, this very pleasing woman departed, leaving a positive injunction to be instantly sent for when any material alteration seemed likely to take place in their patient's present alarming situation. Indeed it was her earnest wish to have remained in the sick chamber through the night; and she had expressed a strong desire to be indulged in the gratification of it; but to this proposal her husband, who accompanied her to the school, and attended her motions in the parlour of the governess, had previously put a decided negative, as her advanced state of pregnancy totally disqualified her for such an exertion of friendship.

The closing scene of Maria's short and innocent life now rapidly approached its final crisis; and before the dawn of the succeeding morning, that crisis was for ever passed. She expired in the arms of the much-afflicted Stella; and her gentle spirit departed to its native heaven almost without a sigh.

Our heroine, hitherto supported by a sense of duty and usefulness to her beloved companion, had sustained every trying occurrence, and borne infinitely more than her share of fatigue in the course of the recent and melancholy attendance in which she had constantly been engaged since her arrival in London, with a degree of persevering fortitude that seemed to set aside all considerations on her own account, and absorbed every feeling foreign to that which the most affectionate attachment dictated: now, when her presence and good offices were become equally unavailing, and exertions, mental or corporeal, no longer necessary, she felt herself totally incapacitated to struggle with existing evils any further; and yielding perforce to the oppressive load of anguish that overwhelmed every faculty of her soul, in a short period after the termination of her late cherished hopes and fears, she was removed to her own apartment in a state of mind nearly bordering on utter insensibility.

Mrs. Mortimer, who, according to the private directions of her husband, was not summoned to witness the decease of poor Miss Ross, found our heroine in the above condition some hours after all was over with the object of her friendly solicitude; and apprehensive in the general confusion and bustle such an event naturally creates every where, but particularly in a boarding-school, that she might not be attended with that degree of tenderness and care her present condition demanded, humanely requested the governess's permission to take her home with her in the carriage.

This favour was readily granted; and Stella, scarcely yet conscious of the transactions around her, was conveyed to the house of her new and kind acquaintance.

CHAP. XXII.

“The tear that flows
“From holy Friendship’s eye is register’d
“For future joys, when tears can flow no more.”

A FORTNIGHT had nearly elapsed after her removal, before Stella appeared sufficiently recovered from the shock of Maria’s death, and the succeeding indisposition that seized her, to leave her chamber.

During a great part of this time her condition seemed so seriously alarming, and her mental faculties so unsettled, that her worthy hostess could not at times divest herself of the utmost anxiety for the consequences that might eventually take place. At length, however, the disorder took a more favourable turn; and, agreeable to the opinion of her medical attendant, who had always averred there was no actual danger, she was soon declared in a state of convalescence.

She was sitting alone in her own room one evening when a carriage drove up to the house, and stopped before the door. Mrs. Mortimer had been from home for the greater part of the day; and she therefore concluded it was that lady now returned. A little bustle, however, succeeded below stairs; and one of the maids soon after entering, she enquired the cause: but relative to this matter the girl could afford her no satisfaction; all she knew being merely no more than that her mistress had got some visitors. This circumstance had nothing particularly singular in it, and therefore she asked no further questions on the subject.

When the hour of retiring for the night arrived, Mrs. Mortimer, after wishing the strangers good repose, repaired to the invalid’s apartment, in order to learn how she found herself; and having chatted a few minutes with her *protégée*, casually mentioned the arrival of a guest whose presence, she observed in a lower voice, could willingly have been dispensed with.

“Yet I speak not this from my own knowledge of her character,” added she, “for we are nearly strangers to each other, though she is the wife of my younger brother, who, I may venture to affirm, is one of the best and most amiable men in the world. Would to Heaven,” she continued, with a sigh, “his lot had proved equal to his merit! and then we should all have been but too happy! From some quarter, however, a little black cloud is perpetually rising to remind us of our imperfect state on earth: this grievance is, perhaps, sent with a similar view; and therefore we ought not to repine, but rather endeavour to make the best of unavoidable evils: at least, such I am determined shall be my mode of proceeding; and, whatever is the event, I can then have nothing to reproach myself with.”

As the topic appeared a tender one, Stella said little on the occasion, further than expressing her regret that Mrs. Mortimer should have any thing to give her uneasiness; and they soon after separated for the night.

Next morning Stella overheard two people conversing in the little dressing-room adjoining her bedchamber: the voice of one of them was speedily recognised for the housemaid’s; that of the other she could not so immediately recollect, though it appeared scarcely less familiar to her ear. The subject of their discourse seemed to turn upon herself and her situation; for she distinguished her own name in the course of their discussion, accompanied by several particulars, which had come within the knowledge of the former, relative to her late residence at the boarding-school, the death of Maria, and a long detailed account of the latter’s funeral, which

struck the heart of our heroine with a sensation of deep and acute anguish that swelled it almost to bursting. Her sobs at length became audible; they reached the party in the dressing-room:—a sudden pause succeeded. The housemaid then entered the chamber, followed by her companion. Stella raised her head, and abruptly looked round on their entrance; when, to her inexpressible astonishment, she discovered in the person of the latter Mrs. St. Vincent's maid Jenny.

An exclamation of affected surprise burst from the lips of the staring Abigail as she advanced further into the apartment and pertly gazed upon the wonder-struck Stella. After a minute or two passed in this manner, apparently with the design of identifying the person of our heroine, she turned upon her heel, and assuming an air of supercilious contempt, such as she had seen practised on similar occasions by her mistress, flounced out of the room.

Stella could not avoid remarking the masterly imitation; and, in spite of her present agitation, internally whispered—

“How futile, how trifling are the adventitious distinctions of rank and riches, while minds, formed of congenial materials, and thus levelled by nature, betray their original similitude, beyond the power of art or education to counteract!”

But shortlived was the mental soliloquy, and painful the train of reflections that speedily succeeded.—How came Mrs. St. Vincent's favourite attendant under the roof of the amiable Mrs. Mortimer?—She must have changed her mistress since Mrs. Ross left Galloway, for Mrs. St. Vincent had then no intention of visiting the south at this period; and indeed could not, with any degree of propriety, quit Rossgrove while Mrs. Arabin and one or two other friends of the family remained as her guests.

This recollection afforded a temporary relief to the thoughts of our heroine, for the elder sister of her departed Maria was the very last person she wished to encounter in the present weak state of her health and spirits; and unconscious of having merited the ill offices of that lady's maid, she gradually began to consider the unexpected appearance of Jenny as rather fortunate than otherwise; for however indifferent might be her private opinion of the latter's temper and prudence, still she was persuaded that the whole tenour of her own conduct and character, had ever proved too irreproachable to be mentioned in any terms but such as would do her credit amongst strangers. Considering the matter in this point of view, she doubted not, therefore, but Mrs. Mortimer would, through the usual channel of Abigail conveyance, soon receive additional conviction that her friendship and goodness were not thrown away on an unworthy object; for in whatever manner Jenny might evince her personal dislike, though ignorant of the cause that gave rise to it, she could never let herself believe the girl was so totally lost to every sense of truth and justice, as to give an unfavourable representation of a person who, to her knowledge, never even formed a wish to cause her a moment's uneasiness on any occasion whatever.

Thus judging of others by herself, she suspected not that hatred in bad minds increases in proportion to the unmerited injuries we have heaped upon the innocent object of our malevolence; a fact too well established by sad and uniform experience to admit of appearing in a questionable shape, however mortifying the truth thereof may prove to the honour of humanity.

One agreeable circumstance was sure to accrue, at any rate, from the very unlooked-for arrival of Jenny: she would now have a charming opportunity of enquiring after the dear mistress of the Hermitage; and perhaps learn something, likewise, of the unfortunate Maria Campbell; though on every thing relative to that subject, the utmost caution was requisite with a character of Jenny's description. The idea of a letter from Mrs. Bertram next succeeded: of this she thought herself perfectly assured; and wondering Jenny had not delivered it on discovering she was the guest of Mrs. Mortimer, Stella became extremely impatient for the appearance of the

housemaid, in order to make the necessary enquiries on this interesting topic.

While thus eager to realize the pleasing day-dream she had indulged with all the enthusiasm of warm and youthful expectation, the whole fabric was most disagreeably overturned by the occurrence of a circumstance she had recently endeavoured to persuade herself could not possibly take place at this juncture.

The door of her chamber was suddenly thrown open by the identical person who was supposed to possess the power of gratifying her wish for domestic intelligence; and in the following instant Mrs. St. Vincent, the formidable Mrs. St. Vincent herself, appeared at the entrance.

The flush of hope, of pleasure and expectation, which had coloured the late pallid cheek of Stella, fled with the rapidity of lightening, and she shrunk intuitively from the bold, unfeeling gaze of her very unwelcome visitor; while the latter advanced further into the room, with an expression of increasing malevolence on her countenance, which indicated insult and mortification to the terrified and trembling object of her constant, but unmerited aversion.

“You will now, Madam, no doubt, believe the evidence of your own eyes,” said the Abigail, with a pert toss of her head.

“Wonderful! most wonderful!” cried her mistress, in a voice scarcely articulate with rage and every bad passion that agitates the human bosom: “this I could not have credited unassisted by the aid of ocular conviction. But pray, Madam,” she continued, “was not your former attempt to seduce the brother’s affections sufficiently atrocious, without evincing an intention to persevere in a design so abominable, by thus practising on the credulity of his sister, and daringly establishing yourself in her family? But, no doubt, my wise mother’s candid, immaculate Miss Bertram would generously acquaint her hostess with the sum total of her adventures in Galloway; and should the authenticity of the confession appear dubious, why Captain Montague, we all know, can easily certify your claims to veracity, by producing a living proof in confirmation of what you may chuse to advance on the subject. Infamous girl! your impudence can only be equalled by your artful contrivances; and both, I firmly believe, are unparalleled in the annals of the unprincipled sisterhood to which you belong!”

Mrs. St. Vincent had now completely run herself out of breath; a circumstance to which the pause that succeeded seemed solely attributable; for to any humane or considerate motive, those best acquainted with the general tenour of her character will not ascribe it. The thing itself, however, proved of little consequence in the present posture of affairs; for Stella, who at first was struck dumb with astonishment and a total incapacity to comprehend the meaning of what she heard, became afterwards so perfectly overcome with horror and a faintness that seized her whole frame, that long ere the conclusion of the harangue, the sound of the speaker’s voice had ceased to reach her, or her presence to inspire either terror or indignation.

Nevertheless, Mrs. St. Vincent was so absorbed by the spirit of unappeasable revenge, that she noticed not the groan uttered by her victim, nor heeded the motionless form of the helpless being who, with her head sunk upon her bosom, lay stretched, without sense or recollection, on the sofa that received her when her trembling limbs refused their supporting aid, and placed her in this humble and death-like situation before the eyes of her mean and vindictive oppressor.

Jenny, however, began to fear the joke had been carried a little too far; and the housemaid happening to pass the door when this idea first occurred, she hastily summoned her to the assistance of the invalid, and entreated her mistress to leave the room.

While this short conversation passed between the Abigail and her worthy mistress, the

housemaid, who had now raised the head of our heroine, suddenly exclaimed—

“Oh my God, she is gone!—the best young lady in the world is surely dead!”

“The best young lady in the world!” repeated Mrs. St. Vincent, in an accent expressive of the most hardened and unfeeling disposition, accompanied by an air of ineffable contempt:—

“perhaps so. But either *the best young lady in the world* quits this house immediately, or I am no longer an inhabitant of it!”

Having pronounced this with uncommon energy, the furious Mrs. St. Vincent indignantly retired, followed by her equally respectable attendant; who, nevertheless, had the sense to prevent her mistress from appearing below stairs till the first effervescence of passion had in some measure subsided.

CHAP. XXIII.

“The stroke of Heaven I can bear; but injuries from man are not so easily supported.”

FARQUHAR.

TERRIFIED by finding all her efforts unavailing for the restoration of Stella, the housemaid at length rung the bell for additional assistance; and the consternation produced by the discovery of our heroine's situation soon became general.

Several ineffectual remedies were successively applied; but the condition of the patient remained nearly unaltered; and she continued apparently unconscious of every exertion in her favour.

Mrs. Mortimer, extremely alarmed and agitated beyond measure, determined not to quit the lifeless form of her favourite till the medical aid already sent for arrived. Having come to this resolution, she dispatched one of the domestics to Mrs. St. Vincent with an account of the disastrous condition of Stella, accompanied by a request to excuse her absence from the breakfast-table, whither she entreated her to repair without ceremony, and act as mistress of the repast, till she herself was again able to rejoin her, and resume her place.

“Indeed!” cried Mrs. St. Vincent, with a disdainful motion of her head as the speaker concluded his message;—“upon my word, very extraordinary usage it must be confessed! Things are really come to a pretty pass, when the daughter of Mr. Ross is only to be considered as a secondary object to a low-born country girl—to Stella Bertram of the Hermitage! Tell your mistress, friend, I am infinitely indebted to her for so great an instance of attention; but at present I do not chuse to avail myself of her politeness: I am not disposed for any breakfast at this juncture.—You are answered, Sir, and may therefore return to her who sent you.”

The man, however, did not return as commanded; but, not being able to comprehend the substance of what he heard, remained stationary, in evident expectation of something less inexplicable, and more resembling the commonplace messages with which he had hitherto been usually entrusted.

Mrs. St. Vincent was not in a humour to be trifled with: she repeated her orders for his absence, accompanied by a look well calculated to enforce immediate obedience; and the servant, with a countenance expressive of dissatisfaction and astonishment, instantly quitted the room. Mrs. Mortimer seemed equally at a loss with the footman to comprehend the unintelligible message he attempted to deliver; for it was merely an attempt, and so cruelly mangled into the bargain, that even Mrs. St. Vincent herself would have found some difficulty to recollect her own arrangement of it, had she been present at the time.

Nevertheless, concluding that the circumstance was produced by some blunder or misapprehension of the servant, and not doubting but her request to Mrs. St. Vincent had been better understood, Mrs. Mortimer, chiefly occupied by her extreme anxiety for the recovery of Stella, soon gave herself no further concern on the occasion, but strove to accomplish this desirable event with a degree of solicitude highly honourable to her feelings and character.

After a considerable space had elapsed, our heroine at length opened her eyes, and gazing around her, with a languid, yet terrified look, finally rested them on the anxious face of her friendly hostess; then suddenly clasping her arms round the neck of the latter as she raised her head from that lady's shoulder, a violent burst of tears succeeded, from which much apparent

relief was presently obtained. But though the faint murmurs and half-pronounced sentences that escaped her were yet too unconnected to be easily comprehended, the sound of her restored voice was speedily heard by the attentive Jenny, who had secretly stationed herself so as to observe all their motions; and no sooner were her fears dissipated by this circumstance (for Jenny and her mistress began to be a little alarmed respecting their share in the foregoing part of the transaction, as the consequences became more and more serious), than she hastened to her employer, and related the happy turn the business had now taken.

Relieved by this intelligence from apprehensions she now felt ashamed to encourage, all the late suppressed, but not yet subdued, evil propensities of her mind, once more returned with renovated force, from the galling reflection of Mrs. Mortimer's neglect, for which no adequate atonement had hitherto been offered; nor any further notice taken of her motions than if she had not been in the same house with the mistress of it.

Propelled by these irritating recollections, so hostile to the feelings of wounded pride and self-consideration, she listened to the information of her maid with a degree of inexpressible rancour, which increased on every given instance of Mrs. Mortimer's affectionate attention to Stella. At length she suddenly started from her seat, and, determined to be an eye-witness of what Jenny related with the most provoking aggravations, proceeded to the chamber of the invalid.

Mrs. Mortimer supposing she came from a humane motive, paid her some compliments under that idea; and was proceeding to speak on the subject which had caused her so great an alarm, when the impatient interruptions of her auditor, and the manner in which she expressed herself on the occasion, produced an explanation of her real sentiments, that proved by no means agreeable to the former, who, though she knew enough of her visitor's character and disposition to be perfectly convinced neither of them were of the most amiable description, yet could not have believed them so extremely the reverse, unless such an instance as the present had occurred to ascertain the fact.

Mrs. Mortimer, though uncommonly good tempered and gentle in her manners, was yet by no means weakly so; and on occasions where it appeared proper to exert herself, possessed sufficient spirit to resent premeditated insult, or ill-timed officiousness: rightly judging, therefore, if any case could authorize her to shew her sense of another person's improper conduct under her own roof, she was now certainly placed in that predicament:—a tolerable warm altercation ensued, which, though carried on with the semblance of politeness on one side, was conducted with so much violence and even scurrility on the other, that an open rupture seemed the probable, and indeed unavoidable consequence resulting from the whole.

In the course of this unpleasant *fracas*, during which she heard herself openly accused of the most degrading and atrocious propensities with which a vindictive, jealous woman could possibly charge her greatest enemy, our poor terrified heroine found means to steal from the apartment; but unable, in the present trembling agitation of her frame, to proceed to a more distant situation, she was forced to take shelter in the dressing-room; where, throwing herself into the first chair that offered, a violent burst of tears came to her relief, and soon proved of infinite service in removing a considerable part of the load that oppressed her overcharged bosom.

She had not remained here above half an hour before a voice she could not immediately recollect, accosted her.

“My dear Miss Bertram,” said the stranger, “I grieve to see you thus; and still more to reflect that your sufferings originate in the unhappy temper of a person with whom our family

happens to be so nearly connected: but, believe me, in our opinion you stand fully acquitted of the charge brought against you; and both Mrs. Mortimer and myself will ever be found ready to do you any service in our power to accomplish.”

Stella was at first too much engrossed by the melancholy nature of her present reflections to pay attention to exterior objects, or to think of immediately uncovering her face, bathed in tears, to the observation of the speaker. At length, overcome by the friendly importunity of the latter, she raised her head, to acknowledge the sense entertained of her goodness at a juncture so trying and painful; and her eyes rested upon features certainly not unknown to her, though unable to recollect the friendly stranger’s name in the present state of her spirits.

This inability was too strongly portrayed on her expressive countenance not to be quickly understood by her visitor; who taking her hand, and regarding her with a look of ineffable benignity, tenderly enquired if she had so totally forgotten Louisa St. Vincent as not to recognise her in the person of her present companion.

Stella started—her throbbing heart beat quicker at the question; and while she apologized for her inattention on the score of sickness and distress of mind, requested to learn what happy circumstance had procured her the honour of her presence at a period so critical and embarrassing.

“I came to meet Mrs. St. Vincent at my sister Mortimer’s,” replied Louisa.

“Your sister Mortimer’s!” repeated Stella, with increasing astonishment: “is my ever amiable and kind Mrs. Mortimer your sister, Madam?”

“Surely, my dear Miss Bertram, you cannot remain ignorant of that circumstance after being so long under her roof.”

“Indeed but I am ignorant of it, Madam; and my want of information on the subject will not appear so extraordinary when it is recollected that, from the nature of my first acquaintance with the dear lady, she would probably suppose her connexion with Mr. Ross’s family previously known to me, and therefore judge it unnecessary to mention it. It is, nevertheless, true she occasionally spoke of a favourite brother, to whom she appeared particularly attached; but the topic seemed ever accompanied with some distressing remembrance, and therefore it was never prolonged by superfluous questions on my part: besides, I have hitherto been too greatly indisposed to converse much on any occasion whatever, even had my spirits proved more equal to the task of exertion than they really were. But,” continued she, bursting into a fresh flood of tears, “ill health and mental distress are only comparative evils, I find, when brought in competition with unmerited disgrace—they vanish into nothing.”

The voice of Stella here became inarticulate, and Louisa’s too much interrupted by her feelings to administer consolation, where it was evidently so much wanted. In a few minutes, however, the latter again addressed herself in the soothing terms of friendly compassion to our heroine; who, somewhat tranquillized and reassured by the tender sympathy of so kind a comforter, endeavoured to shew her gratitude by the subsequent restraint she put upon the violence of those sorrows that filled her agitated bosom.

CHAP. XXIV.

“Regretter ceux qu’on aime est un bien en comparaison de vivre avec ceux qu’on hait.”

ROCHEFAUCAULT.

ALTHOUGH the sound of voices in altercation no longer issued from the adjoining room, yet the smallest noise in the house made Stella still tremble, and the colour of her cheeks undergo an immediate change; for she feared her cruel and implacable enemy would again appear before her, and again use her influence to render her contemptible in the eyes of strangers. At length, flattering herself there was nothing more at present to apprehend on that subject, she ventured to enquire after her tormenter, secretly wishing, yet hardly daring to hope that she had left Town, or at least was no longer an inhabitant under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Mortimer.

“The friendly interposition of Mrs. Arabin has effected a sort of reconciliation between my sister and Mrs. St. Vincent,” replied Louisa, faintly smiling, and endeavouring to suppress a sigh which heaved her bosom as she spoke; “but, from my knowledge of their characters, I much doubt whether it will be very lasting.”

“Mrs. Arabin, Madam—is she too in England?” asked our heroine.

“Yes, my dear,” said Louisa. “It was through her means my unfortunate brother’s wife came at this juncture to the south. Mrs. Arabin has had a considerable fortune lately bequeathed her by a distant relation, which rendered her presence absolutely necessary here; and Mrs. St. Vincent was seized with the whim of accompanying her. No person, you probably know, has so much to say with Mrs. St. Vincent as that lady; and, convinced she could not be with a more worthy woman, her husband readily consented to her absence, on condition she should spend a few days with Mrs. Ross in Devonshire. To this proviso she agreed; and I was desired to meet them at a gentleman’s house about half way to Town: from thence we proceeded to Bellefield; for on receiving information of Maria’s death, Mrs. Arabin wished to visit her poor afflicted mother as speedily as possible; and the situation of her own affairs fortunately permitted her to put this design in execution without any detriment to them, or inconvenience to herself. We arrived in London late last night; and this house not being sufficiently large to accommodate more than Mrs. Arabin and her companion, I removed to a friend’s in the next street, with whom I have long been particularly intimate.”

“But, my dear Madam,” interrupted Stella, with much eagerness, “tell me, I beseech you, how did you leave the family in Devonshire?—Poor Mrs. Ross—”

“Is in deep affliction,” returned Miss St. Vincent; “but, nevertheless, calmly resigned to the irresistible dispensations of Heaven. Yet, were I to hazard an opinion on the nature of her feelings, I should be apt to imagine she suffers not less on account of the living than the dead: her eldest daughter’s conduct was not exactly what either Mrs. Arabin or I could have wished while at Bellefield; her heart, indeed, seems totally callous to every sensation of filial duty. She declined to remain behind, though we strongly urged the propriety of such a measure at that time, arising from our domestic distress; but we urged in vain. Alas, my ill-starred brother! how terribly different is the character and disposition of this unhappy woman to yours!—Ah, why, why was so great a sacrifice demanded!—Would to God—but—”

Here the feelings of Louisa became too acute for utterance; and a pause ensued, which neither seemed disposed for some time to interrupt.

At length it was broken by our heroine; who, in a faltering, tremulous voice, enquired if the ladies were below stairs.

“No,” replied Louisa, wiping the tears from her eyes as she spoke. “Mrs. St. Vincent, ever occupied by personal considerations, recollected she had some articles of fashionable mourning to purchase, and condescended to request my sister’s company on the occasion. As Mrs. Arabin happened to be otherwise engaged, and could not attend her, Catherine, though still extremely dissatisfied with her late behaviour, would not again irritate her by a refusal. They will not probably return for some time. Meanwhile you are left in my charge: and as Mrs. Mortimer gave me a thousand injunctions on the score of attention, I must now take upon me to order my patient to bed; for indeed, my dear Miss Bertram, that appears the most proper place for you at present, as you seem completely exhausted by the preceding cruel events of this morning.”

This was really true, for Stella could scarcely support herself during the greater part of the conversation; and the exertions she had used, originating more in terror and apprehension than any other source, now subsiding, left her proportionably weak, as they had previously been too great for her yet precarious state of health. Two questions, however, still remained to be asked.—Did Mrs. St. Vincent purpose residing constantly with Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer while in Town? and what stay might she be supposed to intend making?

Neither of these enquiries could be answered with any degree of certainty, Louisa replied: the former depended on particular circumstances; though she talked of staying with Catharine when she left her husband, yet her temper and disposition were both so variable, it was impossible to reckon on what succeeding contingencies might produce; and the same assertion held good in regard to the time allotted for her continuance in Town. “But, my dear girl, more of this hereafter; I prohibit any further discourse at present. Hasten to obey the directions of your female physician; and, if practicable, endeavour to procure some repose.”

Stella, snatching the hand of her kind adviser, pressed it silently to her lips; and, assisted by the maid who usually attended her, retired to obey her friendly injunctions.

But though thus considerately prohibited from speaking on the topic nearest her mind, thought, busy thought, was not to be so easily repressed; and in the course of her solitary meditations, the idea more than once occurred of returning immediately to Bellefield. To remain where she was appeared now incompatible with the happiness and comfort either of herself or others: and what right had she to intrude on the peace of those very friends to whom she stood indebted for so many good offices since the period of her final separation from poor Maria?—Was she predestined to make every member of Major St. Vincent’s family equally unhappy with himself?”

The nature of this last reflection proved too bitter not to produce the most acute feelings; and for some time Stella wept, like a child, over the sad conviction of her untoward fate. One step, and one alone, remained to be taken; and she wondered that she had not thought of it even in the midst of her greatest agitation.—Yes, she would set out immediately for Devonshire:—it was her intention, at any rate, to have done so in a few days at the furthest; and, by Emma’s last letter, it appeared plain she was impatiently expected at Bellefield. To meet the dreaded Mrs. St. Vincent a second time could not be thought of with any degree of composure: under the roof of her mother she ran little chance of encountering so unpleasant an accident; for there Mrs. St. Vincent was less likely to come again in haste, than to any other quarter of the country.

Stella now soon arranged her plans for the accomplishment of a speedy retreat; and her mind, relieved by the prospect of a circumstance at present so desirable, became more and more tranquillized. She fell at length into a profound slumber; from which she awoke two hours after,

with renovated strength, refreshed alike in her mental and corporeal faculties, and fully determined on the earliest opportunity to put her scheme into execution.

The first object that met her view on drawing aside the bed curtains, was Mrs. Mortimer; to whom she communicated her intention instantly to depart; but that lady, no less tenacious of her right to free agency than the imperious Mrs. St. Vincent, warmly protested against such an undertaking in the present delicate state of her health. Stella, however, continued firm in her notion of the propriety of the measure; and Mrs. Arabin, who happened to be in search of Mrs. Mortimer, led by the sound of her voice, now joined them, and reinforced the arguments of our heroine with additional ones of her own. These proved so replete with good sense and rational conviction, that their kind hostess, though with much apparent reluctance, at last acquiesced: on condition, however, that Stella relinquished the design of commencing her journey till the following day; which, on being permitted to remain quietly in her own apartment, was reluctantly agreed to.

Mrs. St. Vincent, fortunately, spent the day abroad; and, as “night was at odds with morning” before her return took place, the two sisters passed most of the intervening time with our heroine; for Mrs. Arabin was engaged in looking over some papers relative to her own affairs; and Mr. Mortimer happened to be absent on a visit to a friend in Wales.

The kindness and friendship evinced by these two amiable women for Stella, was such as to affect her in the most sensible manner; and when the hour of separation arrived, she felt the pang of a final adieu scarcely less acute than that experienced on parting with her beloved Mrs. Bertram.

END OF VOL. III.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.