

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.

“It is not a single spot
“Of such a mould, or fix’d to such a clime;
“No—’tis the social circle of my friends,
“The lov’d community in which I’m link’d,
“And in whose welfare all my wishes centre.”

THE morning was lowering and gloomy; it seemed in unison with the frame of mind in which our poor heroine departed from the friendly roof of the kind Mrs. Mortimer, and her no less amiable sister; but if thus forced to fly from those so highly, so justly valued, she was likewise quitting the only person on earth who had hitherto proved her decided and most irreconcilable enemy:—and for whom was she quitting this cruel woman? For Mrs. Ross, for her dear Emma.—Ought she then to repine at any event that accelerated so pleasing a circumstance? Surely, no:—it was the very thing she had long wished to accomplish; for had not Mrs. Ross repeatedly expressed the utmost solicitude for the restoration of her health, and her speedy return to Devonshire? and was she not now at last permitted to join those beloved friends? Ungrateful Stella, to feel the least depression of spirits with such a prospect before her!—How could a sensation so unpardonable possibly be harboured on such an occasion! Henceforth it should not be allowed to intrude on the better feelings of the heart.

“Yes,” continued she mentally, “I shall soon be at the feet of the almost sainted Mrs. Ross, in the circling arms of my kind Emma; and it shall henceforth be my endeavour to supply the place of the ever-to-be-regretted daughter and sister they have lost. Alas! that she who ought to make up the deficiency as far as human means can effect it, should prove herself so unworthy of being considered in either of these two points of view!—but no matter—since that is the case, it becomes me to show myself deserving of their flattering partiality by an additional degree of attention. If we will not exert ourselves for the purpose of mitigating distress, or even prove indifferent to the sorrows of a fellow-creature, we can hardly merit the appellation of human beings, nor presume to request that commiseration under misfortune which we refused to those, perhaps infinitely more estimable than ourselves, in similar circumstances.”

Thus argued the young philosopher as she pursued her journey to Devonshire, accompanied by a female attendant of Mrs. Mortimer’s, who was directed by that lady to take every possible care of her on the road.

The train of reflections to which she had given unbounded freedom, proved in the end extremely consoling and salutary: it filled her mind with increasing solicitude to act as she had prescribed to herself, and illumed her late languid features with a shade of the most interesting description: the *tout-ensemble* bespoke gratitude, benevolence, friendship, and filial duty, all blended in the same sweet countenance, and all alike expressive of the anxiety she felt to put her upright intentions in immediate practice.

On her arrival at Bellefield, the trial that awaited her soon afforded a sufficient opportunity for this purpose. Mrs. Ross and her daughter were extremely affected by her appearance; and even the foregoing wise resolutions of the traveller were more than once nearly put to flight by the excess of maternal and sisterly anguish which she was forced to witness on their first meeting, and in the course of the conversation that speedily succeeded it.

These two circumstances proved too much for the body, if not for the mind of our heroine; and in conjunction with the fatigue suffered by the one, and the internal struggle maintained by the other, she found herself under the disagreeable necessity of keeping her bed for the greater part of the week that followed her return to Bellefield.

Her health, from this period however, was gradually restored, and in the course of a month appeared to have gained ground amazingly; but a long respite from the vicissitudes incident to human life is not our allotted portion on earth.

Stella heard frequently from the Hermitage; Mrs. Ross grew no worse, and time began to produce its usual beneficial effect on the spirits of Emma: she herself had apparently become so far reconciled to irremediable evils, that an air of exterior tranquillity pervaded her countenance, which, whatever might be the secret pang it covered, was sufficiently visible to deceive superficial observers, or preserve her from exciting the troublesome curiosity of those hitherto unacquainted with the real situation of her heart.

Comparatively calm, and unruffled by the obtrusive form of any fresh or disagreeable occurrence, a considerable period stole away with a degree of pensive serenity to which the inmates of Bellefield had recently been strangers; for, if happiness refused to visit them, resignation to the dispensations of Heaven supplied its place; and our heroine vainly imagined this state of present ease was of that middling description to escape the ever changing influence of time and chance, those two great enemies to the durability of terrestrial peace: but youth and inexperience are apt to view a favourite object in the most desirable, rather than in its true light; and Stella soon found she had been guilty of this error, so common to those who, like her, were in a manner new to the world and the world's variation.

Mr. Ross had now been abroad for several months with his son; and his letters, though not so frequent as his lady could have wished, were yet sufficiently so to inform her of all that appeared materially necessary to mention. The death of Maria, however painful the loss of a child is generally found by a parent, seemed to have made no deep impression on the feelings of her father; who considered the deprivation of one child as an advantageous event to another, in as much as the survivor would receive an accumulation of wealth, in his opinion, fully adequate to compensate for any other loss whatever.

The second epistle after the decease of his daughter, contained many consolatory reflections on this subject, and particularly hinted at his intention of settling two thirds of her patrimony on Mrs. St. Vincent, who seemed to have regained in absence that place in his affections which the culpable tenor of her usual conduct had somewhat lessened before his departure from Scotland.

Mrs. Ross saw with deep regret the strange infatuation of this mistaken parent; but she knew that in any predetermined point, remonstrance was unavailing, and reason unattended to. Her son, however, was now again in a convalescent state: that piece of intelligence made amends for much unhappiness; and as they proposed returning soon to England, she judged it best to take no notice at present of the injustice intended to Emma, but rather trust to futurity, which would give the surest proof of her superior worth and consequent claim to parental affection.

She was running over the contents of the letter on the third evening from its arrival, when

another, with the foreign postmark, was put into her hand. As her husband had previously signified the intended time of his quitting the Continent, she doubted not but that this epistle was sent off on the commencement of their journey to the seacoast; and under this impression proceeded to examine it. The first sentence, however, undeceived her: it was written by her son, to inform her that his father had received a violent contusion on his head and left side by the overturning of a carriage; and as the medical gentlemen who had been called in on the occasion seemed rather apprehensive of the result, he thought it proper to acquaint her with the circumstance, as likewise the earnest desire repeatedly expressed by their patient to see her (if able to travel) immediately. He concluded with entreating she would lose no time in complying with this request; and enforced the necessity of the measure in terms so energetic, that Mrs. Ross, fully persuaded her husband was upon his death-bed, and overpowered by the sudden and unexpected nature of the intelligence, became instantly too sick to support her trembling frame: she was, however, happily prevented from falling upon the floor by the entrance of our heroine, who, perceiving her situation, darted across the room, and caught her in her arms just in time to save her from the threatened danger that might have attended such an accident.

Before she was yet sufficiently recovered to speak, she pointed to the cause that had reduced her to a situation so alarming; and Stella snatching up the letter, speedily ran over the contents. By the time it was finished, Mrs. Ross regained the power of articulation; and fixing her now streaming eyes on our heroine, enquired, in a low feeble voice, if she would not accompany her.

Stella started at the question: it was true she possessed few ties to any particular quarter of the globe; but to remove so far from her early and best friend, from the kind, the generous, the maternal Mrs. Bertram, appeared by no means a desirable circumstance. Her friend's health had been long in a precarious state; and, though better of late, yet at her time of life, no great dependance could be placed on the probable nature of its continuance.—Was it then for the child of her bounty, for the unacknowledged orphan who was indebted to her for life, education, support, for every thing;—then was it for this dependant being to desert her worthy benefactress at the very period perhaps when her services might be most wanted, and her presence particularly required? To cross the world of waters, to quit the very land she inhabited, to have no longer the comparative power of flying at a moment's warning to the respected friend of her helpless infancy, should sickness or any other unforeseen casualty demand her speedy return to the Hermitage:—her heart recoiled from the bare idea of a desertion fraught with such apparent ingratitude; and she was going to utter a mild, but decisive negative, when Emma, alarmed by the confused and unsatisfactory account given of her mother's sudden illness by one of the servants, abruptly rushed into the room, and no sooner obtained a knowledge of existing circumstances, than our heroine was assailed with fresh entreaties on the subject.

Unable to resist the united urgency of two such pleaders, Stella at length was compelled to alter her first determination, and give a reluctant consent to their wishes. In consequence of this change in her former plans, Mrs. Ross, Emma, and herself immediately sat down to acquaint Mrs. Bertram with what had passed, and to procure her approbation for what was then in agitation; and as the acquiescence of her *protégée* had only been extorted upon condition that she agreed willingly to the request of Mrs. Ross, an answer was desired without delay. Though the distance was considerable, yet hopes were entertained of procuring it long before they reached Dover, as the wind remained totally adverse to crossing the Channel, and even gave little indication of proving more favourable for some time to come.

After several days of anxious expectation, the much wished-for answer from Mrs.

Bertram arrived. It contained her cheerful permission for Stella to accompany Mrs. Ross, on whom, for the future term of her absence, she delegated all her authority over the movements of our heroine; who likewise received a most kind and affectionate epistle from the same friendly pen, and one scarcely less so from Maria Campbell, fraught with the warmest assurances of lasting regard, and her decided resolution to pay every possible and unremitting degree of attention to their mutual and ever-beloved benefactress.

The tenor of these letters were such as to convey the utmost satisfaction, though not unmingled with a certain melancholy sensation to the bosom of our heroine. Mrs. Ross had signified to Emma's late governess her intention of taking her abroad with her; and every thing being now in readiness for their departure, they became extremely solicitous for its commencement. They at length reached Dover without encountering any unpleasant accident; but were forced to remain two days, on account of the unsettled state of the weather. At last it permitted them to embark; and a few days more brought them to the residence of the Nabob.

CHAP. II.

“Has she consented?—What is her consent?
“Is she not mine?”

HUGHES.

THOUGH Francis Ross, under the first alarm his father’s accident occasioned, had written in a manner that gave cause to apprehend the most serious consequences, the travellers found their fears considerably lessened on their arrival. Mr. Ross remained indeed still weak, and confined to his room; but he was now in a convalescent state, and no dangerous symptoms any longer appeared to render his recovery doubtful.

Whether the reflections usually produced by the seclusion of a sick chamber gave rise to a different mode of thinking, or nature, all powerful nature, made itself be heard on the appearance of a wife and daughter, is hard to determine; but the Nabob received them with a greater degree of kindness and condescension than he usually deigned to evince on any occasion whatever of a domestic description; and, for some time, all went on well. His recovery gradually advanced; and the health of his lady seemed so much improved by the salubrious air of Provence, the house proved so commodious, the surrounding scenery appeared so charming, and young Ross apparently took so much delight in the whole, that it was finally determined to remain in their present residence until the end of the succeeding summer, in full expectation that, long before the conclusion of that yet distant period, they would all be able to return to Britain in a situation, as to health and spirits, very different from what they experienced on quitting it.

Ever attentive and partial to our heroine, Mrs. Ross let no opportunity escape of doing justice to her favourite; and Emma failed not to follow her example with an additional portion of friendly warmth, which did infinite honour to her feeling and affectionate heart. Mr. Ross, however, paid her no particular mark of attention: he was civil indeed, when it appeared scarcely possible to be otherwise; and Stella, little accustomed to any notice from that quarter, received what he chose occasionally to show her, with the utmost propriety of behaviour:—and the line of conduct she observed in his presence (where, however, she came as seldom as circumstances would admit), was so exactly suited to the treatment she met with, that it placed her in a light far superior to the proud and supercilious master of the mansion, in the opinion of all those in the neighbourhood with whom the family associated.

Whatever occurred of a disagreeable nature in this respect at home, was, however, speedily forgotten in the course of the next delightful ramble amidst the rural and fascinating beauties which, in this charming country, surrounded them on every side.

In these rambles she and her companion Emma were not unfrequently joined by Francis Ross, who either was, or affected to be, so prodigiously attached to his sister, that he seldom wished to lose sight of her; and so different on these occasions was the behaviour of this young man to that of his stately father, that Stella usually found herself nearly as much at ease with him as with Emma. Of acquired knowledge, he possessed a considerable portion; and his long residence abroad had furnished him with a fund of information, which rendered his conversation no less amusing than instructive. Stella listened to him as she would to a brother; and she, like her friend, was never more gratified than when he made a third in their little excursion.

Time rolled pleasantly away; and the letters that at various periods arrived from Scotland serving to convince her all was as she could wish at the Hermitage, our heroine became

insensibly reconciled to her distant residence, and apparently satisfied with her acquiescence to the request of Mrs. Ross: but a storm as generally succeeds a calm in the moral, as in the physical world; and one was now preparing to burst on the head of Stella, accompanied with every symptom of overwhelming violence.

Possessing an ardent and sanguine temper, and accustomed from his earliest infancy to have every wish of his heart gratified, Francis Ross was alike a stranger to self-denial, or the usual restraints of parental attention. To converse daily with Stella, to witness her various amiable qualities, her uncommon superiority of mind and cultivated understanding, all of which, from the easy, indifferent light she viewed him in, appeared in their genuine lustre, unrestrained by any sensations she would not, in similar situations, have entertained for a brother—together with the striking elegance of her manner, her fine proportioned form, and beautifully interesting countenance, was not to be thought of with indifference; and the only son of the haughty Nabob was already gone an age in love for the humble Foundling of the Hermitage, before he suspected himself in the smallest danger of such a dereliction from the precepts and practice of his father, or that inherent pride of heart hitherto so strongly entertained by himself on every former occasion of the kind.

Of this circumstance, however, Stella (who thought of nothing less) had not, for some time, the most distant suspicion of his sentiments:—not so with her partial friend Emma: she soon perceived the attachment of her brother; but sensible he required no addition to his pecuniary prospects in the matrimonial line, and convinced in every other respect her beloved Stella was the identical woman born to suit his temper, and constitute his domestic happiness beyond any other being in the world, the favourable opinion he entertained of our heroine, so far from meeting with the least check on her side, experienced every encouragement calculated to stimulate perseverance, and render his sentiments of a permanent nature.

The marked approbation and friendship Mrs. Ross uniformly evinced for the object of his choice was equally, or rather in a greater degree, productive of this effect; for the more he knew of his valuable mother's character and disposition, the more he loved and respected her; while, on the contrary, though formed with similar violent passions, and a temper no less apt to become restive on every appearance of opposition, his father nevertheless stood by no means so high in his opinion, or so dear to his affections; for he well knew that family consequence proved the chief source of all his actions, and that he regarded no rule of conduct but that of the Thelemites—

“Do what thou wilt.”

It is true this same rule was overlooked by Francis himself: but there happened to be this difference—that when practised by the father, it generally militated against some favourite pursuit of the son; whereas it was never adopted by the latter, unless to secure the great point of uncontrolled self-indulgence:—a clear proof that one and the same thing may be viewed in a very opposite light, by (however paradoxical it may appear) two persons exactly of similar dispositions and temper.

Contests of this description were not, however, very frequent; for Francis had, as yet, given no serious cause to apprehend any formidable defalcation from the system of his father, in regard to notions of family importance. The attachments hitherto formed by the young man were, indeed, rather those of the day than the heart; and the Nabob, fully persuaded of this circumstance, seldom judged them sufficiently dangerous to risk injuring him by an unnecessary

exertion of authority, as the long, dubious, and critical state of health enjoyed by the sole male heir of all his well-acquired oriental possessions made him cautious.

To adopt any means *pour passer le tems*, that happened not to be inimical to the favourite views of this considerate parent, were consequently supposed allowable in the present instance, where the prospects for futurity proved so dazzling: and the wary Nabob so managed on all occasions of the kind, as to prevent every probable chance of disappointment by the previous, but secret precautions he took for the purpose. These would not have been neglected now more than formerly, had not two unfortunate events occurred to render them in a great measure impracticable. The accident that confined him to his chamber constituted one of them; the other proceeded from the absence of the confidential agent long entrusted with the honourable office of a spy on the conduct and actions of Francis. This man, under the character of a travelling companion, had been of essential service in more instances than one, to his employer: but a short time prior to that employer's indisposition, he had found it necessary to send him on some private business to Holland; from whence his return proved uncertain, though not impatiently expected.

Had young Ross been more attentive to his father's motions, he would probably have known the precise period at which he purposed, for the first time, quitting his chamber: he either heard it not, or the circumstance totally escaped his memory; and the Nabob had already ventured to the farthest limits of a very romantic garden, before his son thought of the matter.

Mr. Ross finding himself much refreshed by this little excursion, determined on repeating it the next evening, pleasing himself with the thoughts of the agreeable surprise his emancipation from so long a confinement must produce in the mind of his heir, who had been from home during the two preceding days on a shooting party, and was not expected to return before the end of the week.

Francis had for some time been occupied by reflections of the nature of his sentiments in favour of Stella; but pride, combating with inclination, hitherto held the beam nearly equal, and prevented him from coming to any decisive resolution. In the course of his present absence, the longest which had yet taken place since his first acquaintance commenced with our heroine, several circumstances occurred to accelerate his alternately half-formed, half-renounced intentions on her account:—several of his present associates had seen her; and as to see and to admire her proved one and the same thing, she was frequently mentioned in terms of the highest eulogium. An English Baronet then on his travels, young, rich, and accomplished, seemed particularly interested on the occasion, and repeatedly toasted her with every appearance of an enthusiastic attachment too obvious to escape notice: this, of course, drew the raillery of his companions upon him; and the style in which he replied to it, confirmed Francis in the idea already entertained of Sir William's design to make a tender of his hand to his fair country-woman.

Prior to this event, Francis had scarcely experienced the excruciating pang of real jealousy in so tormenting a degree: that worst of human sufferings now took entire possession of his bosom and shook it with uncontrolled violence, and maintained its sway with more than common force. Had the Baronet declared his partiality? and was he a favoured lover? were questions he perpetually asked himself:—if the latter proved the case, the prize for which they mutually languished was not to be relinquished so easily to a comparative stranger: he would contend the point with him, or the first man upon the face of the globe, while a single drop of blood remained in his veins.—Was she not under his father's roof? under the protection of his parents? and had he not a just title to interfere in what so materially concerned her future

welfare? Yes, surely: he was then justified in doing so; and Sir William should be instantly interrogated on the subject of his subsequent intentions. Such was the hasty determination of a nearly sleepless night; and springing from his bed, he hurried on his clothes to put it in immediate execution.

Sir William Harley was then on a visit at the house of an acquaintance who resided in the neighbourhood; but he had spent the preceding day in company with young Ross and the other members of the shooting-party, when the glass circling pretty freely after dinner, *à l'Angloise*, the Baronet had been led on to give his opinion of our heroine, whom he had previously seen, with a degree of warmth not by any means suited to the taste of the auditor most interested on the occasion, who, with his characteristic impetuosity, would have lost no time in ascertaining the extent of his supposed rival's pretensions had an opportunity been then attainable for the purpose; but it so happened that that was not the case, and the succeeding night's meditations terminated as has already been related.

Another disappointment soon followed the above-mentioned; for an accident had happened to one of his horses, which occasioned an unavoidable delay; and before this circumstance could be remedied, the morning was pretty far advanced. He set out after breakfast, however; but on reaching the *chateau* of Sir William's friend, he had the mortification to learn that the object of his pursuit had accompanied the family on an excursion to a villa some miles distant, from whence they were not expected to return before the evening.

Extremely dissatisfied with the nature of this intelligence, he was retracing his steps again in no very pleasant humour, and had already formed the resolution of repeating his enquiries when the time arrived in which it was probable the Baronet might be met with, when some of his sporting companions appeared crossing a field that led in a direct line to the road. These gentlemen no sooner perceived his approach than they quickly advanced, and insisted upon his dismounting to join them. This request he would gladly have evaded, but their solicitations were of too urgent a description to be long resisted: perhaps the accidental discovery that the day's sport lay in that direction where the Baronet was most likely to be encountered in his way back to the *chateau*, contributed in no small degree to procure his compliance with their wishes: at any rate he knew he could contrive to leave them, and accomplish his design by one means or another; for, should he miss Sir William on the road, he had it still in his power to obtain the intended explanation by waiting upon him at his friend's house in the course of his rambles in the adjacent grounds. Making a merit therefore of necessity, and even persuading himself that this was a much better plan than his former arrangement, as it conveyed less the idea of a predetermined resolution to force an avowal of the Baronet's views—a suspicion of which might possibly have put a man of his spirit upon his guard, and defeated the very intention for which it was adopted, Francis secretly applauded the lucky thought that, by thus removing every appearance of coercion, apparently smoothed the way for the ready attainment of the much wished-for satisfaction; and astonished, on reflection, to find he possessed so unusual a portion of prudence, (on which score no great cause for self-gratulation had hitherto occurred) he no longer evinced his former reluctance to make one of the party, but proceeded to accompany them with the semblance at least, if not the reality of good-humoured acquiescence.

CHAP. III.

“Not think of her?
“Impossible!—She’s ever present to me—
“My life, my soul!—she animates my being!”
HUGHES.

THE ardour of pursuit (for in the sports of the field Francis became insensibly interested for several succeeding hours) had, by degrees, led him to some distance from his companions, till at length, overcome with fatigue and mental anxiety, he threw his fowlingpiece upon the grass, and seating himself on the sloping bank of a small rivulet, facing the direction in which the Baronet was expected to appear, gave free scope to the reflections which successively rose in his mind.

The young philosopher, till now unaccustomed to solitary meditation, could not at intervals refrain from experiencing sensations of the utmost astonishment at the new and inconceivable nature of his present cogitation. From surprise, his thoughts gradually turned to the cause in which this wonderfully intellectual revolution originated: and a very short survey served to convince him that Stella Bertram was the principle by which every movement of his mind was directed, as well as the object of every idea.

Her power over his mind had evidently become great, when its influence could thus teach him a lesson till now almost unknown; for, prior to this period, his life, as far as the precarious state of his health permitted, had never been burthened with much anxiety, or a bias to self-examination; neither had an inclination for serious reflection often obtruded itself in the course of any favourite pursuit: his mental faculties now seemed to have undergone an entire alteration on every subject particularly connected with the more tender feelings of the heart; and though no sensation of loose desire impelled him forward for its gratification, sentiments of a new and very different description now throbbd through his bosom with pure and indescribable delight:—in short, the longer he mused over every circumstance that had recently occurred, the more was he persuaded that he had found a congenial spirit in the lovely *protégée* of his mother, who appeared every way calculated to make him happy.

“I will bear this tormenting state of suspense no longer,” he cried, looking at his watch, as he had repeatedly done before, and springing on his feet with vivacity—“no! Sir William has certainly returned by some other road; I will therefore proceed directly to the *chateau* of M. Vancour, and endeavour to satisfy my mind without any further delay.”

Actuated by this impulsive and irresistible desire, he bent his steps once more to the habitation of the same gentleman; where he was informed by one of the domestics that the family were returned, but unaccompanied by their English friend, who had separated from them on the road to pay a visit in the neighbourhood.

“By G—d, then my suspicions are well founded!” muttered the enraged Francis as he turned from the Castle gate: “he is gone, no doubt, to make his proposals in form to my father: but the consent of that father’s son must likewise sanction his pretensions, else——”

Contending passions here stopped his utterance, and striking his forehead with violence, he rushed into the woods, through which a shorter, but well known path conducted him, in less than the space of an hour, to the confines of his father’s residence.

He entered the shrubbery by a small door, of which he always kept a key, and was hastening forward to the house, when his sister unexpectedly appeared, and in the following

moment joined him.

Impatient to procure the desired information, he scarcely allowed himself time to answer her affectionate enquiries relative to his health, and the cause of his unlooked-for return, before the question of "Where is Stella?" in almost breathless agitation, escaped him.

"She is reading to my mother," was the reply. "But tell me, my dear Francis, why you seem in such emotion?—You have not had a renewal of your former complaints, I hope?"

In place of satisfying her anxiety on this head, he again demanded, in a still more perturbed accent, if there were any visitors then in the house.

"None," said Emma, regarding him with increasing surprise.

"None!" he repeated emphatically: "are you sure there are none?—Is my father alone?—Has no one called upon him this evening?"

"No, upon my honour!—not a single being besides our own family have I seen enter the doors to-day. Now, my dearest brother, satisfy my curiosity in turn, and relieve me from those undescribable apprehensions of I know not what, which your strange unaccountable enquiries have given rise to!"

"Yes, Emma! dearest Emma! I will satisfy your curiosity; for you have partly removed a burthen from my heart I could hardly support much longer. Answer me one other query, however, ere my promise is fulfilled.—Has your friend Stella evinced any partiality for Sir William Harley, or ever granted him a private interview, to your knowledge?"

"Good Heaven, Francis, what a question!—how could such an idea possibly enter your head!"

"This is no direct reply, Emma—you evidently evade giving one: speak to the point, I beseech you!"

"Well, my dear peremptory brother, I will speak to the point. Stella, to the best of my knowledge, never had any private interview with Sir William Harley; neither does she, I am convinced, entertain the smallest predilection in his favour. Are you now satisfied? and will you take some pity on the impatience your own conduct has created, and at length endeavour to lay the spirit of curiosity that at this moment exerts its sway so powerfully over your poor little sister?"

He snatched her hand with a look of rapturous delight.—"You merit canonization!" he cried. "Come with me to that jessamine arbour, and I will tell you all: but first again swear that Stella is indifferent to the attentions of this presumptuous Baronet; repeat the charming assurance once more!"

"I will not break a commandment even to please you," she smilingly replied; "therefore, if my word is not as good as an oath, you must rest contented with what I have already told you: by that I abide, and on that you may implicitly rely."

By this time they had reached the arbour; and as Emma already more than half knew his secret, and expected the confession that now speedily took place, they soon came to a thorough understanding of each others sentiments relative to their mutual favourite.

It is probable, however, that the family pride inherent in his nature, would still have prevented, or at least retarded the present avowal, and the consequent determination that followed, of speaking on the subject to his father, had not the powerful bias of inclination triumphed over every intervening obstacle when a formidable rival was supposed to come in competition with his long-cherished, though half-repressed views on our heroine's account.

When any particular measure was once fully resolved on, it was usually put in immediate execution by the impetuous and ardent Francis:—it was not from any apprehension of parental

opposition that he had hitherto refrained from speaking to his father on the topic nearest his heart; he had been too long accustomed to carry every point of moment with the Nabob, to let himself suspect he would meet with a refusal on an occasion of so much importance to his happiness, on which indeed he was clearly persuaded all his comfort in this world entirely depended; neither did he much fear a rejection from Stella, for she appeared to treat him with a superior degree of attention to any other man who approached her in his presence. This circumstance had frequently been remarked with pleasure, without troubling himself to investigate the motive that procured the flattering distinction he experienced. Emma positively assured him that her affections were disengaged; and though Stella had never told her so, she herself was firmly convinced of her opinion being well founded, from the whole tenor of our heroine's conduct when subjects of that description happened to be discussed between them. Emma said what she certainly believed; but Emma was no great casuist in affairs of this nature: warmly attached to Stella, and conceiving her (as already observed) formed in every respect to constitute the domestic felicity of a beloved brother, with the romantic enthusiasm of youthful friendship, she imprudently strengthened the rash resolution he had now adopted, and seemed to imagine the haughty Nabob could not adduce one rational argument in opposition to the final arrangement of her visionary wishes.

It is said that "man appoints, and God disappoints:" it may likewise be said that "the philosophical schemes of sixteen are apparently made to be overturned by the riper wisdom of six-and-forty." Those planned at this period by Francis and Emma, proved exactly of this kind.

The time recently chosen by Mr. Ross for his evening walk happened to arrive soon after his son and daughter had seated themselves in the arbour. Hitherto he had confined himself to a very limited space on the best sheltered side of the garden: the uncommon fineness of this evening, however, unfortunately induced him to extend its usual boundary; and he gradually reached the vicinity of their private retreat, unsuspected by its incautious inmates: here he was upon the point of presenting himself, in order to rest a few minutes on one of the seats, but the sound of voices issuing from within, speedily caught his ear, and arrested his further progress.

A very short time now elapsed before he became sufficiently enlightened on the subject of their discourse, to which he listened with a mingled sensation of rage and the most violent indignation: but, however irritating to parental feelings appeared the decisive tone in which Francis repeatedly expressed his immovable adherence to his recent determinations, the Nabob well knew that nothing was to be carried by a high hand with his future successor; and he now mentally cursed the folly and mistaken indulgence of his own former conduct, which had injudiciously led him to give unchecked licence to a spirit of itself abundantly headstrong, without the encouraging aid of a father's sufferance giving it increased force.

Disagreeable retrospection, however, on causes which were no longer removable, could at present be of no avail; the emergency demanded active exertions: and no sooner had his first astonishment somewhat subsided, than to these he turned his thoughts.

Francis had declared his resolution of mentioning the subject without further delay: it appeared absolutely necessary to frustrate this design until time was obtained to arrange the precise mode of his future proceedings on a business so critically important: this circumstance seemed absolutely necessary; but how, in the existing agitation of his mind, was it to be effected?

Emma had engaged, in his hearing, to procure her brother a private interview with Stella about the same hour, and in the same place, on the succeeding evening: this was not to be tolerated with the smallest degree of patience: in the opinion of Mr. Ross, it must, if

accomplished, prove decisive of his son's destiny, since he was very well convinced that a girl, with Stella Bertram's humble prospects, would not hesitate a moment on the occasion. In the first paroxysm of rage and mortified pride, he thought of instantly repairing to the chamber of his wife, and upbraiding her with the consequences of her ill judged partiality to the innocent, but reprobated object of his fury:—a second reflection on the necessity of appearing totally ignorant of the whole affair, however, led him ultimately to the adoption of more cautious measures.

It had formerly been settled between him and his trusty agent, (the ostensible travelling companion of Francis) that on any appearance of the latter's inclination to form a permanent attachment, unsanctioned by parental approbation, the lady implicated in the business was immediately, but privately, to be disposed of in a Convent for life. The Nabob possessed the golden key most efficacious in all similar predicaments—that key which opens or closes even the holy immaculate gates of a cloister with at least as much facility as St. Peter is supposed to do those of heaven. The case in question appeared of a nature to require the application of caustics; and the chief physician was by no means averse to their administration.

Though it had been the first intention of young Ross to address his father without delay on the situation of his heart, he was advised by Emma ere they separated, to make his design previously known to Stella. This circumstance could not, however, be accomplished from several intervening causes, before the period already fixed upon for the projected interview: it was not therefore without much difficulty he was brought to acquiesce in an arrangement which contributed to procrastinate the termination of his wishes. But the Nabob had at length the satisfaction of learning that his sister had carried her point; though this concession was only obtained on receiving her solemn promise to give him instantaneous intelligence relative to the yet dreaded Baronet's motions, should it so happen that he appeared at the habitation of his father.

As the vehement manner in which Francis had at first expressed himself, seemed to afford no chance of so critical a respite, Mr. Ross found his mind considerably relieved by the time thus unexpectedly procured for the accomplishment of his schemes. He concealed himself behind the arbour, when they prepared to quit it; and, agreeably to the plan settled between the brother and sister, the former had no sooner taken the road back to his friend's villa, and the latter returned to the house, than he followed her example, and retired, unobserved, to his own apartment; from thence he softly stole into a room on the opposite side of the gallery, which commanded an extensive view of that part of the country in which Francis had for some days been resident:—here he saw him winding through the adjacent plantation; and having fully authenticated the certainty of his temporary absence, the Nabob re-entered his chamber, and proceeded to ruminate on the safest mode of commencing the predetermined plan of operation, on the successful result of which seemed to hang the future dignity of ancient blood, and the honour of his hitherto uncontaminated name.

On the supposed fidelity of one domestic alone, he flattered himself he might rely with a tolerable prospect of security. This man had been some time in his service, but was only recently come from England. To him his master now partially opened his mind; for the wary Nabob made it a rule never wholly to commit himself on any occasion whatever where an implicit confidence happened to be not absolutely necessary. He found his agent prompt at comprehending his wishes, and ready to execute them beyond his most sanguine expectations.

CHAP. IV.

“Glorious hypocrisy!—what fools are they,
“Who, fraught with vengeful or ambitious views,
“Wear not thy specious mask!”

MAHOMET.

MR. ROSS appeared at the supper hour with a smooth brow and every semblance of satisfaction, which in reality his heart did not experience.

His unsuspecting wife viewed him with pleasure; Emma secretly hailed this apparent placidity of temper as a propitious omen of her brother’s success; and Stella strove to evince her participation in their happiness, in spite of an unaccountable oppression of spirits which hung heavy on her heart, and seemed to forbode the approach of some unforeseen disaster, though from what quarter she was totally unable to conjecture.

The assumed condescension of the Nabob, however, gradually began to vanish soon after the servants left the room, and gloomy fits of abstraction succeeded; from which, however, on recollection, he seemed solicitous to rouse himself. His eyes once or twice rested on Stella with a scrutinizing expression, that made her bosom thrill with something like a sensation of horror. Before the lapse of another half hour she became insensibly too drowsy to keep awake; and on Mrs. Ross’s noticing this circumstance, her husband suddenly recollected he had yet letters to write, which must be performed before the time commonly allotted to the indulgence of repose could be enjoyed.

As he passed the chair of our heroine, she raised her heavy eyelids to his face. He seemed now, in turn, to shrink from observation, and hurried out of the eating-room.

The chamber occupied by Stella was situated at the farthest end of a long gallery, from which a door led into an adjoining forest: this door, however, was seldom used; and indeed had scarcely been twice opened since the family took possession of the house. What, then, proved the astonishment of the first domestic who had occasion to cross the gallery on the succeeding morning, to find it standing a-jar! She would hardly credit the evidence of her senses to a sight so extraordinary and unexpected: but determined to ascertain the fact, she advanced forward, and astonishment was speedily converted into terror; for near it lay a handkerchief stained with blood, which was quickly recognised as Miss Bertram’s property. Aghast, trembling, and confounded, she instantly dropped it from her fingers; and suddenly casting an agitated look towards the chamber of our heroine, she perceived the door there in the same predicament with the other: she entered it—approached the bed—found it empty, and uttering a faint scream, sunk on a chair that stood near it.

Recollection, however, could scarcely be said to have left her entirely, for almost in the next moment her faculties returned: but the restoration was accompanied by additional circumstances of terror; for the observation which immediately succeeded their temporary suspension, no longer appeared to leave the fate of poor Stella doubtful. The window was in a similar state with the doors, and on the edge of it remained visible the print of a man’s foot: some few articles of her wearing apparel lay scattered in confusion round the room; but every thing of any particular value had been removed, and the drawers and trunks completely emptied of their contents. The disappearance, however, of these articles seemed trifling when put in competition with the apparent loss of their owner; and the affectionate girl, who proved to be the identical Ann formerly mentioned as much attached to Stella, remained for some time fixed to the spot, wringing her hands in an agony of grief, and too deeply agitated to acquaint the family with the dreadful cause of her distress. In this state she was at length found by one of her fellow-

servants; and the alarming discovery soon became general throughout the house.

Emma received the intelligence with horror, and a series of fainting fits succeeded, which, during the period they lasted, marked the powerful nature of her feelings in a very striking manner; and when they ceased, left her too low and languid to quit her room for several hours; in the course of which various enquiries were directed to be made respecting this mysterious affair, but without procuring the smallest satisfaction on the subject.

Though Mrs. Ross could preserve sufficient calmness to give the necessary orders on the occasion, her sufferings and anxiety for the fate of our poor heroine were not less than what her daughter experienced; nor could she help being greatly shocked by the cold, unfeeling apathy displayed by her husband on so trying an event. It is true, he issued similar commands with her own for the purpose of discovery; but these, he insinuated, would certainly be attended with no manner of success, as he was firmly persuaded in his own mind the girl must have eloped with some favourite innamorato, whose participation in her escape particular reasons might render it requisite to conceal, as well as their private attachment to each other.

Mrs. Ross listened to these cruel and unfounded surmises with secret indignation; but she was too well acquainted with his temper and disposition to attempt controverting an opinion, which, in proportion to its fallacy, would, according to his usual practice, be supported with unyielding perseverance, if the whim seized him to do so. Her attention, however, to the main point, was not weakened by any thing he could either hint or say:—she continued her search after the fugitive with unceasing solicitude, though constantly unsuccessful; till her debilitated frame, sinking under the load of anxiety that perpetually preyed upon it, finally became inadequate to the task of further exertion.

Overwhelmed with the extent of a thousand frightful apprehensions, agitated and unhappy, her former complaints returned with increased violence; and before the termination of the third evening from the fatal event, she found herself once more confined to a sick chamber.

But this circumstance, which, in the present situation of affairs, she deeply deplored, may, in some measure, be considered as a fortunate occurrence; for it probably spared her the pain of witnessing the distressing altercation that speedily took place between the Nabob and his son.

Emma, during the first temporary interval of composure, had written a short, confused detail of the affair to her brother; who no sooner received the heart-rending intelligence, than he instantly flew to his father's abode in a state of mind nearly bordering on distraction. The Nabob was previously prepared for an appearance of this kind; and therefore listened to the ravings uttered by the young man with every semblance of his usual indifference to the fate of those who, like Stella, were considered in an inferior point of view:—nay, he even carried his hypocrisy so far, as to affect to believe that the visible interest taken by Francis in her destiny, was merely produced by his feelings on his mother and sister's account, who were both known to be particularly attached to her.

This interview took place in the garden, where the Nabob was waiting the arrival of Francis; whose approach had, in fact, been sedulously watched for by the trusty agent of the former, and announced accordingly.

To put him, in the sportsman's phrase, on a wrong scent, was a matter of no small importance; and even this he artfully found means to accomplish. Francis, convinced that no time was to be lost in a business of such moment, was easily persuaded to depart on the Quixotic scheme of enquiry, without seeing either his mother or Emma, whose lamentation and distress Mr. Ross assured him would only retard his movements, without producing any beneficial

consequence whatever. Had Francis suspected his father's prior knowledge of his sentiments in respect to Stella, he would probably have viewed his conduct in a very different light: at present it appeared exactly such as he had reason to look for from a man of the Nabob's character; and therefore, without giving himself time for further observation, he vociferated for his horses, vaulted into the saddle with the utmost rapidity, and instantly disappeared in the direction his father recommended him to pursue. This, it may possibly occur to the reader, was not precisely the one most likely to crown his exertions with success; on the contrary, it proved diametrically opposite to that he ought to have followed.

On the evening of the third day, the unhappy young man returned, as might be expected, without having obtained the smallest clue by which to direct his future motions. Mr. Ross now artfully insinuated, in the course of their succeeding interview, that, in place of the ruffians who were supposed to have robbed, and then carried her off, it was possible she herself had, as he formerly hinted to his wife, eloped with some person for whom she was either ashamed or averse to acknowledge a predilection.

The bare idea of such a circumstance proved sufficient to rouse every particle of zealous fury in the bosom of his credulous son, who, no longer able to command his feelings, and totally thrown from his guard by the emotion this suggestion produced, quickly made a disclosure of what was already no secret to his auditor; and the confession was greedily seized upon to ease the rancour of a heart labouring under the burthen of parental rage and indignation, hitherto, with the utmost difficulty, restrained from bursting forth on the head of its devoted victim.

A violent altercation succeeded; and the Nabob, either betrayed by his now ungovernable temper beyond the limits of the cautious scheme predetermined upon, or no longer fearful of consequences, having dropped some words of a suspicious tendency, which his son imagined contained more than met the ear, and seemed to convey an intimation of his being acquainted with circumstances relative to the mysterious event of our heroine's disappearance, which apparently involved him as a party in the business, no farther regard to decency was observed by the furious young man, who openly charged his father with a knowledge of her destiny in terms of the most bitter reproach; and the manner in which the accusation was received serving further to strengthen this suspicion, he rushed from his presence with a wild air and a hurried step, vowing to traverse the whole face of the earth in search of the lost Stella, and calling down the most dreadful imprecations on his own head if he ever more considered that man in the light of a parent who could meanly, cruelly, and unjustifiably condescend to the (as he supposed) perpetration of actions so nefarious and inhuman.

Before he reached the outer gate of the court, a strong inclination to bid his mother and Emma a last farewell induced him to return. He ascended the staircase leading to their apartments; but the door at the end of the gallery was locked: he demanded admittance, and was answered by one of the domestics on the other side, that his father had strictly prohibited his entrance; and further, to ensure obedience to this order, was determined to retain the key in his own possession while the young gentleman remained in the vicinage.

Francis uttered another imprecation, and pressing his hand on his palpitating heart, flew from the house with a full resolution either to return with Stella, or absent himself from his father's presence for ever.

CHAP. V.

“Mid cloister’d solitary tombs I stray;
“Despair and horror lead the cheerless way.”

SAVAGE.

IT is now high time to enquire into the fate of our unfortunate heroine, who may be supposed to have suffered no small degree of terror and distress during the foregoing transactions in the family of Mr. Ross.

The private directions of that gentleman had been so punctually executed, that a soporific dose, administered in a small glass of wine, which she drank at supper, soon produced the desired effect, even before the usual period of separating for the remainder of the night.

From the profound sleep which afterwards sealed her eyelids and drowned every mental faculty in oblivion, little he knew was to be apprehended. In this state of intellectual abstraction she was easily removed to a Convent in the neighbourhood, the Abbess of which was entirely in his interest, and had previously been prepared for incidents of a similar description long before Stella arrived in the vicinity: that holy lady happened indeed to be the very person with whom Mr. Ross had agreed, should such a circumstance ever occur, to receive any improper object of his son’s (as he might suppose) permanent selection.

Unhappily for poor Stella, she proved the first female who was imagined to stand exactly in this predicament: of course, the first experiment made on the sincerity of the venerable Abbess fell to her personally to ascertain.

So undesirable a distinction would no doubt have willingly been dispensed with had any preceding intimation of the affair transpired, or even the liberty of choice awaited her acceptance; but neither of these advantages happened to make any part of the Nabob’s arrangement: and the astonishment of his unsuspecting victim, on the perfect restoration of her late dormant faculties, at finding herself in an unknown habitation, and in the presence of entire strangers, is scarcely to be conceived. Her situation, however, was soon explained as far as permission had been granted for that purpose; and she learned, with inexpressible horror, that the gloomy walls of her present abode were henceforth to become her prison, till such time as the person who commanded her destiny, judged proper to give other orders.

In vain did the terror-struck Stella implore to hear the name of her unprovoked, inexorable oppressor; the most tormenting taciturnity was invariably observed on this subject, and whatever could possibly lead to a knowledge thereof was cautiously withheld.

The looks of Mr. Ross on the fatal night of her removal frequently recurred to her memory; and sometimes her suspicions would light upon him as the author of her misfortune: but the idea was instantly checked as unjust and chimerical; for what offence, she asked herself, had she ever given him?—or why, if he disapproved of his lady’s predilection in her favour, should so strange a mode of proceeding be adopted to effect their separation, when the slightest intimation of his wishes would have accomplished it in a far less censurable manner? Mr. Ross, therefore, could certainly have nothing to do with the outrage committed against her. But was she convinced his daughter, Mrs. St. Vincent, was equally free from blame in the affair? Ah, no!—in that quarter alone must the storm that now nearly overwhelmed her, have engendered; for who on earth seemed to bear her any degree of enmity but the unreasonable, the capricious Mrs. St. Vincent?—And must she then remain immured for years, perhaps even for life, in her

present dreary abode—never more to see her beloved Mrs. Bertram—never, possibly, to hear again from the Hermitage—Mrs. Ross, Emma, the Adairs—Alas! alas!” continued the weeping Stella, wringing her hands in agony of despair, “what must be the dreadful feelings experienced by the guilty, when the innocent are thus condemned to such acute misery?—But can it indeed be possible that all communication with my friends in Scotland will be actually prohibited for the future?—No; I have undoubtedly misunderstood the mysterious hints of the cruel people with whom I am placed: I will therefore ascertain the matter immediately; to know the worst will at least prove some relief to my lacerated bosom.”

Such were the reflections which occupied the mind of Stella on the evening of her arrival; for, during several hours after that event took place, her ideas were too confused, her thoughts too much agitated, to comprehend clearly the change that had been effected in her situation.

Determined to learn the extent of her misfortune, in one quarter at least, she started from the hard bed on which she had thrown herself a few minutes before, and, no person being at the time in sight, rushed from her dreary apartment, without knowing whither to direct her steps after she left it.

A long gloomy gallery wound round this side of the building: she proceeded along it in the expectation that it would conduct her to some of the Community, by whose means an interview with the Lady Abbess (who had not hitherto become visible to her) might be obtained. After traversing it for a short period, it terminated on a staircase; this she descended, and speedily entered a vaulted passage, along which the beams of a setting sun directed her progress, as they darted through a few thinly scattered Gothic casements, of small dimensions, placed near the roof.

No single human being had yet met her view; and the solemn silence that reigned amid scenes so new and impressive, filled her mind with a sensation of awful temerity, to which, until this period, she had proved a stranger. At length the faint sounds of distant voices gradually broke the stillness by which she had been surrounded; and after listening to ascertain the direction from whence it proceeded, the lonely wanderer again commenced her route. She was not permitted to continue it much longer ere the same voices were perceived to become more distinct, and immediately a solemn funeral dirge was heard through the arched roof under which she trod.

Stella had never before heard any thing so strikingly mournful, so sweet, so soft, yet so well calculated to speak energetically to the feelings: hers became insensibly and acutely affected, and her tears flowed in unison with the sad, yet not displeasing sensation now experienced. Little time, however, was permitted for this melancholy indulgence: the pale glimmering of torches began to appear at intervals on various projections of the walls—approaching footsteps were heard—and Stella trembled with increasing violence, lest the proceeding she had adopted might be considered as dictated by the instigations of an impertinent and unpardonable curiosity, such as would incur the displeasure of the Abbess, and consequently render the object of her present pursuit abortive.

Terrified by an idea so inimical to her design, she now became suddenly as solicitous to avoid, as she had recently been anxious to meet with the Abbess: hastily turning, therefore, to the first opening that appeared most favourable for the purpose of concealment, she softly entered it. The extent of this place could not be discovered; for either no ray of light any longer darted from the heavens, or else the walls altogether shut out the sun's beams; and from the glare of the torches little appeared to be apprehended. If distance were to be ascertained by sounds, a

considerable space intervened between those from whom they proceeded and herself; and concluding the danger of discovery apparently eluded, she seated herself on something like a small stone bench, and waited in silent agitation the result of her anxiety.

The moments of suspense were not of long continuance: a door was suddenly thrown open in a distant quarter of her retreat; approaching lights again gleamed on her view, and several people, sad, silent, and slow in their movements, advanced to the threshold.

Stella started from her seat, and stole hastily behind an immense pillar, rows of which, by degrees, became visible in the vast extent of her now better seen abode, as the torch-bearers, with downcast eyes and measured steps, preceded a long train of Nuns, who, enveloped in thick and flowing veils, each holding a small crucifix in her left hand, soon after entered.

The whole procession took a winding course round a particular part of the floor, chanting the funeral service for the dead as they glided along. At length they gradually stopped, and the light becoming stationary, she saw a new-made grave, in which a coffin was deposited with impressive solemnity. Another hymn rose in plaintive cadence, and as the vocal harmony ascended, the procession again moved slowly round the receptacle of the silent dead, discovering at intervals to the view of the shuddering Stella that what she had before taken for ruinous stones and rubbish, was, in fact, nothing less than mouldering tombs and humble monuments, simply erected to the memory of departed members of the Community: it proved indeed to be their common burial-place; and she soon perceived that her late seat was a tombstone. This conviction thrilled through her veins with a cold, chilling sensation hitherto unexperienced, and which increased to a painful height as she heard the first shovel of earth sound hollow on the coffin. At every affecting pause of the singers this noise was repeated, till the grave could contain no more; and gladly, most gladly, would our poor agitated heroine have ventured from her concealment to follow the retiring mourners, when the ceremony finished, and they began to depart, had not the recollection she was a stranger and a Protestant restrained her steps. She knew, or at least had been told so, that there were Orders of religious Communities in that part of the kingdom who never permitted any of the latter description to be present on occasions of this kind:—those with whom her lot seemed now cast, might possibly be of the number: at any rate, her spirits were too low at this juncture to risk an experiment that might subject her to an accumulation of ill usage she was but very inadequate to support; and though every succeeding apprehension arose almost to agony at the probable chance of being left behind and alone in such a situation, a situation from the horrors of which she knew not how to extricate herself, as darkness would pervade every corner of her gloomy retreat on the instant disappearance of the last torch-bearer, and, of course, throw next to insurmountable difficulties on her attempts for emancipation; yet, nevertheless, she dared not, or indeed could not, move from the spot, for the more active faculties of her mind became torpid, and her trembling limbs seemed equally incompetent to any immediate exertion. At length she sunk on the pedestal of the pillar, as the rusty closing hinges of the iron door grated upon her ears, while the motionless tongue clove to the roof of a parched and burning mouth, utterly refusing to assist her by emitting the smallest sound in this trying and dreadful emergency.

How long she remained in this condition is uncertain; but a faint noise that proceeded from the same quarter of the vault, first roused her attention from its seeming state of oblivion. A light, feeble and unsteady, once more gleamed around; but it was of too indistinct a nature to render the cause that produced it for some time visible. At last two figures in long flowing robes, one of them bearing a lamp, gradually approached, and having reached the newly-covered grave, prostrated themselves upon it. She who appeared the taller seemed most overwhelmed with grief;

her sobs were sometimes audible; and then for a moment silence would again prevail.

“Alas!” thought the terrified Stella, “what is now to follow? If the spirits of the dead are permitted to revisit their earthly tabernacles, perhaps at this instant something more than mortal is before me:—but, on the contrary, should they prove terrestrial beings like myself—Oh gracious Providence! how the cheering idea vibrates on every fibre of my heart!”

Determined now to risk every thing, and even meet the displeasure of the Abbess, rather than endanger her own safety by losing this second and, possibly, only chance of effecting her liberation from the horrors that on all sides surrounded her, Stella raised herself a little higher, in order to obtain a better view of her unknown neighbours, and to endeavour, from their appearance, to discover what she might most likely have to hope or fear from their visit.

She who had carried the lamp had already quitted her recumbent posture, and having trimmed it, had resumed it from off an adjoining tombstone, where it had been set on their entrance. Her whole attention was now turned to her companion, to whom she seemed solicitous of administering every degree of consolation in her power. The grief of her fellow-mourner, however, was apparently too deep-rooted to benefit by any thing that could at present be said to compose her, and evidently baffled the friendly exertions of her more tranquil comforter. She spoke not, indeed; but deep and heart-rending sighs sufficiently indicated the painful extent of her feelings; and, in spite of every entreaty to change her posture, she continued stretched on the cold, damp earth, that marked the newly-closed and final habitation of the person so bitterly deplored.

At length she was prevailed upon, but not without great difficulty, to rise, and move from the gloomy confines of this extensive and dreary abode, leaning on the arm of her friend: weeping, languid, and sad, she cast a farewell look of unutterable woe on the sacred spot thus reluctantly quitted, and then slowly proceeded forward.

Stella started at the recollection of what must succeed their departure: she no longer apprehended there was any thing supernatural in the appearances before her, and, determined to know her fate, with all the strength she could muster, was going to rush after them, and throw herself upon their mercy, when, after whispering each other in a low accent, and keeping their eyes fixed for some time on the gate by which they entered, the two strangers turned back, and apparently approached the place of her concealment.

The palpitation of her heart increased with the increasing sound of their foot-steps: the possible chance of deliverance, now perhaps within immediate attainment, caused every vein to throb, and produced an emotion so extremely violent, that she feared her senses would again desert her, and by that means render her destiny inevitable, for it did not appear likely another incident of a similar kind would speedily occur to avert the certain evils which otherwise awaited her.

The veil of her who seemed the principal mourner had been thrown back, in order, possibly, to afford more free respiration; that of her companion was likewise partially removed; and the reflection of the lamp displayed two countenances in the softened lineaments of which our heroine conceived she saw sufficient to encourage her to accost them. The features of the former were indeed truly lovely, and the powerful inclination that stimulated an address to her humanity, gained additional strength every moment: still, however, some unaccountable sensation restrained her tongue from a free exercise of its powers, and she continued to watch their motions with the deepest attention. The light now advanced so near, that longer to hesitate was only rendering the chance of alarming them by her too sudden appearance more probable, and, perhaps in that event, hastening their departure with a degree of precipitancy which, in her

present debilitated state, might make every subsequent attempt to overtake them ineffectual. Terrified, therefore, by the fearful prospect of further delay, she quitted her hiding-place to put the momentous design, so long projected, in execution; but either her extreme agitation deprived her of the necessary portion of attention, or else her trembling limbs ill seconded the mental solicitude produced by the occasion, for, just when they came opposite the place where she had concealed herself, as she tottered forward to meet them, her foot struck upon a stone—she stumbled and, uttering a deep groan, fell prostrate before them.

CHAP. VI.

“Amazement and illusion!
“Rivet and nail me where I stand, ye Powers,
“That motionless I may observe her well!”
CONGREVE.

PANIC-STRUCK by an accident so strange and unexpected, the two females shrieked, and in the first start of surprise the lamp fell from the hand of her who bore it, and the light was instantly extinguished.

For some moments terror rooted their steps to the spot; but a second and more hollow groan from Stella recalled their wandering senses to the nature of their present situation; and better acquainted with the private entry than our poor unfortunate heroine, they endeavoured to reach it with the most sedulous anxiety.

Two minutes more would have accomplished this intention, had not the faintly murmured prayer for mercy and assistance which Stella now found means to utter, once more arrested their progress. The person whose grief seemed most acute immediately stopped, to listen from whence the low-breathed accents issued.—“It is the spirit of my beloved, my lamented sister!” said she: “Magdaline, I will not yet depart: her unembodied form certainly crossed our path—yes, her soft voice still vibrates on my ear! Fear not, Magdaline; she was as good as beautiful, and comes not to harm, but comfort this half-broken heart!”

Magdaline, however, felt far more disposed to retire than remain; but her companion refusing to accompany her, she could not prevail on herself to leave her alone, and agonized with a thousand distressing conjectures, in such a frightful situation.

At this awful crisis, when their succeeding motions were yet uncertain, a spark, feebly glimmering near the spot where the lamp still lay, caught their notice, and a faint ray of hope cheered their minds with the idea it might perhaps be yet possible to remedy the recent loss of its assistance.

A circumstance, however, now interfered to render its recovery a far more arduous undertaking than at first was imagined. By what means could the possession of the lamp be attained?—it fell near the unknown object of their alarm; and in the attempt to regain it, something might possibly again happen to deprive them of their remaining senses, and perhaps drive them to a state of permanent insanity. Even the sister of the deceased felt her courage begin to flag, as repeated groans, intermingled with broken, unintelligible sentences, escaped the half-fainting cause of their perturbation; and before any future mode of proceeding could be fully determined upon, the feeble spark of light suddenly became extinct, leaving them once more enveloped in utter darkness.

Prior to this circumstance, Stella had contrived to regain her feet; and, aided by her vicinity to the then unextinguished, but weak assistance afforded by the expiring lamp, a transient view of the fugitives was unexpectedly caught, and again she endeavoured to reach them; but her exertions for the purpose were attended with great difficulty. At length, however, this long-desired point seemed nearly accomplished; for the moonbeams that now shone through a small opening, a little beyond where they stood still, trembling, and irresolute, gave her a second glimpse of their figures, without affording them a like advantage in regard to her: she therefore crept on with renovated spirits, and her agitation continuing to increase as the object of

attainment appeared to become more practicable, she was going to pause for a moment until the palpitation of her heart should prove less ungovernable, and had almost stationed herself in a position, from whence she conceived it possible to follow them, should they suddenly depart, when the female hitherto addressed by the name of Magdaline, whose attention was now attracted by the loud and quick breathing of our poor heroine, turned abruptly round; and the light of the moon falling by her change of posture on the white dress of the latter, she uttered a piercing scream, expressive of extreme terror; and seizing the arm of her now equally alarmed companion, they rushed through the private entrance by which she had been admitted; and, in spite of her efforts to follow them, every trace of their steps soon escaped her vigilance amidst the complicated windings of the building.

Finding it at last no longer possible to continue the pursuit, and convinced that, though she had left the vault by the very door which first conducted her to the interior of that gloomy abode, the passage she happened now to be in was by no means the same through which she had then passed, the poor bewildered girl knew not on which side to turn herself: an oppressive sickness suddenly came over her heart, her senses gradually fled, her eyes again closed, and total oblivion once more resumed its reign over the mind of the harassed and worn-out Stella.

When the restoration of her exhausted faculties once more took place, our heroine found herself on her own bed, in the little cell to which she had been conducted on her arrival at the Convent, and attended by two of the Lay-Sisters.

This happy circumstance appeared so inexplicable, that at first she could scarcely believe it possible, and for some time conceived the whole an illusion of the mind; but before the expiration of another hour, the fact was fully ascertained: and one of the females having retired, the other, who proved to be Magdaline, acceded to her earnest entreaties for an explanation, and she was indulged with a relation of the following particulars.

At the period when Stella quitted her little apartment in order to procure an interview with the Lady Abbess, the Sisterhood happened to be in the Church belonging to the Community, attending the performance of the last service for a departed member of the society, who was to be interred immediately after the usual religious ceremonies observed on such occasions were concluded. This circumstance accounted for the silent and solitary progress of our heroine, the house being at the time totally deserted by all who occupied that particular quarter through which she had wandered.

The abovementioned place of general worship stood at some distance, on the opposite side of a large extensive court, surrounded by high and gloomy walls of an immense thickness. The burial-place lay on the left hand, between the Church and the Monastery, from each of which long vaulted passages led to it. The principal entrance was never opened but for the reception of the dead, who were admitted in this direction immediately on the accompanying procession quitting the Church. The private door was seldom locked, as it could only be used by those who wished to pour forth their petitions to Heaven for the repose of some deceased friend's or companion's soul, whose tomb they commonly visited for that purpose; while the larger gate, on the contrary, served for a greater range than was judged either safe or necessary for the unconditional accommodation of the Sisterhood. Had Stella pursued the first path she entered, it would ultimately have conducted her steps to the Church: by turning too soon into another, she landed in the place already described, where her subsequent difficulties and distresses might have proved of a very serious nature, had not the opportune piety of the two Nuns eventually brought them to a more fortunate termination.

On retiring with the rest of the Community from the last receptacle of mortality,

Magdaline perceived the stupendous iron gate was left unlocked from some circumstance with which she was unacquainted; and knowing the ardent inclination of the weeping Juliana to revisit more privately the remains of a beloved relative, though apparently too much enfeebled by excessive grief to bear the fatigue of returning by the other way, which, in their then quarter of the building required a long circling course to attain, she felt rejoiced at the discovery; and solicitous to profit by it, softly whispered the result of her observation to her friend, and they agreed to seize the earliest opportunity of quitting their companions and effecting their design. This was not difficult to accomplish, for the order of a regular procession was no longer observed; but, on wishing to retire in the same direction, from the idea that it would render their absence less liable to notice, as it was unauthorized by the Abbess's permission, the imaginary sound of approaching steps deterred them, and they proceeded to the other side of the extensive fabric. What followed their final retreat has already been related.

The fugitive Nuns, on entering an inhabited quarter of the Convent, met two of the Sisterhood retiring to their cells, to whom they recounted the recent adventure in the vaults; and their humanity being strengthened by an acquisition of numbers, it was ultimately agreed on to repair again to the burial-place with all possible celerity, and investigate the real cause of alarm.

It was not, however, found necessary to extend their progress quite so far as the burying-ground; for Stella, in the interim, attracted their notice. They quickly perceived nothing was now to be feared from supernatural agency; and finding their efforts to recover her at present ineffectual, she was at length borne to her own little apartment.

Stella, as well as her spirits and strength would admit, poured forth a thousand acknowledgments, after the Nun had ceased speaking, for the very critical assistance afforded her in the late distressing emergency; and overcome by fatigue and the complicated sufferings experienced through the course of this eventful day, she fell into a profound sleep, which produced a beneficial effect on her languid frame; for she awoke considerably refreshed in mind and body just as the Sisterhood were returning from their midnight vespers.

Too much afflicted by the recent loss of the deceased to wish for the society of a stranger, Juliana merely enquired after the state of our heroine's health as she passed her door, and then retired to her solitary cell at the other end of the gallery.

Not so Magdaline:—she stole softly back to Stella, after having apparently left her for the night, and again entered into conversation with the unfortunate prisoner; who now learned many circumstances necessary to be known in her present situation, as to the various forms observed by the Community, the different regulations to be complied with by all new comers, the temper of the Abbess, which was represented as remarkably stern and austere, with a long train of particulars too tedious to enumerate; but not one item of information could she receive relative to her own affairs. Magdaline appeared, and indeed was, totally unacquainted with every event that had befallen her previous to the affair from whence she had lately been extricated: neither was her friend Juliana, had she been with them, better qualified to remedy this defect; for they happened to be ignorant of her very appearance in the Convent before the preceding incident introduced her to their knowledge in a manner so unexpected; though one of the Lay-Sisters who assisted them in the task of discovery, immediately recognised her for the young woman whose arrival she had accidentally witnessed when it first took place.

In the course of Magdaline's low-whispered intelligence, many circumstances transpired which served to impress the harassed mind of her conscious auditor with increasing sensation of terror for the tyrannical and unfeeling disposition of the Lady Abbess, whose character appeared of a most forbidding kind. To remain in her present state of doubt and uncertainty as to the future

arrangement of her destiny, was, however, in the opinion of Stella, too insupportable to acquiesce in without a single effort to lessen the corroding burthen of suspense; and, in spite of all that had been said to intimidate her from the attempt, she resolved to bring the matter to an issue, by requesting an interview with the dreaded Lady Abbess on the ensuing morning.

The communicative Lay-Sister at length bade her good night, and retired to the cell of the disconsolate Juliana, who, she informed Stella, had enjoined her to relate what passed between them, as likewise the situation of our heroine's health at the period of their separation.

CHAP. VII.

“Sweet are the slumbers of the virtuous man!
“A kind refreshing sleep is fall’n upon him:
“I saw him stretch’d at ease, his fancy lost
“In pleasing dreams;—as I drew near his couch,
“He smil’d, and cry’d—‘Caesar, thou can’st not hurt me!’”

CATO.

THE oppressed and unhappy, if innocence smooth their pillow, seldom fail to benefit by the soothing influence of balmy sleep; while the couch of prosperous guilt, strewn with its thousand torments, and composed of thorns instead of down, admits not of the coveted visitor. The slumbers of Stella were of the former description; and her eyes had not yet opened on the broad glare of day when Juliana entered her room, and advancing to her humble pallet, stood silently gazing upon the yet pallid, but beautiful features before her.

The mind of Stella seemed occupied on scenes of a retrospective nature; and as she faintly murmured the name of Mrs. St. Vincent, a soft smile of conscious mental superiority sported in the dimples which adorned her lovely cheeks, and shed a mild ray of chastened resignation over her whole countenance.

The musing Nun felt her affections inconceivably attracted, and gradually experienced a degree of interest for the sleeping Stella, which, on reflection, surprised her, as their knowledge of each other as yet amounted to nothing; but the train of ideas that occupied her mind was speedily interrupted, for the subject of them suddenly awoke: and her visitor, after apologizing for an intrusion which she feared had shortened the period of her repose, expressed her unfeigned satisfaction to learn that the degree of it already enjoyed had proved so refreshing and salutary as our heroine assured her was the case.

Juliana now summoned Magdaline to procure their new acquaintance some breakfast; and the humble meal was no sooner finished, than the latter declared her intention of requesting an immediate interview with the Lady Abbess.

“Alas!” said the pensive Nun, deeply sighing as she spoke, “this is a step, Mademoiselle, I would by no means advise you to take. Our holy Mother is at present confined to her own apartment with a complaint to which she has for some time past been occasionally liable; and during its continuance her temper, soured by illness, and naturally none of the best even when in health, is particularly severe: I fear too, she is by this time acquainted with the incident that befel you last night, for several of the Community are more solicitous to procure her favour, than scrupulous about the means adopted for its attainment. Should my suspicions on this head happen to be verified, believe me, Mademoiselle, you had far better relinquish your design; for our Abbess is not over indulgent to heretics in general, and would never pardon your witnessing the melancholy ceremony of my poor sister’s interment, as she has long decidedly prohibited all that come to the house of your persuasion from mingling with those of our’s on every similar or solemn event of a religious description. Do not therefore, I beseech you, rush thus forewarned, into danger: suspend your intention until I can ascertain the extent of what is to be apprehended on your account; and depend upon my exertions to serve you if possible.”

Stella felt the utmost reluctance to acquiesce in this proposal: protracted ignorance relative to the nature of her future destiny, appeared accumulated misery in her present situation:

she confined her thoughts, nevertheless, to her own breast; and having returned her acknowledgments for the friendly interest evinced for her welfare, she made a merit of necessity, and finally yielded to the remonstrances of her young adviser.

The succeeding hour which they spent in each others society apparently increased their inclination for a repetition of the same gratification; and, before they parted, it was mutually agreed to seize every opportunity that offered for a renewal of the like interviews.

Juliana, though in fact younger than our heroine, appeared notwithstanding her senior by a year or two at least. This circumstance probably originated in some secret cause of discontent which preyed upon her mind (for she did not seem happy), no less than in her style of dress and serious turn of character, without using any uncommon exertion to attain the distinction. She happened to enjoy the good opinion of the Abbess in a particular degree; and, on this account, was frequently intrusted to superintend the arrangements made for those who entered the Convent, either as boarders or for education; a circumstance extremely favourable to the reciprocal wishes of herself and Stella, as it rendered the communication between them infinitely more easy of attainment than could otherwise have been the case. In other respects, the partiality of the Abbess did not seem a matter of that consequence to the lovely recluse that might have been imagined from the visible avidity displayed by many of the Sisterhood to procure it. Juliana was apparently of a retired disposition, and rather appeared solicitous to avoid, than attract observation.

In the evening she returned again to the cell of the disconsolate Stella, and informed her that her suspicions, she flattered herself, were groundless, as every experiment, which could be attempted with safety, had been made to sound the Lady Abbess on the score of her supposed knowledge relative to the late adventure of our heroine; but she appeared totally unacquainted with the whole transaction.—“I am sorry, however,” added Juliana, “to say that orders have been issued to pay the strictest attention to all your movements, and particularly to preclude you from the use of writing materials of every description. These directions, I fear, will be strictly executed: endeavour therefore to exert your fortitude on the occasion; and of one thing be ever assured, that in me you have a faithful and steady friend, who will, to the limited extent of her power, serve and console you, whatever happens.”

The heart of Stella, in spite of this kind assurance, sunk at the very gloomy prospect these words brought before her view. Perpetual confinement, something seemed to whisper, was henceforth to be her allotted portion; and that her old irreconcilable enemy, Mrs. St. Vincent, was at the bottom of this cruel sentence, she remained fully convinced of. To be permitted to hear occasionally from the Hermitage might safely however, be allowed, she thought, though writing to every quarter of the globe was forbidden; such a gratification seemed necessary to restore a small degree of that peace of mind now so unaccountably broken in upon, and could not possibly interfere with the nefarious plans of her inhuman oppressors, since no answer from her could reach the dear inhabitant of that far distant and much-loved abode. The idea of the sufferings Mrs. Ross and Emma would experience on her procrastinated absence, proved another source of anguish; though at times a small ray of hope would illumine her desponding bosom, from the fondly-cherished idea that her fate would not remain uninvestigated by her late protector and her warm-hearted daughter.

“No longer, however,” said she, suddenly breaking a silence of several minutes’ duration, and speaking in a resolute tone; “no longer shall my former intention be delayed.—I will instantly see the Lady Abbess, and know the real evils henceforth to be apprehended. Conduct me then, Mademoiselle, to her presence!—my determination on this subject is fixed and

unalterable.”

Juliana again expostulated; but every argument she could urge against the execution of this favourite scheme, proved ineffectual for its prevention: and though strongly prepossessed with a prophetic conviction of its unsuccessful termination, she at length preceded her, in silence, to the apartment of the Lady Abbess.

At the door her conductor resigned her to the care of a Lay-Sister, and ejaculating a mental petition for the attainment of our heroine’s wishes, suddenly hurried back to her own little chamber.

The Lay-Sister was no sooner informed of her request, than she left her abruptly to know the Lady Abbess’s pleasure.

Some minutes elapsed before she re-appeared; after which Stella was desired to follow her.

A heavy door, that grated on its hinges, was now thrown open, and our heroine ushered into the presence of a diminutive looking woman, wrapped up in flannel, and seated in a large old-fashioned chair, with a table placed before her, on which stood a crucifix, and near it a book of devotions. Her countenance, though sickly and wrinkled, bore evident marks of a haughty disposition: her eyes seemed to have a suspicious malignant cast; and the *tout-ensemble* of the whole figure was so completely repelling, that Stella, almost at the first glance, was tempted to wish she had paid more respect to the opinion of her young companion. It was, however, now too late to retract; and therefore summoning all her remaining fortitude into action, she proceeded to state her case, to request to learn the name of the person who had ventured thus to dispose of her; and finally desired to know whether or not she was to be permitted to keep up any degree of epistolary correspondence with her friends at the Hermitage.

The Abbess coolly eyed her while she spoke, nor once shewed the smallest inclination to interrupt her. A pause of considerable length ensued without any answer being returned; and Stella thinking her interrogatories not properly understood, ventured to repeat them.

The Abbess taking a pinch of snuff, replied, with a contemptuous smile, that she knew neither the Hermitage nor its inhabitants; and as she permitted no communication whatever with distant heretics, whose principles were her detestation at all times, and whose particular character in the present instance was utterly unknown to her, Stella must take the unavoidable consequence of her disobedience, should this order happen to be infringed.—“In regard to your other questions,” added the Abbess, in an accent of visible displeasure, accompanied by a stern severity of manner that made Stella tremble, “I am too little accustomed to be interrogated by my inferiors, to grant the requested satisfaction; and I cannot help wondering at your temerity in hazarding the experiment. Those who committed you to my care had, no doubt, sufficient reason to authorize the step: their confidence shall not be misplaced; I will prove faithful to the trust reposed in me. Retire therefore—rest contented with what I have said, and presume not again to appear in my presence, unsanctioned by a previous command for the purpose. The walls of that enclosure there” pointing with her finger to the window, “must be the extent of your limited excursion: should I find you attempt to exceed the prescribed boundary, even that indulgence is no longer granted. Our Daughter Beatrix knows my pleasure on this topic, and I am convinced will see it executed with punctual exactness and fidelity. Go—retire! I have nothing further to say to you.”

“But, Madam,” said Stella, with a quivering lip and imploring eye, “is no letter permitted to reach me from Scotland?—Mrs. Ross—my dear Emma—Oh Madam!—”

“Begone!” cried the inexorable Abbess, in a voice of fury; “dare you presume to

controvert my arrangements? Mrs. Ross and her daughter! they disown you: does not their visible indifference to your present destination sufficiently prove their total and merited estrangement?—Quit this room instantly—retire to your own, learn obedience, and endeavour to expiate former errors by succeeding contrition!”

Stella saw the danger and inutility of further perseverance, and, drowned in the bitter tears of disappointment, slowly returned to her chamber; which having entered, she threw herself upon the bed, where her bursting heart was allowed for some time to vent its feelings free from restraint or observation.

Though too much agitated to recollect the whole of the Abbess’s words relative to Mrs. Ross and Emma’s imputed neglect, enough of the distressing sentence remained impressed on her tortured memory to convince her, in conjunction with other circumstances, that she had no longer any reason to hope for their interference in her favour. Why such a defalcation from their former behaviour should have taken place, she knew not; for no explanatory cause could be drawn from any part of her own conduct, to elucidate the motives of theirs on the present occasion. It appeared but too evident, however, that her destiny had ceased to interest them; other wise, through the influence they necessarily derived from their superior station and riches, her retreat must indubitably have been discovered.

Stella reasoned more from her feelings than the cooler dictates of reflection: had she attended to the latter, they would have told her that the influence of monastic power was in this country paramount to any other whatever; and disposed of the luckless victims consigned to its care as best suited the particular nature of its own views, without troubling itself about the little trifling articles of right or wrong, of moral rectitude or moral depravity, beyond the narrow but prudential limits of individual consideration, whether taken *in toto* as a community, or a single unconnected body.

CHAP. VIII.

“How happy is the blameless Vestal’s lot!
“The world forgetting, by the world forgot;
“Labour and rest that equal periods keep;
“Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep;
“Desires compos’d, affections ever even;
“Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to heaven.”

POPE.

JULIANA was not much surprised when Stella related the result of her conference with the Abbess, which, with a heavy heart, she had an opportunity of doing soon after she returned to her gloomy apartment, where her new friend, in the course of the succeeding hour, joined her.

Day succeeded day in the same dreary, monotonous manner, unvaried by the smallest change, or the most distant ray of hope: every avenue to the latter seemed eternally closed on earth to our heroine, whose repeated exertions to procure some intelligence of Mrs. Ross and her family proved continually unsuccessful, as did likewise those yet more eagerly attempted for the purpose of hearing from Scotland; for, though she had found means to get one or two letters privately sent off to her beloved Mrs. Bertram, no answer in return ever reached her; and perpetual disappointment at length teaching her the vanity of expectation, she concluded herself no longer remembered beyond the walls of her present prison, to which limited space it seemed now become necessary to confine all her future prospects in this life.

“I have been from my birth an outcast from society!” sighed she to herself, as she sat one evening musing over various incidents which had befallen her. “Before this once unlooked-for termination to my sad fate, the ties of humanity (I may add charity likewise) alone bound me to the world, where, unconnected and forlorn, I possessed no claim to a natural protector! From that world I seem at last to be thrown for ever.—Well, what then?—suppose it is so, I have no right to complain, because not a single being whatsoever is interested in my weal or woe; and consequently none can in that case be stigmatized for a failure, where no duty could be infringed on account of the unacknowledged and finally forgotten Stella.”

This train of thought was too bitter to be pursued without experiencing the most acute anguish; and for several weeks after the heart-rending conviction of her friendless, desolate condition, and the futility of all succeeding expectation became fully ascertained, a slow fever preyed upon her spirits, her health gradually declined, and she was in the end necessitated to keep her bed for a considerable time, during the greater part of which Juliana seldom quitted her pillow, unless to attend the unavoidable duties attached to her situation.

Happily for them both, Beatrix, to whom the ostensible charge of our heroine had been consigned by the proud and unfeeling Abbess, was of a very different disposition from the latter; for, though of a character to justify the confidence reposed in her, and impenetrable to every degree of corruption, or any attempt to make her deviate from the smallest item of what she conceived a duty, that duty was never carried beyond the verge of humanity, nor a fellow-creature intrusted to her care suffered to experience the least uneasiness in her power to avert without trenching on the sacred nature of the offices, she had undertaken to perform.

Stella had the particularly good fortune to please this worthy woman on her first arrival; and through her means enjoyed several little indulgencies, to which, in other circumstances, she

would probably have been a stranger. Youth, with a good constitution, in conjunction with the above advantages, triumphed in time over the nature of her indisposition; and, what was yet of greater importance, the leisure afforded for reflection on the necessity of submission to irremediable evils (a lesson likewise continually inculcated by her friendly companions) insensibly soothed her mind, if not to a state of perfect contentment, at least to one of comparative ease.

Stella alive in every condition of life to the warm impulse of gratitude, conceived the large demands now made upon it required something more than mere words to display its extent; and, under this impression, endeavoured to render herself as useful as possible to Beatrix, by paying the most unremitting attention to the execution of every little piece of service the good Nun intrusted to her management.

This was one of the wisest resolutions she had ever formed, and finally proved its own reward; for mental inertness always increases the existing evil; whereas a contrary mode of proceeding, by keeping the mind and body in constant employment, detaches the former from the influence of corroding reflections, and strengthens the latter, by calling the active propensities of our nature into play.

Had Major St. Vincent remained unmarried, our heroine might not perhaps have found the task of conformity and resignation quite so easy: but a fatal bar was for ever placed between them; and he, like the rest of the world, could apparently be no longer any thing to her. This circumstance, so often secretly deplored in the course of other days, now presented a much altered aspect, and served to make her still more indifferent as to the future termination of her fate: nay, at times, it almost reconciled her to what had happened; for where hope was in every quarter extinct, disappointment could not again reach her. This proved indeed the philosophy of necessity; but if it acted so as to assimilate the mind to its allotted station, the effects it produced were certainly of a more efficacious description than the generality of those usually emanating from sources of a far different kind.

Though a considerable proficient in the French language, and able to read and speak it with ease, Stella still preferred that of her native land to any other in which to convey her sentiments. It was not therefore without sensations of infinite pleasure, that she discovered Juliana was able to converse with her in English: this gratification, however, she was not permitted to enjoy till several weeks had elapsed after her arrival, when a very unforeseen accident procured her the information.

It may be remembered that a considerable part of her most valuable personal property had been removed with herself from the habitation of the Nabob. Stella, too much dispirited and indisposed to pay much attention to its arrangement in her new abode, had allowed the greater portion of it to remain in the state it was then in, without troubling herself to look it over. Hitherto the quarter of the globe from whence she came had never transpired, as she continually spoke French, and Juliana did the same, neither of them supposing the other acquainted with any other language in which to communicate their sentiments: no suspicion of the truth in this respect was therefore harboured on the occasion: but the veil of ignorance was soon to be rent asunder; and the two friends, by the sympathy produced from succeeding events, yet more endeared to each other.

Finding herself one day more than usually inclined to substitute order for confusion, Stella set about the task of replacing her things in the best manner the limited nature of her few accommodations would admit. The ruffians by whom she had been conveyed to the Convent, had thrown her clothes and the other little articles she possessed into a large trunk just in the

same confused manner in which they were hurried from the drawers that contained them in the chamber she then occupied: to effect a thorough reform, it therefore became necessary to empty the whole contents on the floor, from whence they could be taken in the succession that best suited their future destination and her convenience.

In the midst of this employment, Juliana entered, but was instantly retiring again upon perceiving our heroine's present occupation, when the latter requested her visitor to return and be seated. This invitation was accepted, and Stella continued the business she was previously engaged in.

"I will thank you for that small parcel, Mademoiselle," said she, pointing to something wrapped in a piece of paper that lay on a chair near the one in which the Nun was placed.

Juliana immediately took it up; but the paper happened to be loose, and the article it contained slipping from it, dropped upon the floor. The force with which it fell burst open the spring of a shagreen case; and the small miniature so frequently commemorated, caught the eye of the recluse as she stooped to lift it up.

A circumstance nearly similar had formerly made a like discovery to Captain Montague. The present incident brought the preceding one forcibly to remembrance; and Stella, overcome by the numerous recollections that speedily followed, rested her head on the corner of a table by which she happened to be kneeling on the floor, and became suddenly so absorbed in thought that she observed not at first the new and unaccountable emotion of her companion, whose whole attention seemed rivetted on the inanimate object before her.

CHAP. IX.

“Though now through Fate’s dark path we devious stray,
“Maturing time shall smooth the wand’ers way.”

“WHAT do I see?” cried the Nun, in a voice of surprise; then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she added with an air of more composure, “this is your own picture I presume, Mademoiselle?”

“No,” replied Stella, starting from her reverie, “it is not.”

“No!” repeated Juliana, with increasing emotion; “the resemblance is so amazingly striking, I could not have supposed myself mistaken.”

“It is not mine, however.”

“I ask your pardon then; the likeness misled me: but the same idea has, probably, ere now, produced the same conclusion?”

“It has,” answered Stella: “nevertheless, such accidental circumstances frequently occur without the appearance of any previous cause.”

Juliana seemed by no means satisfied with this reply; and after regarding Stella and the miniature alternately, again renewed the subject, by enquiring if it was not designed for some near relation.

“It may perhaps be,” she added, in a tremulous, hesitating tone, while her late pallid cheeks became heightened to the deepest shade of crimson, “it may perhaps be intended for a parent’s—a—mother’s portrait!”

“Alas!” sighed Stella, “I never had the happiness to be acknowledged by——” maternal tenderness, she would have said, but here articulation failed her; and again reclining her face on the side of the table, she permitted the tear to flow that painful recollection had already swelled to the verge of its last boundary.

Juliana was evidently no less affected by the influence of some sad and oppressive remembrance. At length, however, she rose, and approaching Stella, solemnly adjured her to say by what title, if not a filial one, that picture became her property.

“First tell me,” returned our heroine, raising her swimming eyes with astonishment to the speaker, “first tell me from what motive this interrogatory originates; why is the enquiry made?”

“Because,” replied the other, in extreme agitation, “because she whom that painting indubitably represents, was——my mother!”

“Oh God of heaven and earth!” exclaimed Stella, abruptly, “can it be possible!—But, no,” she continued, after a temporary pause; “she whom I have reason to believe the original of that miniature was not a Frenchwoman, consequently could not be your mother.”

“The imaginary objection instantly ceases,” said Juliana, with quickness, “when I tell you my unfortunate parents were of English extraction.”

“Indeed!” cried Stella, with a look expressive of agreeable surprise; “I knew not I was so happy as to have the daughter of a countrywoman for my friend in this dreary abode.”

“Your countrywoman! are you likewise from Great Britain, Mademoiselle?”

“I am,” again sighed Stella; “and flatter myself the discovery will not lessen the reciprocal regard already entertained for each other.”

On this topic, Juliana’s sentiments entirely coincided with her own. The picture, however, seemed still to be uppermost in her thoughts; and again she reverted to it, by once more requesting to know how Stella came to obtain possession of it.

“It is now upwards of seventeen years since it was accidentally left in a house I afterwards inhabited near Port Patrick, in Scotland, by a gentleman and lady who lodged there a short time after their arrival from Ireland; the dear mistress of which house, having vainly endeavoured to discover the legal owner, finally gave it to me from the circumstance of that very resemblance you mention.”

“Exactly about that period,” said the Nun, trembling excessively, “I have been told my mother lay in near, or at the very place you specify. No living child, however, saw the light, I believe: and the departure of her and my father was accelerated by a very unexpected incident, and indeed which had nearly endangered her recovery in the then precarious state of her health; but which, in short, rendered a precipitate retreat immediately necessary.”

“Go on, my dear Juliana!” said Stella, observing she paused at the conclusion of the above sentence; “I am all ear, and most anxious to learn the residue of your intelligence. Why was the departure of your parents thus critically accelerated?”

The poor Nun, however, after an ineffectual struggle with her feelings to proceed, at last burst into tears; and it was some time before she could recover sufficient composure to resume the conversation. At length she became more tranquil, and drying her eyes, with a look of mild resignation, calmly said, she would willingly gratify the curiosity of her auditor, who, as possessor of that picture, seemed to have a claim upon her confidence, which she found too irresistible to combat.

“But do not detest me, Mademoiselle,” she added, emphatically; “hate me not, I beseech you, for errors which commenced before I saw the face of day, for the conduct of my unhappy parents, which depended not on me either to prevent or to remedy!”

Again the fortitude of the fair recluse seemed fluctuating; but the seasonable kindness of our sympathizing heroine gradually reassured her, and rendered it once more stationary. After the lapse of a few minutes she resumed her discourse, and spoke as follows.

“You enquired, I think, what occasioned the abrupt departure of my parents from the coast of Scotland. Alas! suspicion is a constant attendant on error:—my mother, my unhappy mother,” continued Juliana, deeply blushing, “had, in the opinion of the world, forfeited all claim to propriety of conduct by flying from the arms of an acknowledged and respectable husband, to those of—yes, pardon your wretched daughter! the confession——my father——to those of a man who possessed not any legal title to such a distinction.

“At the period to which I allude, they were anxious to escape public notice; an apprehension of incurring which led them to quit Ireland, whither they had first fled in order to secrete themselves from discovery.

“One day as my mother’s confidential maid happened to be conversing with the landlord of an inn at Port Patrick, in Scotland, a stranger suddenly made his appearance, whom she instantly recognised for an intimate friend and near neighbour of my grandfather’s. Alarmed by the circumstance, and persuaded he came at the old gentleman’s request in pursuit of his daughter, she hastened home to their lodgings, and reported her suspicions: but, though these were afterwards found to have been groundless, the conviction of her mistake reached them not in due time to prevent the natural consequence of such information; and they once more became wanderers on the face of the earth.”

This part of the story Stella knew nothing about, though she already more than half suspected the lady in question was the identical mother of her friend Captain Montague, whose story she had formerly heard from the lips of that gentleman. Strongly prepossessed with this idea, and finding herself unaccountably interested on the occasion, she exerted all her energy to

obtain a more circumstantial detail of facts on which to ground the basis of her subsequent opinion; and at length prevailed upon her companion to grant her the requested gratification; a compliance that ultimately convinced her the conjecture previously formed was but too well founded.

In the course of the little narrative, which the agitated speaker related with inimitable grace, several leading incidents in Lady Montague's life appeared totally unknown to her daughter. Stella, however, learned that the fair historian, with a younger sister, whose funeral she had so unfortunately witnessed, was born in the South of France, not far distant from their present habitation; and being early destined by their father for a conventual life, the first stages of their education had commenced and been carried on under the inspection of the worthy Beatrix, with whom their parents were previously acquainted, owing to a circumstance no way connected with these pages, but which had enabled the father of the young ladies, soon after his first arrival in that quarter of the country, to render a very essential piece of service to the family of the Nun, who then resided in the neighbourhood: and this good office being ever gratefully remembered by Beatrix, had effectually secured her friendship and attention to the daughters of him she uniformly viewed in the light of a benefactor.

Early impressed with the notion that their destiny was unalterable, Juliana and her sister had insensibly brought their minds to acquiesce in the determinations of their father, and quietly submitted to a lot which his tyrannical and unhappy temper in the domestic circle made them consider as comparatively desirable.

A novitiate commenced and continued under similar ideas could not, of course, be supposed to present any thing very terrific to their imaginations: in fact, they calmly saw the hour for taking the veil approach; for hitherto no particular tie had bound them to the world, in which from an accidental discovery of their mother's real situation, little seemed to await them but contumely, mortification, and neglect.

Uncommonly attached to each other, they experienced a considerable degree of pleasure in the conviction they were no longer to be separated on earth; and one day saw them both become lasting members of the same Community. But human tranquillity was never intended to be permanent in any condition of life.—A young man, brother to one of the boarders, frequently appeared at the gate of the Convent, and became acquainted with Juliana, who now gradually discovered, though too late to profit by her accession of knowledge, that all the sensations incident to our nature, are not of a description to obey implicitly the dictates of reason, or even religion itself.

Heroically determined, however, to combat these sensations, and conform to the imperious necessity of existing circumstances, Juliana, though she could not entirely expel the enemy, kept him nevertheless at a proper distance: her peace, it was true, fell a sacrifice to the effort; but that it was yet in the power of time and reflection to restore; whereas one wrong step in her situation could never be retrieved. Her sister comforted, strengthened, and applauded her resolution to walk in the narrow path of rectitude: but that beloved sister was prematurely snatched from her bosom by an epidemical disorder which had proved fatal to one or two more in the Convent; and Juliana now groaned under the weight of a double misfortune, unsupported by the friendly and soothing voice of the dear girl who seemed to have had but one heart, one mind, and one interest with herself.

Fast flowed the tears of the poor Nun as she dwelt on this melancholy event, and not slowly were they accompanied by those of the compassionate Stella: she seemed, indeed, to be little less affected than Juliana herself, but curiosity prompted a greater degree of self-command;

for the conclusion of the distressing narrative was not yet accomplished, and she felt a most ardent desire to learn something farther of the parties concerned in it. But in regard to the latter part of her mother's situation and transactions, Juliana seemed equally ignorant with her auditor. Lady Montague had left the South of France soon after her daughters took the veil; and no intelligence whatever had since been obtained of her motions. It was easy, however, to perceive, that the strongest filial attachment was still experienced for this unfortunate parent; whose gentle temper, and many amiable qualities were of that description which took a powerful hold on the heart, although the cooler dictates of judgment could not but condemn the general tenor of a conduct so open to censure, so erroneous, and apparently so culpable. But the predilection of Juliana for her father seemed by no means so ardent, or of so sanguine a nature: and, in spite of her endeavours to conceal it, a thousand different expressions escaped her in the progress of her communication, which indubitably ascertained his disposition and turn of mind to be very different from that possessed by his ill-starred partner.

When the retrospective part of the subject was finished, the striking, but unaccountable resemblance so frequently observed to exist between Stella and the picture of Lady Montague, furnished ample field for surprise; and even conjecture itself was not altogether excluded; for there were moments when, yielding to the magic of imagination, our heroine gave the reins to Fancy, and took a wide range in the regions of possibilities, where she would gladly have traced the source of consanguinity, which the similitude of features seemed to say, in one degree or another, connected her with the family of Montague's mother: for, though many mortifying circumstances unavoidably attended such a discovery, still, in her present friendless state, the conviction that she belonged to some person—that on the extended face of the globe there were beings on whose nature she had a claim to look for support, for protection, should it yet so happen that future events rendered her back the power of requiring their assistance, were reflections which produced the most pleasing sensation, and shed a transient ray of satisfaction and delight over the dark shade of her apparent destiny: such a brother, such a friend as Captain Montague, to ward off the evils of life—to emancipate her from the gloomy prison in which she now languished—to restore her to her country, to the arms of her dear, dear Mrs. Bertram—Oh what ecstasy in the bare idea!

The mind of Stella, absorbed in contemplation so soothing, so congenial to her wishes, recollected not on these occasions the too evident impracticability of profiting by such a relationship, even had she really been entitled to claim it; and all remembrance of the former inutility of every attempt to make her situation known, or to receive in return any intelligence from Scotland, vanished before the ardent inclination she experienced, to consider herself as a link of the common chain by which the inhabitants of the world are, in general, more or less connected with each other.—It would not do, however: second thoughts perpetually intruded to destroy the mental illusion, and to convince the weeping girl that probability was her foe.

Lady Montague had certainly indeed landed at Port Patrick about the period that she herself was ushered into life; and it was no less ascertained as a fact, that the misguided woman had been delivered of a child shortly after her arrival in Galloway: but, alas! beyond this point nothing further appeared to authorize the suggestion, which thus at times recurred with the most tantalizing perseverance; for the infant, it was positively known, had been committed to the silent grave in a very short period after its birth: all possible chance on this subject was consequently done away; and so acute were her feelings on every temporary conviction, that she was frequently under the necessity of calling to remembrance the undeniable infamy of Lady Montague's character, in order to afford some degree of consolation for the previous

disappointment occasioned by finding it impracticable to claim any tie of a family nature with her worthy and amiable children.

CHAP. X.

“With sword and fire
“Drive out all other faiths, and let the world
“Confess ours only.”

ROWE.

THE intelligence Stella was enabled to give in return for Juliana's communication, drew the bonds of friendship still tighter between these two young women; while the lessons of religion and fortitude constantly inculcated by their mutual comforter, the good and sensible Beatrix, proved of singular service to both, particularly in respect to the disagreeable temper of the Lady Abbess, who, whenever her declining health proved equal to the task of tormenting the Sisterhood by her presence, seemed to evince a strong predilection for coercive measures on the most trifling occasion that happened to afford an opening for the display of her collective abilities, which, it must be acknowledged, were so exercised as to be generally productive of more dislike to the inflicter, than either gratitude or reformation in the culprit who had the honour of experiencing such unenvied marks of her attention in their spiritual welfare. But although Stella mildly listened to the precepts of Sister Beatrix, and from many of them derived no small advantage, her early friend and ever-regretted benefactress had previously rendered her religious principles too stationary to endanger their present existence; and she patiently submitted to all the taunts and hardships those stigmatized with the appellation of heretics are sometimes necessitated to sustain in similar friendless situations.

Four years slowly dragged their sullen course along in the same monotonous and joyless manner ere any change, either for the better or worse, took place in her condition. About the conclusion of that period, Stella found it was possible to encounter greater evils than what had yet fallen to her share in the foregoing term of her confinement.

Avarice, as has elsewhere been observed, happened to prove the predominant failing in the Lady Abbess's disposition.

When the preliminary articles for our heroine's admission were first settled, Mr. Ross paid a handsome gratuity in advance for four years certain; after which, should circumstances still require her detention, an annual pension was to be punctually received for her succeeding maintenance while she remained in the Convent.

From some incomprehensible cause which the Lady Abbess could not develop, the latter part of the agreement appeared to have totally escaped his memory, for no remittance was made; nor, what seemed equally extraordinary, was the smallest notice taken of this defalcation in the execution of the above arrangement.

The retentive faculties of the Abbess happened, however, to be formed of more durable materials; and, of course, all possible means of enquiry were set on foot to procure information on the subject. Every attempt of the kind nevertheless failed:—Mr. Ross and his family had removed from the neighbourhood; and in whatever quarter of the globe he had afterwards fixed his abode, neither she nor her emissaries, alike unacquainted with his usual place of residence, could, in any probable degree, ascertain.

Thus deprived of the expected panacea, which alone possessed the power of partially smoothing the rugged surface of a most uneven temper, our *holy Mother* the Abbess began to consider her English boarder as verging towards that nearly useless and most unproductive piece

of lumber vulgarly denominated “*an incumbrance*,” and, in the progress of this idea, charitably resolved to make her smart under the galling lash of dependance as a *scape-goat*, for the deficiencies of others, since no indemnification could be procured for her own.

Stella, of course, gradually became sensible of a very disagreeable alteration in her situation: she had not only an additional portion of ill-humour to bear from the head of the Community, for that her ability in the province of bearing and forbearing would have taught her to sustain with a tolerable degree of magnanimity; but, whatever omissions of a menial description the Lay-Sisters, or even the still lower classes of the domestic establishment were found guilty of, now fell to her share to remedy; while the cheering, instructive conversation of Beatrix, and the tender, soothing sympathy of Juliana, were by degrees denied her through the medium of the unfeeling Abbess, who frequently contrived to render all intercourse between the parties impracticable, from the opposite and various employments purposely assigned them. Stella, however, could have no reasonable cause of complaint; for her considerate oppressor declared that it was all for the sake of her soul’s salvation, and to effect the great work of conversion, that coercive measures had at length been adopted; with which view she was determined to continue them, as the surest method of subduing that vile spirit of perseverance in error by which the little heretic had so long rendered herself conspicuous, in spite of her own most meritorious endeavours to effect a change of principles so repugnant to the true, genuine nature of the Roman Catholic doctrine, and the blessed institution of her holy Mother the Church.

Whether the Abbess really wished to have the merit of making a new convert as some small indemnification for the loss of what sat infinitely nearer her heart, or that she wanted to free the Community of the burden of her maintenance by driving her to some act of desperation, remains problematical to all but herself, and the great Director of human concerns. If the latter motive swayed her conduct, it proved nevertheless as unsuccessful as the means by which the former was ostensibly to be accomplished; for Stella, however secretly depressed or humbled, shrunk not from her allotted task, but exerted herself to the utmost of her power to give satisfaction—satisfaction! vain expectation!—it beamed not on any labour of hers, to cheer the dreary path of oppression:—but, taught as she had been by sad experience to believe herself totally renounced by the happier inhabitants of the world, and void of every claim whatever on society, where could she fly were the doors of her present prison to be shut against her? All good and evil she justly considered in a comparative light; and therefore whatever might prove her actual portion of the latter, it seemed at any rate preferable to encountering the “thousand untried ills that flesh is heir to” when thrown friendless on the world at large in a state of beggary: and what else, she frequently asked herself, had she to expect if emancipated from the bondage under which she now groaned? Nothing, surely! for it appeared too evident after the lapse of so long a period, that no other roof remained to shelter her defenceless form—no hand would be stretched forth to snatch her from insult and penury, should the gloomy gates of the Convent once be decidedly closed upon her fugitive steps. Here at least, though fatigue and ill-humour proved her daily lot, she was yet secured from the various misfortunes young women are often subjected to meet with in a situation similar to hers; and, besides, food and clothing, such as it was, were still allowed her, however other limited indulgencies were withdrawn from her reach: Beatrix too, and her beloved Juliana, were inmates of the same dreary abode; and, though now seldom permitted to enjoy much of their company, still the idea afforded some degree of consolation, when she reflected that she was within the very identical walls which enclosed the only two human beings on earth apparently interested in her welfare.

Stella wisely endeavoured to encourage every alleviating circumstance that served to strengthen her mind and assimilate it to the difficulties of her unfortunate destiny: she therefore bowed her head in meek resignation to the fiat of the Almighty, who she was firmly persuaded ordered every thing for the best; and, without uttering a single murmur, persevered in her system of obedience to the commands of the Abbess, till the constantly accumulating nature of her sufferings, though inadequate to the supposed private views of her unfeeling task-mistress for overwhelming a spirit apparently so gentle, at length partly produced an effect probably emanating from a mode of treatment so barbarously inhuman:—the health of the persecuted victim of pecuniary disappointment visibly declined; and the utmost stretch of intellectual resolution was often barely able to assist her through the various fatiguing offices assigned to her daily performance.

The former apprehensions of the Abbess, lest contamination should be conveyed by the breath of an heretic, evidently no longer existed; for Stella, amongst her other employments, was now frequently appointed to set the necessary articles in order previous to the celebration of any public festival, and to prepare the Church on every occasion of moment for the reception, not only of the Sisterhood, but all those who might be disposed to visit it in general, from whose charitable donations a tolerable harvest was sometimes reaped by the mercenary head of the Society, and converted, without much ceremony, to her own private use.

As interested motives had ceased to require the concealment of our heroine from the observation of strangers, she was at length unconditionally permitted to mingle with the crowd, and witness the whole subsequent proceedings, after having executed the preparatory offices allotted to her.

Though this proved but a poor indemnification for the foregoing fatigue and hardships she had been forced to sustain, it nevertheless made an occasional breach in the sameness of her lot, which sometimes served to detach her thoughts from self-considerations of an unpleasant and distressing nature: the transient pause thus afforded was not, however, always productive of beneficial effects much beyond the transaction in which it originated.

The spectators retired full of what they had seen, gratified and eager to describe the scene to friends, to relations, to acquaintances, who had proved less fortunate than themselves in this respect; they had a home to receive them, to which they were possibly attached by all the domestic enjoyments that exist to bind the heart of man to his fellow-man: parents, brothers, sisters, rose to the view of the young moralizer, as fondly surrounding these fortunate beings with looks of cordial welcome on their return, and listening delighted to the detailed account of their observations, while she——“Oh what a desolate prospect!” sighed the half broken-hearted girl, “what a melancholy reverse is experienced by me!” Sickening at the mental picture that forced itself into notice, Stella, on such occasions, usually threw herself upon her straw mattress, and wept away those hours in which the balmy aid of sleep was denied her.

CHAP. XI.

“’Twas the milk of human kindness—benevolence personified; ’twas elegance, grace, beauty irresistible—every celestial emanation of the Divinity.”

IT was on the eve of a grand annual procession, held in honour of the foundress of the Order, when Stella having spent several hours in the execution of her usual employment, found her strength, from extreme fatigue, gradually failing; till at length no longer able to support her weary frame, she sunk upon one of the marble steps leading to the altar, (for she was then in the Church) and resting her aching head on the ornamental projection of a highly-finished monument near her, became shortly alike indifferent to the fate of the oppressed, or the command of the oppressor.

How long this state of mental inertia might have lasted is uncertain, had not the sound of approaching footsteps roused her attention to the cause from whence it proceeded. She slowly raised her eyes to ascertain this point, and discovered, through the increasing gloom of the evening, three or four people advancing up one of the isles leading from the principal entrance. Concluding they were probably deputed by the Abbess (who might, for any thing she knew to the contrary, prove herself one of the number,) to observe the progress of her labours, our poor dejected heroine immediately quitted her incumbent posture, and again resumed her task: but the whispered accents of the strangers once more attracted her notice; and she turned her head instinctively towards the direction in which they had first met her view.

Stella now perceived they had stopped at a convenient distance, for the purpose of observation, and saw they were regarding her with no common degree of interest, if their solicitude could be judged of by the evident eagerness with which they alternately looked at her, and then spoke to one of the Nuns who accompanied them. That Nun was soon discovered to be Magdaline; and from her long tried attachment, whether discoursing with friends or foes, nothing, she knew, was to be apprehended: Stella was therefore turning to continue her work, under the idea that her solitary and sickly appearance had alone fixed their eyes upon her, when the accidental movement of one of the strangers (for such they assuredly were) admitted a greater portion of light from a lamp suspended over the place where they stood, and displayed to her astonished view the dress of her countrywomen worn by two females, whose appearance proved extremely prepossessing and elegant; while a gentleman, whose *tout-ensemble* came exactly under the same description, made another of the little group, and seemed equally sedulous with his companions to pursue the discourse with their conductress.

A long period of time had elapsed since the agitated Stella had seen a sight that spoke so home to every feeling of her throbbing heart. It was still possible, however, that she might yet be mistaken in regard to their being British; and, with increasing emotion, she listened to catch the smallest word calculated to substitute certainty for doubt. That word at length reached her, as one of the ladies said something in a louder accent to the gentleman: it was English! English indeed! Overcome by the sensations of the moment, the fingers of Stella suddenly relaxed their hold on the side of the altar, and she dropped senseless at the feet of a massy crucifix contiguous thereto.

On recovering her recollection, she found herself supported by the gentleman, while his lovely and benevolent companions were administering to her every assistance in their power.

Stella, on opening her eyes, concluded she had shook off the earthly fetters of mortality, and joined the celestial inhabitants of heaven, as her view rested on the nearest of the two females, whose delicate and finely moulded form could only be surpassed by a set of features, and an expression of countenance, that exceeded in attractive beauty every thing of the kind hitherto witnessed: the other lady was taller, equally well made, less beautiful perhaps, but enjoyed the same fascinating manner and intelligent benignity of look, which at once and universally made their way to the heart wherever they came. Their male companion was all benevolence and real worth, and possessed a character in every respect well qualified to make a third of the number. They insisted upon conducting Stella back to the Convent; and alternately shared with Magdaline in the task of conveying her back to the Church.

Having performed this humane office, and discovered by the answers obtained to their questions from Magdaline, how the unfortunate invalid was situated in the Monastery, they left a handsome present to the Community, and, after a little conversation with the Lady Abbess, retired for the night; having first assured Stella of their determination to revisit her on the succeeding morning, when the unavoidable hurry of the approaching festival would leave them more at liberty to discourse with her, free from the probable chance of interruption, should (as they apprehended) her recent indisposition prevent her from taking any further active part in the various occupations of the day. In this conjecture the amiable trio were not mistaken: the debilitated frame of our heroine, completely exhausted by the unceasing exertion of several days previous labour, now totally succumbed under the intolerable burthen of fatigue she had suffered; and she found herself utterly unable to partake in the enjoyments of a period which, to the greater part of the Sisterhood, seemed fraught with considerations of particular importance.

Sir Frederic Delmore, like Mr. Ross, had made the chief part of his fortune in the East Indies; but, unlike that gentleman in every other respect, his principles, temper, and disposition were all of a description to do honour to human nature, and retrieve the national character from the too often merited obloquy entailed upon it by men of our northern Nabob's cast, who, unfit to be trusted to their own discretion, disgrace the country that gave them birth, by the abhorrent system of plunder and devastation practised on every possible occasion against the defenceless and unoffending inhabitants of the Asiatic world.

Sir Frederic had proved the friend, adviser, and benefactor of all the distressed Indians within the circle of his knowledge: these were not few; and by them he was considered as a being of a superior order, who could not possibly owe his birth to the same country that disgorged so many rapacious vultures in the shape of human creatures, on their ill-fated coast. The catalogue of his virtues was written on the hearts of the needy and afflicted; and their grateful prayers for his everlasting felicity were his constant attendants. Satisfied with the acquisition of a reasonable fortune, acquired in the most unexceptionable manner, the worthy Baronet returned to Europe, unpursued by one of those curses, more deep than loud, which frequently accompany the restored sons of Violence and Peculation from the groaning theatre of their crimes, to the bar of an English House of Commons.

Sir Frederic Delmore, on his arrival in Britain, happened yet to be a bachelor; for the adventurous votaries of the female fortune-hunting system were not much to his taste, and Fate had decreed him a helpmate of a more respectable character. At one of the places of public resort in the metropolis, he first saw the most charming of her sex; and as to see this fascinating woman without experiencing the influence of her attractive powers was impossible, he procured an introduction to her family, made his proposal, and, though some years her senior, he was finally accepted. Perhaps Lady Delmore could not have given a greater instance of sound sense and

superior judgment, than in her election of such a husband, as the result has fully shewn: for this very amiable couple are not only happy in themselves, but likewise a real blessing to all around them. The omnipotent voice of undisputed fame has pronounced the Baronet's choice to be the most beautiful woman in the capital of his Majesty's dominions; but those who know her well, also know that she possesses a better title to celebrity than even her incomparable loveliness, for Lady Delmore is good as she is beautiful. Of the former of these two enviable advantages, her sister (by whom she was accompanied in their present excursion to the Continent) justly shared the meed of equal applause; for her character and disposition proved exactly similar to those so happily enjoyed by her Ladyship. Though perhaps not so exquisitely gifted by nature with a faultless set of features, there was something in the countenance of Miss Mowbray uncommonly interesting, and her figure was rather of a more commanding height than the former's. In short, take this superior worthy trio, all in all, their like will seldom be encountered on the surface of the earth; and Stella soon had cause to bless the lucky chance that fixed their temporary residence in the vicinity of the Convent, no less than the impulse of curiosity that led them so critically to wish for a view of the ornamental arrangements in the interior of the Church, previous to the commencement of the anniversary of its foundress.

As Sir Frederic and the ladies had foreseen, the attention of the Community was too much engrossed by preparation for the ensuing ceremony, to interrupt the projected interview between them and their new acquaintance; and the hour now spent in each other's company, already seemed to have converted the prepossession mutually experienced, into a friendship of many years' standing: the favourable account given of our heroine by Magdaline, no doubt smoothed the way to those sentiments, which a personal knowledge of her character afterwards strengthened in the minds of the travellers; and they parted from her in the firm resolution of breaking her chain, and restoring her again to the more extended society of the world, from which she had now been so long excluded by the most unjustifiable means.

This undertaking was not an herculean one: Sir Frederic possessed not only the ability, but the inclination to serve her. The Abbess had for some time become heartily sick of her unprofitable boarder. A handsome gratuity has often the power of rendering the most unbending disposition flexible: the Baronet tried the experiment—it succeeded; for the Abbess, as usual, heard *reason*, and pocketed his arguments. Stella bade adieu to her old companions in thralldom. The parting with her beloved Juliana and the respectable Beatrix was extremely tender and affecting: alas! their destiny appeared fixed and immutable! and though the idea that her own had proved scarcely less so had rendered her almost indifferent to the prospect of liberation, no sooner was that prospect to appearance realized, than the long-relinquished sensation produced a thousand fresh-born anxieties, hopes, fears, and expectations, which seemed yet to link her future lot to the world, and constitute her once more its not unreluctant inhabitant.

CHAP. XII.

“Relentless Time! destroying pow’r,
“Whom stone and brass obey;
“Who giv’st to every flying hour
“To work some new decay;
“Unheard, unheeded, and unseen,
“Thy secrets saps prevail.”

PARNELL.

SEVEN tedious years had slowly passed over the head of Stella since she last found herself comparatively a free agent in the world; and the feelings that now swelled her grateful heart almost to agony, are hard to describe, as she turned her humid eyes on the receding walls of her late gloomy prison, and immediately afterwards entered the cheerful mansion of her benefactors: words are indeed inadequate to convey a just notion of the various and intermingled recollections that at this interesting juncture forcibly assailed her mind; and some time actually elapsed ere she could credit the evidence of her senses, or persuade herself such things could be. The first circumstance that recalled her wandering imagination was, the ardent inclination she experienced to ascertain the extent of her still existing connexion with the dear and valued friends, under whose maternal care and protection she had formerly been so happy. Of the ever-lamented Mrs. Bertram, the Adairs, the Ross’s, neither Sir Frederic nor the ladies could give her the smallest information, although her earliest enquiries were made for that purpose. The inhabitants of Woodside and the Hermitage were equally unknown to them; and the character Mr. Ross bore alike in the Asiatic and European quarters of the globe was not of a description to claim any congeniality of sentiment with such a man as our worthy Baronet; and of course, a knowledge of the motions of him and his family had not reached the amiable emancipators of Stella. Almost the first moments of her regained freedom were therefore dedicated to the interesting employment of writing to Scotland; and, lest intelligence should fail her in one direction, she applied to another, and addressed herself both to the Hermitage and her old companion at Woodside.

During the period that intervened ere an answer could possibly reach her, she likewise endeavoured to discover the present residence of her still fondly-remembered Mrs. Ross and Emma; for, though flattering herself with receiving this gratification, amongst others, from some one of her expected correspondents at Galloway, it nevertheless was not improbable such information might be partially obtained through the medium of a nearer channel, by applying to those whose mansion they had formerly resided in; for she was not ignorant that they no longer remained in the neighbourhood of her late abode.

In spite of all her efforts, Stella could learn nothing respecting the objects of her enquiry; and she was forced to wait the arrival of the much wished-for packet, as the only and last resource of her anxiety. Meanwhile no one circumstance was omitted by the Baronet and his family to restore her depressed spirits to their natural tone, and render her situation as easy as existing sollicitudes would allow.

Stella, grateful for every instance of their unceasing attention, evinced her sense of their goodness in a manner that rendered her doubly dear to her friendly and discriminating hosts, whose increasing attachment to their *protégée* became every day more apparent, though by no

means surpassed by the sentiments she herself justly harboured in their favour.

A fortnight had yet to elapse before their departure from France was to take place—and the impatience of Stella had already reached its height, when a solitary letter, with a well-known post-mark, made its appearance. She looked at the superscription—it bore the characters of Miss Adair's hand; but she trembled too much to break the seal; and, with a prophetic impression of evil tidings strongly throbbing at her heart, she retired abruptly to her chamber.—Here, after a few minutes of further irresolution, she tore open the envelope with an emotion not to be described, and speedily perceived her worst apprehensions too fatally verified. The contents of this interesting letter, we shall briefly state as follows.

Miss Adair began with expressions of the warmest congratulations on the pleasing prospect of once more seeing her beloved Stella, whom she hailed as a being risen from the dead, since from whom, or of whom, not the smallest intelligence had been received since the last letter she had written to Scotland when still under the care of Mrs. Ross. She then gave a long detailed account of all the various means adopted to discover the cause of the inexplicable silence of our heroine, and spoke with much feeling on the sufferings that circumstance, together with her mysterious disappearance, had occasioned at Woodside and the Hermitage. That Mrs. St. Vincent was the principal cause of the whole nefarious transaction, she seemed fully convinced, and entirely coincided with Stella in the previous opinion given in her letter on this subject; an opinion, the writer added, which was further confirmed by the nature of some epistolary communications made by that lady's servant Jenny, to two or three of her friends in the neighbourhood; all of which contained violent complaints relative to Major St. Vincent's total neglect of her mistress, who, the Abigail confidently asserted, had been deserted for Stella Bertram, and that the latter was then privately living with him somewhere abroad.

After making several judicious remarks on this absurd story, which she assured Stella was utterly discredited by every impartial person acquainted with the principles and character of either of the injured parties, Miss Adair proceeded to answer the numerous and minute enquiries of her newly-recovered correspondent in the rotation they were asked by our heroine: but, alas! what a series of heart-rending and melancholy vicissitudes now opened on her agonized view!—how great, how dreadful the revolutions the last eventful seven years had produced! Mrs. Bertram—the good, the maternal, the benevolent Mrs. Bertram, was no more! she had expired about eighteen months before the emancipation of her beloved and deeply-regretted *protégée*, on whom a thousand blessings were poured with her departing breath, if still in existence. The death of this valuable woman, like her life, proved exemplary, and much more composed than could almost have been hoped, from the unceasing anxiety she evinced on account of her lost adopted child's mysterious destiny. The once unfortunate Maria Campbell, with her hapless offspring, now likewise slumbered in the dust. The latter accidentally caught the smallpox, which the former never had had: ere the virulent nature of the disorder was properly ascertained, the infection happened to be communicated to the fond and much-alarmed mother, whom no arguments or entreaties could separate from her dying infant, and both were soon consigned to the same grave: but not before the ill-fated penitent had bequeathed the chief part of her fortune to her benefactress, (who survived her only a short period) with the reversion of the whole to our heroine, should she ever appear to claim it.

Francis Ross, prepossessed (from several suspicious and strangely corroborating circumstances) with the idea of his father's duplicity in regard to the fate of Stella, who, he firmly believed, had fallen a sacrifice to parental apprehensions on his account, had continued immovable in his resolution of seeing the Nabob no more from the moment every effort for her

recovery appeared ineffectual. To this determination he religiously adhered, in spite of his father's incredulity, or the agonizing entreaties of a half-distracted mother and sister, who, on their knees, implored him to alter his intention. Francis remained deaf to every sensation but that which Mr. Ross had raised in his bosom: resentment therefore taking the lead of filial duty, he yielded to its momentary impulse, bade his fainting, weeping female relatives an eternal adieu, and, without noticing his father in any respect whatever, quitted his roof, never to return.

Three days after his departure he waited upon Sir William Harley, whom he abruptly accused of being an accomplice with his father in the disappearance of our heroine. The Baron resented the imputation, as he was justly entitled to do—high words ensued—a challenge succeeded—they fought—the rash impetuous Francis Ross fell at the second fire; and before the dawn of the following morning this misguided, ungovernable young man had ceased to breathe for ever. The fatal result of this melancholy affair proved decisive of poor Mrs. Ross's long fluctuating destiny: but, though on the verge of the grave, she was not yet permitted to die in peace. Intelligence of a most disgraceful nature, relative to Mrs. St. Vincent's conduct, received about the same period, gave the finishing blow to her mental and corporeal sufferings:—she expired in the arms of the wretched Emma, whose health for several succeeding weeks remained in a state that occasioned the most serious apprehensions for her recovery: she did recover, however; and afterwards accompanied her father on a second voyage to the East Indies, whither some affairs of the utmost importance demanded his immediate return. A storm overtook them near the Cape—the vessel was driven out of her course—she struck upon a sunken rock—instantly bulged, and in the next moment, passengers and crew were alike launched into one watery tomb.

Miss Adair accounted for her knowledge of the foregoing melancholy circumstance, by informing her friend that Captain, now Major Montague, had occasionally corresponded with her since the loss of Stella, for whose fate he uniformly expressed the kindest solicitude; and from his obliging communications she had been enabled to state the abovementioned particulars, as likewise many others contained in her long epistle. She added, that he had received the hand of the amiable Louisa St. Vincent nearly three years prior to the present period; that he was then quartered in the south of England, and had become possessed of a handsome addition to the fortune derived from Mr. Howard, by the death of his father Sir Charles, who had only landed in his native country a very short time previous to his decease. Of Mrs. St. Vincent and her proceedings she spoke in the strongest terms of reprobation: the virtuous part of the world, it appeared, had now totally renounced her society; but the immense fortune to which she succeeded on the loss of her father (whom she had found means to soften in her favour, in order to save herself from being disinherited, as he had once threatened to do, on the premature death of her brother,) still procured her many associates, and supported her unblushing effrontery in repeated attempts to outface the public opinion and consequent disgrace she was frequently doomed to experience. With her amiable husband all manner of intercourse had long ceased to exist: he and his friends had often endeavoured to procure the necessary proofs of criminality on which to ground the commencement of a prosecution for adultery; but though her guilt remained no longer apparently equivocal, either with her old favourite Jones, or others of similar character; so artfully had she managed, that no legal evidence could be adduced against her sufficiently strong for the purpose of inserting her name amongst the worthies of a similar stamp in the Doctors Commons: in consequence of which failure she still retained the convenient title and privileges of a wife, however the moral turpitude of her actions might have rendered her undeserving of such a distinction.

The unfortunate and ill-used husband of this vile woman, indignant at so many instances of depravity, irritated by repeated disappointment, and, finally, sick of a country which presented nothing to his view but prospects of the most humiliating and distressing nature, had at length exchanged into a marching regiment, and accompanied it as Lieutenant-Colonel to Gibraltar, where he was yet stationed, and likely to continue for some time.

Mrs. Wallace, now some years a widow, resided almost constantly with her niece Sally Thompson; and both seemed equally to mourn the supposed hopeless absence of their much-regretted Stella.

Miss Adair having acquainted her friend with the marriage of her two younger sisters, one of whom was become the wife of our heroine's old admirer Mr. Johnstone, who had unexpectedly attained possession of a large fortune on the demise of a distant relation, and enumerated several other domestic occurrences in her own family, next proceeded to mention a few incidents of a more public nature, which she imagined would be acceptable to her reader; and then concluded the epistle with an urgent request for her speedy return, in which the writer said she was joined by her father, who being appointed Mrs. Bertram's sole executor by her last will and testament, ardently wished for her arrival, in order to give up his trust, by resigning the future management of a handsome independent property into her own hands; for which purpose he had been busily employed in the preparatory arrangement of her affairs ever since the first intimation of his ward's actual existence reached Woodside.

Such were, as succinctly as it appeared possible to relate them, the multifarious contents of Miss Adair's long and closely written epistle: the half of which, however, was scarcely perused, ere she to whom it was addressed, became suddenly unequal to the task of reading what yet remained unfinished, and alike indifferent to the sorrows of the past, as to the splendid prospects that offered for the future.

CHAP. XIII.

“Tout ce que je puis vous fouhaiter de mieux, est de ne vous jamais revoir.”

VOLTAIRE'S LIFE OF LOUIS XIV.

SOMETHING more than an hour and a half had already expired since our heroine quitted the sitting-room to examine her packet, and yet she returned not. The ladies began to be alarmed, lest the communication of some disagreeable intelligence had prolonged her absence beyond what appeared to them a reasonable time for the gratification of her curiosity; and Miss Mowbray, in order to investigate the cause of it, at length hurried to her chamber.

The first sight that presented itself on her entrance, was Stella extended on the floor, cold, pale, insensible, and apparently in the last stage of her earthly existence. The fatal letter lay open near her, and the envelope, torn through the middle, was discovered at a greater distance under the table.

The scream of astonishment and horror that escaped the terrified Miss Mowbray, soon brought the requisite assistance to her aid. Stella in due time recovered her faculties, and accounted for their suspension by the sad, sad detail of circumstances she had received; the heads of which, when more adequate to the recapitulation, were partially related to her sympathizing auditors—partially, I say, for she could not bring herself to mention the base surmises which had been propagated of her supposed connexion with St. Vincent; nor was the extent of his unworthy wife's misconduct exposed to animadversion: it was a subject Stella dared not trust her feelings to dwell upon; and consequently, as little was said on the occasion as could possibly be done without breaking in upon the relative nature of her other intelligence.

Various were the effects produced by the foregoing information on the hearts of her benevolent and charming protectors; who, having now nothing of importance to require the prolongation of their residence in France, immediately determined on the commencement of their journey to the place of embarkation, as soon as their *protégée* found herself able to bear the fatigue of travelling.

Two days more produced this effect, and removed every apprehended difficulty on her side. The morning of the third was therefore fixed upon to put their design in execution; and on the preceding evening Stella entered the gates of her late gloomy habitation, in order to visit her former friends, but particularly Juliana and Beatrix, for the last time.

The leading features of the French Revolution had already begun to assume a serious aspect in the capital of the kingdom and its vicinity: seeds of the same sanguinary plant were even evincing a propensity to vegetation in the more distant provinces; and as no person could say “thus far and no farther” such things shall go, Stella now exacted a solemn promise from her weeping companions to consider her roof as their future asylum, and its mistress as one who would ever be ready to receive them with the open arms of friendship and real affection, should succeeding events render her the happy means of sheltering them from the vicissitudes of human affairs in the hour of adversity, and, through that medium, enable her to repay the many hours of comparative peace and soothing consolation so frequently experienced in their society.

It had recently been hinted in her hearing, she said, that a scheme was already in contemplation to lessen the number of religious institutions at present established in France. “Should this embryo plan be realized, and the Sisterhood happen to come within its circle,”

Stella again repeated, emphatically, “think on me—remember your promise, and carefully preserve this direction to my place of residence in North Britain.”

She then gave each of the Nuns a written address, which she particularly requested them to preserve, whatever befel them; who turning to the window while they examined the paper, she slipped three small parcels, containing a few valuable articles, such as she knew would be most acceptable to them, on the table: these were all much alike; but on returning to her cell, Juliana found she had been remembered in a superior degree to the other two Nuns; for Stella, by the assistance of the portress, had contrived to convey thither additional tokens of her lasting regard, to a considerable amount; amongst which were several religious books, and a curiously inlaid crucifix, composed of ebony and silver.

Though Stella could not help thinking it cruel to make them sharers in those apprehensions which some recent discussions on the subject had inspired her with, yet neither could she forbear to renew it more than once before her departure from the Convent. Sister Beatrix, however, entertained no fears of the kind: she was confident their tutelary Saint and the blessed Virgin would protect them, and shield the hearts of all good Catholics, like her countrywomen, from such sacrilegious proceedings, which she was sure none but the heretical enemies of her holy Mother the Church, could possibly attempt even to think of, far less to put in practice. In this opinion, Magdaline seemed likewise inclined to acquiesce; but candidly acknowledged her incompetency to decide on what might ultimately prove best, unless an optional power was permitted to ascertain the matter. Beatrix crossed herself at the bare idea of such a power, and cast a look of marked disapprobation on the speaker, who was rather suspected of being more partial to freedom than confinement. While the weeping Juliana, agitated and unhappy, sighed profoundly, said little, and remained apparently indifferent to every consideration, the approaching separation from Stella excepted. At length the latter tore herself from the clasping arms of the of the sobbing girl, and rushed from the the room. Beatrix having committed the fair fainting recluse to the care of Magdaline, who had long been particularly attached to her, followed the steps of our heroine; and finding she was hastening towards the outer court, without intending to pay a farewell visit to the Abbess, the good Nun strongly urged a change of measures, and represented the ungracious appearance such an instance of unchristian and persevering enmity exhibited in so striking a point of view, that Stella, who, in the present agitation of her mind had never once recollected such a woman as her former oppressor was in the world, instantly acceded to her wishes; and not being of a temper to return resentment or ill-will even to the most offending of her fellow-creatures, she gratefully acknowledged her obligations to her friendly adviser for thus recalling her to a proper sense of her duty, and accompanied her as she spoke, to the Abbess’s apartment.

The late mercenary tyrant, now a tyrant no longer, understanding the purport of her visit, and expecting some emolument would accrue from it—an idea originating in the already experienced munificent mind and temper of the Baronet, who, when presenting her with a handsome reward for kindness, care, and protection never bestowed on her unfortunate boarder, had informed her that he should amply supply Stella with the pecuniary means of following his example in this respect, before she took a final leave of the Community—received our heroine in so different a manner, and with so altered an aspect, that she scarcely knew which to admire most—the pliability of features and disposition thus exhibited, or the baseness of a mind that could impel her to a change of conduct so sudden and extraordinary. No tears of regret, no parting sigh, witnessed the separation that, after the lapse of a very short period, now took place. Stella listened in silent disgust to common-place sentences of advice, uttered by a person whose

corrupt heart had never felt the influence of human kindness, nor practised the precepts she appeared so urgent to teach others. The reflection that this was undoubtedly the last interview with the woman who had so long contributed her endeavours to render her life completely wretched, could not be supposed to inspire any sensations similar to the least of those which swelled her bosom when quitting the little affectionate group so dear to her heart: on the contrary, she was perfectly convinced the longer she continued in her presence, that one of the most fortunate things which could easily befall her was, never to be again subjected to the government, either mental or corporeal, of such a director. A small present was, however, tendered, which was readily accepted; but with what different feelings from those recently witnessed elsewhere! Stella then coldly, but with the semblance of respect, bade her adieu, and retired unreluctantly from her presence. She next paid a short visit to the rest of the Community, who were collected together in the refectory in expectation of her arrival.

Stella had enjoyed the good fortune to be almost a general favourite with the Sisterhood, at least the greater part of them, although strictly prohibited from associating much with any of the number: and the blessings they now poured upon her head, with the ardent petitions preferred for her lasting happiness, strongly affected her sensibility. Every attempt to articulate her gratitude, however, proved abortive; and at length, utterly unable to preserve any degree of composure, she abruptly departed, accompanied still by Beatrix, who left her not till the last boundary of conventual freedom opposed an insurmountable barrier to her further progress.

Every thing being previously prepared for the return of our heroine and her friends to England, the journey was commenced at the appointed time; and they reached the place of embarkation without encountering any unpleasant accident. Favourable gales speedily wafted them to the shores of Britain, where they had soon the satisfaction of landing in good health and spirits on *terra firma*; which the ladies seemed disposed to consider as a far more desirable circumstance than the finest aquatic excursion that ever was undertaken.

CHAP. XIV.

“The mind is its own place, and in itself
“Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n.”

MILTON.

OUR heroine’s reluctance to quit her good and beautiful protectors, though greater than any she had hitherto experienced on a similar short-lived acquaintance, was not of that description to preclude the hopes of a second meeting; on the contrary, her favourite trio had faithfully promised to pass some part of the ensuing year at the Hermitage: and, with this prospect in view, the ladies separated from her two days after their landing, with mutual professions of lasting esteem, remembrance, and affection, and, attended by their domestics, took their road to the metropolis; while Stella, pursuing an opposite direction, bent her course to the north, with a throbbing heart, that seemed to shrink with horror from the recollection of all that time had effected since she last saw the scenes now so soon to be revisited.

She was not, however, permitted to travel alone; neither Sir Frederic nor the ladies would listen to such an idea: the worthy Baronet, therefore, continued to be her escort till she reached Carlisle; there, after seeing her seated in one of the stage-coaches, he left her to rejoin his lovely and amiable family in London; while pensive, moralizing, and sad, his grateful *protégée* pursued her northern route.

The coach stopped at the King’s Arms in Dumfries; and Stella started from a deep reverie on finding herself conducted to the same bed-room formerly occupied by Mrs. Ross during their short stay at that place. Unable to answer the girl who requested to know her further commands, she waved her hand for her to retire; and no sooner heard the door close behind her, than throwing herself on the well-remembered bed, she gave vent to her tears, and for some time allowed them to flow with unrestrained freedom. St. Vincent, Montague, all the absent, and all the dead, swam in mournful succession before her mental vision, which conjured up a thousand distressing images: their steps were no longer heard on the stair-case—their voices no longer vibrated on her ear from the sitting-room—her attendance was no longer required by the ever-lamented woman who then rested her head upon the very pillow, perhaps, that now supported her own.

“Alas! alas!” cried the throbbing Stella, “what a dreadful change has a few years effected! How dreary, how sad, how desolate appears all around me! To stay here all night is impossible!—no, I cannot indeed stay here all night!—the very thought almost rends my heart.”

The chambermaid again made her appearance, to know what the lady chose for supper, and to light her to the parlour.

The lady was not disposed for any supper; neither did she chuse to be lighted to the parlour: a post-chaise was all she wanted; and this was requested to be got ready with the utmost dispatch, as she was under the necessity of proceeding on her journey without further loss of time.

The girl stared at this unexpected turn of affairs, muttered something to herself as she turned to leave the room, and immediately retired to execute Stella’s orders.

As Stella descended the staircase when the carriage was announced, the sound of a trumpet caught her ear: she started, and for a moment became stationary. Though silent, the expression of her countenance seemed perfectly understood by the waiter who preceded her with

a candle, and who looking back upon finding she had stopped, said—"It is the military trumpet, Madam, and the last for the night."

Stella now instantly recollected herself, and affecting an air of indifference, enquired, in a voice that but ill seconded the attempt, what regiment was then quartered in Dumfries.

"The King's Own," replied the man; "a very fine corps, Madam: they succeeded Colonel Arabin's light horse, which have been twice here within these seven years, and we think these even surpass them."

Stella thought the latter could not be surpassed: she spoke not, however, but a profound sigh escaped her as she hastily entered the carriage, which immediately drove off.

The words "Colonel Arabin's light horse," again set the busy fancy of the lonely traveller at work; and she raised not her throbbing temples from the corner of the vehicle till it reached the next stage from Dumfries, about half an hour before midnight.

At first it had been her intention to proceed forwards after having a change of carriage and horses; but finding herself now extremely fatigued and languid, and dreading a recurrence of the same painful recollections which she had experienced at Dumfries, should inability to pursue her journey oblige her to sleep at ——, our heroine finally yielded to the arguments of her hostess, who strongly urged the necessity of remaining till morning, in order to procure that repose of which she stood visibly in need.

As she was drinking some wine and water, with a small piece of biscuit, a chaise drove up to the door. The servant who attended, opened one of the window-shutters, and seeing a gentleman and lady alight, immediately left the room to offer his assistance. In a few minutes the door of the parlour again opened; and Stella, naturally supposing it was only the waiter who had re-entered, paid no attention to the circumstance, till, finding herself suddenly clasped in some person's arms, she hastily turned her head round, in order to discover what was to be hoped or feared from a salutation so abruptly alarming, and instantly recognised her old friend and late correspondent, Miss Adair! She was speedily followed by her father: and the joy produced by this meeting, though certainly of a mingled description, proved reciprocally gratifying, and sincerely felt by each of the parties.

Stella, on her reaching England, had lost no time in announcing her arrival and succeeding motions, to her friends at Woodside. Apprised of her intentions, Mr. Adair and his daughter instantly determined to give her the meeting at Dumfries, and accompany her from thence to the Hermitage, which had been prepared for her reception immediately after the arrival of her first letter; for, though once in contemplation to carry her first to Woodside, that idea had been wisely renounced by her guardian, from a persuasion that it would be better to get over the painful and distressing sensations occasioned by a first sight of her former cheerful, but now solitary abode, and all the heart-rending emotions a return under such circumstances must naturally create, as soon as possible, since it must be done at last; and procrastination in all such cases being, as he knew, only productive of additional misery, this change in their plans was accordingly adopted.

Some unforeseen impediment had, nevertheless, occurred to retard the hour of departure, and prevented their arrival at Dumfries, which it was hoped would otherwise have been accomplished the evening before she reached that place. The result of their expectations had not fallen far short of the original arrangement, as the present critical interview evinced; and the remainder of the night would have stolen away without the smallest idea of repose intruding itself, had not Mr. Adair at length insisted upon the female companions endeavouring to renovate their exhausted spirits by trying to obtain a few hours' rest, which the fatigued and exhausted

Stella principally seemed to require.

Convinced by her pale and languid look in the morning that every attempt for the purpose had proved ineffectual, and conceiving another day's residence in their present quarters absolutely necessary before she could be able to continue her journey, Mr. Adair once more exerted the authority of a guardian, and prevailed upon her to comply with his desire, though evidently much against her inclination.

The introduction of subjects supposed to be particularly interesting, had hitherto been carefully avoided as far as possible by her two friends: Stella, nevertheless, possessed too great a share of good sense and reflection, not to know such discussion would prove requisite before the expiration of a much longer time; and wishing to have so severe a trial of her fortitude over, she prepared to enter upon the topic of domestic occurrences, after having given a tolerably circumstantial account of all that had befallen herself in the course of the last seven years.

Mr. Adair was a man of sound understanding and superior abilities: he saw it was better to give way to the bias of inclination, and allow the luxury of unrestrained grief to have its scope, when the motion came from herself, than perhaps be reduced to the necessity of forcing her to commence the distressing task at some future juncture, equally inimical to her feelings. The afternoon and evening of the succeeding day were, therefore, allotted to information and explanations of various descriptions; and whatever might have been felt or suffered during this period, the ice once broken, each of the party found their mind considerably eased ere the hour of separation for the night arrived.

Sleep, however, again fled the heavy eyelids of our heroine, whose thoughts continued to wander over the past for the space of several long hours: but almost one of the first lessons inculcated on her young mind by the beloved instructress she deplored, had been—implicit resignation to the will of her Maker; and the arguments used to enforce this admirable precept now powerfully recurring to the memory of Stella, she determined henceforth to attempt the practice of it, as the surest means of procuring some degree of mental tranquillity, and evincing her lasting respect for the dear teacher, by thus proving the efficacy of an adherence to that line of conduct early marked out for her to follow.

This resolution once fairly settled, she soon fell asleep, and awaked not till the morning was pretty far advanced; when finding herself more refreshed than she had been for many preceding days, the party immediately commenced their journey to the neighbourhood of Port Patrick.

Stella had particularly requested they might neither stop to sleep at ——, or Newtonstewart: though ignorant of the motives which dictated this strange request, the solicitude with which it was urged procured the ready acquiescence of Mr. Adair; and in due time the carriage entered the public road that wound round the memorable park at Rossgrove, and finally led to the Hermitage.

CHAP. XV.

“For thee my mem’ry learns to smart,
“Sure ev’ry vein contains a bleeding heart!”

SAVAGE.

STELLA once more experienced the instability of human resolution, as her eyes, swimming in the bitter tears of remembrance, glanced over the well-remembered scenes that now presented themselves to her view; and she mentally acknowledged that it was much easier to form systems of conduct, than to put them in practice.

This mortifying conviction, of which she had so frequently experienced the truth, bore yet harder upon her feelings when the chaise stopped at the little gate of the Hermitage: all her late assumed fortitude forsook her in this moment of trial; she shrunk from the offered hand of Mr. Adair, who first alighted from the carriage, cast an agonized look of unutterable woe on the now uninhabited abode, in which no Mrs. Bertram must ever again appear to welcome her home, to clasp her in the maternal embrace, or speak peace to the wounded bosom of misfortune; and then concealing her face on the side panel of the vehicle, she yielded to the irresistible impulse of conflicting passions, and sobbed aloud.

To check the first violent effusions of strong sensibility on any renewal of a heavy affliction, is seldom the surest method to bring the sufferer relief, though a very common one with *comforters* of a certain description; on the contrary, it is generally more productive of an opposite effect, by making the swelling pang of an overcharged heart afterwards burst forth with a force proportionably great to the severity of the former restraint imposed upon it. Nature ought, and in fact will have vent, where the feelings are acute; and the spirit of true consolation consists not in suppressing its sensations, but in permitting the mind to derive that relief which the omnipotent First Cause of all has evidently assigned it, from the free indulgence of a reasonable portion of human grief. Luckily for Stella, her present friends happened to view the matter in this light; and during the space of several minutes remained profoundly silent. At length Miss Adair, who had not yet left her side, softly whispered—

“Stella, my love, for Heaven’s sake recollect yourself! Come, let me assist you into the carriage; here is my father still likewise attending your motions; our good Mrs. Wallace too—see, she approaches to welcome you!”

Stella raised her languid head at the sound of the well-remembered name; and instantly hastening from the chaise, felt herself silently folded in that worthy woman’s arms, on whose bosom she once more dissolved in tears. Another affecting pause succeeded; after which she presented her hand to Mr. Adair, and holding her handkerchief to her face with the other, advanced to the door of the house; which, however, was no sooner opened, than the much-agitated Stella, unable to command the overpowering sensations that pressed upon her heart almost to suffocation, immediately rushed up the staircase to the room she had formerly occupied, and locking the door upon herself, continued for upwards of an hour deaf to the earnest entreaties of her friends, who repeatedly beseeched her to admit them.

When this request was at length complied, they found her so seriously indisposed, that her wishes were readily acceded to, upon expressing a desire to keep her chamber for the remainder of the evening: the family of Woodside always felt themselves at home in the Hermitage, therefore no consideration on the score of politeness interfered with this measure,

which her friends trusted would eventually contribute to the restoration of a greater degree of mental tranquillity. Mr. Adair, however, judged it unnecessary to prolong his stay any farther at the present juncture; and having business that required his presence at home, took the opportunity of returning with the chaise to Woodside.

Unwilling to leave Stella alone on the first melancholy night of her arrival, it was not without extreme reluctance Mrs. Wallace and Miss Adair retired to separate apartments, on a positive rejection of their several requests to become her bedfellow: partly satisfied, however, by her repeated assurances that she was infinitely better, they were forced to submit; and a little before the clock struck eleven, having prevailed upon her to take, with some negus, a small piece of toasted bread, she was consigned to the counsels of her solitary pillow; the house soon became quiet, and the rest of its inhabitants speedily sunk to repose.

No sooner was the latter circumstance fully ascertained, than Stella, who was still awake, prepared to execute a design which had recently taken entire possession of her thoughts: this proved no other than to visit the now forsaken chamber of her departed benefactress; a step which she persuaded herself would produce the most salutary effect, by the soothing influence such an indulgence could not fail to shed over her agitated spirits.

Such an undertaking created none of those weak terrors to which common minds are liable, in the superior one of our heroine, who had been too often condemned to perform many a solitary task through all the various hours of the night, surrounded by the silent mouldering dead in the awe-inspiring Church of her late prison, to feel any particular repugnance on the present occasion, where the interesting friend of her earliest youth was no longer near her—a deprivation deeply regretted in the state of mind she now experienced; for to have been able to weep over the cold inanimate remains of her beloved Mrs. Bertram, would, she imagined, have afforded her a superlative gratification: that gratification, however, was, alas! totally out of the question:—not so with what appeared on the point of attainment; it seemed at least within her reach, and she determined to accomplish the intention without further loss of time. A lamp had been left burning on the table; she took it up, and having slipped on a few clothes, softly left her apartment.

The door of Mrs. Bertram's chamber was unlocked; it yielded to the first tremulous touch of her hand, and she advanced forward, with a heavy heart, to the dark and empty fire-place. Here, having set her lamp on the hearth, she remained for some time stationary and sad, while her swimming eyes glanced mournfully round the untenanted and silent apartment. The bed and other pieces of furniture were the same she had formerly been accustomed to see, and exactly retained the positions they occupied when she left the Hermitage. Often had she watched by the dear invalid who once reposed in that bed; often had she seen her seated in those chairs, leaning on the table now before her.

“Alas!” sighed the young moralizer, “what memorials of times for ever fled are here! Every thing seems full of her who, to me at least, is no more!—How frequently placed at her side, or kneeling by her pillow, have I listened, delighted, to the mild voice of instruction as it issued warm from the heart that has ceased to beat, and the lips which are closed for ever! Alas! is it possible, can this sad reverse be real? can such vicissitudes happen?”

With her hands clasped in each other, and eyes intently rivetted on the vacant bed, she now hung over it for some time in silence, till Fancy exerting its creative magic, almost persuaded her the departed protector of her helpless infancy was again restored to her view, and stretched on the spot before her. For a short while the cherished idea was indulged, and past days of felicity permitted to rank themselves once more in the catalogue of the present; but this

soothing deception soon vanished before the returning light of reason and recollection, which gradually dispelled the baseless fabric of imagination, and bursting into a fresh flood of tears, she suddenly exclaimed—

“Oh my mother, guide, supporter, monitress, all that was friendly and good! must I indeed never see you more! never more be fated to enjoy your blessed society, your edifying example, on earth! No! ah, no! you are too surely lost to the wretched Stella, now nearly as much unconnected with the world as when your maternal arm first opened to receive the hapless object of parental neglect! Oh my friend, my benefactress! why was I not allowed to soften the pang of dissolution, to watch over your expiring moments, and to profit from the last impressive advice, from the solemn parting injunction, by the tenor of which your adopted child would henceforth have ruled her future conduct!”

Unable longer to support her agitated frame, she threw herself across the bed in the deepest affliction, and again yielded to the various and distressing sensations that pressed upon her grateful and affectionate heart.

This state of mental abstraction from her present situation proved not, however, of very long continuance, for it was speedily interrupted in a most unexpected manner by a hollow sigh that came apparently from near the window. Stella raised her head, but almost immediately resumed her former position, persuaded there was some mistake in the case, merely occasioned by the existing nature of her own meditations: nevertheless, a repetition of the same sound, deeper, and more prolonged than the first, again caught her ear: this was distinctly heard; but before any judgment could be formed on a circumstance so inexplicable, the most plaintive, melancholy, and sublime strains of harmony instantly succeeded to produce additional astonishment. These, no more than what had preceded them, could now possibly be considered as an illusion of the senses, for nothing of the kind could be plainer. The melody, however, had ceased; and, thunderstruck by an incident so perfectly unaccountable, she scarcely ventured to breathe, bewildered, and utterly at a loss what to think, or whether to wish or dread a renewal of strains so celestial, that they appeared to be produced by the agency of something more than mortal.

The fearful nights she had spent in the burying-ground of the Convent, at this period of awful suspense, flashed upon her memory; but the sensations resulting from that and the present occurrence proved totally different:—horror and terrifying apprehensions then occupied every idea; pensive, mournful feelings, not perhaps entirely free from some degree of anxiety for the conclusion of so extraordinary an event, were what she chiefly experienced during the moments of uncertainty under which she now laboured. Ere any resolution, however, could be finally taken on the subject, the light finger of the mysterious musician once more swept over the trembling strings, and the music swelled by degrees to a loud and full cadence that vibrated through the chamber, and then died away as before.

“Wonderful!” said Stella, who by this time had quitted her recumbent posture, and stood in a listening attitude: “surely the benignant spirit of her who once cheered this room with her presence, hovers over the child of her bounty, and comes to soothe my perturbed mind to peace! What should I apprehend!” she added, after a temporary pause; “evil never found entrance here, nor preface its approach in so pleasing a manner: why then should I hesitate to investigate the source of this perplexing affair? No, I will not hesitate, convinced as I am that nothing bad has produced it; I will not shrink from the examination reason and common sense demands.”

As she stooped for the lamp, something with a kind of rustling noise fluttered on the hearth, and presently fell at her feet. An involuntary start was not to be avoided; she held the

light, however, to the new cause of alarm, and discovered a couple of withered leaves on the floor. The window must certainly be open, thought Stella, and she immediately advanced in the direction that led to it, though not quite free from some small degree of terror; yet with a fixed determination to satisfy herself, if to be satisfied were practicable. The sash, it appeared, had indeed been left accidentally open, and an Æolian harp, which she now recollected formerly belonged to Maria Campbell, lay near it, over which partial gusts of wind had occasionally swept as they rushed with a sighing kind of sound through the almost leafless trees before the window.

Perhaps nothing of a similar description affects the feeling heart, if previously disposed to melancholy sensations, in a more powerful manner than the wild and pensive notes of this little instrument; and at this moment they happened to be in perfect unison with the thoughts of our heroine, and seemed to waft them to heaven with every soft ascending swell. She placed herself in an easy chair, which Mrs. Bertram had usually occupied when ill health confined her to her room, and resting her head on the back of it, remained for some time absorbed in the luxury of unrestrained, but chastened sorrow, silently listening at intervals to the soothing strains of the aerial musician, till her mind, insensibly tranquillized, appeared to acquire new strength by every succeeding reflection that filled it. A prayerbook accidentally caught her eye on the chimney-piece; it was immediately recognised for one particularly used by the late mistress of the house. Stella opened it with a sigh, dropped on her knees by the side of the table, and drawing the lamp nearer, continued to read, and address her Maker by turns, for a considerable period.

At length the clock struck four; the “music of the spheres” no longer floated round the chamber, for the breeze had ceased to lend its assistance; and the now expiring lamp barely served to render darkness visible. Though wrapped in a travelling cloak lined with fur, Stella began to feel the chill air of a frosty morning; and therefore, with a heart more at ease, and a mind finally resigned to the wise, but inscrutable dispensations of Providence, she glanced another look round the apartment, and then softly closing the door after her, stole back to her own room, where, having hastened into bed, she was speedily locked in the renovating arms of a repose more profound than any which she had enjoyed for a considerable time.

CHAP. XVI.

“Improves her charms
“With inward greatness, unaffected wisdom,
“And sanctity of manners.”

ADDISON.

STELLA appeared at breakfast with spirits unusually refreshed and tranquil; even her looks seemed to have partaken of the same benign influence, and beamed with some small emanation of their wonted serenity. Her two friends were no less astonished, than rejoiced by an alteration equally unexpected as agreeable; and with unremitting attention, continued to adopt every method most likely to render it of permanent duration. The good sense possessed by our heroine seconded their endeavours, which were finally crowned with a considerable degree of success in a much shorter period than they once supposed probable; for, though a certain expression of melancholy still cast its pensive shade over her lovely, intelligent features, the more violent effusions of acute grief soon gradually subsided, and all that remained visible of its former influence, only tended to render her countenance more interestingly beautiful and attractive.

Thus several weeks passed away. Miss Adair was still her visitor; her father occasionally so; and Mrs. Wallace, at the particular request of our heroine, became a constant member of her family.

The able and friendly executor of her beloved Mrs. Bertram's will had, by this time, resigned the management of her affairs into her own hands; retaining, however, at her earnest request, the office of chief counsellor and adviser when his assistance appeared necessary. She was now in the actual possession of a handsome fortune, for the bequest of Maria Campbell amounted to upwards of ten thousand pounds, independent of what descended to her by Mrs. Bertram's deed of settlement, which, though comparatively trifling, had increased to about forty pounds per annum, one half of which advance had been added by the death of that lady's former pensioner, the other by the judicious arrangement of Mr. Adair; so that the original twenty pounds, which at one time appeared all that she was likely to call her own, had now doubled its value; and rumour, as usual on such occasions, having generously thrown another ten thousand into the scale, Stella might, if so inclined, have mingled with the first circles in that part of the country, and figured as one of its chief ornaments: but, though wealthy beyond either her wishes or most sanguine expectation, our heroine secretly experienced the inefficacy of riches to procure happiness; and, while apparently encompassed with every thing best calculated for its attainment, disappointed hopes and corroding anguish embittered her days, when thought, as was too frequently the case, perversely strayed beyond the boundaries reason had assigned it, and recurred to what might have been, had not her ill-starred fate decreed otherwise.

The various afflictions under which she had laboured, were all of a nature to admit of participation, by which means their pristine force was gradually diminished, and at length finally subdued. While her mind was labouring under this afflictive influence, other subjects of regret were nearly banished; but no sooner had these ceased to become the predominant evils, and resignation with time blunted their edge, than her unfortunate predilection for the husband of her greatest enemy returned with renovated strength: and as this predilection was of that description which debarred all confidential communication, it silently preyed upon her mind, and frequently threw a shade over every surrounding gratification, though the apparent serenity of her air and

manner gave no indication of such being the case; and the uniform tenor of a well-regulated conduct rather seemed to imply a state of internal ease than otherwise, since, whatever might prove the extent of her sufferings, no consideration of a selfish nature was ever permitted to damp the enjoyment of another by the indulgence of feelings she had firmly determined never to avow.

A circumstance had now existed for some time which likewise increased her chagrin: Major Montague appeared to have dropped all correspondence with Miss Adair, to whose communication on the subject of our heroine's arrival in Scotland, no answer whatever had been returned: many unavoidable occurrences, to be sure, might have occasioned his silence; but still, after all the previous anxiety expressed on her account, it seemed particularly strange no notice should be taken of the very event he had hitherto so repeatedly wished to ascertain. Perhaps one of the chief sources of the disappointment this incident produced, arose, though unwilling to acknowledge it even to herself, from a latent desire to learn something of St. Vincent's motions. She concluded, however, that as he was undoubtedly still at Gibraltar, no material change had probably taken place in his situation; and, under this supposition, tried to consider his friend's apparent neglect of less consequence, persuaded that nothing relative to the topic in which she was most interested could, in the present state of affairs, be obtained through the channel of his intelligence; or if obtained, ought it to prove of importance to her?

It was verging towards the end of October when Stella revisited her native shores: the weather had for some time proved extremely unfavourable for out-of-door recreations, and therefore no temptation interfered to interrupt the course of some internal arrangements, which, convinced she ought never to let her mind remain unemployed, she now took the opportunity of executing.

As to be serviceable to her fellow-creatures was a duty early imprinted on her mind, and the ability for putting that humane precept in practice now greatly in her power, various plans for beneficial institutions were daily formed, and canvassed over in the course of every evening; one of which it was determined should be realized immediately. This was, to have a small habitation erected for a school-house, where the poorer class of children in the neighbourhood might be taught reading, and every kind of useful needle-work, gratis, by some woman of respectable character, if such could be found, properly qualified for the undertaking. Necessary enquiries for this purpose were of course set on foot; and in the meantime, a circumstance occurred that considerably accelerated one part of the benevolent scheme. It was discovered, upon examination, that a small cottage adjoining the old ruin, which had long remained unoccupied, might easily be repaired and fitted up for the occasion. The situation was certainly preferable, on account of several local advantages it enjoyed, to any other that could have been fixed upon; and Stella, fully sensible that these rendered it particularly adapted to her views, gave orders to have what was required for making it habitable, instantly accomplished. But undertakings of this kind did not occupy all her attention; those which came more properly under the denomination of amusement, sometimes had their turn: and the long deserted grotto formed a prominent feature in that number.

This romantic little spot was kept in tolerable order during Mrs. Bertram's life; but, after her decease, had been rather neglected, and now visibly wanted many repairs in various quarters. Stella recollected some ornamental improvements she had observed in a fabric of similar construction, during her residence with Mrs. Ross, in Provence: these at the time struck her as suitable to this place; and she now determined to have the design executed in a style of appropriate simplicity and elegant neatness.

The sensations experienced by our heroine on her first visit to this favourite retreat were certainly by no means of an enviable nature; but as she had settled her future mode of life, preferring retirement, and purposing to keep very little company either at home or abroad, she rightly concluded that the wisest plan to be adopted was, to beautify and improve her landed property, and to have every thing in and round the house made as consonant to her wishes as taste, situation, and command of money could accomplish. To lead a life of "single blessedness" was, at present, her determination: she possessed no acknowledged family tie in the world to have any after-claim upon her fortune; and as it was her determined resolution never to exceed the limits of her annual income, the principal consequently remained, to bequeath at her death to those with whose friendly attachment she had most reason to be satisfied. Stella therefore thought she was justly entitled to please her fancy on the above subjects; and consequently, when the weather would allow, her intended improvements were to be effected, and the Hermitage literally converted into a little terrestrial paradise.

Amongst other sources of rational enjoyment, one of the chief and most favourite with Stella was not forgotten. Mrs. Bertram had a small, but select collection of the most esteemed authors: to the increase of these she turned her attention, and soon procured a very considerable addition by the assistance of her former admirer, Mr. Johnstone, who was now clergyman of the parish, and, as has already been said, husband to one of the Miss Adairs. This gentleman had fortunately a friend in London, on whose discriminating taste and judgment he could perfectly rely for executing the commission in a proper manner; and Stella was so much pleased with his performance of it, that an appropriate apartment for the future reception of her valuable literary acquisitions, was immediately determined to be erected.

In planning arrangements for the future, in drawing amusement and instruction from her now voluminous library, and in the society of her faithful friend Miss Adair, and the other members of that family, the dreary months of winter imperceptibly stole away, and Stella soon saw her schemes realized by the exertions of the busy mechanics employed for that purpose.

An addition of two wings to the house supplied her with a most excellent apartment for the reception of her books, and a variety of well-chosen historical prints, procured at the same time. A music-room, which corresponded with the library, on the opposite side of the mansion, was fitted up in a more expensive style, though perfectly agreeable to the idea of elegant simplicity which pervaded all her plans of improvements; and on the ground floor were two excellent sitting-rooms. The grotto was again put in order, and embellished by improvements; the garden assumed a new appearance, and the school-house was fast advancing: this latter might, indeed, have been much sooner finished, had not its romantic situation tempted our heroine to extend her first intention, by making its dimensions larger, and giving to the whole an air of Gothic grandeur, though still on a comparative scale, which corresponded better with its vicinity to the old ruin, and formed at the same time a fine object from the windows of the library, which faced in that direction. This striking little edifice was so contrived as to admit of two families under its roof, without interfering in any manner whatever with each other: the larger and most commodious division was allotted for the afore-said purpose of education; the lesser designed for the habitation of the gardener.

Before the commencement of the approaching summer, our heroine received a very agreeable addition to her small society, by the almost unlooked-for arrival of her three old friends, Juliana, Beatrix, and Magdaline, who, on the dissolution of their Order, (which being very unpopular in that part of Provence where it happened to be situated, had been accomplished by the neighbouring peasantry under the pressure of many aggravating circumstances,) having

effected their escape to England, were come to throw themselves on her humanity, and to claim that protection, a presentiment of what was to befall them had induced her to offer at the time of their separation in the Convent. The reception they met with from the compassionate and warm-hearted Stella, proved such as to indemnify them for all they had previously suffered, and afforded daily scope to bless the moment of their first introduction and subsequent attention to her forlorn situation while under the dominion of the cruel and capricious Lady Abbess.

That unprincipled woman, they informed Stella, had sustained many indignities in the progress of their emancipation from her tyranny; till at last, humbled to the dust, and terrified by the instigations of a reproaching conscience, she had confessed a series of crimes which the good and innocent Beatrix shrunk from enumerating. One of her transactions, however, was too much connected with the former sufferings of their present benefactress not to claim an exception; for, in the course of the penitential fits with which she was occasionally seized, she confessed that her conduct to the patient, friendless, and ill-treated Stella, often lay heavy on her mind; and that, wishing to disburden it of one load at least, though comparatively trifling in enormity to many others, she desired Beatrix, on her arrival in Scotland, to acquaint her late victim with the compunction now experienced on her account; and likewise to tell her that the cause of her confinement, which she had frequently appeared so solicitous to learn, was Mr. Ross's apprehensions lest his son should form a matrimonial connexion with one so much his inferior; a connexion which the young gentleman, he affirmed, seemed bent upon effecting.

Stella expressed her astonishment at the latter part of this intelligence, declaring it must certainly have originated in some mistake, as nothing of the kind had ever been mentioned to her by Francis Ross.

The Nun, however, persisted in the story, and appeared fully convinced of its authenticity. She likewise added, that the Abbess was so much irritated by the neglect of the Nabob to fulfil the remaining stipulations of their engagement, that she had thought of taking measures to free the Community from the further burden of her maintenance, through the medium of means not quite so unexceptionable as those which fortunately offered to accomplish her liberation by the critical interference of Sir Frederic and Lady Delmore. The precise nature of those means Beatrix forbore to specify; but the deep blush that suffused her countenance at this part of her little narrative, seemed to indicate they were not of the most harmless description. Satisfied that such was the case, and grateful to the ruling arm of Providence for permitting her to escape the threatened evil, Stella pressed not for an explanation of nefarious intentions, which could only serve to heap coals of fire on the head of a fallen enemy; without benefiting herself; and Beatrix, secretly giving her credit for such an instance of self-command, proceeded to relate a number of corroborating circumstances, which evidently established the collusion between the mercenary Abbess and her unprincipled employer. She finished, by saying that the former expired under a variety of sufferings, mental and corporeal, closing her earthly career in one of the vaults of their late residence, where several of the Sisterhood had been forced to conceal themselves from the savage fury of their unfeeling persecutors.

This communication of the Nun convinced our heroine of the injustice done Mrs. St. Vincent by the suspicions formerly harboured against her, as having a hand in her confinement, and taught her to be more cautious in future of forming conclusions from her feelings or prejudices, however the corroborating nature of antecedent circumstances might apparently combine to warrant them.

Mr. Ross had never stood very high in her opinion; and what she now heard did not alter her former sentiments: but as his injustice to her had eventually proved its own punishment in

the loss of his only son, and he himself was no longer able either to persecute her, or defend his own nefarious proceedings, she wished not to war with the dead; and therefore requested the past might be buried in oblivion, in consideration of the many instances of friendship received from some of the other members of his family, and the lasting gratitude, remembrance, and regard she should invariably retain for them.

Beatrix commended this christian disposition, and promised to comply with her wishes on the subject.

CHAP. XVII.

“The world forgetting, by the world forgot.”

POPE.

MEANWHILE our heroine heard frequently from Lady Delmore and her sister, and flattered herself she should have every thing in order for their reception prior to the period of their intended visit to Galloway; which, from some unexpected circumstances, she found was not likely to take place so speedily as had been hoped for at the time of her separating from them.

The building originally designed for the school-house, from its secluded and romantic situation, appeared so congenial to the ideas of the emigrants, whose predilection for retirement seemed rather increased than diminished by the nature of their recent misfortunes, that Stella changed her intention in regard to its first destination, and had it privately fitted up for their reception, upon finding their unconquerable reluctance to renounce the mode of life they had hitherto been accustomed to, and the solicitude they frequently expressed for a similar retreat.

Fully acquainted with all that was necessary to render it such as they desired, every convenience and accommodation suitable for the purpose to which it was now allotted, Stella directed to be procured.

A part of the old ruin was converted into a small chapel; and as its exterior appearance was carefully preserved, no suspicion of the real use for which it was designed could cause any murmurs amongst the lower class of the Scottish peasantry, who were seldom inclined to grant their Roman Catholic neighbours so public a mark of religious indulgence.

The friendly attention of our considerate heroine proved unremitting while this business was in hand, and every thing was at length concluded to her mind, before the future inhabitants entertained the most distant idea of what had been done in their favour; but when finally informed of this circumstance, language is inadequate to do justice to their feelings: suffice it to say, that the effusions of their gratitude were such, that Stella on no previous exertion of benevolence, had ever felt more sincerely gratified, or experienced a higher degree of self-approbation.

But public utility was not to be absorbed in the narrow limits of private gratification: another school-house, though on a different scale, was speedily erected. It consisted merely of two rooms, besides that set apart for the purposes of education, and lay so near the first building, without subjecting the occupiers to the chance of any disagreeable intrusion from its daily inmates, that the Nuns could easily overlook the children's progress in all the various kinds of needle-work—a task the religious of the Order to which they belonged were particularly qualified to perform; and which Beatrix, and her companion Magdaline, now undertook to superintend, aided by the assistance of Juliana, whose perfect knowledge of the English language rendered her an useful auxiliary on the occasion. A very respectable elderly woman, of superior birth and education, but decayed fortune, was ultimately procured to conduct the other branches of instruction: and our heroine had soon the supreme happiness of seeing her benevolent plans in a probable way to benefit numbers of her less affluent fellow-creatures.

Thus in the laudable pursuits of humanity, and every praise-worthy action calculated to keep her mind constantly occupied, Stella held her even course, and magnanimously determined to draw sources of self-congratulation from her exertions for the good of others, with a view to smooth their rugged passage through the chances and changes of life, however thinly, in some

respects, it had pleased Providence to strew her own path with roses.

Uniformly and firmly resolved by no mental imbecility on her side to increase, if she could not conquer, the fatal predilection secretly harboured for St. Vincent, every circumstance that could in any manner tend to produce that effect, was on all occasions sedulously avoided. Actuated by this principle, she had hitherto suppressed the latent inclination that sometimes instigated a wish to revisit particular spots, the situations of which were strongly impressed on her memory by the interesting nature of those occurrences of which they had formerly been the scene. It is true, the high-road leading to Woodside circled round a part of the park which came under the above description; but, though this was the case, and her sensations were such as, from her acute sensibility, must often have rendered the task of passing it extremely painful, Stella turned not from what was proper to be done, in consideration of any selfish or weak indulgence on her own account: she did not indeed willingly lay herself open to such trials of fortitude; neither did she fly from what appeared necessary to be encountered, when circumstances required a different mode of conduct. To approach nearer any of the well-remembered spots, scenes of days for ever passed, than could be easily avoided with propriety, had never yet been attempted: all her merely optional rambles were constantly made in a different direction; and, of course, neither the pleasure-grounds immediately adjacent to the house of Rossgrove, the house itself, nor pavilion, had ever been resorted to since her arrival from the Continent.

During the greater part of the foregoing time Miss Adair had seldom left the Hermitage, except when her presence happened to be particularly wanted at home. In this situation she found herself placed one afternoon about the middle of autumn; and in compliance with a message from her mother, set out for Woodside, from whence she was not expected to return for some days.

Scarcely had Miss Adair taken her departure, before Mrs. Wallace was sent for by her niece, on account of one of the children being suddenly seized with an alarming illness. This was the first time Stella had been deprived of both her companions at the same juncture; and tea was no sooner over than she prepared to visit her Gallic neighbours, and endeavour to prevail upon Juliana to accompany her back for the remainder of the night.

Though the latter, disgusted with the world, and hopeless of ever again meeting the man of her choice, who there were several reasons to believe had fallen a victim to the popular rage for reformation before she quitted France, no longer felt any inclination to mingle in society, and never left her favourite abode without much reluctance: yet, whenever Stella expressed a wish for her company, she yielded to the calls of gratitude and affection, without attending to any other sensation, and immediately obeyed the summons of her benefactress with apparent alacrity. She had never till now, indeed, been requested to sleep out of the cottage of St. Clare (as the habitation of the Nuns was styled, in remembrance of their former residence in Provence,) since it first became the abode of the emigrants; but our heroine did not despair of obtaining her acquiescence to her wishes even in this point.

The evening happened to be uncommonly fine, and as the distance to the cottage was but short, she determined to lengthen her walk by taking a more circuitous path than the usual one.

At the extremity of the late Nabob's pleasure-grounds, a sort of labyrinth had been formed in those plantations which lay most remote from the mansion-house, on the side nearest the Hermitage: this terminated on the ridge of fantastic rocks which surrounded that quarter of the latter where the grotto was situated; and several of the winding walks ran in a direction so far from Rossgrove, that Stella, accompanied by one or other of her friends, sometimes frequented them, without conceiving it any infringement on the secret resolution previously taken to avoid

every circumstance calculated to soften the heart, or recall dangerous remembrances, contrary to the rule of conduct she had prescribed herself.

In the course of her long absence from Scotland the trees and various evergreens, of which the labyrinth was chiefly composed, had considerably increased in size, and approximated more closely to each other; by which means, as well as by some alterations made during that time, the different paths were rendered exceeding intricate and difficult to follow, in proportion as they wound nearer the house of their proprietor: of course, the inhabitants of the Hermitage never ventured to any distance beyond their knowledge, but generally confined their rambles to the vicinity of the grotto.

The road Stella had now taken, led to this labyrinth; and by degrees she entered it, unconscious almost of the circumstance, so much had she gradually become absorbed in reflection. It was the first time that, alone, and unobserved, she had pursued the solitary direction which conducted her to its confines; but her mind happening to be in a frame peculiarly disposed to meditation, and conceiving there would still be sufficient time to call upon Juliana after the conclusion of her peregrination, she gave the reins to inclination, and proceeded insensibly forward, without remembering to pay a necessary attention to her steps, or the surrounding objects by which their returning motions were to be directed, till, after a progress of near an hour's length, she came, most unexpectedly, and all at once, upon the walls of the pavilion and bathing-house.

Stella started, as from a dream, at the unlooked-for discovery; and glancing her eyes around, seemed irresolute what course to pursue. She now perceived that the alterations made in the labyrinth had misled her most egregiously, and felt extremely dissatisfied with herself for indulging a degree of mental abstraction sufficiently powerful to lay the foundation of her present perplexities, by the inattention it naturally produced. After a short pause, curiosity, and something yet more impulsive, however, prevailed; but the latter sensation was carefully covered over by the plausible pretext of examining a book-case, which it was now conveniently recollected stood in the upper apartment. The particular construction of this piece of furniture it appeared requisite to examine, in order to procure a similar one for the grotto: and perfectly satisfied with this ostensible motive for her present defalcation from former resolutions, she permitted the intention to be speedily realized.

“I will venture once more to view the interior,” she said; “perhaps the doorway may be unlocked, and, alas! there is no longer any fear of interruption from the members of a family, all of whom are now nearly swept from the face of the earth.”

Deeply sighing at the melancholy recollection these few words forcibly produced, she laid her hand upon the lock, and found she was not mistaken in her conjecture. Having ascended the staircase, Stella immediately entered the room where Hammond's Love Elegies formerly were discovered.

Various changes had taken place in this well-remembered room since she had last seen it; the furniture was totally different, and the whole seemed to have undergone a thorough alteration. In the opinion of Stella, this alteration, however, was not for the better; and a sigh more profound than the first, marked her sincerity on the occasion.

Instead of the elegant simplicity which once characterized this sweet secluded retreat, an air of voluptuousness reigned in every quarter: the paintings, the artfully concealed recesses in which the sofas were placed, the mirrors—all, in short, evinced a taste repugnant to the nicer feelings of true female delicacy—all breathed a fascinating influence, rather calculated to derange the virtuous sensations of the heart, rather than to render them more permanent.

Stella turned from a cursory examination of the *tout-ensemble* with disgust, and proceeded to the small adjoining cabinet, in which the supposed object of her visit used, in other days, to occupy a distinguished situation. Disappointment, however, attended the search: the book-case no longer appeared; and arrangements similar to those in the larger apartments, also adorned this once more becomingly furnished apartment. At first these changes surprised, no less than displeased her. Mrs. St. Vincent, she presumed, had seldom favoured the Grove with her presence for any length of time since the fatal accident which constituted her its mistress; and her husband was at too great a distance to prove the director of decorations so expensive and improper. In a few minutes, however, Stella recollected Mrs. Wallace had one day mentioned something relative to Mrs. St. Vincent's spending part of a summer at the Grove, soon after it came into her possession; and even hinted that those who accompanied her during her residence there, were by no means noted for propriety of conduct: to this intelligence she had further added, that they frequently held their revels in the pavilion, which had been purposely fitted up for their reception. This information no sooner recurred to her memory, than the mystery at once vanished, and all that she saw was immediately accounted for.

Now more than ever disgusted and dissatisfied with the ultimate conclusion of her researches, she indignantly withdrew from the small apartment, and was hastily crossing to the door of the principal one, when a book, in the same window, and almost in the very identical spot from whence the Love Elegies had been purloined, attracted her notice; and she advanced, with a degree of emotion not to be repressed, in order to examine its titlepage.

The subject of her curiosity proved to be a late publication of some celebrity, and seemed to have been recently perused, for it remained only half closed, and a marker dropped from the leaves as she lifted it up. Stella picked up the latter, with a view to replace it, and perceived it was a visiting card, with the words "Lord Fitzhenry, New Bond Street," printed in the middle of an elegantly engraved border.

The name of Fitzhenry seemed not entirely new to our heroine; but so faint was the recollection retained of it, that she could not possibly call to mind where, or on what occasion it had ever been mentioned in her hearing. This circumstance might easily prove the case; for the old Lord bearing that title, had given up all intercourse with the world long before her departure from England; consequently, he was seldom spoken of in a family not personally acquainted with him, and to the members of which he was only known in the character of great-uncle to St. Vincent, whose prospect of succeeding to his fortune or honours, appeared at that period far too distant to merit any particular degree of attention.

Perfectly unable to form any conclusion from the nature of her confused ideas on this head, the titlepage was again resorted to. Whoever it belonged to must have been in that apartment very lately; and Stella, more and more puzzled, knew not what construction to put upon an incident so unaccountable: all intercourse between Rossgrove and the Hermitage had, to be sure, long ceased to exist; and, of course, the former might have many visitors unknown to the inhabitants of the latter: nevertheless, as things of the smallest importance, particularly if new, are speedily circulated in a country place, it still appeared probable, if any person of the rank this visiting-card announced was at present in the neighbourhood, the circumstance would certainly have transpired, and, through some channel or another, reached her. At length, after a variety of conjectures, she finally concluded that some distant connexion or acquaintance of the family, then on their way to Ireland, had taken the opportunity of viewing the Grove, and accidentally left the volume behind in the pavilion.

CHAP. XVIII.

“With the throb true passion proves,
“Shall fond affection greet the form it loves.”

MISS WILLIAMS.

SATISFIED with this solution of the mystery, Stella replaced the volume, and once more moved towards the door: but the wonder was not to cease with the finishing stroke thus assigned it. In retiring from the window, the train of her gown swept something along with it, which, from the sound, seemed of a hard substance: on stooping to examine what was there, she perceived a ring on the floor: it was a mourning one, with an appropriate device, elegantly executed; and the name of Mrs. Ross, together with the period of her death, richly enamelled upon the inside of it.

Hitherto the attention of Stella had been occupied by trifles, when put in competition with the object which now almost exclusively engrossed it; and she hurried back to the window, in order to view her new acquisition more minutely. What remembrances did not the little magic circle recall to her agitated mind!—what changes, what vicissitudes had befallen her since the time of which it bore the date!

“But,” cried our heroine, as if suddenly recollecting herself, “how came this mournful memento here? it surely could not have been dropped by the unworthy daughter of my dear lamented benefactress; for even admitting, which however is not very probable, that she paid her mother’s memory the respect of wearing such a thing, and had accidentally left it in this place, still it could scarcely have lain unnoticed from the distant period of her last residence at the Grove until the moment of its present discovery.”

A second inundation of conjectures succeeded this new and inexplicable incident: these, however, soon terminated in a manner similar to their predecessors, for she no longer doubted that the ring, like the volume, belonged to some person of the description already mentioned.

What to do with these apparently deserted articles, was now the question. The book she felt no inclination to remove: but the case proved different with its companion; for Stella could not help fancying a certain degree of disrespect seemed attached to the idea of letting it remain in such a state of total neglect, while the conviction that it rested not with her to remedy the negligence of its unknown owner, held her fluctuating and irresolute how to proceed, so as to reconcile the bias of her affectionate heart with those notions of justice and propriety which alternately interfered with her wishes on the occasion.

Before she had come to any decided resolution, her thoughts were suddenly diverted into another channel, and her whole frame petrified with terror and apprehension; for approaching steps were unexpectedly heard, and the murmur of voices ascended, which seemed to issue from persons either already on the staircase, or at least in the lower part of the pavilion.

“A ring is so small an object,” said one of the speakers, whose words now more distinctly reached the listening, trembling Stella, “that it might easily escape every attempt to find it in the green-house; but your Lordship may depend upon my utmost endeavours to recover it if possible.”

What answer was returned to this assurance, our heroine knew not; for, solely anxious to evade discovery, the fatal ring was hastily thrown upon the nearest sofa, after which she rushed into the little cabinet, and softly closed the door behind her.

Two persons almost immediately entered the room from which she had so precipitately

retreated; and in the space of a few minutes he, whose words were first recognised, suddenly exclaimed, in accents of exultation—"Here it is, my Lord—I have found it at last; it must certainly have happened as you suspected, and dropped from your finger when your Lordship's glove fell behind the sofa, where I see the latter still lies."

The expression of pleasure uttered by the other stranger on recovering his ring, marked the value he entertained for it: they did more; for the energetic, yet harmonious accents vibrated on the heart of the trembling Stella with a sensation too powerful, too unexpected for endurance. A deep and profound sigh burst from her bosom; and the succeeding noise occasioned by her fainting frame falling upon the floor, speedily brought the cause of her alarm to witness its effects. The door was abruptly thrown open, and our heroine, on the restoration of her faculties, found herself supported by the circling arms of St. Vincent!

For some time she could hardly credit the evidence of her senses; and when that ceased to be the case, the agitation of the moment was so great, that, totally thrown off her guard, a thousand unconscious indications of the real state of her heart mingled with the astonishment his unexpected appearance created, and to the ardent, penetrating eyes of her highly gratified companion, fully conveyed all he wished to be assured of.

When the first moments of surprise and joy began to subside, the impropriety of her present situation recurred to the recollection of our heroine with renovated force; for her sensations, no less than the imprudence which had led her to run the risk of such an interview by visiting the pavilion, appeared equally reprehensible; and therefore disengaging herself from his still supporting arms, she endeavoured to assume an air of more dignified composure; and, having attempted to apologize for her *mal-à-propos* intrusion, she arose to depart, while the tear that would swell to its utmost boundary, seemed to say her feelings and look were not entirely in unison with each other.

To part from her in this manner was not, however, the present intention of her companion; and neither remonstrances, entreaties, nor even appearance of displeasure, proved sufficiently powerful to effect her purposed retreat.

Convinced, from the nature of his present situation, that he might now address her in the most honourable and unequivocal terms, St. Vincent, though a respect to Stella still continued to direct his conduct, no longer seemed the serious, the unhappy, the reserved character she formerly remembered him. Ever energetic, manly, and noble in all his actions, an uncommon animation pervaded every feature at this juncture, and rendered all he said particularly impressive; his very air and manner conveyed the idea of having undergone a new and incredible revolution: he was no longer to be driven from her presence in obedience to the cold dictates of a repelling prudence, or restrained from evincing the unalterable sentiments of his heart by the influence of considerations which had once rendered him superlatively miserable.

St. Vincent was no longer a married man: the unfortunate woman, for years his torment and disgrace, had at length paid the debt of nature: he was free, unshackled by the galling chain of an ill-sorted union, and, from an unlooked-for combination of circumstances, henceforth at liberty to offer his hand and fortune to her who alone merited his most ardent and unalterable attachment.

The whole of this surprising intelligence was uttered with so much vehemence of expression, and in terms so strongly descriptive of his feelings, that Stella, overpowered by the influx of new ideas, which took entire possession of her mind, permitted him in silent perturbation to reseat her: and now first remarking his mourning dress, which (had any proof of his veracity been necessary) sufficiently witnessed the truth of what she had just heard, and

seemed to sanction a relaxation from the stern line of propriety hitherto so strictly observed, he was insensibly allowed to explain himself in a fuller and more connected style, without the smallest attempt from his now happy auditor to interrupt the communication, who listened with an increasing degree of interest to the history of former sufferings, in the bitterness of which she had but too deeply participated not to feel extremely affected by the recapitulation; while her heart, unusually softened, and irresistibly assailed in favour of the man who had ever remained master of its earliest movements, gradually yielded to the actuating impulse of tender affection; and as he held her enraptured to his bosom, she softly murmured forth acknowledgements of her sentiments continuing the same as, some years back, he had but too much reason to believe them.

The circling arms of St. Vincent returned a more fervent pressure as the blushing Stella pronounced this ecstatic confession of persevering regard, while a temporary, but most expressive silence marked the nature of their sensations. He then yielded to Stella's efforts to be disengaged from his arms, which, the moment she recollected herself, she attempted to effect, and in a short time each of the parties became more composed, and better able to converse on the astonishing alteration which had, since their last sight of each other, taken place in their affairs.

The person by whom St. Vincent was accompanied on his arrival at the pavilion, had retired the moment the restoration of our heroine's faculties was fully ascertained; they were consequently left at liberty to discuss all those various topics of communication which seemed to press for a particular and immediate degree of attention; and in the course of their conversation, Stella learned the following particulars.

CHAP. XIX.

“All things are ready, if our minds be so.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IT appeared that soon after the late Mrs. Ross joined her husband in Provence, St. Vincent's brother fell an early victim to a long series of ill conduct, and almost every species of moral depravity. His father did not long survive him, bent to the grave by the irremediable errors of one son, and the misery which the consequences of those errors had, through his means, entailed on the other. The death of the latter happened just before St. Vincent left England; he had therefore the melancholy gratification of performing the last duties to this unfortunate parent, and doing every thing in his power to render his widowed mother's situation consonant to her wishes.

By his marriage articles with Margaret Ross, the Grove, in failure of her brother and his more immediate heirs, was to be the joint property of her and her husband for the term of their several lives; after which it descended, of course, to their children: but in case no issue resulted from this ill-sorted union, (and St. Vincent not only now survived his wife, but likewise the other branches of his family,) then the whole of the Nabob's landed possessions was finally to rest with his daughter's husband, provided they had been five years married at the time of her decease.

Many things which are considered as our greatest misfortune at the time of their being, are, in fact, frequently found to be productive of future benefit. Had St. Vincent's attempts to obtain a divorce succeeded at the time they were first set on foot, Rossgrove would have been ultimately lost to him; and, in that event, devolved on a man with whom his father-in-law had

constantly been at variance, and whose degree of propinquity appeared almost too distant to admit of being properly ascertained; a circumstance which might hereafter have proved the source of endless discord and unceasing litigation.

Disappointed in every endeavour to effect a legal and final separation from an artful and abandoned woman, who, in spite of his utmost exertions to the contrary, still contrived to preserve the title of his wife, and anxious to fly a country where mortification and domestic disgrace continually met him in the ideal form of one whom he no longer saw, though apparently bound to for life, St. Vincent, as Miss Adair had already related, changed into a marching regiment then under sailing orders for Gibraltar, whither he accompanied it with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

In the course of his last year's residence abroad he succeeded to the honours and fortune of his great-uncle Lord Fitzhenry, who died in the early part of the preceding summer, at an advanced age, leaving him a clear estate of some thousands per annum in the south of England.

Two months after that event took place, another, of still more importance to his peace, was announced from Britain; for he then learned that his vile wife had at length finished her guilty career; and, almost for the first time in her life, performed an act of justice, by vindicating our heroine with her dying breath, from the cruel aspersions formerly cast upon her conduct, by imploring her husband might be informed of her penitence and remorse; and finally, by recommending Stella as her successor in his affections, should the attachment she more than suspected he once entertained for her ill-treated, but worthy rival, still exist in his bosom.

Extremely affected by a proceeding so little expected from her late unfeeling persecutor, Stella permitted her tears to flow unrestrained for the space of several minutes; and in reply to Lord Fitzhenry's enquiry if she was ready to evince her forgiveness of past injuries, by a prompt acquiescence in the wishes so emphatically expressed by an expiring and repentant enemy, she instinctively, and silently presented her hand for his acceptance, which, it may be supposed, was not received with indifference. St. Vincent pressed it to his lips, to his heart; and forcing her blushing face from his shoulder, on which it had reclined, sealed the long wished-for and precious donation, with a warm and fervent embrace: he then recommenced the office of historian, and proceeded to conclude what remained of his little narrative, by adding that, as the situation of his affairs now required a speedy return to Britain, permission from the Commander in Chief was easily obtained for that purpose; when, after a prosperous voyage, he once more landed on his native shore, and directly set about the arrangements which more particularly demanded his attention.

No sooner was this in some measure accomplished, than, anxious to inform himself of the fate of an object far more interesting, he quitted the metropolis on the very first moment in which his presence could possibly be dispensed with, and proceeded to the North, with all the additional impatience so long and so painful a restraint on his feelings might naturally be supposed to create.

Stella here interrupted him, to enquire how he had become acquainted with her present residence in Galloway; and found by the answer she received, that Miss Adair's letter, containing her little history, as likewise another afterwards written by the same lady, had never reached Major Montague; a circumstance probably owing to his being at that time in Ireland, which might have occasioned their miscarriage. Conceiving, therefore, the imaginary silence of his Scottish correspondent merely proceeded from a miscarriage in the article of intelligence, he had forborne to trouble her by enquiries on the subject, convinced, had any thing occurred worthy of communication, it would not have been withheld from his knowledge.

The deficiency on the score of facts caused by this incident was, however, tolerably compensated for by the Delmore family, who happening to be acquainted with Montague, and discovering his anxiety for the fate of their beloved *protégée*, soon made him master of every event in which she was implicated, as far the extent of their own information enabled them to gratify him.

St. Vincent further added, that he had only reached Rossgrove at a late hour on the preceding evening; and though extremely solicitous to pay his immediate respects at the Hermitage, yet unwilling to make his first appearance there without a proper introduction, in order to do away every remaining shadow of those disagreeable rumours formerly propagated to their mutual disadvantage, he had endeavoured to restrain his impatience till the arrival of Montague and his sister Louisa, whom he left upon the road, and hourly expected to see at Rossgrove; and to whose subsequent arrangements it was intended to entrust the management of this affair.

“Happily,” he continued, smiling as he spoke, and raising our heroine’s hand to his lips, “part of this plan has already been effected without the interference of foreign assistance; what remains to be accomplished, they must manage in the best manner they can. This little magic ring, in conjunction with the advice of the gardener, who knowing I had been here, suggested the possibility of recovering it in this place, must account for the subsequent, though partial change of measures which has now taken place; I say partial, for we shall still make our appearance at your mansion in due form when that lazy fellow Montague and his wife arrives, who ought to have joined me ere this. You will receive us, my Stella, I trust?”

“And where pray is now my beloved and kind friend Mrs. Mortimer?” asked Stella, without answering the last question in any other manner than by a look sufficiently expressive to give him full satisfaction.

“She is at present confined to the house by the declining health of her husband, who has long been much indisposed; but scarcely any person more sincerely wishes to congratulate me on, I hope, a speedy approaching event, than your friend Fanny; the warmth of whose attachment to her future sister would certainly have excited jealousy in no small degree, had she been otherwise than a female admirer.”

Having conversed for some time longer on the various topics by which their attention was engrossed, Stella, on examining her watch, was astonished at the lateness of the hour, and, almost for the first moment, remarked that twilight, “clad in sober gray,” appeared verging on its darkest shade; she therefore prepared to return home: and her companion, convinced of the propriety of the motion, consented, though not without reluctance, to a short separation, but positively refused to quit her before she reached the Hermitage. As Stella found it totally impossible to controvert this design, she was forced to acquiesce at length in the measure, and permit him to have his own way.

During their walk through the labyrinth, St. Vincent informed her he had already visited all the well-remembered spots in the park and its vicinity, which past occurrences had engraven, never to be effaced, on his memory: “of the number, one, however, and a principal one too,” he added, in a gay tone of voice, “still remains to be explored. The grotto, I understand, has undergone many judicious alterations since I last saw it; let us now take the path that leads to it. Nay, my Stella, refuse me not this trifling indulgence; to review the interior of that spot where the conviction that I was not totally indifferent to the woman I so exclusively, so ardently adored, first reached my knowledge, appears too gratifying to every feeling of my heart patiently to bear a disappointment at this juncture.”

Stella was again under the necessity of granting a reluctant consent: she once more perceived with astonishment that he was no longer to be forced from her presence, as in other days, nor disposed to deny himself those trifling enjoyments which the mind of true sensibility knows best how to appreciate in all cases where either the real or imaginary interests of the heart are implicated. She listened to him in silence; and, with their minds greatly agitated, they at length entered the favourite retreat.

As a repetition of the scene that followed might not be quite so interesting to those who have no particular part assigned to them, as to the actual performers in the drama, we shall not fatigue our readers by dwelling on the minuter features of the subject, but merely observe, that nearly another hour elapsed before either the gentleman or lady recollected the flight of time, or the increasing necessity for a separation. At length, however, they parted, and returned to their respective habitations in a frame of mind very different from that experienced on the commencement of this eventful evening.

Stella no longer thought of requesting Juliana's company; on the contrary, she rejoiced to find herself alone, and at liberty to indulge the various reflections that pressed upon her mind. A change so wonderful, so utterly unexpected, had taken place in her future prospects, that there were times when the whole of the foregoing incidents appeared like an illusion of the imagination, and she almost feared to indulge a retrospection, lest a second view of the foregoing circumstances should establish the certainty of their being imaginary, and leave her once more a prey to corroding anguish and secret disappointment. When, however, the first tumultuous sensations produced by a mental recapitulation of the evening's occurrences began to subside, and the reality of their existence no longer appeared in a questionable shape, sober reason resumed its empire, and presented obstacles so insurmountable, so inimical to her wishes, that, sickening at the thought of what yet remained to be encountered, she almost regretted the hasty and, as it now seemed, ill-judged confirmation of her former predilection for St. Vincent which he had recently extorted from her.

"He knows not the circumstances of my birth," said she to herself; "he dreams not that she whom he would raise to rank and consequence may, perhaps, be the offspring of the lowest class of the community, or what is infinitely worse, the spurious issue of depravity and vice. Shall I then repay his long-harboured and generous affection by giving to his arms a woman who may ultimately be the means of entailing as much disgrace and misery on his head in the person of, possibly, her nearest relatives, as he has already had to encounter with from one who, by her erroneous proceedings, caused him so much unhappiness?—No, I will not be the selfish, the unworthy being, who, indifferent to the feelings of others, thinks but of gratifying its own. Fitzhenry must be still ignorant of my real situation—ignorant that I am merely the child of humanity, unacknowledged, unconnected by any tie of relationship with the wide extended circle of my fellow-mortals! Oh why, why did not Major Montague save me the humiliating task of such a confession!—why, alas! was not the whole truth laid before the noble St. Vincent when other parts of my mortifying story were mentioned to him! It is not, however, yet too late to be more explicit; he shall not take an impostor to his bosom—no, dear and beloved St. Vincent! hard and sad though the undertaking appears that may possibly separate us for ever, you shall know all; and the sacred immutable dictates of truth and justice be permitted to rise superior to every other consideration. I will explain to-morrow the mystery which envelops me, when those most interested in the discovery are assembled under my roof, and by their decision shall my future steps be directed, my conduct governed. Should that decision prove finally destructive of my too fondly indulged hopes, I must patiently submit to its fiat, and endeavour to tranquillize

my perturbed bosom with the best source of all consolation—the cheering voice of an approving conscience, and a conviction I have performed my duty by strictly adhering to the strict line of moral rectitude, which situation and circumstances have already marked out for my future conduct.”

Deep was the sigh that succeeded this determination; and Stella restlessly passed the remainder of the night. An air of anxious solicitude pervaded her features on the following morning; and when a note from Fitzhenry was put into her hands, announcing the arrival of their friends, together with their intention of visiting the Hermitage in the course of the forenoon, she became so extremely agitated, that, but for the timely aid of some hartshorn and water, her senses must inevitably have suffered a temporary suspension.

CHAP. XX.

“Something must be done
“Of high import ere night, that I may sleep,
“Or wake for ever.”

BROOKE.

STELLA endeavoured to prepare her mind for the approaching interview by every assistance that reason, and a high sense of what her own character demanded, could possibly furnish for the purpose; and so far did the conscious recollection of moral integrity ultimately strengthen her intention, that she found herself infinitely more able to perform the allotted task, than at one time seemed likely to prove the case. The period assigned for the commencement of that task now rapidly advanced: it came, and she was speedily pressed to the bosoms of her friendly and fondly-beloved visitors.

When the first transports occasioned by this meeting were over, that agitation, originating in another cause, which Stella had been again endeavouring to suppress, returned, and taking possession of every faculty of her mind, prevented the explanation she wished to enter upon. At length, however, the tremendous design was undertaken; but no sooner was the point to which it tended fully comprehended by her impatient auditors, than an absolute negative was instantly put upon the subject, and the further continuance of it positively refused to be listened to.

With every circumstance she could relate, Fitzhenry was already acquainted; Montague had told him all; and the sole effect it produced on his mind was, only to add an additional argument for the speedy surrender of her hand, in order that she might no longer have cause to consider herself unconnected and, as heretofore, nearly alone in the world.

Neither Fitzhenry nor herself were now accountable to any human being for their actions; and consequently to persist in the idea of sacrificing a great portion of happiness within their reach, because the utmost extent of their prospects could not be realized, appeared too chimerical and fastidious to be acquiesced in. In short, overpowered, if not altogether convinced by the united and unyielding rhetoric of her three opponents, our heroine was finally necessitated to descend from her altitude, to renounce her intentions, and submit to the arduous task of consenting to follow her own inclination.

Before they parted, Montague using the privilege of an old friend, placed her hand in Fitzhenry's, who received it as the most precious gift of Heaven, while Louisa clasped her future sister in her arms, and repeatedly thanked her husband for accelerating the happiness of a justly beloved brother. One circumstance Stella, however, would by no means be prevailed upon to give up: on no account whatever would she hear of a change in her present situation till the year of mourning for her unfortunate predecessor had expired; and Fitzhenry, however he censured a determination so inimical to his wishes, finding Mrs. Montague on the side of his fair opponent, and the Major neutral, was at length forced to relinquish the animating hope of an immediate union with his destined bride. Every thing, nevertheless, was carried on with the prospect of that union in view; and the family of Rossgrove seemed henceforth to have but one interest and one heart with that of the Hermitage.

Miss Adair, in the course of the following week, returned to the latter, with the changes in which she and her friends at Woodside had been previously acquainted by Major Montague, who personally waited upon them with the information: nor were the Nuns less pleased with this

accession of rank, fortune, and happiness, which their amiable benefactress was soon to obtain, they participated in all her feelings; and, though the pensive melancholy that pervaded Juliana's appearance was rather augmented than diminished by the comparison she could not help drawing between their destiny, still she rejoiced in the opening prospects of her much-valued friend, and daily offered petitions to Heaven for their successful termination.

From the first moment of Mrs. Montague's introduction to the emigrants, she became warmly interested in favour of Juliana, and her husband appeared no less so. In consequence of her observing the increasing nature of their predilection, Stella ventured at length to disclose the connexion that subsisted between the parties; and though Montague seemed extremely agitated during the communication, yet he permitted not a single sentence to escape that could possibly wound the feelings of his amiable and newly-discovered sister; for his principles were too pure, and his heart too good, to punish the innocent daughters for the errors of their misguided parent.

Perhaps there never was a set of people more satisfied with each others society than the present inhabitants of Rossgrove and the Hermitage: two months had already passed with the rapidity of one; and no single day in that period elapsed without spending some part of it under the same roof. Louisa, Stella, and Juliana seemed informed by one mind, and never so happy as when in company with each other: the latter, however, seldom left the cottage without a sensation of secret reluctance; and the gratification experienced in their presence was always more sincere when she was permitted to enjoy it within the walls of her secluded retreat. Beatrix, entirely occupied by religious subjects, and the interests of the school, which she evinced an unceasing inclination to superintend, would never be prevailed upon to exceed the limits she had prescribed herself, and consequently remained always at the cottage; from whence Magdaline, however, sometimes departed, for the purpose of temporary recreation in the neighbourhood; and being of a more cheerful disposition than the other, with a natural turn for observation, she generally picked up something in the course of these little excursions, which, repeated in her broken English and accompanying manner, frequently entertained her auditors at the Hermitage for an hour or two when they met in an evening.

The first circumstance that occurred to interrupt the even tenor of their days was, the death of Mr. Mortimer, after a severe and lingering illness of several months' duration. This melancholy event requiring the presence of his wife's relatives in the vicinity of the metropolis, they found themselves under the unavoidable necessity of an immediate journey to the south of England.

When the subject of their departure was first discussed, Stella entertained not the smallest idea of accompanying them; but, though secretly averse to the measure, the united wishes of her friends at the Grove at length induced her to suppress every remaining degree of reluctance; and she finally consented to make one of the party.

This compliance with their request, however, was perhaps chiefly produced by the present condition of Louisa, who happened to be now far advanced in her second pregnancy; and, of course, less able to bear the fatigue of attending upon Mrs. Mortimer during the earliest stages of affliction, than, under other circumstances, might have proved the case.

Stella, on recollection, wondered how she could possibly hesitate on such an occasion; and ultimately flattered herself with the thoughts of supplying every deficiency of Louisa's. Gratified by the opportunity that thus offered for evincing her lasting remembrance of former attention, she seemed to have entirely sacrificed her own inclination in one respect, to that which had taken possession of her mind in another, and she prepared for her journey with apparent alacrity.

But though the propelling desire of enjoying her society had at first led Lord Fitzhenry to hint his wishes on the subject, a motive scarcely less powerful instigated the united perseverance of the party to effect their design:—by appearing thus publicly with his family, not only countenanced, but even visibly respected by every branch of it, the envenomed tongue of slander would probably be laid asleep, and no longer venture to propagate those cruel rumours once so malignantly levelled at a character not more justly than conspicuously supported.

At the time of Mr. Mortimer's death, Lord Fitzhenry was occupied in the superintendance of several judicious alterations then carrying on under his personal direction at Rossgrove; and something relative to them, in conjunction with county business of importance, unexpectedly interfering with their previous arrangements, the commencement of the journey was necessarily postponed to the beginning of the succeeding week.

On the evening of the day on which this unforeseen delay took place, Lord Fitzhenry, Montague, and Louisa happened to be with Stella at the Hermitage, when the latter was abruptly summoned from the library, where they were sitting, by Mrs. Wallace, whose agitated and hurried manner extremely surprised our heroine, and she instantly demanded to know the reason of it.

The good woman, while she evidently struggled to assume an air of external composure, which but ill accorded with the nature of her feelings, having drawn her companion to a window near the staircase, speedily proceeded to inform her in a low voice, that a person was at that very moment in the house who, she had reason to believe, was better acquainted with the mysterious circumstances of her birth than she appeared willing to acknowledge.

Stella, almost breathless with the emotion this surprising intelligence created, requested, in faltering accents, to hear upon what grounds the above supposition was founded; and Mrs. Wallace quickly gratified her ardent curiosity by the following intelligence.

“As the evening proved fine, I set out, when tea was over, to enquire if my niece Sally had executed a little commission with which I had entrusted her. Before I reached the corner of the barn, she appeared at the door of the house, and beckoning me to go round the back way, I took the path that led in that direction, and found her there ready to receive me.

‘A surprising thing has happened,’ said she, in a whisper; ‘I saw you approaching, but wished first to speak with you in private. The woman who called herself Mrs. Norris, and who acted in the capacity of an attendant on the strange gentleman, is now in the house. She says she has just landed from Ireland, and is going to the neighbourhood of Dumfries, where some of her relations reside; but, upon enquiry, understanding I was now married and settled at this place, she could not think of quitting Wigtonshire without seeing me. At first I was quite at a loss, and could not recollect her after the lapse of so many years: however, upon learning her name, that was no longer the case; and I thanked her for so kind a proof of remembrance. Having prevailed upon my visitor to partake of some refreshment, we seated ourselves by the fireside, and naturally entered upon the subject of former days. Mrs. Norris, however, seemed solicitous to avoid every particular allusion to topics apparently tending to satisfy my curiosity relative to the history of those she accompanied at the commencement of our acquaintance; and as a recurrence to this kind of conversation was evidently disagreeable, I soon forbore to urge it, till, recollecting the circumstances of the picture, and the wonderful resemblance it had to Miss Stella, the thought struck me that something might now perhaps be discovered about an officer, which had so long puzzled all in the secret of her birth to account for; so, without mentioning the latter affair, I merely related the manner in which it had been found after their departure from the Hermitage, requesting at the same time to know whether it belonged to herself or the lady. Mrs.

Norris appeared surprised and much agitated by the enquiry, and, without returning a direct answer to my question, desired immediately to see the miniature, which, she said, had been lost somewhere in the course of their journey, though not having missed it at the time, they knew not the precise spot. I told her it was not in my possession, but I doubted not she might nevertheless obtain a sight of it, as I believed it was still at the Hermitage.'

'And who now inhabits the Hermitage?' she asked.

'A young lady,' I replied, 'to whom Mrs. Bertram bequeathed it at her decease.'

'I should like to see the place again,' observed Mrs. Norris, after a short pause. 'Perhaps the lady will indulge my curiosity in regard to the picture if you request it?'

'I said I was convinced that gratification could easily be obtained; and added I would accompany her with pleasure when my husband returned from the fields, which I expected would be the case in less than an hour. It was about this time I first bethought myself,' continued Sally, 'to mention the singular circumstance of discovering a child in my uncle's vessel when she and the other strangers landed at Port Patrick; but, while relating it, I took care not to give the smallest hint that could lead her to suppose I knew any thing further of the business, or the situation of the infant afterwards, as I wished to act with caution until your advice was procured on the occasion. Mrs. Norris seemed uncommonly struck with this intelligence, her colour repeatedly varied, and her tongue for some time refused its office. I observed her in silence, and began to conjecture she was not quite so unacquainted with this mysterious transaction as she seemed willing to make one believe; and just as I was going to send over to the Hermitage, you were fortunately discovered approaching at a distance. Finding my husband now returned from the superintendence of his labourers, I desired him to keep her in conversation during my absence, and immediately stole out to consult with you as to the proper steps next to be pursued, in order to obtain that information which, I am more and more persuaded, is in this woman's power to afford.'

"Such," continued Mrs. Wallace, "proved the substance of my niece's communication; and judging it of too much consequence to be neglected, we finally agreed that I should return here, without making my appearance before her visitor, who, after receiving an invitation to remain all night at the farm-house, was to be accompanied hither by Sally, chiefly with a view, as the latter pretended, to examine the miniature. I hoped to have preceded them half an hour at least; but in getting over the stile, I made a false step, which hurt my ankle, and prevented my reaching you at an earlier period; of course, they arrived almost as soon as myself; and Mrs. Norris is now below in the back parlour. What, dear Miss Stella, is your pleasure on the occasion? Sally has already asked for me; and, under pretence of enquiring for the picture, waits at the bottom of the stairs for further instruction."

Stella, in the utmost perturbation of mind and spirits, paused for a moment, and then desired her to take the miniature in her hand to shew to the stranger; and, by keeping her attention engaged, endeavour to prevent her departure till such time as the advice of her visitors in the library could be obtained. She then hastened back to that apartment, and, as well as the emotion under which she laboured would permit, recapitulated the foregoing particulars to her astonished auditors; after which they consulted on the proper measures to be adopted in so singular an emergency.

CHAP. XXI.

“Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind:
“The thief that steals thinks every bush an officer.”
SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. Wallace having acquainted her niece with the present result of her information, now followed her into the parlour, and was introduced to their guest as the aunt of the latter. The picture almost immediately became the topic of discourse, while the changing countenance of her who intently examined it was sedulously watched by her companions. At length Mrs. Wallace took an opportunity to remark, in a seemingly careless manner, that it extremely resembled a young lady of her acquaintance; and then turning to Mrs. Norris, repeated what Sally had previously told her relative to the inexplicable incident which happened four-and-twenty years back in her husband's vessel; abruptly adding, as she fixed a steadfast and penetrating eye on the visibly agitated person to whom she addressed herself—

“By the bye, Mrs. Norris, you can possibly give some insight into this strange affair; for, if I mistake not, you were one of the only two female passengers on board at the time: and as the infant foundling must certainly have crossed the Channel from Ireland, I presume a circumstance so extraordinary could not be altogether unknown to you, or some of the party you accompanied. This supposition, indeed, appears doubly probable from the total ignorance of the whole crew respecting it; and it seems pretty clear a new-born child could not long have existed in such a state as that in which it was found.”

The deepening colour that rushed over her features upon this sudden charge, the hesitation in her voice, and every other symptom of confusion that followed, alike united to evince the justice of Mrs. Wallace's suspicions, in spite of the awkward endeavours of the stranger to do them away, who, after some further conversation on the subject, and a positive denial of having had any share in the transaction, declared she must immediately return to Port Patrick, in order to give some directions relative to her journey, which had hitherto escaped her memory.

Mrs. Wallace expected a similar manoeuvre, and was prepared for it. She adroitly contrived to prevent this design in a manner Mrs. Norris could not evade, and soon after quitted the room, with the intention, she said, of procuring some refreshment for her visitors; but, in fact, to relate what she observed, which, in her opinion, amounted to little less than conviction.

Having accomplished this matter, and returned again to the parlour, she perceived Mrs. Norris had assumed a more composed look, and appeared quite collected. Determined not to let her off so easily, her tormentor renewed the attack, which the stranger again attempted to parry, by protesting, as before, that so far from possessing any knowledge of the circumstance now mentioned, she had not even heard of it till that day.

“But pray,” said she, in a gayer tone of affected ease, “what became of this wonderful child? Is it still alive? or, as it seems to have dropped from the clouds, did it find a cradle in the sea?”

“That was probably the fate designed for it,” replied Mrs. Wallace, with a look that indicated much, and instantly repressed the assumed levity of the enquirer, who hoped, by treating the story lightly, to shew she considered it merely as a jest. “The infant, however, was miraculously preserved by the critical interposition of Providence; adopted, educated, and finally

provided for, by the late worthy owner of this house, to whose more than maternal attention her conduct has uniformly done the highest honour; and she is now on the point of being united to an English gentleman of family, fortune, and merit, equal to the most sanguine wishes of all who know her. In short, the once deserted victim of unnatural parents now——”

Mrs. Wallace was prevented from proceeding, not by a servant with refreshments, as expected by some of the party, but the sudden entrance of Stella and Major Montague; on whose appearance, starting from her seat, she exclaimed—“I beg pardon, Madam! I have been so much engaged with my niece’s friend here, that I really forgot to look for the book you wanted.”

While she was thus addressing Stella, Sally took an opportunity of whispering her companion—“That is the young person who was found in my uncle’s vessel. Don’t you think she resembles the picture amazingly?”

But Sally and her aunt might now have spoken till Doomsday unheeded by their guest, whose every look and idea seemed intently rivetted on the face of our heroine, whose late pallid cheeks began to exhibit a faint colouring of rosy red, that rendered her countenance peculiarly striking at this interesting moment, and even heightened the likeness usually observed between her features and the miniature, in a very considerable degree.

“Here it is,” said Mrs. Wallace, reaching a volume from the table by which Mrs. Norris and Sally were standing. “Pray, Major Montague, hand it to Miss Stella.”

At the word “Montague” Mrs. Norris started, as if bitten by a serpent; and, turning her eyes hastily from our heroine upon him who had been accosted by that denomination, she drew her bonnet further over her face, and apparently shrunk from notice behind the table: her looks, however, still kept the same direction, and glanced alternately from one to the other, till a frenzied expression of horror and distraction gradually marked every distorted feature; when, totally overpowered by the complicated nature of her feelings, she at length caught the arm of Sally, to prevent her from falling upon the floor, and pressing it with a convulsive grasp, sunk by her side on a chair that happened to be near them.

“You are ill!” cried Sally, really terrified by her appearance. “Pray, aunt, assist me to support Mrs. Norris till something is procured to revive her.”

Hitherto Montague and Stella had taken their station nearly opposite her, so as to afford a full view of them both, and affected to be entirely occupied in examining some engravings in the book Mrs. Wallace had given them: the Major, however, now hastily raised his head, as did Stella, in evident perturbation. He whispered her, nevertheless, not to become an active assistant, as she seemed desirous of doing; and then advancing a few steps closer to the invalid, after regarding her with a stern and scrutinizing eye, said—“Your name, if my conjecture is right, has not always been Norris; answer me, were you not once known by that of Palmer?”

Before there was time to return an answer to the question, Juliana, for whom Miss Adair had flown to the cottage, joined the party assembled in the parlour; and having observed the stranger for a short period in silent emotion, soon recognised in the person of Mrs. Norris her mother’s old and confidential attendant; who now perceiving all her attempts at concealment ineffectual, and every subterfuge of no further avail, suddenly quitted her chair, and sinking at the feet of Major Montague, confessed she was the person he supposed, while, in accents of wild supplication, she implored for mercy and forgiveness—“for mercy on himself,” she added, with peculiar emphasis; “for, if you are the intended husband of that lady, as there is a God in heaven, she is your sister, and the daughter of her who bore you!”

Mrs. Palmer, on pronouncing these words, cast a ghastly and terrified look towards the scarcely less affected Stella; and those who were present at this scene, immediately concluded,

from the tenor of her words and manner, that she imagined Major Montague was the gentleman to whom the fate of our heroine was to be united. After a moment's pause, as if gasping for breath, she thus proceeded:—

“Yes, there is an Almighty, a ruling Power above us! and I am yet permitted to become the instrument of some good on earth, by proving the means of a discovery so critically momentous! Will you not then shew me compassion? will you not have pity on the guilty miserable being thus at your knees entreating for pardon?” and she motioned to approach yet nearer.

“Wretch!” cried Montague, indignantly, recoiling a few paces, “where is my unhappy mother? where the infamous Ormsby? I have since discovered he died not by the hand of his much injured antagonist, as was first supposed to be the case. Answer me quickly—answer me instantly, without further hesitation!”

Terrified by the vehemence of his voice and peremptory air, the trembling culprit could not immediately command the power of utterance; but, on a repetition of the same enquiry, in a tone that admitted not of procrastination, she faintly replied, that her master had indeed, against every appearance of probability, recovered the effects of the wound he received from Sir Charles; but his life was not to be preserved, for he afterwards fell in one of the popular tumults at Paris; and Lady Montague,” she added, with a deep sigh, “expired of a broken-heart some months ago in Ireland, whither she retired on the death of Captain Ormsby.”

“Of a broken-heart, did you say?” cried Montague, striking his forehead with violence.

“Oh my mother!” exclaimed Stella and Juliana in one voice, and falling into each others arms in an agony of grief, “what a destiny was yours!”

“A dreadful one!” rejoined Mrs. Palmer, speaking in a low hollow accent, and again raising her languid head from a neighbouring chair, on which it had rested; “for Captain Ormsby proved an unfeeling tyrant; and in sorrow, remorse, and repentance, she passed the lingering period of her earthly existence: but she is now beyond the reach of human inflictions; she has at length got to that happy country, ‘where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.’ Would to God——”

Here Mrs. Palmer's voice became still lower, and what she attempted to utter died away upon her lips, while a deep sigh burst forth, and her head once more dropped upon the chair. A solemn pause ensued, which neither Montague nor the ladies seemed desirous to interrupt. The former paced the room in much apparent agitation; the latter leaned upon each other, and covering their faces with their handkerchiefs, wept in silence.

Meanwhile Mrs. Wallace and Sally employed their utmost exertions to rouse the now torpid faculties of the late speaker; but every effort for that purpose proved at present ineffectual: faint, exhausted, and breathless, the variety of sensations that pressed upon her heart deprived her of the power to give them vent by words, and she remained totally unable to continue her interesting communications at this juncture.

Perceiving it in vain to hope for a further gratification of their curiosity till such time as the narrator was in a state more adequate to the distressing task, Montague led Stella and Juliana from the room; and as they declined returning to the library in the present agitation of their spirits, he assisted them to the nearest bed-chamber, where Mrs. Wallace, having left the care of the invalid to Sally and one of the maids, almost instantly followed; and by the application of proper restoratives, preserved them from fainting.

Here they were joined by Mrs. Montague and Miss Adair, to whom their good old attendant briefly related the substance of what had passed at the late interview; while Montague,

as well as the perturbed state of his mind would permit, went through a similar explanation to the hardly less agitated Lord Fitzhenry.

During these transactions in the other parts of the house, Mrs. Palmer had leisure to collect her wandering ideas; and, unmolested by the voice of enquiry, endeavoured to recompose her spirits, in order to finish the painful undertaking yet to be accomplished. In this attempt she was greatly assisted by the amiable character received of Stella through the medium of her two companions; and still more so, when, in the course of their communications, she found herself agreeably undeceived in respect to the intended husband of our heroine. This latter discovery seemed to have removed a considerable weight from her conscience; and sensible she must proceed with a narrative, the protracted delay of which appeared now only in the light of accumulating misery, she made a desperate effort upon her feelings to bring the remainder of the humiliating confession to a final conclusion; and, in a tremulous voice, requested the necessary measures might be taken for that purpose, by entreating the further attention of her former auditors. They were no less anxious than Mrs. Palmer for the prosecution of this interesting object; and being, like herself, now somewhat recruited, immediately obeyed the summons they received to the parlour, whither the rest of our heroine's visitors consented to accompany them.

On perceiving their approach, Mrs. Palmer half raised herself from the sofa on which she had been placed; and after taking some hartshorn drops presented by Sally, without lifting her eyes, or attempting to look at any of the party that now ranged themselves around her, made an effort to speak: her tongue, however, once more refused its office; and before she could obtain the command of it to render herself sufficiently intelligible, Montague spared her a further struggle by stepping forward, and, after a short pause, commenced the conversation where it had before broken off.

"You hinted at Ormsby's ill-treatment of Lady Montague, I think; if so, why did she not leave him?" said he.

"Because," replied Mrs. Palmer, in yet a feeble voice, though somewhat recovered by the company's indulgence, "strange as it may appear, she still continued fondly attached to him; and besides, he had always been regarded as her husband."

"Her husband!" repeated Montague, indignantly.

"Yes, her husband; you are possibly ignorant, Sir, of the engagement that existed between them prior to her union with Sir Charles Montague."

Stella and Juliana involuntarily started, and looked at each other; while Montague, in extreme emotion, called upon her to proceed.

"Captain Ormsby and Miss Cramond were privately married before she knew your father, Sir. An unexpected order to join a part of his regiment in a distant island, with which, as a military man, he was instantly necessitated to comply, separated them a few minutes after the conclusion of the ceremony; and a combination of circumstances seemed to corroborate a rumour of his having been lost in a vessel that foundered at sea, which the protracted nature of his absence apparently rendered but too probable. Sir Charles Montague, in the interim, appeared as the professed admirer of the self-supposed widow, who, broken-spirited, and too timid to avow the truth, which she well knew would not alter the mercenary views of Mr. Cramond, though such a confession might procure her his eternal malediction, yielded to the unfortunate, unresisting softness of her disposition, and became the acknowledged wife of one man, while the imaginary relic of another, for whom she would singly have mourned to the termination of her earthly career, had so melancholy an indulgence been permitted her. Mrs. Cramond was not insensible to the silent, though visible distress of her daughter; but she was likewise acquainted

with her father's temper and disposition, and therefore attempted not to controvert his designs. Captain Ormsby again appeared; and you already know, in some degree, what followed. Lady Montague found his arguments, when backed by inclination, too potent to combat; and at length renounced every thing in favour of the irresistible attachment she bore him who was uniformly considered as the chosen husband of her heart: the sequel, however, did not justify this sacrifice. His character, upon trial, proved by no means congenial to her own; and, though personal affection continued to blend her destiny with his, judgment condemned the steps she had taken, and frequently imbibtered every prospect of the present and the future. The die, however, was cast—from its decision there was no appeal; and her sufferings, although sustained in silence, were acute. Fond of change, or fearful of discovery, we were perpetually on the wing. Ireland, where the Captain possessed a small property, was the first place of our intended residence when my Lady quitted her father's house; but some imaginary apprehension of being traced to the retreat selected for their concealment in that kingdom, produced a sudden change of measures even before we reached the spot; and again we embarked on board a vessel then upon the point of sailing for Port Patrick, from whence it was settled that we should proceed to the neighbourhood of Dumfries, for the purpose of procuring a temporary abode with a sister of mine, who lived in a retired part of the country. Lady Montague happened to be at this period fast approaching to the eve of an expected confinement; and the terror, anxiety, fatigue, and perturbation of mind she was now continually doomed to encounter, combined at this unfortunate juncture to accelerate the dreaded event. Under circumstances equally adverse to convenience or safety, during the course of an unusually tedious voyage and much tempestuous weather, my poor Lady was seized with the pains of a premature labour; and three hours before we could make the Scottish shore, with no other female attendant but myself to afford her the smallest assistance, was—was——”

Again Mrs. Palmer's voice faltered, and again her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. She motioned for a glass of water that stood upon the table, which Sally immediately reached her; and either anxious to conclude the painful topic, or intimidated by the stern commands of the gentleman to proceed, in a few minutes once more recommenced her task.

CHAP. XXII.

“I’ve turn’d my eyes inward upon myself,
“Where foul offence and shame have laid all waste;
“Therefore my soul abhors the wretched dwelling,
“And longs to find some better place of rest.”

ROWE.

“LADY Montague was delivered of a child, which could scarcely be said to exist, so feeble seemed the state of its almost torpid appearance: she herself believed it already dead; and Captain Ormsby, who wanted not any addition of this description to his family, commanded me to confirm her in that opinion. In short, had the event of its birth taken place during the dark hours of the night, the devoted infant would speedily have fulfilled his wishes, and quitted the world for a watery grave almost as soon as it entered it; but an overruling Providence fortunately ordained it otherwise. This circumstance, so momentous in its consequences, happened in the day-time; and a succession of unforeseen occurrences rendered it impracticable to dispose of the poor baby in the preconceived manner, without subjecting ourselves to all attendant dangers of a discovery. It is true, the evening was far advanced before we left the ship; but the crew were too much in motion for the safe execution of our design. Indeed, the hand of Heaven seemed to shelter it from evil, and ward off the lifted arm of the murderer; for, in the course of the time that intervened from the period of its mother’s delivery, to our landing at Port Patrick, some one or other of the sailors was perpetually in the vicinity of our cabin, and thus defeated every attempt to throw it overboard. Captain Ormsby, however, suggested the possibility of this being effected during the bustle occasioned by Lady Montague’s removal, who was known to be alarmingly ill, though the precise nature of her indisposition, it may be easily supposed, was carefully concealed from observation. Disappointment, nevertheless, was once more our fate; for the men continued to cross our steps in every direction. At length, driven to the last extremity, and perceiving no prospect of escaping detection should procrastination longer prevail, I flew back to my own little cabin, under pretence of having forgotten something, just as we were all assembled upon deck ready to quit the vessel; and snatching up the helpless innocent from the bed where it had hitherto lain concealed, I darted into the first obscure opening that presented itself to my notice, threw it upon a hammoc in a distant corner of the place, and instantly ascending again, was immediately assisted on shore, where I arrived a minute or two before the chair which contained my Lady, was entirely lowered from the side of the ship, and received her as it touched the ground, for we did not land till tide had ebbed from the vessel, by which means the aid of a boat was unnecessary, and of course, made our task much less difficult to accomplish.

“Though the final disposal of the poor infant proceeded rather from a momentary impulse of despair, than the cooler dictates of sober judgment, I yet flattered myself that the circumstance would pass unheeded till the vessel was again under weigh, which, after landing some contraband goods, I knew was to return, without delay, to the Irish coast; and though the wind had proved adverse to us, it suited that intention so completely, that I became less and less apprehensive of a discovery before the object of my fears was sufficiently distant, to remove every probable chance of suspicion of the real perpetrators of a deed so atrocious: at all events, the child, I concluded, could not possibly survive any length of time; and should it happen to be dead when found by the owner of the hammoc, I doubted not but the incident would be naturally

ascribed to some Irishwoman who had been on board prior to our embarkation; and the tempestuous weather during the voyage seemed to favour this idea, by preventing any of the crew from occupying their hammocs while we were at sea.

“Thank God,” cried Mrs. Palmer, emphatically raising her clasped hands and humid eyes to heaven, “thank God, my nefarious expectations proved abortive, and that the dreadful crime of murder is not amongst the other sins I have to answer for! I understand that look, Sir,” continued she, as her eye casually met Lord Fitzhenry’s; “it says, as the deed was premeditated, and actually designed to take place, I can have little to congratulate myself upon as to the result. All this I perfectly know; but, nevertheless, no language is adequate to express the satisfaction I now derive from the real termination of this long deplored transaction; for, humbled as I am by the oppression of conscious guilt and the frowns of fortune, my education was much superior to the rank in life I have filled, and my principles uncorrupted, till Captain Ormsby turned them aside from the paths of moral rectitude by the influence he acquired over the avaricious and mercenary bias of my mind. But I wander from my story.

“The apparent success that attended the manoeuvre I have related, justified the subsequent opinion formed of it; the vessel sailed again immediately, and the affair seemed consigned to oblivion. Something like a pang of remorse would frequently indeed shoot through my bosom when the incident was recalled by any adventitious occurrence to my memory; but I usually contrived to blunt its poignancy by the reflection that I had only accelerated, not caused the fate of the child, whose destiny appeared irrevocably decided prior to my interference.

“Lady Montague’s indisposition, which had passed with the ship’s crew as the effect of sea-sickness, continued to increase after our arrival at Port Patrick, and by degrees became equally violent as before. We congratulated ourselves, however, (that is to say, Captain Ormsby and I,) on the adroit management of the child’s disposal; so that whatever might now prove the nature of her illness, it could no longer make her liable to suspicion in one instance, or render dubious the assertion of her being sister or niece to my master; in either of which characters she occasionally appeared, as best suited the necessity of the moment. There is no security, however, for the successful continuation of immoral prosperity. Her Ladyship’s disorder became more and more inexplicably acute; and, to our utter astonishment, in less than three hours from the time of our landing at Port Patrick, she was delivered of another infant, though not like its twin-sister, alive, for it gave not the smallest indication whatever of existence.

“A dispute with the landlady of the inn where this last affair happened, rendered a removal from her house necessary almost before Lady Montague’s state of convalescence proved equal to the undertaking; and the Hermitage being then unoccupied, we engaged it for a few weeks’ residence, or at least till the invalid became more able to bear the fatigue of travelling further into the country. From this habitation, however, as from the inn, a premature departure speedily took place; the cause of which originated in a circumstance that occurred while I was one day in Port Patrick, settling some marketing and shop accounts with our late landlord, who procured most of the articles we required for the house, and executed all our little commissions.

“While we were conversing together in the bar, a gentleman entered the passage, whom I instantly recognised as an intimate friend and neighbour of Mr. Cramond; and doubting not but he had come in pursuit of us, by the request of my Lady’s father, I stole out at a back door, and hurried to my master’s, in order to relate what I had seen, that the proper measures might be adopted on the occasion for the purpose of concealment and safety. It afterwards appeared that the object of our alarm had no intention to molest us, and was merely going to Ireland on some

private business of his own: this we knew not, however, at the time; and a construction similar to what I had formed, being put upon his appearance by the Captain and my Lady, we quitted the Hermitage with the utmost precipitation; and, instead of pursuing the intended route to Dumfries, hastened by unfrequented roads to Wales, where we remained for some time in a state of tolerable tranquillity; till at length the wish for change again placed us in the condition of travellers: and after visiting several places on the Continent, we settled, for a longer time than usual, at a small and delightful residence in Provence, where Miss Juliana and her sister first saw the light.

“In the neighbourhood of this place was situated the Convent of St. Clare, with one of the inhabitants of which an acquaintance had been formed, through the medium of a circumstance no way connected with my present communication, though it was probably the eventual means of inspiring Captain Ormsby with the idea of providing for his daughters, whom he seemed to regard in the light of incumbrances rather than in any other point of view, by obliging them to become members of the same Community with Sister Beatrix, and finally remaining there, for which purpose they had been early confided to her care, and brought up in the Roman Catholic persuasion. The whole of this arrangement was entirely contrary to my Lady’s wishes; but these were not much consulted upon the occasion, and she was therefore forced to submit in silence, satisfied of one thing at least, that if such was to be the irrevocable destiny of her children, they could not possibly have fallen into better hands than this worthy Nun, and the person who happened at that juncture to be the Lady Abbess of the house; though we afterwards heard the death of the latter had been a considerable loss to the Sisterhood, as her successor proved of a very different character.

“It was during our residence in Provence, that the failure of a man connected with my master in pecuniary affairs, obliged us to revisit England; when the disagreeable and most unexpected interview at Dover, which you, Sir,” looking at Montague, “probably recollect, took place. From that time Lady Montague’s health gradually declined, occasioned by the shock then sustained; and though her decease did not happen for many succeeding years, all enjoyment of life seemed entirely at an end, and every prospect considerably darkened during the remainder of her miserable existence. At length her weary pilgrimage finally closed in the peaceful grave, and removed her beyond the further reach of human afflictions. Lady Montague’s death proved exemplary; and in the eyes of a merciful Redeemer has fully, I trust, atoned for all her worldly errors: she died a saint in every sense of the word.”

Stella and Juliana again wept in each others arms, and Montague covering his face with his handkerchief, hastily retired to the window.

“As the small annuity purchased by Captain Ormsby for my Lady,” resumed Mrs. Palmer, after a short silence, “expired with her life, she frequently regretted her inability to reward what she was pleased to term my faithful services and attachment. She bequeathed me a trifle, however, sufficient to exclude actual want; and my nefarious conduct in regard to you, Madam,” addressing Stella, “entitles me to nothing further. I have been in Ireland some time with a near relation of my father, who has long resided in that kingdom, and am now on my return to the place of my birth in the neighbourhood of Dumfries.”

Such were the chief incidents contained in Mrs. Palmer’s communication, which appeared particularly connected with our present history: what else she related being totally foreign to the subject, we shall not repeat: neither did it seem necessary to notice every instance of the deep distress evinced by this unhappy woman in the course of her narrative; nor the various painful and affecting impressions it made upon her auditors. Suffice it to say, that Lady

Montague was considered, upon the whole, as more unfortunate than vicious; and the possibility of viewing her in this light afforded no small degree of consolatory satisfaction to her good and virtuous, though afflicted offspring, who, whatever might have proved the faults of their ill judging parent, recognised the existing and newly-discovered relationship to each other with every mark of the sincerest affection and delight.

As Mrs. Palmer professed to feel the keenest remorse; and had besides, made all the reparation for her former proceedings that could possibly be expected; and as it likewise appeared her deceased mistress was really satisfied with her services, Montague and Stella, instigated by sentiments of filial respect to their mother's memory, settled on her a small annual addition to her present little income; accompanied by this proviso, however, which Lord Fitzhenry insisted should make part of the bargain, that, after the following day, she should never more presume to revisit the neighbourhood of Rossgrove, as he vehemently protested he could not bear to look upon the intended murderer of his beloved Stella with any tolerable degree of patience.

Having finally concluded all that remained of this business, Sally, at the request of Juliana, conducted Mrs. Palmer to the cottage, where the fair Nun afterwards joined her, and spent the residue of the night in conversing on past occurrences with her old acquaintance, who departed at the appointed time from that part of the country.

CHAP. XXIII.

“Patience and time wear out the longest day.”
SHAKESPEARE.

THE nature of the recent communication proved sufficiently interesting to furnish a copious subject for reflexion during the short period the parties most intimately connected with the particular circumstances of it now continued in Galloway. Major Montague, with a degree of friendly warmth that did him infinite honour, repeatedly declared that, however some parts of Mrs. Palmer’s intelligence might distress his feelings as a son, those of a brother were peculiarly gratified by the certainty of an event which he had long felt a hitherto unaccountable presentiment would, at a future period, come to pass. Louisa seemed equally delighted with the discovery of her relationship to Stella; and Lord Fitzhenry protested, that if any one thing on earth could possibly have added to the value of the latter in his opinion, it was exactly the very incident that had happened, which, by ascertaining her propinquity to his friend Montague, rendered her yet more dear to his heart.

The mind of Stella, reassured by so many instances of kindness and seasonable attention, gradually overcame the first shock she could not avoid feeling on the painful and humiliating recital of Mrs. Palmer. Sensible of the delicate motives which dictated their unceasing assiduity for the restoration of her former tranquillity and cheerfulness, every exertion was practised on her side to second their wishes. These attempts, founded in good sense and gratitude, were not unattended with success; and as she had uniformly expected some such explanation of the mystery that enveloped her birth, the final result of the whole made a less permanent impression, than under a different view of the affair would probably have proved the case.

To render Juliana independent in her pecuniary circumstances, now became a principal consideration with her affectionate brother and sister: but on this occasion Lord Fitzhenry would not be excluded from a share in their consultations; and they found it equally impossible to prevent him from making over five thousand pounds of funded property in the five per cents to the fair recluse: Montague therefore engaged that himself and his brother Sir Frederic should double that sum. The latter had been under the necessity of going to the West Indies on account of some business his deceased father had left unfinished; and after a residence of a few years in that quarter of the globe, was expected home in the course of the next summer; when, from what he knew of the Baronet’s disposition, there was not a doubt but all he had promised in his name would be readily complied with.

As two orphan daughters of Mr. Adair’s youngest brother constantly resided with their uncle, Miss Adair’s absence from Woodside could, on most occasions, be more easily dispensed with, than if such substitutes had not been at hand to supply her place in the family. Solicitous to gratify his Stella in every thing calculated to afford her the smallest degree of pleasure, Lord Fitzhenry, seconded by Montague and Louisa, privately exerted their united influence to procure the company of our heroine’s favourite friend in the proposed excursion to England; and Mr. and Mrs. Adair, finally overcome by importunities they found it impossible to resist, at length acquiesced on condition that their daughter’s stay in the south did not exceed three months at the farthest. Scarcely any circumstance of the kind could have given Stella more real delight than this attention to her wishes; and she received it as a fresh proof of their increasing anxiety to oblige her.

On the evening preceding their departure, she paid a farewell visit to the pavilion and grotto, accompanied by Fitzhenry, who retraced the various incidents which had formerly happened in each of these places, particularly the last, with a minuteness of detail that proved the indelible impression they had made upon his memory; while the affecting contrast he drew between the nature of his past and present sensations in the memorable grotto, softened their hearts even to tears; which flowed, however, from a far different source from those which were once wrung from them by deep sorrow and a keen sense of their adverse situations.

Hammond's Elegies lay on the window-seat of the grotto, where they had been accidentally left the last time she perused them in that lonely retreat. Hitherto Lord Fitzhenry had not seen them; but his eye now caught a casual glance of the little volume just as Stella was upon the point of removing it from his view, and he instantly laid hold of it in spite of her struggles to prevent him.

No sooner was it discovered to have once belonged to himself, and the great length of time that had elapsed since he first recollected its disappearance, than it immediately struck him that it was the very same work he now remembered she seemed formerly so anxious to conceal from observation in the Park; and the value it must have possessed in her opinion, from the long time and care with which it had been preserved through several trying vicissitudes of life, seemed sufficiently obvious to mark the unalterable and deep-rooted nature of her predilection in his favour, when every adverse and unpropitious incident apparently interfered to render the present situation of affairs by no means likely ever to take place.

The thousand nameless sensations that now throbbed in their virtuous and faithful bosoms as they dwelt on several topics of a description too interesting to be easily dismissed, convinced them of what indeed they had long known—that the smallest deviation from the narrow path of moral rectitude in any part of their former conduct, would have poisoned the pure source of those innocent enjoyments they now mutually experienced, and rendered every succeeding reflection a burden too corroding to be supported with any degree of tranquillity to themselves, or comfort to their domestic connexions. Misfortune, in the common acceptation of the word, may be finally surmounted without materially injuring the peace of the human mind; but premeditated or persevering error, whatever contrition may afterwards follow it, cannot be so entirely effaced from remembrance as not to return with occasional acuteness; for the total exclusion of memory is not in our power—we cannot help recollecting that such things have been, nor still the harassing intimation of a wounded spirit and a reproving conscience. Happily, Lord Fitzhenry and our heroine had none of those mental tormentors to struggle against: thought came not fraught with any disagreeable ally; for self-reproach mingled not its lacerating ingredients in the cup of rational pleasure prepared for them; and the past, like the present and future, presented nothing to their view but a serene and unclouded sky.

The lovers next bent their steps to the cottage, where they found the Major, Mrs. Montague, and Miss Adair waiting their arrival. Here they remained till a late hour; and at parting took a most affectionate leave of Juliana, and a friendly one of her two companions Beatrix and Magdaline: each of the latter, however, seemed too much engrossed by the duties of religion, and the attention due to their pupils, to feel the separation equally severe with the former; but as she had declined all their entreaties to make one of the party, they had nothing to reproach themselves with on the occasion. Mrs. Wallace, whose little fortune had likewise received a considerable addition after the departure of Mrs. Palmer, undertook the charge of the Hermitage during the absence of its mistress. The eldest daughter of her niece Sally, a girl now nearly sixteen, had recently been taken by Stella into service in the capacity of her own maid;

and her father and mother had received a promise from his Lordship of sitting rent free for the period of ten years after his marriage with our heroine: meanwhile, orders were given to build a neat little commodious dwelling adjoining the farmer's habitation, for Mrs. Wallace, who was alternately to reside either under what she might call her own roof, or at the Hermitage, as best suited her inclination in future.

Stella having received a thousand blessings from this worthy woman, and finally bidden her adieu, accompanied her friends back to Rossgrove; from whence (having previously taken leave of the Adairs, and one or two other families in the neighbourhood with whom she was on visiting terms,) they set out on their journey at an early hour in the morning, and reached the metropolis about the end of the week, without meeting with any occurrence of consequence on the road to retard their progress.

Mrs. Mortimer, though in a state of the deepest affliction, received them in the kindest manner; and all the connexions of the St. Vincent family eagerly vied with each other in evincing their approbation of, and attention to, the future Lady Fitzhenry: but scarcely any circumstance afforded our heroine a greater sensation of heartfelt pleasure, than the frequent interviews that now took place between her and the Delmores, with whom she spent much of her time.

As neither Mrs. Mortimer nor her sister could at present quit the house of mourning to appear with her in public, the Baronet's family, accompanied by Mrs. Arabin and some of the gentlemen of their acquaintance, of which number his Lordship seldom failed to make one, conducted her to see every thing particularly worthy of observation in the great and extensive circle of the metropolis.

On their return one evening from visiting the Magdaline-Hospital, (where they discovered the once favourite, but unworthy maid of the late Mrs. St. Vincent, who had been placed there through the humane interference of Mrs. Arabin,) Montague found his brother Sir Frederic just returned from the West Indies. A stranger to all those events which had recently occurred, it was necessary to enter upon a brief detail of the whole, in order to make him properly master of incidents in which he was too deeply interested. This task Lord Fitzhenry and the Major undertook to perform; and had the pleasure to perceive on its conclusion, that Sir Frederic fully justified his brother's opinion of him by the subsequent part of his conduct. He received Stella as a sister in every sense of the word, and coincided with their intentions previously formed in favour of Juliana, with all the promptitude and warmth of a just and generous mind. Stella had the pleasure of introducing this newly-attained relative to the Delmore family; and the inexpressible delight of speedily perceiving the commencement of a mutual attachment between him and the amiable Miss Mowbray, which she flattered herself would, in time, arrive at the point she wished it.

But though admired and beloved wherever she appeared, Stella felt no reluctance to quit the busy scenes of London, except what originated in the idea of separating from friends so justly valued as the Delmores; who, however, positively engaged to spend some time at Rossgrove, when a certain happy event was once fairly over; a promise that considerably ameliorated the painful sensations occasioned by their parting interview.

This matter settled, at the appointed time for bidding adieu to the capital, Lord Fitzhenry, the Mortimers, Montagues, Stella, and Miss Adair set out for the former's country seat in Yorkshire. Sir Frederic found it impossible to quit the metropolis at this juncture, but gave his friends reason to believe he would speedily join them.

At Mount Fitzhenry Stella was introduced to her future mother-in-law, who had

constantly resided at this place from the time it came into her son's possession on the decease of his uncle. Mrs. Vincent, who was prevented visiting her daughter Mortimer by the return of a complaint to which she was subject at this season of the year, received our heroine with every mark of the most cordial affection. Conscious of the sacrifice her beloved Fitzhenry had formerly made of his own happiness at the shrine of filial duty, and perpetually reproaching herself with the share she had had in eventually imbittering the life of him who had resigned every individual feeling on his own account, in order to secure the peace and honour of his father's family, the good old lady imagined she could not more sufficiently recompense him for past sufferings, than by shewing the most distinguished and unequivocal proofs of approbation and esteem for the woman who, by his own free election, was now to reward him for all that his long meritorious self-denial had once cost him, through the medium of an extorted compliance with the wishes of his parents.

Louisa's little boy, who commonly remained with his grandmother, soon became so particularly attached to our heroine, that he was seldom seen from her side; while his cousins, the two Mortimers, appeared almost equally sedulous and successful in their endeavours to obtain her notice.

On the second week after their arrival, Miss Adair returned to Scotland, in compliance with the promise previously given to her parents; and at the expiration of the time appointed by Stella, our heroine bestowed her hand upon him who had uniformly possessed an exclusive right to her affections from the first hour of their acquaintance with each other.

As the newly-married couple were mutually partial to scenes of domestic tranquillity, and what might rather be called the more retired line of life, it was finally agreed to spend the depth of every succeeding winter at Mount Fitzhenry, and the summer and autumn at their northern residence, to which, on many accounts, they were both much attached; and whither they now prepared to return in a few days after the celebration of their nuptials. Montague and Louisa were again to be their travelling companions; while Mrs. Mortimer and the children remained with Mrs. St. Vincent, whose present state of health would not permit of her taking so long a journey with any degree of ease or safety to herself.

The last evening but one previous to their intended departure was now arrived, and Lady Fitzhenry was just putting on her bonnet to take a ramble with his Lordship through the pleasure-grounds, when the sound of carriage wheels was heard in the avenue that led to the principal entrance of the house; and in a few minutes more the Delmores, Miss Mowbray, and Sir Frederic Montague appeared in the saloon; when the latter agreeably surprised his friends at Mount Fitzhenry, by claiming their congratulations on his union with the amiable Maria, who was fervently pressed to the heart of her new relatives with every indication of the sincerest affection and pleasure.

No addition to the society of those previously assembled at the Mount could have possibly proved more acceptable than that which it had now received. A few days delay of their northern journey was the natural consequence; Mrs. St. Vincent particularly requesting to be gratified with their company a little longer. At length the travellers, accompanied by their visitors, bade farewell to that worthy lady and Mrs. Mortimer, and proceeded with all dispatch to Galloway.

At Rossgrove, they found the Adairs, Juliana, and Mrs. Wallace waiting to receive them; and the interview that succeeded their arrival was such as the reader may suppose: a happier group indeed had scarcely ever met, than that which was now to be seen under the hospitable roof of Lord Fitzhenry. Mr. Adair, to whose judgment and direction every thing about the place

had been left during the absence of its owner, appeared much gratified by the compliments paid to his taste for the judicious and well-conducted arrangements apparent, not only in the interior of the building, where, in conformity with his Lordship's wishes, several alterations had been made, but likewise through various other parts of the domain.

About a fortnight from the time of their arrival, while some of their neighbours were on a visit at the Grove, and the windings of the mazy dance were tracing in the drawing-room, where polite ease and cheerful good-humour reigned on every side, Stella, struck with the recollection of a similar scene formerly witnessed in this very apartment from her favourite grotto, and affected by the remembrance of the incident that followed, softly stole to one of the windows, and gave way to the grateful sensations that filled her mind as the long succession of painful events which had intervened in the course of that period crowded upon it. These were now for ever past; her situation was changed, wonderfully changed in every respect: but, for the blessings at present enjoyed, she was not more thankful to Providence, than for the power that Providence had given her to enjoy them free from the lacerating pang of remorse, or even the slightest degree of self-reproach. Lord Fitzhenry, whose eyes had been fixed on hers as they were raised to heaven with an air of sublime adoration almost more than human, soon after joined her, and speedily learned all that was passing in her pure, virtuous, and happy bosom. Absorbed in the delicious feelings that occupied each of their minds, they perceived not for some time that Sir Frederic Montague had left the room, and that Louisa, with the Delmores, and the Lady of the former, were also absent; till the Baronet entering again, approached them, leading in a stranger of the most elegant and prepossessing appearance, who was instantly announced as M. St. Lambert, the long-lost lover of Juliana, and one who had for some time been supposed an inhabitant of the other world.

An event so unexpected and agreeable, proved a source of additional felicity to the friendly and noble owners of Rossgrove; and the manner in which the stranger was received, fully evinced the pleasure his presence afforded them. This very desirable occurrence had been effected through the medium of Sir Frederic Montague and the Delmores' extensive acquaintance amongst the French Emigrants, to whom they had secretly applied for intelligence of the young Count's destiny; and thus finally obtained a knowledge of his existence.

As Juliana had never been partial to the line of life allotted her by her father, and uniformly cherished the most ardent, though hopeless affection for the man of her early choice, matters were soon adjusted for their speedy union; after which they retired to the Hermitage, where, at the particular request of Lady Fitzhenry, they fixed their residence; and, with their inestimable friends at the Grove, apparently formed but one family, bound together by the links of the sincerest attachment and congeniality of mind.

Miss Adair continues to enjoy the place she has long held in the heart of her now happy Stella, and, though addressed by men of the first rank and merit in the country, has hitherto declined all proposals of marriage, and appears determined to retain the reprobated appellation of "an old maid," in spite of the numerous opportunities which daily occur for making observations on that genuine felicity produced by the "feast of reason and flow of soul" continually experienced by the good and virtuous votaries of Hymen, where a similarity of sentiment, temper, and disposition exists, to render the connubial lot a state of rational enjoyment and cheerful content.

FINIS.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.