

SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW;
OR, THE
FISHERMAN'S DAUGHTERS OF BRIGHTON.

A Patchwork Story.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF LIGHT AND SHADE; EVERSFIELD ABBEY;

BANKS OF THE WYE; AUNT AND NIECE, &c. &c.

The first in native dignity surpass'd-
Artless and unadorn'd she pleas'd the more;

- - - -

The other dame seem'd e'en of fairer hue,
Fat bold her mien, unguarded mov'd her eye.

VOL. II.

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SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW.

CHAP. I.

———Ever was he seen
A faithful pastor! POLWHELL

THOUGH Mr. Elwyn had received from nature a good understanding, yet he had not been gifted with much strength of mind; his father's indulgence had not permitted him to discern this weakness in his son's character; and under little parental discipline or mental controul, encouraged in pursuing every thing which he liked; and while he kept within the bounds of propriety, receiving no check in his pleasures, it is not surprising that he fell into those errors which embittered his future life. His heart was rightly formed, his temper was good, his morals were not vicious; but neglecting to fortify his own imbecility with the firm rock of religion, he shrunk appalled from every thing which opposed his wishes; and unaided by the stability of principle, or the consolations of piety, he sacrificed every virtuous sentiment, and ultimately became the voluntary victim of vice! How frequently are the words of sacred writ realized before us! how often do we see "the sins of the parents visited on their children!"

The extravagance of Elwyn's father, the profusion which in the days of youth had impaired and hurt *his* fortune, and which he had not *then* considered as an injury to his son, was brought to his reflection and his conscience at the decline of life, when avarice not unfrequently takes place of the opposite quality in the human breast.

The peculiar situation, the extreme youth, the relative affinity of the orphan heiress, and the reversionary claim of his son, all pointed her out to the doating father as the *person* destined to repair his errors; and Henry's first lesson from his father had his cousin Clara for its object. Of an inactive disposition, nurtured in luxury, and addicted to its enjoyments, nothing appeared more congenial to the wishes of Henry; and Clara's partial eyes soon viewed her cousin in the light which her uncle desired. Her kind and judicious aunt, who loved this amiable girl with an affection equal to that which she felt for her son, was pleased at the prospect of the happiness of these two beloved objects centering in one another; and hoped that while the fortune of Clara might add to Henry's opportunities of doing good, his affection and gratitude would ensure her felicity.

Henry Elwyn went through the usual routine of education at a public school, and afterwards at college, with credit, though not with distinction; his easy good-nature and inoffensiveness of manners, made him generally liked; and as no spark of emulation existed in his character, he never excited envy or jealousy.

With the flattering prospects which were before him, his father did not hesitate to supply him with the means of gratifying every wish that he formed; he soon perceived that his inclination did not lead him towards his cousin Clara, although she was eminently gifted, both in person and manners, to rivet the heart which should once acknowledge her influence; but Mr. Elwyn's notions on this score were by no means romantic; and he concluded, that when Henry had taken his fill of the world and its pleasures, he should see him sit down soberly and contentedly with his cousin, a married man.

Henry Elwyn had a perfect appreciation of the character of Clara; and while he saw it so entirely disinterested, so free from selfishness, while he observed her gentleness and humility, at

the same time that her superiority in intellect, in judgment, and discrimination, was painfully pressed upon him by the bright light of truth, he was uneasy and awed in her presence; a humiliating, a degrading feeling oppressed him; his own interested and mercenary views, in seeking to form a connexion with her, were forcibly presented to his mind, by the suggestions of his yet *unseared* conscience; but he had neither resolution to oppose himself to the wishes of his father, nor strength of mind to bear the privations to which a limited income would subject him; neither did he possess the application and stability requisite to embark in a genteel profession, and to secure, by his own meritorious exertions, those indulgencies which he had been accustomed to consider as the necessaries of life.

Seeing Clara Elwyn as *he* saw her, thinking so differently from her, yet at the same moment admiring the virtue which he dared not imitate (and which he was about to act in direct contradiction to), while she was to become the sacrifice, is it wonderful that Elwyn's absences from home became more frequent, as the period fixed upon for his marriage drew nearer?

At college he had been acquainted with Edward Harley, a young man of slender hopes and narrow fortune. The easiness of access, and unassuming manner by which Elwyn's character was marked, had given this humbler son of fortune courage to approach him, for modesty and diffidence were his characteristic traits; and hope blighted ere it had budded in him, by the consciousness of his forlorn situation, and the isolation of his prospects. With the death of his parents he had lost every thing on which he had leaned, and in his turn he now saw himself the only stay of his lovely sister.

The parents of Harley had moved in an inferior situation; but having the advantage of a classical free-school in the town where they lived, they naturally wished to obtain an education for their son, which might so essentially benefit him, when they could do it free of expence to themselves; and accordingly he was entered on the foundation, and obtained such credit with the master for his assiduous application and general good conduct, that he was one of the youths who prosecuted his studies afterwards at Oxford, on the same endowment, by succeeding to a scholarship annexed to it.

With a sense of inferiority, and no soothing ideas derived from a consciousness of his own merit, Harley felt much gratified when he found that Mr. Elwyn received him with a good-humour and ease, which was seldom evinced by his fellow-collegians; he was grateful for that sufferance, which had been so seldom his lot to meet with; and his advice and opinions on the subject of Elwyn's studies (opinions which had been derived from close reading and application), had more than once been of use to that idle and unstable young man, who had thus gathered the fruits which another had ripened.

The humility and natural modesty of Harley gave Elwyn no fear of his assuming on this superiority of knowledge; on the contrary, he became more respectful in his behaviour, and wore the air of the obliged, rather than that of him who had been conferring obligations.

With the usual tenor of Elwyn's disposition, he would probably have forgotten his college friend intirely, if accident had not once more presented him before him.

Having spent some weeks amongst a set of choice companions at Southampton, he was returning towards Gloucestershire by a circuitous way (the party having separated), and being almost overcome with lassitude and ennui with his first day's exercise, at the close of evening he sauntered, rather than rode, through a picturesque and lovely village, situated in a romantic and luxuriantly-wooded valley; he mechanically checked his horse as he saw a person approaching him, and inquired the name of the place. As he to whom he had addressed himself answered "Beech Grove," their eyes met; their voices had previously and reciprocally rang in their ears.

Elwyn sprang from the saddle, and with friendly hand met the hand of Edward Harley. He readily yielded to the wish of the village pastor, and any place being at that period preferable to home in his estimation, he consented to pass a few days in this lovely retirement. The servant was directed by Harley to lead the horses to the parsonage, and Elwyn, taking his friend's arm, they crossed the church-yard by a nearer way.

"This is a sweet situation," said Elwyn.

"Yes," replied Harley, stopping, looking round him with enthusiasm, and lifting up his eyes towards heaven, as if in thankful gratitude; "I am happy!"

"It is a good living, I conclude," said Elwyn, "for this is a rich tract of country. I heartily give you joy, Harley; how long have you had it? I never heard of your preferment."

"The living is a good one, I believe," answered Harley, with carelessness; "I do not know what it may be worth; I leave that to my rector; I am only his curate, on sixty pounds per annum, and think myself well paid for being made happy."

"Sixty pounds per annum—a curacy—and happiness!" *Here* was a lesson for Elwyn; but it was an incomprehensible one to him. "How is it possible that you can live, Harley, on such a paltry pittance?"

"You shall see," answered the young clergyman. "Ah, my dear Mr. Elwyn, I often think how just are the words of a poet whom I always admire (because his simple and natural descriptions cannot fail of touching the heart alive to rural beauties, and rural manners)—

'Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long.'

As he repeated the last line, he pronounced it in a low and tremulous cadence, as if, with a prescient eye, he had seen that the limits of his own destiny were nearly closed.

"You are an enthusiast, Harley," said Elwyn.

"I would teach you to become one too, if you would look with me 'through nature, up to nature's God,'" answered Harley. "Look, Mr. Elwyn, can any thing be more beautiful than this scene? Behold the setting sun gilding our village spire; observe those finely-spreading beeches, which form a grove beyond it (and which gives the place its name); listen to the little choristers of these sylvan scenes, as they are chaunting their evening orisons; see those 'laughing meads,' so beautifully studded over with sheep; listen to the lowing herd; and look but just beyond the church-yard wall, and see the innocent children intent on rustic pastimes; even the river, as it glides through the vale below, conveys a sound sonorous to my ear, and in low murmurs speaks of happiness."

Elwyn had been used to seek happiness in far different scenes, and different objects; and although *perchance* he never found her, he could almost have laughed outright in the face of his friend; but he thought it inhuman to break the spell of his enchantment, and walked on, unconscious that ere a few hours were passed, he himself should feel as much entranced.

A green door from the church-yard wall opened upon a grassy terrace; and the whitened parsonage, a small but neat habitation, was in their view, the beams of the setting sun gilding its casement windows.

"I dwell with Simplicity," said Edward, as he opened the door on the terrace.

Elwyn preceded his friend, the door not being sufficiently large to admit them both at once—"And even Simplicity has her snares," cried Elwyn, laughing on perceiving himself

suddenly enveloped by a large net, which had been thrown over his whole person, by some one who had lain in ambush behind a large rose-bush, which grew at the side of the door-way.

Edward laughed; a stifled laugh was also heard from the place of concealment. Harley motioning his friend to keep silence, dragged the criminal to light, in the form of a blooming dimpled Hebe, who, on perceiving her brother at liberty, and a stranger enveloped by the net, sprang from his retaining hold, and with the agile swiftness of a young fawn, bounded over the grassy terrace, and ran into the house.

“Who is it that has thus fairly caught me in her toils?—who is this lovely Atalanta, Harley?” asked Elwyn.—

“If such thy haunts, Simplicity,
Oh, lovely maid! *I’ll* dwell with thee.”

“This dear girl is my sister,” answered Harley; “and a more unsophisticated creature there exists not upon earth. For *her* there cannot be a more desirable situation than this; her mind has had little cultivation, for till I was settled myself, I could not have her with me; and she was brought up amongst those whose ‘ignorance was bliss.’ She is of an age when impressions are easily made; her temper is affectionate and chearful; she is the very spring of my existence, for her vivacity enlivens my rather too sombre disposition. She is very grateful to me for any instructions which I give her; I mean to cultivate her mind sufficiently to teach her to enjoy the comforts of life, without giving it too much refinement or fastidiousness. I hope she will turn out a good girl.”

“Why seek to alter what is in itself so charming? Can you, by cultivation, add to the pure simplicity of the native snowdrop?”

“No,” said Harley; “the works of God are perfect; but there is a sully—a stain—a *human taint*, for which principle, discipline, and wholesome counsel, are necessary.”

“You talk like the *divine*, I perceive,” said Elwyn, with something sarcastic in his manner.

“Rather say the Christian, my good sir,” replied Harley.

Elwyn was soon ushered into the sitting-room of the parsonage, and to the bewitching girl, who in timid and blushing confusion apologized for her unintentional rudeness, saying, that “Edward had told her to wait for him in the garden, and that he would come and assist her in covering a cherry-tree with a net; but that he had lingered so long, that she was quite tired, and to revenge herself, she had, on hearing approaching steps in the church-yard, hid herself behind the rose-bush, and instantaneously enveloped the person of him who first set his foot on the terrace, concluding that it must be her brother, and that he had been detained, and was accompanied (as was frequently the case) by the parish clerk.”

The apology was received with delight; and the next morning saw Elwyn divested from ennui and lassitude, and assisting the smiling Ellen in protecting her cherries from the dangerous truants of the grove.

Every day, and all day long, Elwyn was at the side of Ellen Harley; he was taken captive by the fascination of her artless beauties; he felt no sensation of inequality here, as in the presence of his cousin Clara; he did not now hesitate, ere he made a remark, to know if it was well timed or appropriate.

Ellen seemed to approve every thing which he uttered, and to laugh at a jest, even where no jest was intended; her remarks might be called trifling and unimportant, to those who are

accustomed to weigh and examine every sentence ere they granted a cold assent; but Elwyn must have been a *cynic* and an *insensate* not to have listened, when they came in such sweet tones to his ear, and were accompanied by such bewitching smiles and artless innocence of expression.

Harley did not at first observe the dangerous situation in which he had placed his friend and sister; and when at length he did discover it, the warm entreaties, the fond professions of that friend—the silent pleadings of that sister’s looks, triumphed over the rectitude of his principles, and he consented to their mutual wish, and joined their hands.

Here was a dereliction from the path of duty, which ill assorted with the otherwise undeviating tenor of our village pastor’s conduct; but who shall say, if thus tempted, he might not thus have erred? For *himself*, for his own advancement, Harley would have steadily refused every prospect which had been held out to him, if it must have been accompanied with the slightest deviation from the line of duty; but to secure a protector to his beloved Ellen—to forward her happiness—to place it beyond the frail tenure on which his own existence hung (for his delicate constitution seemed daily to predict an early dissolution)—to place her in so eligible a situation, surely he might, without dishonour to himself, consent to the entreaties of Elwyn, and conceal the marriage, till he should have gained his father’s approbation.

Harley tried to reconcile his own conduct to his principles; but it was only when he was witnessing the happiness of the fond pair whom “Love had joined,” that he could feel intirely free from self-upbraidings.

Elwyn had never hinted to his deceived friend his prior engagement to Miss Elwyn; and had merely urged, as a reason for a clandestine marriage, his own impetuous wishes, and the cruel and *unnecessary* suspense in which he should wear away the hours of absence, till he should have settled the formal preliminaries with his father, for the *ceremonious* celebration of that event on which his happiness depended, and of which, when it should have taken place, he was assured of obtaining the consent of his indulgent parent. Passion gave Elwyn rhetoric and animation unknown to him before; and Harley, as we have seen, was softened to his wishes.

It was at Elwyn’s first return home from Beech Grove, that Harley was seized with an illness that proved fatal to him; a few days terminated his existence; and the simple Ellen was not alive to his danger in time to send for her husband, otherwise it is probable that in witnessing the last moments of Harley, his mind might have been happily impressed, and he might have pursued a different course to that which he unfortunately took.

Elwyn’s return home had been triumphantly hailed by his father; his affairs had lately become more and more embarrassed; and his son’s numerous calls upon his purse had not a little contributed to bring them into their present awkward state; he pressed Henry to a speedy marriage with his cousin; Elwyn hesitated; but irresolutely forbore to acquaint his father with the insuperable obstacle which he had himself created to the union.

While in a state of doubt as to what conduct to pursue, fearing to incur his father’s everlasting displeasure—fearing to wound his cousin’s peace of mind, but, most of all, fearing to relinquish those pleasures and those luxuries on which he had hitherto revelled, even to satiety, he received a letter from his Ellen; it implored him to come to her immediately; it was couched in terms of distress and affliction, which Elwyn, who knew the tenderness of her brother’s affection, could well reconcile to this her sudden loss of him. He lost no time in obeying the summons; and in removing this artless and simple girl from the retirement of Beech Grove, to an asylum which he provided for her, in a village near the metropolis, here she assumed the name of Belford, at his request; and here, a very few months afterwards, he succeeded in making her believe that the ceremony of their marriage had not been legally solemnized between them, and

that she was not his wife; and that though this had proceeded from an oversight in her brother, yet that his character would severely suffer in the eyes of the world, were it ever brought to light; and, finally, that finding his father inflexible to all his intreaties, and resolutely bent on casting him off without a shilling, should he act in opposition to his will, in a moment of desperation he had united himself to a lady of *his* selection, and had thus rendered himself miserable for ever.

Poor Ellen had nothing to oppose to this intelligence, but sighs and tears; she had lost him who would have assisted her with his counsel, and strengthened her weak and ductile mind by his advice. Her poor bark was now put on ocean's tide, without rudder or pilot. She credulously, *fondly* believed Elwyn's vows of eternal love, and fancied, because he *told* her so, that he had been more unfortunate than faulty. He called all the powers above to witness to his solemn asseverations of making her his wife, whenever it should please death to take his present lady; he forgot not to hint at the apparent delicacy of her constitution; and he gave ample proofs of the comforts which *her* fortune would enable him to bestow on his Ellen.

That Ellen still listened to the "voice of the charmer," whom she had first known in the Beech Woods of Hampshire; and while she yielded up her child to his care, she had not resolution to order the father to discontinue his visits to herself, but through a term of twenty years, received him as her guest, at his occasional absences from Elwyn Hall; and, during that period, received her maintenance at his hands, and still lived on the idea of taking Mrs. Elwyn's station at a future day, and becoming the mistress of Elwyn Hall.

CHAP. II.

No more at dawning morn I rise,
And sun myself in Clara's eyes.

SCOTT'S LADY OF THE LAKE

HARLEY'S description of his sister had been perfectly just; her mind was like a sheet of blank paper.

When Elwyn made his appearance at Beech Grove, Harley, but newly settled in his parsonage, had scarcely began the labour of cultivation; *Elwyn* never thought of it; his love for Ellen (if we may call it by that name) had nothing intellectual in its nature; and, as we have seen in his behaviour towards the hapless Clara, in the pursuits of a refined and discriminating mind, there was nothing congenial to his taste. If, after an absence of some months, Ellen received him with her wonted smiles and caresses, he was well pleased; and even when the dimpled season of blooming youth was past, and the tint of fairest, *fresh* beauty had departed from the cheek of Ellen, he yet retained his first preference, and listened to her prattle, with none of that uneasiness and tedium which attended a *tête-à-tête* conversation with Mrs. Elwyn.

A young female, living in seclusion, in a village near the metropolis, under the sanction of a married name, yet seeing her nominal husband only at stated periods, and then under mysterious circumstances (as during his visits to Feltham he was never accompanied by a servant), could not fail of drawing forth some remarks amongst the neighbours; nobody thought of *visiting* Mrs. Belford; indeed she was generally beheld as a woman of more than suspicious character.

Left to herself, with no resources, no taste for study, no wish for improvement, and entirely confined to the society of her two maid-servants, is it wonderful if the understanding of Ellen, never very brilliant, daily became more limited and more "mediocre;" her conversation imperceptibly assumed the style of common-place and hacknied sentences, an hundred times reiterated in the course of the twenty-four hours, and in questions which the gossiping tribe of female domestics are in general well inclined to answer. The affairs of the whole village were canvassed by Mrs. Belford and her two damsels; the chandler's-shop was the mart of intelligence; and no sooner was it there procured, than it was conveyed by these prompt messengers to their mistress, who sat in her parlour, from morning till night, cutting out patchwork, and listening to the news of Sally and Betty.

That beauty which at fifteen had been dazzling, and which had owed much of its attraction to sparkling youth, to ruddy health, and to a swan-like skin, had, during the lapse of twenty years, lost almost every trace of what had most distinguished it; the colour on her cheek had gradually faded; her skin had assumed a deadened hue of sickliness; and even her actions and movements, no longer seen as those of a lively romp of fifteen on the grassy terrace of Beech Grove, but cooped up in a little parlour, had at once an air ungraceful and uncouth.

There was no mischief, no malice, in the composition of Ellen; she asked for intelligence merely to say something, and to have answers; her mind was as devoid of vicious as virtuous propensities; she might really be said to vegetate rather than to live, except when Mr. Elwyn appeared at Feltham; for *then* she became unusually animated, though from being unused to see him, and during his absence shut out from the rest of the world, her manners insensibly wore an air of constrained respect while she conversed with him; and though still very fond of him, and

always hoping that the time would arrive when she should be mistress of Elwyn Hall, and in her "own rightful place," as she called it, yet she not unfrequently found it a little relief to retire awhile from Mr. Elwyn; and while he was taking his afternoon's nap, assembling Sally and Betty, she would exhibit to their admiring eyes the "*lovely presents*" he had brought her.

The informality of her marriage, Ellen had always considered as her misfortune rather than her fault; it had never occurred to her, that on making the discovery, it was her immediate duty to break off all further intercourse with Elwyn, and to consider him in future only as the husband of another. She never thought of Mrs. Elwyn but as an interloper between herself and happiness; she never thought of Elwyn's father but as a cruel tyrant, who had forced his son into a marriage which he abhorred; in fact, she *thought* only as Elwyn would have her, and all his representations she *literally* believed; but never, even in those moments when the artless endearments of Ellen had called forth all the fervour of Elwyn's love, never had he breathed a syllable which could be construed into disrespect for Clara. There was in her goodness, her virtues, and her understanding, something so superior, and so imposing, that he scrupulously veiled her from the observation and the discussion of the simple Ellen, with much of that sacred caution with which a superstitious devotee would shroud the relics of a favourite saint from each unholy touch.

It is more than probable, that had no impediments arisen to Elwyn's connexion with Ellen (and had he introduced her as his wife, with the approbation and sanction of his father), that he would long since have repented of his youthful choice, and have turned from her with apathy, if not disgust; but being obliged to visit her clandestinely, always received with smiles, and parted from with tears, and charges of a quick return, there was an attraction in the intercourse which gave some interest, the interest of *variety* at least, to his otherwise inactive mind.

Of late years, when the beauty of Ellen had visibly faded, and when the health of Mrs. Elwyn had daily declined, without being entirely undermined; when he had seen her nobly, cheerfully struggling with sufferings, both bodily and mental, under which most women would immediately have sank; when he had seen her eye, though divested of its primeval lustre, still faintly beaming with a softened expression as it turned towards him, he had more frequently quitted home to fly from his own thoughts, and from the reproaches of conscience, than for the pleasure of seeing his once-adored Ellen; with her, his feelings were blunted and obtuse; he resigned himself to a vacuity of mind, and a lethargy of intellect: but this was almost impossible in the presence of the injured Clara; the momentary, yet inartificial display of her good sense, her patience, and, most of all, her piety; the discrimination which enabled her at the first survey to distinguish between the sophistry of false sentiment, and sterling and immutable truth; her rectitude of conduct, her innate humility, her strict manner of judging her *own* conduct, and the lenity which she observed with regard to that of others, all wounded him to the quick; and while he acknowledged the majesty of Virtue, he trembled before her shrine, and fled from her all-imposing power.

Never had a man ventured greater lengths to secure happiness than had Elwyn; never had any man wandered further from the mark. Those pleasures, and those luxuries, for which he had bartered so much, palled, without gratifying his senses. That rank in life which he had attained by his marriage with his cousin, he could not enjoy, for an accusing angel, in the form of Clara, was always pointing out his aggravated crime; and even in the retreat of Ellen, while lavishly heaping upon her those gewgaws which were so flatteringly received, he often turned his own condemner, and asked himself by what right, either of honesty or honour, he *thus* disposed of the fortune of Clara?

A prospect of relief presented itself to Elwyn in the form of his son; his easy and softened nature longed to have him near him; we have seen how he succeeded in gratifying this wish, and the engrossing fondness with which he regarded him. The love which he once felt for the mother, seemed now transferred to her child; and Elwyn's visits to Ellen had, from thenceforth, been passed in portraying the engaging charms, and the promising talents, of this incomparable boy.

Ellen's feelings were not very quick, or her maternal anxieties very acute, but her vanity was flattered at hearing she had such an all-accomplished son, and she listened to Elwyn's accounts of "Mr. Henry," as she always respectfully termed him, with an interest which she had never taken in any one subject, save in the praises of her own beauty, which had stolen on her youthful imagination in the luxuriant groves of Hampshire. The monotony of her life—the mechanical movement of her fingers, in cutting triangles, squares, and octagons for patch-work, the daily retailers of the village gossip, from the *retail* shop, were now likely to fade, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, and leave not a wreck (though perchance many a *shred*) behind."

Mrs. Elwyn was dead. Ellen received the intelligence with joy; she was told to expect a visit from her husband.

CHAP. III.

The glass revers'd, by magic power of spleen,
A wrinkled idiot now the fair is seen.

MISS AIKEN.

ALWAYS enthusiastic, always impelled by his feelings, impatient of controul, unused to disappointment, apt to be taken by outward appearances, and tremblingly alive to the censures and the plaudits of the world, with more impetuosity in his disposition than augured well either for his happiness or his principles, we may conceive the perturbation of Henry Elwyn as he drew near the habitation of his mother. A thousand interesting and affecting traits of their first interview had been flitting before his heated imagination; he had supported this fainting, this *already* adored parent, as, overcome by emotion, she had vainly endeavoured to strain her child to her maternal bosom; he had knelt at her feet, and been raised to her arms, while the warm tears of affection had watered his face; he had heard the soft and mellifluous tones in which she had bestowed her blessing.

Mr. Elwyn, on the contrary, had relapsed into his usual solitary and abstracted mood, which seemed to proceed rather from a suspension of mental action, than from intense rumination; but to the eager—the earnest—the oft-repeated inquiries of his companion, he at length answered, “That the habitation which contained her who was henceforward to be known as Mrs. Elwyn was in sight;” and they were soon driven up to the door.

The heart of Henry panted; his whole frame was agitated, as he assisted his father in descending from the carriage. Mr. Elwyn preceded him into the house, where, at the parlour door, he was met by—was it possible?—could this be his mother?—could this be the lovely, the bewitching Ellen Harley? Dressed in a showy and vulgar-printed linen, with more of deep rose-coloured ribbon on her cap than would have been thought sufficient by the bar-maid of a country inn, she stood before her astonished—her wonder-struck son; and as she received the kiss of Mr. Elwyn, with coolness, but with a sort of respectful acquiescence, she turned towards her son, who was utterly motionless; all his high-wrought feelings were flown at the first glance; it seemed as if the revulsion had destroyed all animation—all sensation; he was fixed as a statue.

“Ellen, do you not speak to our son?” asked Mr. Elwyn.

“Oh! certainly, sir,” said Mrs. Elwyn, taking his hand. “How do you do, sir? I am very glad to see you—how dye do, Mr. Henry?—I hope I see you well, sir?—Dear me! only but to think what a fine stout young gentleman he has grown!—very so indeed—very much so!”

Henry bent his head on the hand of his mother; he touched, but did not press it with his lips; but the touch seemed to recall him to some sense of his situation. He remembered that she was his *mother*; but he turned to the window to conceal the tear which trickled down his manly cheek, while Mrs. Elwyn addressed to her husband reiterated questions of “And when did you leave home, sir?”—“You had pleasant weather—very much so”—“The roads are very good now, I suppose?”—“Pleasant travelling, I dare say”—“I thought you would be here to dinner—I was saying so this morning to Betty.”

What an utter dispersion of all the romance, the sentiment, and the enthusiasm of Henry, had this short specimen of his mother’s conversation occasioned! He could not bear the excess of disappointment, the cruel mortification which he had experienced. On pretence of looking at the

garden, he stole out of the room; but he there gave way to the agony of his mind.—“And had the happiness of Clara Elwyn, that superior, that almost perfect creature, been sacrificed for such a coarse, such an underbred woman as this? Was this indeed the parent for whom he had bespoken the love and the respect, the attention and the deference of Mary Ellis—Mary Ellis, who had been accustomed to the refined conversation, the elegant manners, to the fervid affection of her beloved protectress, who had caught from her bright example all that was excellent and praiseworthy, and whose quick discrimination would enable her instantaneously to perceive, that there existed neither feeling, sentiment, or refinement, in the person who was to supply her place?—And the world,” cried he, “what will the *world* say of *Harry Belford’s* mother? will they not, from her appearance—from her language, deduce *all* that is lowering to my pride and my feelings?—Shall I not be daily wounded through her?—Shall I not be ashamed of *her* whom I ought to honour and to revere? Oh! Mr. Elwyn, into what a cruel predicament has your blind, your infatuated passion placed your offspring in! Rather would he have remained for ever in ignorance of his birth, than be thus oppressed by the weight of degrading feelings!—A father, still keeping himself concealed—I shall only be pointed at as the *illegitimate* child of *her* who has usurped the place of Mrs. Elwyn. The proud—the courted—the hitherto *happy* Harry Belford, will now be doomed to hear the voice of ridicule and sarcasm levelled at his mother!—He will—no!—he *will not!*” cried he, answering himself, with that furious expression of quickly rousing spirit, which he was not in the habit of controuling, or submitting to the dictates of reason, “No! The being who *dares* to cast an insinuation on *my* mother, shall find a way to the heart of her son with his sword, or shall atone for the insult with his own life-blood!”

This *heroic* and *magnanimous* resolve, seemed, in some measure, to have appeased the boiling fervour of his soul, and he walked himself into a more temperate frame of mind, and was lowered to something more like *animal heat*, ere he returned to his father and mother.

“If such thy haunts, Simplicity,
Oh, lovely maid! I’ll live with thee.”

Such had been the words which Mr. Elwyn had used two-and-twenty years ago, on first seeing Ellen Harley; had he made use of them at *this* period, to the person who sat on the opposite side of the fire, they would have been laughed at as a burlesque. Associating only with minds of the lowest order for such a length of time, can it be thought unnatural that the simple taste of Ellen should have been perverted and tortured?—that the native graces which were hers in extreme youth, should have fled with mature years, and that awkward and forced attempts at gentility and politeness should have usurped their place?

Mr. Elwyn had seen the gradual change without noticing it; he still beheld the traces of that beauty which had once charmed him; and in proportion as Ellen’s loveliness and attractive simplicity had vanished, so had his acuteness of perception been blunted, and his understanding and discernment been clouded.

In recounting his own history to his son, the emotions which were raised in his mind had carried him back to that period when he had felt with ardour, and admired with enthusiasm; and he had, unfortunately, described things that *had* been in such glowing colours, that Henry Elwyn had foolishly and fondly imagined they *still* were.

Called to be a witness of Mr. Elwyn’s second union with his mother, it required all Henry’s resolution to support him through the scene; he felt that this union would place *him* in a very questionable light to the world; but the heart-piercing entreaty of his father, as he had knelt

at his feet at Elwyn Hall, and had besought him to spare his character from infamy while he lived, was not forgotten—and he witnessed the ceremony.

Mrs. Elwyn appeared wholly unembarrassed, and to have no unpleasant retrospections with respect to the former ceremony; she had no tremours, or fears, although she was still taught to believe that her son had no legal claim to the fortune of his father; but this was such an old matter, that it was no longer a subject to employ her mind.—“Mr. Henry was a very fine sensible young man, very much so indeed—and a great favourite with Mr. Elwyn—a very great favourite indeed—She was now going to be taken home—and to be the mistress of Elwyn Hall—and she must conduct herself like a prudent lady—and be very affable—and very genteel—and speak well of every body—and show the world that she had not one bit of pride.”

Henry could not determine on accompanying his father and mother back to the Hall, he therefore urged a wish of staying to partake a few of the pleasures of the metropolis; and Mr. Elwyn, always indulgent, consented, while his *sagacious* lady observed, “That it was very natural, very much so indeed, for so young and fine a gentleman as Mr. Henry, to wish to show himself a little, and to take a little recreation in the season of youth; but,” she added, “that she should expect him again soon, for she should greatly feel his loss—very so!”

Mary Ellis meanwhile had been sedulously endeavouring to prepare herself for the reception of the new mistress of Elwyn Hall; she was assured that she could never behold a *second* Mrs. Elwyn, who could, in *her* estimation, equal the first; she could not reconcile the idea of strict propriety and so hasty a marriage; she allowed a great deal for the high tone of Henry’s feelings, at the idea of being introduced to this parent; and much of his glowing colouring she attributed to the enthusiastic heat of his imagination; Mary expected, therefore, neither a perfect, nor an angelic, but a human being.

CHAP. IV.

Some prudes of rigid kind forbore to call
On the kind females' favourites at the Hall.
CRABBE.

ALTHOUGH Mary Ellis would have tried to check every rebellious feeling on the approach of Mrs. Elwyn, in conformance with her well-grounded principles of duty and religion, yet another motive was in co-operation with these, a motive which was more powerful than she herself suspected.

The being in the whole world who now professed to feel for her any portion of regard or affection, was Henry; it was *his* mother whom she was to receive, and she felt something gratifying and soothing to her self-love, in the idea of receiving her in a way which he would approve and applaud. How then was she mortified and humbled when she saw Mr. and Mrs. Elwyn return, but unaccompanied by Henry! how greatly did she feel the want of his encouraging, his approving eye, as she first approached Mrs. Elwyn! how was she astonished at the unpolished, yet unconfused manner of that lady! how was she wounded by the cold abstraction which still marked the deportment of Mr. Elwyn, who neither assisting the awkward curiosity of his wife, or the trembling diffidence of Mary, seemed as perfectly shrouded in his own reflections, or in vacant listlessness, as if he had already been shut up, and reclining in the great chair in his library!—"Had not Henry sent a letter?—a word? had he not breathed a hint to account for his absence?—had he not thought it *possible* that she might stand in need of support—of encouragement?" These were some of the heart-aching inquiries which passed in quick succession before Mary; but she had no time for reflection.

The new mistress of the Hall, eager to view her new possessions, proud of her "brief authority," and anxious to gratify a silly curiosity, almost inundated her with questions, and almost deprived her of breath; for running from room to room, she was touching and admiring every thing she saw, asking the cost of each article, and the names and uses of many, declaring, "It was all very pretty, beautiful, and elegant, very so indeed."

Her manner, so totally different to what Mary had been accustomed, her person, her appearance, her behaviour, all so entirely the reverse of her expectations, she could scarcely restrain her feelings; she felt worried, teased, almost irritated, by the constant volubility which assailed her, and she longed to creep into some quiet corner, where she might relieve her full heart by a plentiful shower of tears; but Mrs. Elwyn held her by the arm, and while she went on with "pray, Miss, what is this?" and "dear Miss, do tell me what is that?" and "was this the *last* Mrs. Elwyn's doing?" and "is that the *last* Mrs. Elwyn's work?" a negative, an affirmative, or an answer of "I do not know," fell in rapid succession from her lips.

The drawing-room, hung with portraits of the Elwyn family, afforded a wide field for declamation; the names of each venerable personage, long since numbered with the dead, were called over. A predecessor of the family, who had been eminent in the law, and had risen to the dignity of a judge, was an object of marked respect.

"I shall know the judge again by his wig, you see," said the wise lady; "very fine—very fine indeed!—how much it must have cost him, when he had it new! And the divine, Miss Mary, I shall remember by his band and gown; so there you see, I have found out two of the family already—there's the judge, you know, and the doctor."

Mary scarcely attended, for her heart was palpitating; she saw Mrs. Elwyn tripping on to the portrait of her beloved, her lamented protectress—a portrait which she had been in the habit of contemplating daily for the last month, which she had *never* viewed without emotion. The likeness was striking; the serious yet placid expression of Clara's features, had been preserved by the happy pencil of Romney; and the delicacy of that countenance, which had been the index of a truly delicate and refined mind, had almost sanctified the touch of the painter, and had spread over it an air of something more than mortal—at least so Mary thought, and so she delighted to behold it.

It had been taken in the days of youth and hilarity, when a gay vista of delight had apparently opened to the view of Clara; it had been taken previous to her marriage with her cousin; but the pensive prescient expression of her soft blue eye, as the lifted lid was turned towards heaven, seemed, even then, to intimate that she must look beyond this nether world for happiness.

“And who is this here lady?—who is she?—more modern, I perceive, by the frame.—Who is this lady, Miss?” asked Mrs. Elwyn.

“This is the portrait of Mrs. Elwyn, madam.”

“Of the *last* Mrs. Elwyn?”

“Yes, ma'am, it is.”

“Dear me—dear me! only to think—I am quite surprised. Why I had taken it into my head that she was a great beauty. Law bless me! this picture could never have been at all like her, if she was. Was it thought a likeness, Miss What-do-you-call-em?”

“Oh it is a great—a striking likeness!” answered Mary.

“Well, for my part, if ever I was more surprised in all my born days—Law, bless me! how formal she looks! and so thin—and so spare—and then no fine colour in the cheeks, and the eyes no roundness in them—Well, commend *me* to *such* a beauty as that; for my part, I see no beauty there—do you, Miss?”

“Yes, ma'am, I see a great deal,” said Mary, as she moved mechanically on to the next picture.

“And so that was the *last* Mrs. Elwyn?” said the lady; “so that was the *beauty* I have heard so much of?” muttering in an under tone to herself, and casting a lingering look at the picture, as she followed Mary to the next.

Bitter were the feelings which struggled in the affectionate bosom of poor Mary, at such an indelicate survey of the object of her admiration; her heart would have been too full to have named the next portrait, but Mrs. Elwyn saved her the trouble. “Ah! there he is indeed!—there he is to the very life!—there's Mr. Elwyn to a T!—Ah, he wore that very coloured coat when he first saw me in Hampshire! and that was the way he dressed his hair too!—See Miss, how nice he looks—how much of a gentleman!—oh, very so indeed! that picture *should* have been mine by right. Well, there is no crying over spilt milk; better late than never. To be sure what a handsome man he was in those days! and Mr. Henry, my son, Miss, he is a very fine young man, don't you think so? but he does not come up to his—to Mr. Elwyn, do you think he does, Miss?”

“Not knowing Mr. Elwyn at the period you speak of, madam, I cannot be a judge,” answered Mary, who seeing that Mrs. Elwyn meant to be civil, and that her coarse remarks were entirely the result of ignorance, earnestly endeavoured to acquire resolution, and to behave with composure.

“No, that is very true, as you observe, you can't be a judge, Miss—what is it? I always forget your name; but I believe you are never *called* Elwyn.”

“No, ma’am, my name is Ellis.”

“Ah, so it is—I remember now, Mr. Elwyn told me all about it—and Mr. Henry too; Mr. Henry spoke very handsome of you, very so indeed; and I promised to be very kind to you, and I dare say we shall be very good friends.”

“I hope so, ma’am.”

“Do you understand patchwork, Miss?”

“I do not know that I do, ma’am.”

“Oh you will very soon learn, I dare say, and you shall help me; I make no doubt but when I come to tumble over Mrs. Elwyn’s old hoards, I shall find a good many odd bits of one sort or another; and we will set to, and I dare say between us, shall make some very pretty quilts, for I waste nothing; the least bit that is can be joined to another, you know; and if I did not *bring* a fortune to Mr. Elwyn,” and she gave a sneering toss of the head towards Mrs. Elwyn’s unconscious resemblance, “I will *save* one.”

The meek figure on the canvas seemed to preach patience and piety to her beloved child, as she threw an almost imploring look towards it; while Mrs. Elwyn, seizing her by the arm, cried, “Come, Miss, what shall we see next? ’tis all very well worth seeing, I’m sure, and very grand, and very pretty.”

It has been remarked, and that not unfrequently, that the minor trials of life, those every-day occurrences which are constantly operating on the temper, and harassing the mind, are more difficult to surmount, and contribute, in a greater degree, to the perfections of the human character, than those striking events, which, by calling forth a sudden display of resolution, are frequently a mere flash in the pan (if we may be allowed the expression), and attended with no beneficial result.

It had been the zealous labour of the deceased Mrs. Elwyn to lay the ground-work of Mary’s character on a stable foundation; this *foundation* enabled her to bear with patience her present trials; the habit of *retrospection* had been cultivated for a beneficial purpose; when she met with any thing unpleasant, she recollected how much more unpleasant had been the situation from which her benefactress had rescued her; when her delicacy was wounded, and her sensibility hurt by the ignorance and the coarseness of Mrs. Elwyn, she recalled the long period of happiness which she had enjoyed under the indulgent eye, and the sensitive kindness of her beloved protectress; when she was wearied with the silly remarks, and weak garrulity of her present companion, she recollected with gratitude the many hours of refined enjoyment which she had spent in the improving converse of her last; and thus by looking backwards gratefully to past days of unmerited happiness, and forwards with humble hope to a never-ending period of felicity, and to a reunion with her departed friend, “in the realms of light and love,” she tried, by retrospection and anticipation, to lose the painful sense of the present.

Full of her own importance, Mrs. Elwyn always appeared in a complete bustle, and was never weary of making arrangements and alterations in the domestic economy at the Hall, which may be easily guessed to have turned out alterations rather than improvements; for the well-digested plans of Clara, and the soundness of her judgment, the steadiness with which she had issued her orders, the benefits which had been derived from their adoption, had been seen through a long term of years, during which period the Elwyn fortune had flourished under her management—the domestics had smiled as they had grown old in her service, and the whole neighbourhood had felt the effects of her discriminating bounty.

The present lady’s mind was as contracted as her understanding; she was as ignorant of the necessary expences of a genteel establishment, as she was of the necessary forms of genteel

life; by attempting to be *prudent*, as she called it, she became parsimonious, in matters where the saving or the expenditure was of little consequence; and by a *partial* investigation, things of greater moment were in danger of being lavished without a thought. She delighted in rattling her keys, and calling herself her *own housekeeper*; while the faithful domestic who had retained that station under the auspices of the judicious Clara, and who was well qualified, both by practice and principle, to perform the office, was still retained in the family, in a sort of *nondescript* situation, and received the wages of a housekeeper, for the most part to sew together patches of *nondescript* shapes, for *nondescript* purposes; while the self-installed housekeeper was always searching in her pocket for the keys which she had lost, sending for the smiths to repair the locks which she had hampered, and turning the whole house into confusion, by neglecting to put things in their original places, or purposely seeking out new ones, in order to hide them from the domestics; and as her memory, amidst this multiplicity of business, was not very tenacious, there was often a hue and cry for some indispensable article of the table, which the lady of the mansion had put out of sight; fancying that every thing she did was very wise, she was never weary of recapitulating her exertions; and the repast was generally enlivened by a petty detail of the most minute occurrences of the morning.

Mr. Elwyn scarcely ever appeared to listen, so it was the part of the patient Mary to *seem* an attentive hearer.

Mrs. Elwyn appeared at the parish church of Norton in all due form as a bride. Three or four of the villagers formed a squad to pay their respects; and “she was so affable, so obliging, and so civil,” that they were from that moment on an intimate footing at the Hall. Mrs. Elwyn pronounced them *all* in one breath to be “very genteel, and very sensible, and very polite,” because they came *finely* dressed, talked of the weather, admired the Hall, and smiled assent, as soon as she had opened her lips.

The families who had been accustomed to keep up a friendly intercourse with Clara, and who were *really* well-bred and well-informed, still kept aloof, not liking the “questionable shape” in which this lady *so soon* appeared at the Hall, and not relishing the idea of having their lamented neighbour so soon superseded; but in the gossip of the attorney’s wife, in the flattery of an apothecary’s widow, who had a grown-up daughter to dispose of, and in the assistance of a maiden gentlewoman in making patches, Mrs. Elwyn had nothing more to desire. She said, that “really the village of Norton afforded the most agreeable society, very so indeed—very genteel ladies all; and *how* pleasant that Miss Lawson should be so extremely fond of patchwork!”

These under-bred females, who would have feared to approach the ear of the dignified Clara with a tale of scandal, with broad compliments, or with offers of assisting her in her refined pursuits and occupations, could easily fathom the depth of the present lady’s understanding; and while neither abashed by her superior elegance, or awed by her superior virtue, they were loud in their plaudits and admiration, and extolled her as “a being without a grain of pride or consequence,” and talked of “now feeling themselves at *ease* at the Hall,” which they “must say, never *could* have been the case in the last lady’s time.” So pleasant do we find it to *censure* those whose characters are beyond our imitation—so pleasant is it to *applaud* those who rise only to our own level—in fact, so grateful is it to extol ourselves.

Although Mrs. Elwyn had never made a direct communication to Mary of her early history and her former marriage, yet her frequent allusions to it were so plain, and her hints were so broad, that within a very few days after her arrival at the Hall, she had nothing to learn on the subject; and added to her other unpleasant feelings, she had the bitter regret of knowing, that while she had been one of the *most* amiable, her late friend had also been one of the most injured

of women. Her natural diffidence and restraint in the presence of Mr. Elwyn, was increased into something like aversion from this knowledge, and it required all her fortitude, it exercised all her patience, to be commonly cheerful before him.—“Henry Elwyn neither came or wrote; *he* was partaking in all the pleasures of the gay world, mixing, with careless avidity, in all its amusements, unmindful of the companion of his early days, alike indifferent to her weal or woe.”

Such were sometimes the bitter ruminations of Mary Ellis; at others, her disinterested spirit rejoiced that he was spared from the many mortifications which would have assailed his proud heart, in witnessing the vulgarity and coarseness of his mother.

In fact, as we have before observed, Henry had fled away from the contemplation; he could not bear the idea of beholding the contrast which she would form to the late Mrs. Elwyn; he thought with commiseration of Mary Ellis, and knew the trials which she must necessarily encounter; but he left her to brave them alone; and in the mad pursuit of pleasure, he sought to bury the remembrance of the first mortification which had ever assailed him; but it returned when the fevered pulse prevented his tranquil slumber; it pursued him when he came fatigued and enervated from the midnight party; he then felt that even pleasure had its alloy—that dissipation had its intervals of ennui; and in those moments the image of the gentle, the soul-consoling Mary, like a benignant angel, flitted before his imagination, and he would ask himself whether the mad tumult of revelry, and all its meretricious allurements, could, by a rational creature, be one moment preferred to the sober and placid conversation of that much-esteemed girl?

It was one day that his head aching from the noise and nonsense of the foregoing night's *pleasure*, his heart reproaching for “time mispent, and talents mis-applied;” his exhausted purse reminding him that he could not stay much longer in the metropolis, without making another application to Mr. Elwyn to recruit it; and his conscience telling him, that though such an application would be attended to, yet that his duty required his return to the Hall, when he knew that his father had long expected him there—it was on *this* day that he determined to quit town in the succeeding morning; and full of the magnanimous resolve, he mentioned it to a friend who came to call on him at that moment.

“Ah, I see how it is,” said Mr. Fitzallan, who had a great turn for raillery, and who was loth to lose a companion whom he found so pleasant, “you are going to rusticate—the gallant gay Lothario, the dashing Harry Elwyn is now to disappear; he is going to the pastoral haunts, to the sylvan scenes of Elwyn; the treasured object of his affection there ‘wastes her sweetness in the desert air;’ he sees the charming form of Mary Ellis; he falls in with the designs of the first Mrs. Elwyn; he is taken captive by her sweet simplicity—her sparkling beauty; *she* becomes the *fortunate* foundling; *he* becomes a benedict—a married man; and then—why then the curtain drops—the scene closes—Farewell, Harry,” said Fitzallan, holding out his hand, in a tone half mournful, half bantering.

Henry reddened; Fitzallan had laid an emphasis on the words “fortunate foundling;” his heart, his rebellious heart, revolted from the idea of forming such a connexion, for was he not the son, the *legitimate* son of his patron?—was he not the *lineal* heir of the Elwyns? All the beauty, all the virtues of Mary Ellis, were forgotten in this thought, and he proudly, warmly averred that such an idea had never entered his imagination.

Fitzallan smiled at his warmth; the two friends dined together; and heated with wine, and buoyant in spirits, they went to the opera. It was the *last* evening of Henry Elwyn's stay in town; he thought the house had never looked so splendid; the dancers had never before pleased him so much; the first song was enchanting; the ballet was ecstatic. In a transport of delight, he turned

his head to address Fitzallan, when he saw two ladies near him, and his eye rested on the bewitching countenance of Laretta Montgomery.

The chasm which had elapsed since he had last seen her was forgotten; instantaneously he was transported back to the enchanted supper-table at Cheltenham; he again remembered the honied smile which was playing on her lips; the eager anxiety with which he had waited for words, which were to render him the most blest of human beings.

Lady Laretta was with her daughter; and her rank being well understood, he should now have an opportunity of showing the sarcastic Fitzallan, that an higher object than a “fortunate foundling” claimed the regard and the attentions of Henry Elwyn. Eagerly he advanced to lady Laretta, who, with her accustomed ease, and in her usual figurative manner of speaking, told him that she “thought he had vanished for ever from the regions of the earth.”

“But now that I have lighted on a celestial hemisphere,” replied Henry, gaily, “oh, give me welcome!” and he turned towards Laretta, who affected to be constrained and distant, yet seemed at the same time to be overwhelmed by embarrassing consciousness, as her eyes dropt before his ardent gaze.

The evening passed rapidly; Henry accounted for his hasty flight from Cheltenham; he talked of the pain which he had suffered in the idea of so abrupt a desertion, and of the strange appearance which his conduct must have worn to the lovely Miss Montgomery, and the amiable lady Laretta.

The young lady still adopted something of reserve and diffidence in her manner; her mamma was flowery and metaphorical; both ladies, however, contrived to make him understand that they were to leave town in the morning, but neither of them seemed inclined to tell him to what spot they meant to bend their course. How tantalizing—how—how provokingly mortifying was this! had he then found the charming Laretta only to lose her again? could he have no opportunity of renewing his suit?—of hearing that delightful avowal which she was once on the point of making to him? He eagerly assisted the ladies to their carriage, and passionately pressing the hand of Laretta, he asked her to admit him in the morning, prior to her departure; smiling she gave him her address; and returning with Fitzallan to the tavern where they had dined, the morning dawned on them while toasting to the health of the beauteous Laretta Montgomery, in bumpers of sparkling champagne.

Fitzallan congratulated his friend on his conquest, and declared, that under the mask of bashfulness, under the semblance of wounded pride, and apparent displeasure at his long desertion, he could perceive that the heart of Laretta was firmly his.

The natural vanity of Henry inclined him to believe it; every succeeding glass of the exhilarating liquor strengthened him in this opinion, and he returned home in most elevated spirits. Elwyn Hall and the humble Mary Ellis were entirely put to flight; he thought not of his journey; his head was full of champagne, his heart of Laretta Montgomery; he thought only of pursuing her wherever she might go. To feverish and disturbed dreams, succeeded some hours of deep sleep, and Henry awoke at a later hour than he had fixed to appear before the object of his admiration. Hastily dressing himself, he lost not a minute in going to the house where Miss Montgomery had directed him; alas! he was doomed to experience the severest rebuff, for on making his inquiries, he was answered that both the ladies had been gone for nearly an hour. His first idea was that of instant pursuit, but the person of the house could afford him no clue as to the way which the travellers had taken; all he could learn was, that they had left town, and that they were gone into the country; and not in the best of tempers with Laretta Montgomery, neither with himself, he retraced his footsteps to his own lodgings, with rather a slower pace than

he had set out. Fitzallan soon joined him, and laughed at his fallen and altered countenance; it was too sore a subject for raillery; and to avoid the bantering of his friend, to dissipate his own thoughts, and not knowing what else to do, Elwyn actually did make a desperate effort, and left London that afternoon.

CHAP. V.

But from these dames I turn, and as before,
What suits not with my humour, hurry o'er.

PARTENOPEX DE BLOIX.

ON the evening of the following day, Henry Elwyn reached the Hall. He felt no little degree of perturbation as he thought of the changes which had taken place since he had last been there; he felt awkward at the idea of meeting Mary Ellis, for he had certainly been strangely neglectful of her; "she was a good girl, and must have met with some unpleasant trials since he had quitted her;" he feared to look in her countenance for her opinion of his mother; but in his usual precipitate manner he entered the house, and not letting the servant announce him, he preceded him into the drawing-room. Mrs. Elwyn was there, seated in high giggle, over a card-table, with Mrs. Buxton (the wife of an attorney), and Mrs. and Miss Lumley, the apothecary's widow and daughter, previously mentioned as being residents at Norton, while Miss Lawson, with great apparent consequence, was arranging patches at a little work-table; and Mary Ellis, with meek complacency, received the work from her hands, and mechanically followed the directions given her; her taper fingers dexterously plying the needle, while her truant thoughts were reverting to times that were past, and to the recollection of more pleasant hours.

Mrs. Elwyn had just picked up the odd trick, and declared "it was very extraordinary—very much so indeed, with *her* hand, for she did not think to have made three tricks for her part, hadn't the cards played so monstrous lucky," when she rose astonished from her seat, to make a proper curtsy to a gentleman, and to receive him with due politeness, not at the first moment recognising who it was; but when she did, she cried out, "Oh! bless and preserve us all, if here isn't Mr. Henry himself!—who should have thought of seeing you, sir?—quite a stranger—very so indeed!"

In the mean time, all the ladies were put into some little trepidation. Mrs. Lumley pointed to her daughter to hold up, while the young lady, throwing something between a *toss* and a *fling* towards her mother, pretended to be deeply intent in adjusting the *apology* for a tucker, which covered about half an inch, and left a *wide expanse* without a shade. Mrs. Buxton shuffled the cards with much dexterity, preparatory to her adversary's next deal; and Miss Lawson, perceiving that Henry having shaken hands with his mother, had now approached the trembling sempstress, added yet more business and consequence to her air, as she now contrived, and now cut out. Mary Ellis had indeed been surprised at seeing Elwyn enter; but it was an agreeable surprise; his return gave her great pleasure, and she received him with one of those good-humoured smiles, which always found the way to his heart; and at this moment Lauretta Montgomery was, in her turn, forgotten.

"And what, in the name of fortune, are you about here, Mary?" asked he, taking up a handful of the patches which Miss Lawson had just assorted, and throwing them into a mingled heap.

"Oh! my dear sir, for Heaven's sake take care what you do!" cried Miss Lawson, "you will absolutely ruin me!"

Henry begged ten thousand pardons, assured Miss Lawson his intentions were quite harmless; and asking for Mr. Elwyn, and promising Mrs. Elwyn to return to tea, he left the room.

Henry was perfectly acquainted with the faces of the females who were thus snugly associated with his mother, but was rather surprised, and not much gratified, at seeing their apparent intimacy.

Miss Lawson laughed very much, and joked with Mary on the mischief which had been done to her labours, and declared that she should make the “naughty boy set all the patches in order again himself.”

Mrs. Elwyn was asking the ladies all round the table “whether they did not think Mr. Henry a very fine young man, and very much grown?” and when she put the question to Miss Lumley, her mother answered, rather quickly, for her, “Oh, poor girl, she is so shy, Mrs. Elwyn, that I do suppose *she* would not have found out whether he had come into the room upon his head or his heels.”

“Oh dear me! what then, I suppose Miss Lumley is very shy—very so indeed. Well now, do *you* know I should never have thought it,” said Mrs. Elwyn, while, as if to *prove*, or to *disprove* to the correctness of her mother’s statement, Miss Lumley strode, with no very feminine or timid air, to the glass, saying, as she twisted and twirled, and *tried* to turn an obstinate lock, “The deuce is in my hair, I *do* really believe, for it never will sit as I would have it.”

“Miss Lumley, when you have settled *your curl*, we should be glad if you would lead,” said Mrs. Buxton.

“I am coming in a minute,” said the *shy creature*.

Miss Lawson was between thirty and forty years of age; she had passed through life with successive and continued hopes of marriage, which had not yet been accomplished; but even now she had not relinquished them, as she was frequently heard to say, that from thirty-five to forty-five in the life of woman, was the most fascinating period, and that any woman who had a tolerable figure and address, might *then* do what she pleased with the other sex.

Now Miss Lawson’s figure was *scarcely* tolerable; but her *address* (assurance would perhaps be as good a term) made up for it. She had the art of expressing herself with fluency, and had caught by *ear* a few of the opinions, and some of the phrases and sentiments of those persons with whom she had occasionally mixed; ingenious enough in work, ready in conversation, falling in with the habits of her superiors, and flattering them by sliding into their opinions, she had mingled in society, and readily accepted invitations which had been given, from the mixed and various motives of good-nature, policy, convenience, family connexion, &c. &c. Her real knowledge was very superficial; her mind was by no means cultivated, neither her manners refined; but by great plausibility of manner, and quoting the words of others, she passed for an agreeable woman with those who did not perceive that her conversation was not all of a piece; that the high flown was often joined to something below par; that her encomiums were exaggerated beyond all the bounds of common sense, or the properties of language; and that she would break into the same rapture on seeing a coloured ribbon, as on seeing a first-rate man of war full rigged and sailed, and call both “beautiful!” If she disliked the shape of a bonnet, she might probably have called it “awfully vulgar!” and have expressed her approbation of the grand ruin of Tintern Abbey (like another lady whom we have been told of), by calling it “a very genteel place.” Positive and superlative were the only degrees of comparison which Miss Lawson used; with her *inferiors* she was *positive*, or with those whom she deemed her equals; with her *superiors* she dealt solely in superlatives; and her notes of admiration were thicker than we find them in some modern publications. She knew every person mentioned in conversation, and was *intimately* acquainted with *those* who were distinguished by rank, wealth, or talent. If an

original idea was started, "it was very singular, but she had been thinking to herself at *that moment*;" if any thing was to be explained to her, she understood it before the explanation was began; if any thing to be related, she had heard it some time since, but did not think it right to mention it, or was charged to secrecy; and then she knew the very best way to work this, and the very best method to make that—oh she was the very crack of the village, and certainly called a most agreeable charming creature by all who knew her.

That familiarity which is naturally attached to such self-important characters, had nothing attractive in it to Mary Ellis; her own character was so widely different, that, like the retiring mimosa, she felt herself recoil from an intimacy with Miss Lawson; but that lady was not easily daunted, and "my dear," and "Mary," and "love," were the usual appellations of regard with which she addressed her; while to Mrs. Elwyn she answered, "exactly so," "perfectly correct," "indeed it is," "oh surely, my dear ma'am," "I perfectly coincide with you." And could such marked respect and approbation do otherwise than please Mrs. Elwyn, who, elevated to a height which rendered her weak head rather dizzy, required a little encouragement to enable her to sit steadily? And the marked air of deference with which Miss Lawson waited for her decision on the combination of a patch, was a very gratifying appeal to the judgment of this good lady; while Miss Lawson was often thrown into a "*luminous crisis*" when the patch was formed, and was never weary of reiterating, "oh, beautiful! charming! simply elegant! what an agreeable diversity!—what a combination of light and shade!—see how elegantly these colours are diversified!—well, this must be the very mirror of the graces—I call this the very marrow of patchwork; here's a delicate combination—now you must look at it, my dearest Mary; is it not sweet?"

Mary would perhaps have thought the *marrow* an awkward combination; but Miss Lawson's raptures were unbroken, and gave no time for comment on the side of her hearers, neither for consideration on her own. Without any decided view, it was the fixed rule of Miss Lawson to endeavour to attract the particular notice of every man she met, and perceiving that Henry Elwyn had regarded Mary with the partiality, and addressed her with the unstudied familiarity of an old acquaintance, she pretended to be more intimate with her, and more partial to her, than she had ever yet been; and drawing her chair close to hers, she waited, with no little degree of impatience, for the re-appearance of the beau.

He returned as he promised to the tea-table, having left Mr. Elwyn to his accustomed afternoon's nap; but disgusted with the girlish frivolity of Miss Lawson, and hurt at seeing the familiar association of his mother with such a party, his pride was too much wounded to render him a very agreeable acquisition to their society; and he threw himself into a chair at a distance from the circle, and scarcely uttered a voluntary word.

Mrs. Elwyn was the first to remark his silence. "Why, Mr. Henry, what is the matter, sir? I believe you have left your heart behind you now. Why, sir, you are very grave and solid—very so indeed; fatigued with your journey, sir, I suppose?"

"No, ma'am," answered Elwyn, gravely.

"Come, ladies, can't you tell us something a little entertaining?—can't you help us to a little news to entertain Mr. Henry?—So, sir, we have got new neighbours, I find."

"Have we, ma'am?" answered Elwyn, with an indifferent air.

"Oh yes, sir" said Mrs. Buxton, who now found a theme on which she could expatiate. "Salcombe Lodge is taken at last; well, I never thought as Mr. Morland would have got his price; but these Indians you see do not mind money any more than dirt."

"I suppose not—I suppose not," said Mrs. Elwyn.

“What is the gentleman called that has taken it?” said Mrs. Lumley; “I never can recollect his name.”

“Oh, general Halifax,” said Miss Lawson; “he is well known; he lived in the East a great while, and has an immense fortune.”

“A very sensible man, I dare say,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“At any rate he is an extreme fascinating one,” said Miss Lawson, affecting a half sigh; “and he is very—*very* handsome, I can assure you, Sophia,” turning towards Miss Lumley.

“You know him, I suppose, Miss Lawson?” said the literal Mrs. Elwyn.

“Not absolutely *acquainted*, my dear madam; but from my intimate knowledge of governor Purbeck and lady Elizabeth, and of colonel Vetton and Mrs. ——, and of half a hundred more of the great people that came from the East, I seem to claim a sort of intimacy with the Halifaxes already; indeed, the general and myself now do every thing but speak; we exchange very—what I call friendly looks, and I will venture to say, he knows me very well by report; we look at one another, as much as to say, ‘we *are* to be acquainted.’ The Lodge family will be a most agreeable acquisition.”

“Mrs. Halifax never stirs out, I am told,” said Mrs. Buxton.

“A very great invalid, I dare say,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“I don’t know as to that,” said Mrs. Lumley; “they say she can eat, and drink, and sleep.”

“But law, mamma, they say her face is as yellow as an orange.”

“And her back almost as *round*,” said Miss Lawson, in an under voice, which was meant to be perfectly distinguishable to Henry Elwyn.

“A very agreeable, sensible lady, I dare say,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“I have been told she had a great fortune,” said Mrs. Lumley.

“She *looks* as if she had,” said Miss Sophia.

“She is considerably older than Halifax,” said Miss Lawson; “I understand she was a mustee, or a creole, or something, and the rich widow of a nabob, and that she was in ill-health when the general married her; but she has held out some years already, it seems.”

“And if she eats, and drinks, and sleeps, though her face *may* be the colour of an orange, she may hold out some years longer,” said Mrs. Buxton.

“And I suppose they have a great many servants, and live very genteel, and all that,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“Princely, princely!” replied Miss Lawson; “oh, I assure you Halifax has all that about him. These East Indians know how to live; I *must* know, for I have been a great deal amongst them;” then followed a long account of the general’s equipage, retinue, and establishment, which was garnished by the remarks of the different hearers and relaters.

Mrs. Elwyn declared her intention of visiting at the Lodge, a declaration with which Henry was not much pleased, for he did not like the idea of her exposing herself to the ridicule, or the modest Mary to the unqualified admiration of an ostentatious and voluptuous East Indian.

“Wait a little till you hear something about them, madam, till you find whether they are worth your notice,” said Elwyn.

“Oh, I dare say they are very sensible good kind of people, and you see Miss Lawson *does* know something about them; and you find they live very genteel, and keep several carriages.”

“Oh, they live in good style,” said Miss Lawson, “certainly, very good style; but, as Mr. Henry Elwyn justly observes, circumspection ought to be used in making an acquaintance; indeed I was going to make the same remark myself.”

Miss Lawson had thus contrived in a moment to slide into the *inferred* sentiments of Henry Elwyn, and to be of the same opinion with him; she fancied that *he* was particular in his notions on these points, but it could not do *her* the least harm to adopt this peculiarity for the time being; and she therefore most gravely added, that connexions were much easier made than shaken off.

Mary had penetration enough to remark the inconsistency of this lady's sentiments, and her instantaneous change of tone; she threw rather an arch, though it was a momentary glance, towards Henry; he understood it; and gratified at this sly appeal, and amused with Miss Lawson's variability, he said—"We must not be fastidious; there is something ill-natured and suspicious in withholding our friendship from a family, till we have pryed about to discover the family tree, and the whole line of their genealogy, and all the secret anecdotes of their ancestors."

"Exactly so," cried Miss Lawson; "I was just going to make the same observation."

"A very sensible remark, Mr. Henry," said Mrs. Elwyn; "don't you think so, ladies?—very so indeed."

"Intimacies with strangers have frequently been productive of unpleasant consequences," pursued Henry.

"How very just is that!" said Miss Lawson; "my dear sir, we agree exactly."

"We cannot *disagree* madam," said Henry, with a half bow, while the manner in which he spoke raised a smile on the countenance of Mary.

Henry Elwyn was not sorry when the party adjourned; Mrs. Elwyn then retreated in great apparent bustle, to issue orders respecting the family arrangements. Mr. Elwyn was still in his elbow chair, in the library, and was not to be disturbed; Mary Ellis had stolen out of the room when the party were dispersing; Henry now sought her in the accustomed apartment, and there he found her. She was leaning her head on her hand, in a pensive posture, but started on seeing him, and welcomed him in her accustomed manner.

"Mary," cried he, and the eager impetuosity of his manner proved the deep interest which he took in the question, "dearest Mary, tell me, are you comfortable? are you happy?"

"Why would you ask the question, Mr. Henry?—why should you doubt it?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake! do not *you* learn to *Mr.* Henry me too. I heard, Mary, that—the manners of my—the different society—indeed, Mary, I think you cannot *like* the society of these village gossips."

"I am not fastidious—I have no *right* to be so," answered Mary; "Mrs. Elwyn derives amusement from their company; she is very kind and obliging to me, and I should be very culpable, very presumptuous, if I were to adopt sentiments which were inimical to hers, on such trifling and insignificant matters."

Henry saw the good sense and the delicacy of mind which had led Mary thus obliquely to praise his mother, at the very moment when he longed, yet dreaded, to ask her opinion of her; he snatched her hand to his eyes, saying—"Amiable, interesting girl, I don't know any one like you!"

Mary was surprised at his warmth; his approbation gave her pleasure; she had merely uttered the genuine sentiments of her heart; for great as was the difference between the last and the present Mrs. Elwyn, yet as the present lady treated her with kindness and good-nature, she was too candid not to acknowledge it to her son, and too considerate not to wish that she might amuse herself in the manner which best suited her taste and inclination.

“Teach me some of your forbearance—your sweetness—your magnanimity, Mary,” cried Elwyn.

“We must try to teach ourselves in these points,” said Mary; “and I feel myself so very unskilful, and so great a novice, that I dare not attempt to teach another.”

“How can you bear the silly and low tittle-tattle of the circle in which I just now found you?”

“We must not be fastidious, you know,” said Mary, smiling; “I think these were your own words to Miss Lawson.”

“If any one has a right to be so, it is you,” returned Elwyn, with animation, “for who are so eminently calculated to enjoy the pleasures of a refined intercourse, of rational intelligent conversation——”

“Me!” interrupted Mary, “me! consider what you are saying, Harry; have *I* a right to be fastidious? consider—consider for a moment, what *was* Mary Ellis?—in what station was *she* found by her esteemed protectress, and say, if you dare, that she has a right to choose companions and society for those so much above her. Oh, Harry, you forget yourself—you forget me!”

Henry *had* forgotten himself; overcome by the contemplation of the mild graces, the unobtrusive virtues of Mary, he had nearly given utterance to the warm admiration with which his heart was overflowing; but *she* had recalled him to recollection; he remembered the sarcastic conversation of Fitzallan; he remembered the ridicule attached to his manner, when talking to him of this fortunate foundling; a sudden change took place in his manner, a sudden revulsion in his feelings; he reddened—he coloured—he bit his lips—he turned away from Mary, and, after a minute’s silence, he said—“Have you seen this general Halifax?”

“Never,” answered she.

“Seriously,” said he, “for to you, Mary, I speak my *real* unqualified sentiments, I think some caution should always be used in forming intimacies with strangers. My mother has lived so long in retirement, that she may be called quite a novice in the world; and Mr. Elwyn has so habituated himself to ease and inactivity, that he scarcely exercises his understanding, unless he is obliged to it. I believe, for once, *I* must assume the office of mentor, and give my cautions with the *imposing air* of worldly wisdom.”

The entrance of Mrs. Elwyn put an end to the *tête-à-tête*.

For a female, and a *young* female, Mary Ellis had a very small share of vanity; yet she could not help feeling gratified at the marked approbation which her conduct and sentiments had drawn forth from Henry Elwyn. His return to the Hall gave her undissembled satisfaction, for he had been the companion of her infancy; he had participated in her pleasures, and had feelingly sympathized in her sorrows, without indulging any romantic visions, or giving the reins to a too sanguine imagination. She thought his regard seemed heightened, rather than diminished by his late absence.

Mrs. Elwyn appeared very good-humoured to her; the wishes of her son seemed to give the law to her conduct, and his opinion to be the bias of her judgment. The indulgent fondness of Mr. Elwyn for Henry knew no bounds.

“Life,” thought Mary, “would still be invaluable, were it to be spent in contributing to the happiness, to the welfare of Harry Elwyn.” But she suffered not herself to dwell on this idea; she recalled her wandering thoughts, and she lost not the present good in vain anticipations.

The first three or four days of Elwyn’s return were passed in the domestic circle; he watched Mary Ellis in her occupations, admired the undeviating sweetness with which she

attended to the trifling and querrulous repetitions of his mother, and the unwearied patience with which she assisted her in her favourite employment. The tranquil serenity of the one formed a fine contrast to the bustling and hurrying importance of the other; and though the insignificancy and weakness of his mother's character was thus displayed to his view, yet it ceased to wound him as acutely as before, for he could turn with delighted admiration to the contemplation of *Mary Ellis*.

Mr. Elwyn seemed to have made peace with his conscience in the performance of his promise. Ellen was the mistress of Elwyn Hall; his son was now called by his own name; and, having exerted himself thus far, he relapsed into his usual indolence; and, save when he took his daily food, or his accustomed potations, or when he smiled on Henry, or was teased by frequent repetition to answer some question of Mrs. Elwyn's, he seemed as totally abstracted from all passing occurrences, as if his faculties had been entranced in sleep.

This total imbecility, this inert torpidity, gave Henry the deepest concern; he had ever felt the liveliest gratitude towards Mr. Elwyn, he *now* respected him as a father—respected him notwithstanding the flagrant errors of his conduct, and would willingly have drawn a veil over *them* for ever. The unfortunate and guilty habit of intemperate enjoyment, which had originated in an unquiet conscience, had now taken too firm a hold to be shaken off. Henry observed the daily inroads which it was making on his corporeal as well as his mental faculties; he saw, he lamented, but he was unable to prevent it. Mrs. Elwyn was not so clear-sighted; her perceptions were not quick, neither were her feelings painfully acute; she often talked of what Mr. Elwyn *had* been; what he *was*, appeared only to strike her as the natural change from the meridian to the decline of life: had she seen her husband staggering riotously into the room, she would probably have called him “a little merry;” but when taking his accustomed naps, or sitting in stupid reverie, she never imagined that he could be otherwise than perfectly sober, though his faculties were then as completely besotted, as if he had been exhilarated to the point which she would have termed “a little merry.”

CHAP. VI.

So sung the sirens as of yore
Upon the false Ausonian shore MOORE.

AFTER the dissipation and confusion of the metropolis, the quiet calm of the Hall was not unpleasant to Elwyn; but accustomed to use a great deal of exercise when in the country, he frequently mounted his horse, and going out unattended in the morning, returned only when the shades of evening were closing around him.

It was from one of these absences, that Mary remarked the unusual animation of his manner at his return; with great vivacity he rallied on the sedentary occupation which engaged so much of her time, and assured her that no modern woman thought of taking a needle in her hand.

“How would all my patches be sewn together, if that were to be the case here? answer me that question, Mr. Henry?”

But Mr. Henry was not in the humour for answering questions, particularly from his mother; for having snatched up Mary’s scissars from the table, he was most expertly amusing himself in cutting Mrs. Elwyn’s prettiest *patches* into *shreds*.

“Why, dear me—bless us all—only to think how mischievous you are this evening!” cried Mrs. Elwyn; “law bless me, Mr. Henry, only to see what you *have* been about! you have cut up my two best patches, the very ones which *I ordained* for the middle of the quilt.”

“There you see the folly of *predestinating* a patch, ma’am,” answered he, with careless levity, cutting on, and humming an Italian song. “Do *you* sing Italian, Mary?”

Mary lifted her eyes; they seemed to ask him whether he had not forgotten himself.

“Ah, true, I think you never learnt Italian—what delightful strains!”

“I do not hear them,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“I hear them even now,” said Henry, “that is, in my *mind’s ear*, madam.”

“I understand nothing at all about it,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “but I think you seem very funny and comical to-night, Mr. Henry—I wonder where you have been?”

Mary Ellis thought him neither funny nor comical; she perceived by his flushed countenance and inflamed eyelids, that he had taken more wine than he ought to have done; and as *she* conceived the gaiety of his manner to originate from this cause, it had a very opposite effect upon hers; she felt graver, and more inclined to be silent than usual; and she could scarcely command her feelings to answer the raillery with which he incessantly assailed her. Evidently he had been in company, and hearing music; whose then were the delightful strains which had made such an impression on his fancy? Mary longed to know; she had never before felt so curious about a matter of such little moment; but she did not indulge her curiosity by asking one question. In an oblique way, Mrs. Elwyn asked fifty, such as, “Where can you have been, I wonder?” and “I should like to know what you have seen that has made you so merry?” but Henry did not satisfy her, and Mary was left to conjecture.

The following morning Henry Elwyn was absent from the breakfast-table; this was an unusual circumstance; many inquiries were made; the answer was, that he had been gone out on horseback above an hour.

“Very extraordinary, very so indeed,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

The Italian strains were now in the *mind's ear* of Mary; had they not been warbled from the lips of Beauty? She half sighed as she handed the cream to Mr. Elwyn instead of the sugar; but soon recollecting herself, she recovered her accustomed self-possession.

"Well now, my dear Miss Mary," said Mrs. Elwyn, "I have ordered the carriage, and you and I will take *our* ride now unknown to Mr. Henry; we'll puzzle *him* this time. This general What-is-it, and his lady, must think it very un-genteel and unpolite in me, you see, who are what you may call the *head* person here (and she bridled with no little assumption of consequence), if I do not call upon them; from all accounts they are very sensible genteel people; so, as I was telling Mr. Elwyn, we will go this very morning."

"This morning, ma'am!" repeated Mary, "had you not better—had you not——"

"Oh, no—I had better nothing at all," said the lady, with a decisive air; "I go this very morning; Mr. Elwyn is not very well, he says, to go with me, so I shall make your apologies to the general, my dear," turning to him, "in a *very* genteel manner, and say you will take the very first opportunity of waiting on him—that will be polite; and so, Miss Ellis, you will be ready to go with me at twelve; 'tis but an hour's ride, and then we shall get there at one—and smarten yourself up, for I assure you *I* shall make a point of shewing myself as Mrs. Elwyn."

"Aye, do, do, Ellen," said Mr. Elwyn, as he put a piece of buttered muffin into his mouth; "if Harry had been here, he might have gone with you."

"Why, very true, so he might indeed, sir—he might indeed; but you see he did not seem much inclined to visit these strangers; he does not seem to like these foreigners somehow; but, for *my* part, 'tis nothing to me at all; I would as leave go to see twenty of 'em as I would one; I should behave all the same—very civil and genteel to them all, and conduct myself as your wife should, my dear; I should show 'em I know how to behave."

It was not often that Mary Ellis felt herself inclined to oppose the wishes of those around her, but on this occasion, she would gladly have been excused from attending Mrs. Elwyn. Her repugnance to the visit arose entirely from having heard Henry Elwyn express his sentiments on the subject; it was plain that he wished to use caution, and to make inquiries, before an intercourse was began with the new family; would he not think his mother foolish and imprudent, thus to seize the hour of his absence to make the visit?— would he not think that *she* disregarded his opinion, and slighted his advice? but the decisive tone of Mrs. Elwyn, and the quiet concurrence of her husband, had given Mary no alternative but an open refusal; and as this would have been departing from the rule of conduct she had prescribed to herself, as indeed it would have done no good (for Mrs. Elwyn would then have gone alone), she sedulously tried to conceal her mortification, and to attend that lady with an appearance of cheerfulness: but, alas! it required some resolution to approach Mrs. Elwyn, who, seeking on this occasion to show her own consequence, had so ill-assorted her dress, and so ill chosen her colours, that she was far more like some farcical character in an entertainment, than any thing in *common*, much less *genteel* life. An elegant sarsnet pelisse, shot with green (which had been made for the poor Clara, but which she had not lived to put on), was put over a yellow silk gown, and a large crimson scarf shawl, which, thrown over a person of an elegant shape and air, would have given grace and relief by its folded drapery, was so huddled and bundled on, that it quite disfigured her; a light blue silk bonnet (of the *truest* blue generally seen at elections), well ribboned and crimped, was placed on her head; and neither a short nor a long, but a *full* and highly-stiffened veil, spread out like an umbrella, and dilated with every waving breeze.

The sight of the pelisse alone would have overcome poor Mary, for it would have recalled a thousand fond and painfully affecting images to her memory; but the confusion of colours, and of covering, was so great, that she did not immediately recognise it.

“Well, now I am ready, Miss Mary, and very smart, an’t I?—this pelisse, you see, fits me to a nicety; so the last Mrs. Elwyn must have been my exact size and shape. I had no occasion for my shawl, it being quite warm to-day; but it is a very handsome one, and I thought it would be an hundred pities not to show it; and how d’ye like my new blue bonnet? I think it mighty becoming, and very genteel—very so indeed; and this here *real* lace veil, being so nicely starched, you see, sets away from my face; I don’t like any thing mopping and *hoodling*, and covering up my face, for I am not ashamed of *my face*, Miss Mary; Mr. Elwyn used to call it a very pretty face.”

The coach was at the door, and in the act of getting in, Mrs. Elwyn said—“as you drive through Norton, stop at Miss Lawson’s.” The coachman drove off. “Miss Lawson will like very well to go with us, I dare say,” continued Mrs. Elwyn; “it will be but good-humoured to give her a lift, you see; you know *she* has no carriage, and ’tis not always fine weather for walking; she’s a very nice agreeable lady, and I am sure very polite to me—she’ll be an agreeable acquisition to our party—very so indeed; and knowing, as she says, so many of these here Indians, from east to west, she’ll be quite free and ready with them.”

If Mary’s wish had been consulted, she would not have particularly desired Miss Lawson to be of the party; but it was not for her to make exceptions; Mrs. Elwyn had a right to do as she pleased.

The coach presently arrived at Norton, and Miss Lawson was soon equipped, and showed her sense of the obligation conferred on her by Mrs. Elwyn, in the exulting kiss of the hand with which she saluted the Lumleys and Mrs. Buxton, as she rolled by their respective doors.

“And where is Mr. Henry Elwyn, my love?” asked Miss Lawson, with a meaning air, as she addressed Mary; “how comes he not to attend us on this occasion?”

“Why Mr. Henry is gone out, you see, and we do not know where,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

“I wonder *you* do not know, Miss Ellis,” said Miss Lawson, laying a stress on the monosyllable *you*; “I thought he told *you* every thing.”

“But you find he does not,” answered Mary, rather laconically.

“Why should you think he did, Miss Lawson?” asked Mrs. Elwyn.

“Because it is natural, my dear madam, and because every body can see with half an eye that Mr. Henry—well, well, I will say no more; perhaps I may confuse the dear girl,” and she took Mary’s hand, with an air of fond consideration.

“I do not think Miss Mary would have been at all confused if you had said on, for there is nothing at all of *that kind*,” said Mrs. Elwyn, in a graver tone than usual; “*my* son Mr. Henry is, to be sure, a very fine genteel young man, and every body can see as well as you, Miss Lawson, that go where he will, all over the world, he has only to *ask* and to *have*.”

A painful feeling oppressed the heart of Mary; unconsciously she let down the glass, and leant her head out of the window.

“Oh yes, that is very apparent,” replied Miss Lawson, who instantaneously caught the tone of Mrs. Elwyn; “I declare, for my own part, I don’t know a more truly fascinating young man; and then, my dear madam, when we consider his great advantages in other respects, he may make a connexion any where.”

“That is what I have just said,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “and I dare say he will—I dare say he will.”

“The men know their own value now,” said Miss Lawson, again addressing herself to Mary; but Mary’s head was still averted.

“Mr. Henry is very particular—very nice,” said his mother, “very so indeed; perhaps he is a little too much so.”

“My dear madam, surely this is erring on the right side.”

“May be it is,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “but now about these gentlefolks at Salcombe Lodge; you see he did not seem much to approve of my going; but I was determined, if only for curiosity sake, to go, and to show myself as Mrs. Elwyn, of Elwyn Hall.”

“Very laudable, very proper, very praiseworthy, surely,” said Miss Lawson. “Why, Miss Ellis, you are much engaged in looking out at the prospect.”

“This lawn always strikes me as being very pretty,” said Mary.

“And the house stands well,” said Miss Lawson; “Morland was at an immense expence in raising this villa; I always said he would overshoot the mark; however, it seems that he has got a good tenant now, and I dare say a good price.”

Through a bold sweep, the coach now stopped at the entrance of the Lodge; an universal agitation pervaded the frame of Mary as the step was let down; a maccaroni footman stood at the portico kicking his heels, and whistling a tune with great nonchalance, as he watched the party descending from the carriage; he scarcely replied to Mrs. Elwyn’s question of whether the general and Mrs. Halifax were at home, but with as indifferent an air as he had worn at the door, he crossed the hall, and by his actions, gave the ladies to understand that they might follow him. He opened the door of a large breakfast-room; Venetian windows, even with the ground, were adorned with light verandas, which were filled with plants, while the most costly and choicest exotics were ranged within the windows, and perfumed the room with their fragrance; two large and superb gilt Indian screens excluded the upper part of the room from view; the man walked within them, but turning back, said, in a low tone of voice—“Whom am I to announce?”

“Mrs. Elwyn, of Elwyn Hall,” replied the lady, with no little degree of self-consequence, “Miss Lawson, and Miss Ellis.”

An exclamation of surprise was heard from behind the screen, and the next moment our agitated Mary found herself within the magic circle, and, could it be possible!—yes, the first object her eyes encountered was Henry Elwyn!

A sumptuous and elegant *dejeuné* was placed on a large table, and a party was formed round it, in the manner which we shall describe: near the head of the table, on a Turkish settee, reclined an elegant female, whose careless attitude and fashionable undress, were calculated to display the fine symmetry of her gracefully-proportioned form; a very well-looking and graceful man was presenting her a cup of tea: on the other side of the table, and almost close to a fire of no common size, sat a little homely and deformed woman, of saffron-coloured hue, who looked old enough to be the mother of the whole company; she seemed very busy in taking care of herself, and neither looked upwards, or turned to the right or the left to make observations; yet at her right hand, lounging on the corner of a young lady’s chair, with one arm thrown carelessly round its back, was Henry Elwyn; his eyes were bent on her bewitching countenance with speaking admiration, as she turned around and spoke to him with a smile of blandishment. A lady was pouring out the tea at the bottom of the table, with modest and unimportant air; she was not strikingly handsome, and the first bloom of youth was passed; and conceiving by her employment, and by her being the only female who rose from her seat, that she must be the lady of the house, Mrs. Elwyn advanced to her with a low curtsy, saying—“Mrs. Halifax, I presume—I hope I have the pleasure of seeing you quite well, madam?”

At the first sound of his mother's voice, Henry Elwyn started, confused and confounded. "What did she say?" asked the little old woman of the tea-maker, while the gentleman who had been the attendant of the fair recliner, advanced with the air of a man who knew and practised the laws of politeness, and gracefully bowed to the strangers.

Mrs. Elwyn, lifting up her hands and eyes in astonishment, now exclaimed—"Why bless us all, if there isn't Mr. Henry! why only to think of it! In the name of fortune, how came *you* here, sir?"

Henry scarcely answered, for the young lady pulling him by the arm, said, in no very low whisper, "Do you know them?—they are very queer-looking people—who are they?—do tell me who they are?"

Henry assumed some resolution, and with a tolerable degree of composure, now introduced his mother (as Mrs. Elwyn), Miss Lawson, and Mary Ellis, to the little lady (who was no *less* a personage than Mrs. Halifax), to the gentleman, who was the master of the house, and to the reclining lady and her fair daughter, whom our readers will, ere this, have recognised for lady Lauretta and Miss Montgomery: Miss Letsom, the tea-maker, was not left unnoticed in this introduction; and, as if seeing and pitying the evident embarrassment of Mary Ellis, that lady placed a chair for her, and very civilly offered her a cup of tea, which Mary as civilly refused, without daring to raise her eyes, without daring to cast a glance at Henry Elwyn.

There was a great deal of the courtly address and the suavity of polite life in general Halifax—there was nothing of it in his lady; she regarded Mrs. Elwyn and the party with as little complaisance as curiosity, and seemed to leave her husband and Miss Letsom to do all the civilities for her.

The general advanced to Mrs. Elwyn, thanked her for the honour of her visit, and placing a chair for her close to his wife, he said—"You had better get pretty near to Mrs. Halifax, that she may enjoy your conversation, madam; unfortunately she is a little deaf."

Mrs. Elwyn bustled on, with no little consequence, to the place allotted for her, making Mr. Elwyn's apologies for not having called at the same time with herself, adding—"Had he known that Mr. Henry was making you a visit, sir, he would, I dare say, have sent you this message by him."

"Mr. Henry Elwyn stole a march upon us," said Miss Lawson; "that was not very fair," turning on him one of her most agreeable smiles.

"By the merest accident," said Henry, "I yesterday discovered that my amiable friends, lady Lauretta and Miss Montgomery, were here on a visit to Mrs. Halifax; and the general (bowing to him) was so polite and so pressing, that I could not resist the temptation of taking advantage of his permission, and repeating my visit at an early hour this morning."

"We languished for your presence, Elwyn," said lady Lauretta, "for it appeared an age since we had separated."

"I'm sure, Mr. Henry, you ought to be much obliged to that good lady for her kind compliments," said Mrs. Elwyn; then raising her voice rather shrilly in the ear of Mrs. Halifax, she said—"I hope you like your new situation, ma'am? it is very pretty, and very tasty, and all very nice, and very handsome, I'm sure, very so indeed—I say I hope you like England, ma'am?"

Mrs. Halifax laconically answered, "Indifferently."

"I hope we shall be very good neighbours, ma'am, and sociable and friendly together."

"I seldom go out," said Mrs. Halifax. "Child," addressing Miss Letsom, "what *can* you have you been about? there is not the smallest taste of tea in the cup you have given me."

Miss Lawson meanwhile had got the ear of the general, who, through politeness, was obliged to attend, though the reiterated yawnings of lady Laretta showed that she considered such attention a very great bore; Miss Lawson, however, expatiated on the refined delights of elegant retirement, and on the enjoyments of the metropolis, in the same breath; at one moment she was in India, and the next in England; her volubility exceeded its usual bounds, for she was willing to make a particular impression on the Montgomerys and on the general, and to show them that she was better bred, and better informed, than her “dear Mrs. Elwyn,” and that she was not so full of awkwardness and confusion as her “interesting Mary.”

“Laretta, child of my affection!” said lady Laretta, “Elwyn is expiring for harmony—do strike the harp in praise of Bragela.”

“Aye, pray do indulge us,” said Miss Lawson, turning with a familiar air to Laretta.

“Go to the upper window,” said lady Laretta, “and let thy floating sounds come trembling o’er mine ear!”

Laretta gave her hand to Henry Elwyn, who led her beyond the screen. They were no longer seen by the company; but the voice of Miss Montgomery, as it ran through all the trills and turnings of scientific melody, was heard, and the brilliancy of her execution, though not *seen*, was audibly acknowledged.

“Very fine, very fine indeed, madam,” said Mrs. Elwyn, addressing herself at the conclusion of the first song to Mrs. Halifax.

“It is exquisite!” said Miss Lawson, “astonishing!—oh, what heavenly strains! I hope they have not altogether ceased,” looking pleasantly at lady Laretta, as though she meant through *her* interest to ask for a repetition of them; but lady Laretta did not notice the appeal, and the performance ended. The performer seemed to be engaged in an interesting conversation with her companion, which their lowered voices, and the obstruction of the screen, prevented from being distinguishable to the rest of the company.

“Very pretty, madam, very so indeed,” said Mrs. Elwyn, addressing Mrs. Halifax.

Mrs. Halifax turned round with a laconic “What?”

“I say music is very pretty, ma’am, very so indeed.”

“Yes, to those who can hear it,” said Mrs. Halifax; “for *my* part, I don’t hear a single note *now*—’tis all in the *piano*—too much in the piano for me.”

“Music, it is plain, is not Mrs. Halifax’s *forte*,” said the general.

“Very good, very good indeed,” said Miss Lawson; “oh, what a delightful resource! in hearing *such* sounds, one can forget all that is past, present, and to come!”

Mary Ellis had never sat in more painful restraint than during the foregoing scene; her astonishment on finding Harry Elwyn at Salcombe Lodge—the mortification and embarrassment which his reddening countenance had displayed at their entrance—the easy indifference of lady Laretta’s manner—the abrupt rudeness of Mrs. Halifax—the fashionable *politesse* of her husband—and the assured ease of Miss Montgomery, all contributed to intimidate her, and to add to her natural diffidence; a thousand lowering and vexatious ideas obtruded themselves on her mind; and she thought Mrs. Elwyn was more tiresome, more silly, more underbred, than she had ever known her, and that she would never conclude her visit.

“I don’t know that I ever saw that sort of music in my life,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “with your permission, ma’am, I will go and look at it.”

“I don’t know what you say,” said Mrs. Halifax; but seeing Mrs. Elwyn rise from her seat, she said—“if you are going, good morning to you.”

Mrs. Elwyn had already moved some paces, but catching the words of Mrs. Halifax, she hastily turned round to say she was not going, when her crimson shawl, entangling itself in one of the burnished ornaments of the screen (and the lady pulling to extricate it with no little force), it fell with a tremendous noise on the floor.

“Heavenly powers! is my Lairetta, is my beautiful Lairetta hurt?” cried lady Lairetta, for the first time raising herself from the couch.

“No, dearest, sweetest mamma!” cried Lairetta, while Elwyn, assisted by Mary, had raised the screen.

“Do not trouble yourselves,” said the general; “we’ll order it to be put back; it is quite warm enough; and then we shall be able to *see* Miss Montgomery, as well as *hear* her.”

“I beg a thousand pardons indeed, sir,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “I did not go to do it; it is all the fault of my shawl, and only see how I have torn it—my spick and span new shawl too!—real *India*, sir,” shewing it to the general, “which you, who have been used to them, no doubt observed before.”

“What *is* all this about?” asked Mrs. Halifax; “what are they putting back the screen for? we are not going to *dance*; we shall all be froze to death.”

“I am expiring with heat,” said lady Lairetta.

“It is very warm, as your ladyship observed,” said Miss Lawson; then seizing the vacated seat of Mrs. Elwyn, she thought it proper to say something to the lady of the house, and said—“I dare say you feel yourself very chilly, ma’am? ours is a cold climate.”

“Well, young lady,” said Mrs. Elwyn, once more advancing to the harp, “I hope I did not frighten you much? and I hope, Mr. Henry—I hope, sir, I don’t interrupt you?”

“Oh, by no means,” said Lairetta, laughing.

“Well,” continued Mrs. Elwyn, handling the instrument, touching all the gilded parts, and smoothing down the strings with her fingers, “this is very fine, and very grand, very so indeed; this is worth seeing—I say, Mr. Henry, this *is* worth seeing; a very pretty sight, very much so indeed—and cost a good deal, I suppose; now, pray, what might such a thing cost?”

“I don’t know,” said Lairetta, carelessly.

“No, no, I suppose not,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “but your mamma does—I dare say my lady does?”

“Alas! alas! I acknowledge my utter ignorance,” said lady Lairetta, shaking her head, “for of what importance is the *cost* of such an article, in comparison to its intrinsic worth? oh, play me something more—for pity’s sake play on, loveliest of lovelies! for it will sooth my quivering frame, which has not ceased to vibrate from the recent paroxysm of terror caused by the fall of that tremendous veil.”

Lairetta touched the chords of the harp.

“Oh, it steals over my soul, like the sweet south wind upon a bank of violets!” said lady Lairetta.

Suddenly stopping, Miss Montgomery said—“But that young lady *can play*; *she* must give us a song now;” and turning to Henry, she added—“*You* must ask Miss Ellis to play.”

“No, no,” answered Elwyn, with quickness, “go on, pray go on—I beseech you go on—I will not be cheated thus—*she* cannot play—she does not know a note—pray, pray—I intreat you continue.”

Lairetta *did* continue; she warbled an Italian air, the very air which Henry had been humming the preceding evening. It evinced the power of her voice, and the facility of her execution.

Mary felt the crimson rise to her cheek when Miss Montgomery had asked *her* to play; she was about to confess her total ignorance of the accomplishment, but the crimson retreated from her cheek; it returned with warm tides to her throbbing aching heart, as she heard the mortifying, the hasty manner in which Henry Elwyn had answered for her, as she marked the eager, the impatient earnestness with which he had urged the lovely Laretta to proceed.

The song at length finished, amidst the thanks of Mrs. Elwyn, the passionate encomiums of Henry, and the loud plaudits of Miss Lawson, who was also got near Miss Montgomery, declaring the harp was always her favourite instrument, &c. &c.

“Well, Mr. Henry,” said Mrs. Elwyn, “and now will you attend us home? it is time for us to take our leave.”

“Oh, no, no; he must not go.”

“You must not quit us to-day, Elwyn,” said lady Laretta and general Halifax in a breath.

Henry bowed, with the gratified air of a man who put no constraint on his inclinations in remaining; and Mrs. Elwyn sailed round to make her parting congees, and severally to give her invitations to all the party. To Mrs. Halifax she first addressed herself; her repelling “What?” obliged Mrs. Elwyn to repeat what she had before said in a yet louder key.

“I don’t know that *I* shall stir out of the house while I stay in the country; the general is to do as he pleases,” answered the lady, in a very ungracious tone.

Lady Laretta made a slight inclination of her head, saying—“We must get our friend Elwyn to shew us the way.” Miss Montgomery smiled. Miss Letsom, “seldom went out:” but general Halifax was more diffuse. He said—“that he had no notion of standing upon ceremony in the country; that he should take the earliest opportunity for calling on Mrs. Elwyn; and that he felt highly indebted to Mrs. Elwyn for the obliging favour she had now conferred on Mrs. Halifax.”

The gentlemen attended them to the door; and the general, having assisted Mrs. Elwyn and Miss Lawson into the coach, Henry held out his hand to Mary; but as if she had not observed him, she sprang unassisted into the carriage, and returning the parting bow of general Halifax, it drove away.

CHAP. VII.

Shall envy then torment your breast?

MOORE.

BOTH Mrs. Elwyn and Miss Lawson immediately broke forth—"Very genteel sensible people, very much so indeed."

"General Halifax, what an insinuating man!"

"Mrs. Halifax, poor lady, a very great invalid, you see."

"Lady Lauretta, what a fascinating creature!—Miss Montgomery, how lovely!"

"And that Miss Letsom, a very civil-behaved lady."

"Oh! my dear Mrs. Elwyn, one and all of them; they are certainly most charming people! and as to Mr. Henry Elwyn—well, *I say* nothing; but I think it requires very little discernment. Well, ma'am, what say you? I do not wonder that *he* finds them quite magnetic: but, my dear Mary, how very grave you are! don't you think Miss Montgomery the loveliest of the lovelies, as her sweet engaging mamma beautifully termed her?"

"I think her very pretty," said Mary.

"Pretty!" repeated Miss Lawson, "nay, my dear Mary, she is beautiful!—she is angelic!—she has a most elegant figure!—her countenance is surely enchanting!—and, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Henry Elwyn thinks so."

"Mr. Henry seems a great favourite with them all, a very great one indeed," said Mrs. Elwyn, drawing up with no little appearance of satisfaction; "and don't wonder at it, for he is really a very fine young man, very so indeed; he will make many hearts ache, I dare say; I only hope he won't throw himself away in a hurry, you see, but take time to look about him."

"Oh, there is little fear of that, ma'am," answered Miss Lawson, "for men know their own value. What should you think of Miss Montgomery for a wife for him?"

"Oh, I *could* have no objection, I am sure, not in the least, to such a genteel young lady as she is—and her mother, a lady of title too! people, you see, Miss Lawson, of very great fashion!"

Mary Ellis was glad when they were returned to the Hall; and released from the talkativeness of her companions, she repaired to her own room. She felt angry with Henry Elwyn, out of temper with herself, out of love with the whole world; she had seldom given way to such unprofitable—to such useless ruminations; she thought of Lauretta Montgomery; the dying strains of her voice yet trilled on her ear; she regretted her own want of musical instruction; she almost accused her departed friend of neglect, in not having taught her this accomplishment. Tears, bitter tears of mortification, of vexation, trickled down her cheeks; but not long were they suffered to flow from these feelings by our virtuous Mary; they were changed into those of self-accusation and penitence; she severely reproached herself for indulging such wayward emotions; she remembered what she was, and how superior, how infinitely superior to any thing which she could have expected, had been her instructions and her acquirements; she reverted to the sentiments of her beloved protectress on this very subject. She had often said—"I prefer the wildly sweet and untaught voice of my Mary, when singing a simple English ballad, or lifting up itself in pious devotion in the evening hymn, to all the affected trillings of the Italian school. I should injure the sweet simplicity I admire, by giving her partial and superficial instruction; and, unless she were to discover an extraordinary genius for music, and an extraordinary capacity in learning, I should think that I was voluntarily trifling with a large portion of her invaluable time."—"How just, how proper were these notions!" thought Mary; "to

me, to me how utterly useless would such an acquisition have been! for Miss Montgomery, for *her*—” Mary was again relapsing, for a fresh accession of tears started to her eyes—“Oh, may she be as amiable as she is accomplished!” thought she, “may she be as virtuous as she is beautiful! for does it not appear that she is destined to be the wife of Henry Elwyn, and will it not make Mary Ellis happy to know that he is so?”

This morning had made an entire change in the hopes, in the wishes, in the thoughts of Mary, for though scarcely known to herself, the affectionate manner of Henry towards her since the decease of her first friend, had strengthened the partiality with which she had beheld him from infancy; he had been all the world to her of late, the only being who had felt, who had professed an interest for her; and there was something so isolated and so forlorn in the idea of his making a connexion, which would entirely estrange him, which would render him wholly indifferent to her happiness—“No, *not* indifferent to my happiness,” thought Mary; “why should I suspect it? for shall not *I* feel as anxiously interested for him, though married—though far removed—though separated for ever from me, as though he were still here—as though I daily saw him?”

In taking his usual ride on the morning preceding the one we have been mentioning, Henry Elwyn had encountered a party who attracted his attention. A gentleman was driving a landaulet; an elegant-looking female sat by his side on the box, while another, no less elegant, reclined in the open vehicle; two outriders followed. Supposing that these were a party from Salcombe Lodge, he was riding on with a slight bow, when an exclamation of surprise from the lady on the box almost entranced him with pleasure, for he saw his adorable Laretta Montgomery; an introduction instantly took place between the gentlemen; and to the mutual surprise expressed by the ladies and Henry on finding their vicinity to each other, he was given to understand, that, till that moment, they had not the remotest idea that they were so near to Elwyn Hall.

Elwyn gently chid Laretta for leaving London; she pretended to have waited for him till she had imagined he must have forgotten the appointment; but mutual forgiveness was soon extended; general Halifax insisted on his accompanying them to Salcombe Lodge, to spend the day “*en famille*;” and from this visit we have seen his return, and have remarked the unusual exhilaration of his spirits.

Having given his sentiments with regard to visiting the Halifax family, in so very direct a manner on a preceding occasion, and having acted now in such direct opposition to them, Henry thought his conduct would wear a very inconsistent appearance to Mary Ellis; and, strange as it may appear, he had seldom done any thing foolish, imprudent, or inconsistent, but he had mentally asked himself what Mary Ellis would have thought of it?

Thus, in the midst of his impetuosity, his versatility, and his pride, this lord of the creation always had a reference to the *better* judgment of an humble and unambitious female. “Besides,” thought Elwyn, “it would take so much time to give a description of the Montgomerys, his mother would overwhelm him with questions, she would be so eager to introduce herself, he should feel mortified and humiliated at her uncouth manners, and awkward attempts at civility;” in fact, he did not choose to mention *where* he had been, though he was too much elated by the bewitching smiles of Laretta, and the wine he had taken, not to make it very evident that he had made a very pleasant visit; and setting off the following morning to repeat it, he was discovered in the manner we have related.

Independent of the particular attraction which he found in contemplating the fascinating countenance of Laretta, Salcombe Lodge was a most pleasant lounge for such a young man as

Elwyn. The general was very agreeable, very well bred, and very fond of company; his table was excellent, and ease was the characteristic of the house. The deafness and taciturnity of Mrs. Halifax were no check to the conversation or the relaxation of the guests, for perceiving that they did not operate upon the host, and that, except as to the forms of politeness, he seemed to consider her as a cypher, they took the tone of their behaviour from him, and amused themselves as they liked, without the remotest reference to her.

The whole village of Norton was in commotion upon the very unexpected intelligence which was now brought home by Miss Lawson from Salcombe Lodge, and which she circulated with great avidity, namely, that “Mr. Henry Elwyn was paying his addresses to Miss Montgomery, who was a charming interesting girl, and formed for him; whose mother, lady Lauretta Montgomery, decidedly the most elegant creature in the world, doated on him, &c. &c. &c.”

All the world might, on this subject, have thought with Miss Lawson; it was evident that Henry Elwyn paid the most particular attention to Lauretta; it was as evident that his attentions were well received; but as yet, though he had made many protestations of love, and vows of eternal constancy, he had not, in direct terms, proposed himself as a husband. Elwyn felt a strange repugnance at the idea of being a married man; he doated, passionately doated on Lauretta. The thoughts of beholding her the wife of another, would have driven him to distraction; his intentions were certainly serious, his views were honourable, and the connexion would be advantageous.

The morning when Lauretta quitted London, when she quitted it without his seeing her, when he thought she had purposely eluded his pursuit, that morning he would unhesitatingly have made her his wife, to have secured her to himself; but now that she was within his reach, that he daily contemplated her charms, and basked in the sunshine of her smiles, he was contented to while away the sportive hours of present enjoyment, without eagerly pressing for an union, though it would make the fair Lauretta his for ever.

The visit of Mrs. Elwyn was returned by the visiting part of the Lodge family, namely, the general, lady Lauretta and her daughter; and from that day a brisk intercourse was maintained between the two houses.

Mr. Elwyn was very polite in his reception of the strangers; always an admirer of beauty, he viewed the lovely Lauretta with evident marks of approbation: during the first interview, he exerted himself sufficiently to throw off some of his usual lethargic manner; but this could not last; and the master of the Hall, and the mistress of the Lodge, were *mutes* in every party, except as to the functions of eating and drinking, and then it must be allowed that they both sustained active parts.

It was in vain that Mary Ellis tried to view Miss Montgomery and her ladyship in a favourable light; fain would she have joined in the encomiums which Mrs. Elwyn and Miss Lawson were never weary of lavishing upon them; she frequently chid herself; she frequently asked whether it was not prejudice, caprice, or envy, which prevented her from distinguishing their excellencies as clearly as other people, and perhaps she would unhesitatingly have given sentence against herself, if she had not referred (as she delighted to do on every occasion) to the sentiments of her lost friend—“Would she have approved the eccentric manners of lady Lauretta Montgomery?—Who could doubt the tenderness, the affection of Mrs. Elwyn for herself?—had it not equalled, if not exceeded, that of the most affectionate parent, and yet had *she* ever lavished on her those empassioned, those romantic epithets, which, poured out as they were at all times, and in all companies, seemed to render their sincerity very doubtful?—The studied, yet

apparently careless attitudes of lady Laretta too, the loose costume of her dress, were these in conformity with her situation? with that of a dignified and virtuous widow?—Did the entire devotion of general Halifax (his neglect of his wife, his attention to her), did her sufferance of his attention render him a character which Mrs. Elwyn would have esteemed?” Mary could answer here undoubtingly in the negative. “And Miss Montgomery, could such an ambition for display, such an unbounded desire for admiration, such taste for coquetry, such a familiarity with every man with whom she conversed, such a contempt for domestic occupation, such an eager ear for flattery, could these have been thought in consonance with the rules of virtue, modesty, and retiredness, which Mrs. Elwyn had been used to term the best acquisitions of a young female? here also Mary could answer by the same monosyllable; and feeling as she did for Henry Elwyn the most partial regard, admiring his virtues, while she saw and lamented his faults (faults which had their origin in the early indulgence of Mr. Elwyn, and which had been strengthened by the natural bias of his own disposition), she grieved at the idea of his forming a connexion, which had, in her estimation, little prospect of affording him permanent happiness.

From frequently revolving on this subject, and not having learnt the art of concealment, Mary Ellis, at each succeeding interview, grew more reserved and constrained in the presence of lady Laretta and Miss Montgomery; the latter observed it; and imagining that Mary was jealous of the attentions of Henry Elwyn towards her, she always contrived to engross them entirely when Mary was present; more than once, the expression of Elwyn’s countenance had given Laretta a momentary feel of uneasiness, for when she had uttered an equivocal expression, or given an unusual license to her *gaité de cœur*, she had seen the instantaneous turn of his eye cast towards Mary, as if to observe whether such sentiments and such sprightliness met with her approbation. To make that low-born girl an umpire of her conduct, was not to be borne; and Laretta, under the mask of levity and good-humour, had often contrived to make Mary appear in an awkward light before Henry Elwyn, while in his absence, a cutting expression, or a malicious sarcasm, taught our poor orphan to remember the vast disparity between herself and the granddaughter of the earl of Levensdale; yet, perhaps there was not much to boast of but the high-sounding name in this alliance to nobility.

In early life, lady Laretta had formed a clandestine connexion with a young Scotchman, of the name of Montgomery. Her ladyship had a small independence; her husband not a shilling. The maledictions of the earl pursued the young couple; they embarked for India; Montgomery got into a military capacity in that country, and died in a year or two previous to the appearance of his widow at Cheltenham.

Lady Laretta returned in the suite of general and Mrs. Halifax, and her imposing air and manner completely eclipsed her companion; and as we have seen, lady Laretta’s camels, lady Laretta’s retinue, and lady Laretta’s jewels, had made a considerable noise, and had preceded her to Cheltenham.

With general Halifax lady Laretta had long been on the most intimate terms; having a large fortune, he was coming to enjoy it in England, and to revel in Asiatic splendour on British shores. Lady Laretta’s finances were very limited; her manner of living had been very extravagant; her taste for expence had been boundless; and her disregard of every prudential maxim had kept her husband poor, and she had been obliged for pecuniary assistance to general Halifax: but on arriving in England, she found that a great change had taken place in her affairs; her father was dead, and, dying without male issue, the title was extinct. His anger at her disobedience had continued to his dying hour, and he had made a distant relative the sole heir of his property. A maiden sister of lord Levensdale’s, however, feeling a compassion for her *grand-*

niece, had bequeathed lady Laretta an annuity during the life of her daughter; but in the event of her ladyship's surviving her daughter, this annuity was to drop off also to the heir of lord Levensdale.

Montgomery's family had been low, but he had risen to the rank of a colonel; and the meanness of her father's origin was wholly forgotten by the fair Laretta, who thought only of her maternal GRAND-father, the earl of Levensdale.

Mary could almost laugh at the entire change which Miss Lawson's manner had undergone towards her; it was no longer "dear Mary," and "interesting girl," but "child," and "Miss Ellis;" she was now frequently overlooked, while Miss Montgomery was appealed to on all occasions; and even the flattery and obsequiousness of Miss Lawson appeared grateful to the ear of Laretta. To Mrs. Elwyn, Miss Lawson was still the most civil of the civil, for she would adopt her sentiments to all parties with whom it was her interest to accord; but the opinions of such an insignificant *know-nothing* girl as Mary Ellis, were not worth inquiring into; and Mary's would not have been very *pleasing* to her, could she have looked into her bosom, at the moment when she had detected the sly and mischievous manner in which she had joined Laretta in ridiculing some silly remarks of Mrs. Elwyn's, and when her own encouragement had been the origin of its utterance.

Miss Lawson was now a daily visitor at Salcombe Lodge; she raked the whole vicinity for delicacies for Mrs. Halifax; she admired the graceful attitudes of lady Laretta, and diverted the attention of Mrs. Halifax when the general appeared to be admiring them also; and she did not intrude with her usual volubility on the *têtes-à-tête* of Laretta with Elwyn. Mrs. Halifax said—"She was a civil young woman enough," which was going much further than she usually did; lady Laretta languished out that "She had discernment;" and the general called "Lawson a kind, considerate creature;" Laretta said—"She was very good-natured;" and Miss Letsom was silent, because she was never to think (much less speak) but when applied to.

Elated with her intimacy, and the firm footing which she had established for herself in this "princely mansion," as she called the Lodge, Miss Lawson could scarcely tell whether she moved on her head or her heels, as she daily perambulated from the Lodge to the Hall, or the Hall to the Lodge.

The Lumleys and Mrs. Buxton now seldom saw her, except when they met to play cards at the Hall; for though Mrs. Elwyn liked the family at Salcombe Lodge very much indeed, and thought them all very charming sensible people, yet she thought the Norton coterie very charming also, and enjoyed a rubber of whist in an evening with them, and hearing their gossips, *rather* more than the Eastern ease and the Eastern metaphors of lady Laretta, and the Italian airs and Italian graces of her daughter. Mrs. Elwyn felt *grand* and *fine* with one party, but *snug* and *comfortable* with the other; and however she might fancy that she liked grandeur and finery, yet the simple Ellen Harley was only at home in common life, and with the common amusements of common minds.

CHAP. VIII.

Here nought but candour reigns, indulgent ease,
Good-natured lounging, sauntering up and down.

THOMSON'S CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

THINGS continued in this situation some weeks, and no incident had occurred worth relating. The summer was rapidly passing by, and the weather was delightfully pleasant.

One evening Mary was returning from a walk which she had been taking to the village of Norton, in order to visit some poor pensioners of her late friend, who were still happy objects of *her* attention, and whom she sedulously tried to prevent from feeling the extent of their loss; at the entrance of the park she was overtaken by a gentleman on horseback, who was attended by a servant; on passing Mary, he checked his horse, looked at her for an instant, and then said in a tone of surprise—"If I am not greatly mistaken, I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Montgomery?"

Mary turned her countenance upon him, a countenance which, glowing with exercise, had never looked to more advantage than at this moment, and answered—"Indeed, sir, you *are* greatly mistaken; my name is not Montgomery."

"Ten thousand pardons!" exclaimed the gentleman; "I never was more deceived. But now, madam, will you have the goodness to inform me if Harry Elwyn is at home?"

Mary answered that he was at a house in the vicinity, but would be at home in the evening: the stranger thanked her, and rode on; and on her entering the house, she found him sitting with Mrs. Elwyn, and was by her introduced to him with—"Miss Mary, this gentleman is an intimate friend of Mr. Henry's. This, you see, is Mr. Fitzallan—you have heard of him often; and this, Mr. Fitzallan, is Miss Mary—this is Miss Mary Ellis, sir."

Fitzallan bowed, and again asked pardon for his recent mistake. "It is evident," said he, "that there must be a very great likeness, for I never saw Miss Montgomery but once, and had not the remotest idea of her being in this neighbourhood; but when I addressed you, I could have sworn that I was speaking to that lady."

"We were never thought alike before, I believe," said Mary, blushing.

"Never," said Mrs. Elwyn; "but you see likenesses strike people differently; for my part, I don't see it; Miss Montgomery, sir, is a very beautiful young lady—very pretty—very so indeed; for that matter, Miss Mary is *very well*—yes, she is *very well*."

"No matter, madam, I still retain my opinion; the two ladies are certainly extremely alike as to height and figure; that must be evident to every one; the *expression* of the countenance may differ, and I think Miss Ellis is thinner than Miss Montgomery; but surely the features are very similar?"

"Well, sir, you will have it so I see," said Mrs. Elwyn; "we'll tell Mr. Henry about it when he comes home; he will laugh, I dare say—yes, we will tell him about it."

Fitzallan had promised to pay Henry a visit, without specifying the time; and being at this period free from any engagement, he had not thought it necessary to apprise him of his intention. Henry Elwyn was rejoiced to see him; he had great pleasure in his conversation and society; the presence of Fitzallan seemed to infuse general life into the circle; he was animated, cheerful, and well-informed, well-looking, and well-bred, the only son of a baronet, and heir to a large fortune.

Lauretta's attractions were all displayed; she ran for him through all her sweet smiles; she trilled through all her witching airs; and *Elwyn* almost accused her of coquetry—of lightness, when he saw and heard her; but again he recollected the undeviating sweetness of her manners, which was displayed to every one who came within the vortex of its benign influence; and he remembered that if asked to sing, her right hand must forget its cunning, if she did not sing melodiously. “Skilled in the mazes of her sex's art,” Lauretta delighted in raising the jealous fears of Henry:—“what right had *he* to assume any authority over her conduct, when he had not yet made her a direct offer of his hand?—might not the attentions of Mr. Fitzallan facilitate this desirable event?”

The attentions of Mr. Fitzallan, however, were not particular; he did not mean, nay more, he did not wish them to be so; his manner towards Lauretta might often be translated into oblique raillery, and implied sarcasm, rather than pointed compliment, or expressed admiration; but Lauretta possessed a pleasant mode of translating, with respect to herself, and had a consciousness of manner about her, which made the most trivial and unimportant nothings addressed to her by a beau, appear of interesting moment.

Two days after the arrival of Fitzallan at the Hall, an invitation to dinner was received from Salcombe Lodge, and accepted with due consequence by Mrs. Elwyn. Mary was included in the invitation, and she dared not refuse, though she would much rather have staid at home.

Mr. Elwyn exerted himself to appear on this occasion, for Miss Lawson had whispered that the general had a turtle just arrived from London; and the idea of this savoury viand, and of the old Madeira (which had *three times* doubled the Cape), with which it would be qualified, acted as a stimulus to his epicurean imagination.

Miss Lawson was now become an *indispensable* at Salcombe Lodge; therefore, as Henry and his friend Fitzallan chose to walk, she got a lift in the coach from Mrs. Elwyn: as they passed through the village, and the carriage overtaking Mrs. and Miss Lumley, who were walking to the same place, Miss Lawson loudly vociferated from the window as she passed them—“An't you broiled to death?” and having asked the question, she very consequentially drew in her head, and left her friends to *walk* and *broil* without troubling herself for the answer.

The ladies at the Lodge were already assembled in the drawing-room, lady Lauretta reclining negligently with her back towards Mrs. Halifax, who, taking her pinch of snuff, seemed as perfectly easy in her way, as was her elegant visitor in hers. Lauretta was reading at a window, on a low seat, her feet extended on an ottoman, when the party made their entrance; she partly raised her eyes from the book, partly bent her head, and then resumed her studies; while Miss Letsom, who was engaged at her netting, rose from her seat, very obligingly saw the company accommodated, and, by her quiet attentions, tried to make up for the deficiency of those around her.

“We are very early, I believe, ma'am?” said Mrs. Elwyn, having bustled through her compliments, and now thinking it right to address the mistress of the house—“But you know, as I said to you, Mr. Elwyn, sir, said I, it is better to be too early than too late; Mistress Halifax will be ready for us—and so you are, you see, ma'am.”

“I believe I am deafer than ever,” said Mrs. Halifax, half applying her silver trumpet to her ear, yet with so indifferent an air, as if she had said—“No matter whether I hear it or not.”

Mrs. Elwyn, however, was of a contrary opinion, for she very leisurely repeated her speech verbatim, in a louder key. Lady Lauretta shrunk back, as if her nerves were quite wounded by the sound; and Miss Letsom, perceiving that her ladyship's uneasiness, and the cause of it, were both observed by Mary, tried to engage her in *conversation*. The circle was

presently enlarged by the entrance of the Lumleys and Mr. Munden; while Miss Lawson was renewing her questions to these ladies concerning their broiling walk, Mr. Munden introduced himself to the party.

He was a bachelor of some fortune in the neighbourhood; a blunt man of fifty years of age, who assumed to himself the privilege of saying what he liked, and living as he pleased; and who fancied that nobody had a right to take umbrage at any thing he said, let him be as rude as he pleased; he had some good qualities, but with so many particularities, it cannot be supposed that he was a general favourite: he was very uncertain with regard to his habits; sometimes he visited frequently, sometimes he shut himself up entirely; if he saw any thing he disliked in any house where he visited, he quitted it abruptly, and without giving any reason for his conduct; he was very partial to the late Mrs. Elwyn, but after her death he had never called at the Hall.

There was an unoffending good-nature about Mr. Elwyn, which seemed to bespeak forbearance; and as he cordially, though silently, held out his hand to Mr. Munden, he checked the *sarcastic* compliment of congratulation which was about to issue from his lips; and surveying his countenance, he said—"How in the world is it?—you are got much fatter, Elwyn; yet, hang me if I think you look the better for it." Then entirely passing over Mrs. Elwyn, he came to Mary Ellis, and chucking her under the chin—"Why, child," said he, "*you* are shrunk into a skeleton?" then pinching her cheek, he said—"Where is the rosy colour which I used to see here?" The action and the inquiry were both calculated to bring it back to its wonted station. Mary recollected when she had last seen Mr. Munden; tears were starting to her eyes; he moved off, and addressing lady Lauretta, said—"Pray is not your ladyship afraid of losing the use of your limbs, by always keeping them up in this manner? Upon my conscience, I believe you lay in this very attitude the last time I saw you, and that was a fortnight ago."

"And shall be there the *next*, in all human probability," said lady Lauretta, languidly; "I have no energy, no elasticity left."

"And never will, if you do not exert yourself," said Mr. Munden; "my life for it, if you would get up early of a morning, walk a couple of miles before breakfast, and set yourself about some employment, you would soon look, move, and *sit*, like a rational being."

Lady Lauretta closed her eyes, to show her utter inattention.

"I am afraid the young gentlemen will make you wait, ma'am," said Mrs. Elwyn, applying herself to Mrs. Halifax's auricular assistant.

"What do you say?" asked the lady; "oh, I understand you now; the general and your son are together; I did not comprehend you at first."

"Mrs. Elwyn did not speak of *your* young man, it seems, but of two who are coming from the Hall," said Mr. Munden, in a key which again threw all the nerves of lady Lauretta into disorder.

"Oh, I believe I had forgot; I think there is another besides, a Mr. Fitz— Fitz-something, I am sure I forget what."

"Here comes the general, I'm sure," said Miss Lawson, "for I smell the otto of roses."

"Arabian gales are not more sweet!" said lady Lauretta, in a low voice.

The general entered, unfolding his newly-scented handkerchief of finest cambric. He paid his compliments to all his guests, in a most pleasing and courtier-like manner; just touched (or pretended to touch) the tip of his wife's finger, as he passed her, with an "How are you, my love?" and then, not seeing a chair near him, he carelessly threw himself on the arm of the sofa which supported lady Lauretta.

"Order dinner to be served when it is ready," said Mrs. Halifax to Miss Letsom.

“You forget our two beaux, my dearest love,” said the general.

“Do as you are bid, child,” said Mrs. Halifax, and Miss Letsom obeyed.

“Oh, the gentlemen will be here in a minute,” said Miss Lawson.

“I dare say they will, I dare say they will,” said Mrs. Elwyn.

Miss Montgomery was still sitting with her book in her hand, and her back to the open window, which was even with the ground; sometimes she adjusted a stray lock, sometimes her eyes fell on the book: at the moment when Mrs. Elwyn spoke, the eyes of another also fell on the book, and these lines were audibly repeated:—

“And ne’er did Grecian chisel trace
A nymph, a naiad, or a grace,
Of finer form, or lovelier face!”

The three lines were spoken with emphasis, and distinctly heard, *before* the “Oh! Mr. Fitzallan, how could you frighten me so?” by Miss Montgomery, was answered by the responsive scream of lady Laretta, as she saw the start of her child.

The truant beaux walked into the window, and followed Laretta, who hastening to her mother, cried—“My angel, beautiful mamma! say have I alarmed you?”

“No, child of my heart! best beloved of my soul! for ‘shouldst thou sit upon my head and eyes, I shall rejoice, for thou art gentle*!”

“Hang me though if I should rejoice at any such thing,” said Mr. Munden.

“E’en the slight harebell rais’d its head.
Elastic from her airy tread,”

said Fitzallan.

“Ah, that is all very well in poetry,” said Mr. Munden, “because poetry is a fiction altogether.”

“And lady Laretta Montgomery was speaking in blank verse, and that is poetry too, you know, sir,” said Miss Lawson.

“And poetry, they say, madam, is prose run mad,” said Munden.

“Mamma generally speaks in blank verse,” said Laretta.

“It suits the redundancy of her imagination,” said the general, in a low voice.

“Then, ma’am,” said Mr. Munden, “as I acknowledge myself to be a prosing old fellow, will you be so good when you address *me*, to try to speak in prose, and then perhaps I may have some chance of understanding you.”

“Lord! Mr. Munden,” said Miss Lumley, “I do believe you thought lady Laretta asked *you* to sit upon her head.”

“Oh, by no means,” said Munden; “but in general company, the conversation should, I think, be adapted to general comprehension; I do not understand the tropes and figures of Eastern metaphor, for my part.”

“But if you will have the goodness to follow me,” said the general, “I hope we shall see something which we shall *all* of us be able to understand;” and he took the hand of lady Laretta to lead her to the dining-room. The guests followed in order; and, according to the established custom of the house, general Halifax took the head of the table, lady Laretta gracing his right

* Bahar Danush.

hand. Mrs. Halifax took her wonted station at the side; and Miss Letsom, quietly occupied in carving for, and assisting the company, filled the bottom seat.

The dinner passed as dinners usually do; little conversation that could be so termed, much unmeaning politeness, much apparent satisfaction, and much approbation of the good things, to which the lady of the house did as much honour as any of the guests. Fitzallan and Henry Elwyn were placed, one on each side of Laretta; they shared her smiles between them; and she was almost exclusively the object of their attention. It was in vain that Miss Lumley lounged herself into various attitudes, and tried to copy Miss Montgomery in every variation; the clumsy heaviness of her form could not borrow the airy flexibility of her model; and what might charm in the one, could not fail of disgusting in the other.

Miss Lawson finding that she was not doomed to be the first in request with the beaux, adopted another plan, and endeavoured to be the first in favour with the belles; she was most assiduously attentive to lady Laretta, declared and vowed (upon her honour too) that “poor Mrs. Halifax ate nothing;” and as to her “dear Miss Montgomery, she looked so wicked, that there was positively no bearing of her.”

The Lumleys and Mary, even Mrs. Elwyn, were now excused from her attentions, and escaped her remarks, for they were insignificant beings in comparison of the trio at Salcombe Lodge (Miss Letsom, it seems, being left entirely out of the calculations of others, was not *reckoned* upon by Miss Lawson); now and then, indeed, valuing herself upon her superior knowledge, she would ask Mrs. Lumley if she ever saw such a dish as that before? and whether she liked another? and once she reminded Miss Lumley, “that her long walk had made her look quite jaded.”

Glances of mortification and ill-concealed contempt were exchanged between the mother and daughter, and they seemed as plainly to say, as words could have made it appear, “Take care, Miss Lawson, or perhaps you may be cut out at our next whist-party.”

Next to Miss Letsom, and at the bottom of the table, Mary Ellis tried to feel herself at ease, and to console herself, for the utter disregard of the rest of the company, in her good-natured civility.

The behaviour of this lady naturally excited her admiration, while she seemed too insignificant to be noticed by any individual, except in the way of a question or command; she saw that *every* individual had a portion of her attention and civility; and that the obligingness of her behaviour had nothing in it affected or overstrained, but seemed naturally to proceed from the goodness of her disposition. There was no assumption in her manner; there was nothing striking in her appearance; she scarcely ventured on a remark; her answers were generally confined to monosyllables; she obeyed the orders of Mrs. Halifax with prompt cheerfulness, and bore her peevish chidings with undeviating patience. “How would such conduct have been admired by my ever-lamented protectress!” thought Mary; “how would she have applauded such an utter forgetfulness of self!” While mentally making this remark, her soft eyes were fixed on the countenance of Miss Letsom, as if she would discover whether it was to fortitude or to insensibility, to servile dependence or to genuine humility, that she was to impute her behaviour; but the transient flush which illumined her care-worn countenance, as Mrs. Halifax said, in a discordant key—“Letsom, why, child, you must be asleep, I think; you *know* I never eat the part you have sent me,” proved that her feelings were not dead; and the sweetness with which she addressed herself to Mary, evinced that she was equally humble to all, and that she could be obliging to those who were powerless as herself, and from whom no return was to be expected. Mary Ellis was prone to behold every human being in a favourable light; she felt a sympathy for

Miss Letsom; she fancied that there was a similarity in their situations, and she felt a kindred spark of emulation glow within her breast, as she hoped to conduct herself with equal forbearance and propriety; but, ah! the truant heart, the truant eyes of Mary frequently wandered towards that part of the table where, in all the *pride of conquest*, Henry Elwyn sat, and where, in all the pride of *conscious beauty*, Laretta listened to his conversation: in respect to herself, the utter disregard, the almost contemptuous neglect of Miss Montgomery, did not give her the smallest uneasiness; but was it not plain, that a woman who could act with insolence to her own sex, who could reserve her smiles and her agreeable qualities exclusively for the other, was it not plain that such a woman was not formed either with a mind or temper calculated for domestic happiness? But the sanguine, the enthusiastic Henry, saw in her perfection's self; he basked in her smiles, he lived only in her presence; and it was not in the *power* of Mary Ellis, it was scarcely in her *wish* to break the charm.

When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, lady Laretta resumed her usual situation; Mrs. Halifax was assisted by Miss Letsom to her armed chair, where having had a pillow placed at her back, and taken two pinches of snuff, she very leisurely composed herself for her afternoon's nap, saying—"Pray, good people, entertain yourselves;" and the good people endeavoured to do as they were bidden.

Mrs. Elwyn proposed a walk round the gardens; Laretta affected not to hear; and Miss Lawson, choosing at this juncture to pay her court to her, affected also to be equally deaf. The Lumleys, however, did not think it decorous to be deaf to the proposition; and Miss Letsom, looking at Mrs. Halifax, and seeing by her "sealed eyelids," that she might be spared, offered her arm to Mary Ellis, and followed Mrs. Elwyn and the Lumleys. The door was scarcely closed, ere Laretta said—"Who is that poor girl whom the Elwyns hawk about?"

"Oh," answered Miss Lawson, "she is a *protegée* of the *last* Mrs. Elwyn's."

"And has she descended to the present, with the old clothes, and the bed-patches of her predecessor?"

Miss Lawson laughed and said—"How wicked you are!"

"Oh, not at all; but one is sick of seeing the *various* wardrobes, of hearing of the *motley* patches, and looking at that *stationary* countenance, that immoveable form!"

"I have heard Miss Ellis thought pretty," said Miss Lawson.

"Pretty?—impossible! she has no action—no manner—no grace; has she, my beautiful mamma?"

"Star of the east! I have never let my eyes light on her countenance; thy presence so completely engrosses my whole of vision, that it has no vacancy for other objects."

"My dearest, sweetest mamma!" said Laretta, clasping her hands and kissing the forehead of lady Laretta.

"My angel girl!" whispered her ladyship.

"What relation is this Miss Ellis to the Elwyns?" asked Laretta.

"Ellis," repeated lady Laretta, and she half raised her head from the sofa.

"Ellis is the name by which she is *known*," said the voluble Miss Lawson, glad to have interested lady Laretta, and delighted at being able to gratify the curiosity of her "angel girl," even though she decorated the story with a few additions which had not truth for their basis.

The story which Mrs. Elwyn *told* of her adopting a child, whose parents were drowned at sea during a storm at Brighton, was animadverted upon by the narrator, and she put the question to her hearers, whether it was likely that Mrs. Elwyn would have consented to separate the *twin* sisters, whether it was *probable* that another lady should have started up at the same moment to

adopt the other, and that Mrs. Elwyn should never be able to discover her name, or to get any clue by which to trace her.—“With *Mr.* Elwyn,” continued Miss Lawson, “the story passed current; he had *his* reasons for not minutely investigating at *that* period, for then it was that he first introduced his son to the Hall; we all know *his* story, poor man; all the world have made their comments upon it; and while he has quietly borne the odium of *that* world, Mrs. Elwyn was cried up as a prodigy, extolled as an angel, and her adoption of this *motherless* child was applauded as a sterling and disinterested act of charity—Had Mr. Elwyn’s heart been *read*, I believe—but he was an easy, quiet mortal.”

“I dare say it was her *own* child,” said Laretta.

“Mrs. Elwyn certainly repeated her visit to Brighton *earlier than usual* that summer, and staid *later*; altogether it was a most unaccountable history,” said Miss Lawson. “I was not at home when the *infant* was first introduced, but I confess, that I have always been one of the *unbelievers*, though at Norton, at *that* time, one should have been thought *worse* than an infidel to have *doubted* the story, or the kidnapping of the other bantling. Mrs. Elwyn had *bought* herself a name; but I am always inclined to judge from probabilities, rather than possibilities.”

Lady Laretta smiled—“Such an incident,” said she, “would have been more likely to have happened under the romantic influence of our eastern region, than in your colder climate.”

“Certainly,” said Miss Lawson; “your ladyship sees I am persuaded how entirely fabulous the whole story must have been. In order to wind up the catastrophe, and to render the finale complete, these *twin* heroines ought to meet again—be recognised by one another as sisters.”

“And be *twin* stars of perfection!” said Laretta, with a laugh.

“What a brilliant, what a lively imagination you have got!” said Miss Lawson.

“Have I?” asked Laretta, with an air of would-be innocent simplicity, which was meant to conceal the feelings of gratified vanity.

“At one time, and during the *last* Mrs. Elwyn’s life, a match was talked of between Mr. Henry Elwyn and Mary Ellis.”

“That *would* have been ridiculous enough,” said Laretta, biting her lips.

“I confess I did not *then* think it *probable*, for Henry Elwyn ought to have looked higher—*now*—” and the retreating eyes of Laretta conveyed the implication better than Miss Lawson could have done it by concluding the sentence.

CHAP. IX.

“For still my heart regards thy weal,
Warmly, as it was wont to do.”

IN the mean time, Mary Ellis and Miss Letsom had got very sociable; Mary found Miss Letsom very sensible, well informed, and well behaved; but the natural diffidence of her manner had been so increased by her situation, that time was required to develop her character; and it was in retirement, and in private conversation like the present, that she was best seen and best known.

The virtues and the graces of our Mary, too, like those of her companion, blossomed in the shade; she had talents for conversation, but it was conversation where she could be free from restraint, where she felt assured that the sentiments which she uttered would be received with forbearance and consideration; she felt chilled and silenced by the harsh manner of Mrs. Halifax, by the rude *nonchalance* of Lauretta; but her heart expanded itself with modest warmth to meet the encouraging kindness of Miss Letsom. It was seldom that Mary had passed so pleasant an hour; but while pleased in each other's society, they neither of them forgot the attention due to Mrs. Elwyn, or to the Lumleys.

Freed from the shackles of a circle to which she was unaccustomed, Mrs. Elwyn frisked about the gardens like a child escaped from school; she admired every thing she saw, “declared that Miss Montgomery was a most lovely, beautiful creature! very so indeed;” asked each of the ladies over and over again, whether they did not think so too? and *more* than hinted that her partiality for Mr. Henry was very apparent.

Mrs. Lumley found herself necessitated to agree with Mrs. Elwyn, yet silently wondered at *Mr. Henry's* taste, as she looked with the partiality of a mother at the bold unmeaning stare of her tall daughter's prominent eyes; and Miss was mentally *vowing* that she had been a great fool, to expose herself to such a scorching walk, to sit in buckram, to be entirely overlooked by the men, and to finish with such a stupid saunter round the garden. She felt that she had forcibly realized the words of the preacher; and that the day which had dawned in vanity, was likely to close in vexation of spirit.

Miss Letsom looked apprehensively at her watch two or three times during the last quarter of an hour; she knew the probable duration of Mrs. Halifax's nap, and that *she* should be in instant requisition on her first opening her eyes; that lady was in the act of doing so when they entered the room, and said, in an hurried tone—“Now, Letsom, you may ring; I am ready for my coffee.”

“We have had a pleasant walk, ma'am, very so indeed,” said Mrs. Elwyn, applying her voice to the ear of Mrs. Halifax; but she had not the art (though she had the wish) of rendering it intelligible to that lady.

“Yes, yes,” answered she, “I have had a pleasant nap enough; I suspect you have been doing the same; its very natural; after making a good dinner, it refreshes one almost as much as a pinch of snuff,” leisurely applying her finger and thumb to the snuff-box.—“Come, Letsom, make haste with the coffee, child.”

Tea and coffee were both brought; and while the room was lighting up with almost innumerable lights, Mary gently slid to the tea-table, and assisted Miss Letsom.

Breaking from Miss Lawson, with whom, till this moment, she had been deeply engaged, Miss Montgomery walked to her harp, and leaning over it, she seemed to be invoking the spirit

of harmony. Lights were placed on each side of the instrument, and she appeared as if going to strike the trembling strings, when the door opened, and the gentlemen entered. Lauretta's back was towards it, and it did not suit the *rapt tenor of her soul* to look with "vulgar ken" to see who entered. With slow and heavy step, came Mr. Elwyn; he placed himself near the tea-table; then entered Mr. Munden; he was followed by the others. Mr. Munden stole towards Miss Montgomery, and placing one of his hands on each of her shoulders, he said—"I did not know that you were acquainted with this instrument." Lauretta started, and frowningly turned round, as if she was not used to so rough a salute. Mr. Munden started also, as he said—"Pon honour, madam, I ask your pardon; I wouldn't have alarmed you for all the world, for we all were witnesses of *your* nervousness (as they call it) this morning; but I declare to you, that I took you for that silent little girl, that I now see is snugly sitting at the corner of the tea-table." Lauretta half turned away, a great deal more disconcerted at the mistake than the apology; a contemptuous silence was all the notice she took of his speech. "Whew, whew!" said Mr. Munden, "hang me if I do not think there is a great likeness between those two young ones—what say you, ma'am?" turning to Mrs. Elwyn.

"I have heard the remark made before, sir," said Mrs. Elwyn; "Mr. Fitzallan remarked it."

"Oh then it seems it is quite an old story," said Lauretta, colouring.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" said Miss Lawson, in a whisper, and addressing herself to Lauretta. "Come, were you not going to witch us with your charming melody?—perfection's self!" for taking the cue from lady Lauretta, and having grown into considerable importance with herself, during her confidential communication in the afternoon, Miss Lawson now thought it incumbent upon her to be orientally rhapsodic when addressing herself to Lauretta.

"It appears there may be *twin stars* of perfection," said Lauretta, sarcastically, and *almost* pointingly. "You know I made that remark before. And so *you* thought *me* like Miss—Miss—I forget her name—I always *do* forget her name," continued Lauretta, addressing Fitzallan, and applying, as if to be helped out in the name by Miss Lawson.

"Ellis," said Miss Lawson.

"Ellis—aye, so it is."

"Ellis," repeated Mrs. Elwyn, "you see, is something like Elwyn, but not quite; both syllables are not the same, but both names begin with an E and an L."

"Yes, I certainly thought there was a likeness when I first had the pleasure of seeing Miss Ellis," answered Fitzallan.

Henry Elwyn was tired of the discussion; he did not wish it to be continued; he saw that it did not please Lauretta, that it confused Mary Ellis (though he had leaned on the back of her chair as if to screen her from observation), and that if pursued, his mother would still further expose herself; so hastily walking towards the harp, he said, addressing himself to Lauretta—"Why tantalize us with assuming this attitude? we are all ear."

"Say rather all *eye*," said Lauretta, with cutting severity, and colouring as she darted an angry glance towards the chair where sat Mary Ellis, and where Elwyn had been leaning while he sipped his coffee.

This little trait of feminine jealousy was calculated to gratify the vanity of such a man as Elwyn; his sober judgment might have condemned it, but his judgment was not sober; he seized the fair hand of Lauretta, and pressed it to his lips, as he asked her—"Why she was so cruel?" He placed the music-book before her, and was opening to a favourite song; half playfully, half fretfully, she resisted his entreaties. In the scuffle, one of the wax-lights fell on the lap of Lauretta; her dress of lightest, finest muslin, was in flames! she uttered a piercing scream, and

flew towards the sofa with the rapidity of lightning; with almost equal rapidity she was followed by Henry and by Mary, but not till the screamings of lady Lauretta were added to those of her daughter; and the flames were communicated from Lauretta's dress to the recumbent drapery of her ladyship. Elwyn eagerly tried to extinguish them by wrapping the skirts of his coat round Lauretta, while Mary, with great presence of mind, snatching up a shawl of camel's hair, folded it round the writhing form of her mother. All was confusion, hurry, and apprehension. Mrs. Halifax kept crying out—"What are you all about there? are you determined to burn down the house; I'm frightened out of my senses."

The general not attending to his lady, eagerly crowded round her guests; the flames were happily extinguished; and, more frightened than hurt, lady Lauretta was conveyed to her apartment by the general and Fitzallan. Lauretta was following her "dear angel mamma," and still screaming from unappeased terror as she leant on the arm of Mary, and was about to receive the eagerly-proffered assistance of Henry on the other side, when Mary perceiving that his hand was scorched, instantaneously relinquished the care of Lauretta, as she caught his arm, and cried out—"Henry, dear Henry, are *you* not hurt?"

The sudden inquiry, the earnest, yet tender tone in which it was made, the natural action which had accompanied it, spoke volumes to the heart of Elwyn; he saw for one moment *only* Mary Ellis; he remembered only Mary Ellis, the gentle companion of his early days; he answered—"No, Mary, dearest Mary, it is nothing—a mere trifle—do not alarm yourself."

Overpowered by the sudden revulsion of her feelings, overpowered by her exertions, overpowered by the kind address of Henry, abashed and confused at having had so many witnesses of her behaviour, Mary was only recalled to herself by the lengthened screams of Lauretta; again she offered her arm, but she now found herself superseded by Miss Lawson; and Fitzallan having re-entered, had usurped the place which Elwyn would have taken.

"You are a very good girl," said Mr. Munden, tapping the cheek of Mary; "you see the advantage of a little strength of mind and self-possession—screaming and inaction are equally futile; it is promptitude and decision which can alone be effective, in a situation like that which has recently occurred—You had a good instructress, my girl."

"I had the *best*, sir," whispered Mary, while tears rushed to her eyes.

Mr. Elwyn, roused to some appearance of animation in the idea of Henry having met with an hurt, insisted on having the coach ordered immediately, and on his taking a seat in it; Mrs. Elwyn was of his opinion, but said—"She did not know what to say about Miss Lawson, who was a civil obliging lady as could be met with."

Henry begged he might be allowed to walk home, assuring his father that he had received no material hurt; but he was overruled; and Mrs. Elwyn said, that—"If he was to go out in the evening air, he would *most* likely get an inflammation to his hand, a mortification must then *certainly* ensue, and *perhaps* it might not stop there."

Mrs. Lumley remarked that it was a beautiful evening, and may be *now* Miss Lawson would have no dislike to a walk, as there was no *fear of a broil*.

During the ride home, Henry Elwyn was unusually silent and thoughtful, yet he answered the inquiries which were made to him from time to time concerning his hand, with the utmost good-nature.

Initiated in the arts of healing by her beloved friend, Mary was followed by Elwyn into her own little apartment, and there, while attended by Mrs. Elwyn, who declared, that "it made her shudder to look at it," she made use of those applications which had been found beneficial in such cases, and, with gentle caution, bound up his scorched hand; while admiring her readiness,

her activity, and her humanity, Elwyn looked at her with eyes of speaking admiration, and thanked her with all the warmth of gratitude.

Under the care of Mary, her patient soon mended; by her advice, he wore his hand in a sling; and this gave him an additional interest in the eyes of the fair Laretta, especially when she reflected that his hurt was acquired in her service.

CHAP. X.

“But near thee I can never stay,
My heart would soon again be there!”

THE story of the fire had really been *blazed* abroad; Mary Ellis’s natural emotion on seeing that her earliest friend had been hurt, was almost construed into a declaration of love. Miss Lawson, who was not deficient in discernment, had easily perceived that under the affectation of considering her as an insignificant low-born girl, Miss Montgomery literally beheld and feared Mary Ellis as a formidable rival; she had seen with what avidity the story of her mysterious origin was received by this young lady, and that it had even the power of partly raising lady Laretta from her recumbent attitude, who had *almost* given it her attention.

To make herself pleasing to those ladies, who were now greater in her estimation than those at Elwyn Hall, was the first wish of Miss Lawson; she had nothing to alledge against her “dear Mary,” her lately “sweet Mary Ellis,” only that there was a certain coldness and reserve in her manners, which totally precluded her from imagining that she was beheld with the same reciprocity of sentiment as that she had affected to feel for her; and only that let her “sweet Mary” owe her origin to whom she would, decidedly she could not boast of an earl for her grandfather—of a lady Laretta for her “beautiful mamma!”

To such frivolous motives, the wish of gaining the favour of the Montgomerys, and desire of being reckoned of importance by them, must we trace the eagerness with which Miss Lawson recounted all that she had heard, and all that she had *surmised* relative to Mary Ellis. When she had once felt her ground, she could proceed with security; the likeness between Laretta and Mary, which certainly must be striking, as it had been generally remarked, was not received with satisfaction either by the mother or daughter; and Miss Lawson *knew* (from frequent and agonizing experience) that the burning of her gown was nothing in comparison to the burnings of envy and jealousy, as she assisted in supporting the lovely form of “her charming Laretta” to her apartment.

Without directly making a confession of her wounded feelings, Laretta covertly acknowledged all that Miss Lawson understood by implication; and the “affected heroism and self-command of Mary Ellis” was ridiculed; “her forward declaration of tender interest for Elwyn,” was as loudly contemned, “an interest which any woman of true delicacy would have been careful how she displayed, *even for her husband*, much less for one whose whole thoughts and hopes were centered in another.”

Laretta sighed; perhaps her sigh was a doubting one; at length she ventured to say—“I wonder if the Elwyns—the old folks I mean—I wonder if they see the fondness of this girl for Elwyn.”

“Mr. Elwyn, you know, is, poor man, next to a muscle, my dear Miss Montgomery, in regard to every thing but the mere animal functions of eating and drinking.”

“And Mrs. Elwyn, having low vulgar notions herself,” interposed Laretta, “may possibly——”

“Oh no! she could not possibly approve such a connexion for *Mr. Henry*; if she has not seen the girl’s striking partiality *yet*, she *shall* see it; I shall think it my *duty* to inform her, knowing, as I do—that is, believing—that is, suspecting that the late Mrs. Elwyn’s *orphan*—you understand me—I really think, my dearest Miss Montgomery, star of the east, as the dear lady

Lauretta sublimely calls you, I really think I ought in conscience to tell Mrs. Elwyn, that she may caution, that she may guard Miss Ellis against the sad prospect of an unrequited passion, for that every wish of Henry Elwyn's heart is centered in the fair Lauretta."

"Do you *think* so?" asked Lauretta, with an air meant to be incredulous.

"Nay, dearest Miss Montgomery, I could *swear* it!"

Having now sufficient subject matter for animadversion, with the consciousness that the further she proceeded the firmer she rivetted her intimacy with the Montgomerys, Miss Lawson prevailed on the whole village of Norton to believe that Miss Ellis was dying for love of Mr. Henry Elwyn (for though a young lady may look, feel, and talk, as if in redundant health, yet she is always accused of being *dying for love*, as soon as she is suspected of a partiality for one of the other sex).

It was some time before Miss Lawson could make Mrs. Elwyn understand that there was any thing to be afraid of in the cure which Miss Ellis was performing on the scorched hand of Henry Elwyn; hints, inuendoes, and surmises, were scarcely understood by that good lady; though rather against her prescribed mode in such cases, Miss Lawson was obliged to be more explanatory, as she perceived that Mrs. Elwyn grew harder of comprehension; she perceived too, that the "interesting Lauretta" was full of doubts and fears, although she concealed them from every eye but hers; and that Henry Elwyn was not so undeviating in his attendance at the Lodge as before the accident, and, in fact, that she should "really be only doing her duty, in putting *poor* Mrs. Elwyn on her guard;" so with this most conscientious and friendly motive, she went to the Hall, and pretending once more to be deeply engaged in the disposition of patches, she began her most anxious and friendly inquiries after Mr. Henry Elwyn, and "wished that in having one hurt cured, he might not get another."

At a loss to understand the meaning of this wish, Miss Lawson was reduced to an explanation: she said, that—"Where a partiality was so very apparent on *one* side, and where such frequent opportunities were afforded of displaying it, a return was in the nature of things to be expected; and to be sure, Mr. Henry Elwyn was so very obliging to every body, and so very insinuating in his manners, that *any* woman with a little vanity," (here she looked rather consciously, and fixed her eyes on a patch) "and not absolutely hideous in her person," (here she glanced her eyes towards the glass which stood between the piers) "any woman," continued she, "with a *little* vanity, might easily fancy herself the object of his particular regard: for *my* part, I declare I never saw any thing in his behaviour towards Miss Ellis which he may not have used towards me—but we are all apt to think and believe what we hope; and if the mysteriousness of her birth was set aside, and he really *should* come to like her——"

"No, no," said Mrs. Elwyn, rising from her seat, and in her hurry letting her scissors fall off her lap on the floor, "no, no, Miss Lawson, Mr. Henry Elwyn must look a good deal higher; he must look a great deal higher, Miss Lawson," and she tossed her head with an air of consequence. "Miss Mary is very well in her way, very well in her way—poor thing, she can help nothing at all of it; but Mr. Elwyn, but *my* son, I assure you, Miss Lawson, he has only to choose or refuse."

"So I say, my dear ma'am," returned Miss Lawson, "that is exactly what I say; why there is Mr. Henry Elwyn, said I, the most elegant and handsome young man in this part of the world——"

"Or in *any* part of the world," interposed his mother; for the vanity which had once superseded every other idea in the contemplation of *her own* personal charms, had now devolved to her son; and to have *his* beauty praised was at once her pride and her delight.

“Now is it likely,” continued Miss Lawson, “that *such* a man will throw himself away in such an unheard-of manner, especially when there are those who are his equals in every respect—allied to quality?”

“Ah, I guess who you mean,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “leave me alone for a guess—and I dare say it will be a match—I think it will, Miss Lawson.”

“And as to poor Mary,” said Miss Lawson, “she must wear the willow.”

“Indeed she is a very comfortable well-behaved young girl,” said Mrs. Elwyn, “I can’t say but what she is—and so you say she is in love with Mr. Henry?”

“Oh, ma’am, for mercy’s sake don’t say it—don’t breathe a hint of the kind. I only said that it was observed, that it was remarked, that it was partly suspected, that her evident interest the other night at Salcombe Lodge, when she imagined that Mr. Henry Elwyn was burnt—oh, for my own part, I think Mary Ellis a sweetly-interesting girl; and if the *last* Mrs. Elwyn had told the truth at first, and not put her on the world in such a ‘questionable shape——’”

“I don’t at all wonder at her being partial to Mr. Henry, he is a very nice young man,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “but, however, *that* will never be, Miss Lawson.”

“My dearest madam, I know it; I only thought that where opportunities of being together so frequent, and where the tenderness on one side is so apparent, gratitude, feeling, sympathy, might induce—you understand me, I dare say you understand me?”

“Oh, perfectly,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “but I’m sure Mr. Elwyn would not approve of it, any more than myself—however, it shall be my care—”

“Ah, there it is; my dear Mrs. Elwyn, I do not presume to dictate to you—I know our sentiments are generally in unison—I know that opposition in such cases is generally productive of contrary effects to those which are wished; and if Mr. Henry Elwyn was to be told that you disliked the idea of such a connexion, Heaven knows but he might, for the first time, think of it.”

“Oh, I shall not say a syllable about it; I know he has a partiality elsewhere,” nodding significantly: “as to poor Miss Mary, she is not at all to be blamed; you know if she loves him, she cannot help it; but I will be watchful and careful, Miss Lawson, and act with prudence; I always act with prudence, you see—you see the care of a young woman is a great charge; if I can help it, she shall have no opportunity of being alone with him; for the future, I must attend to the doctoring of the hand—I am sure I have enough to do, what with one thing and the other; but I do not mind it—I don’t mind having my hands full of business—I like to be doing; there’s these patches, I need not sew one of them, if I had not got a mind, for I have maids enough that can work for me, and I might sit up with my hands before me all day long, if I liked it; but I’m very active and observing, Miss Lawson, very so indeed. To be sure, after all that *you* have told me about Miss Mary’s being the child of the last Mrs. Elwyn—”

“Oh, my dear madam, pardon me there, I did not tell you; give me leave to set you right; I only said, merely by way of a hint, that it had been suggested by such and such persons, that the circumstance of a certain person’s going to Brighton at those periods, looked rather mysterious, and that it led to a supposition of such and such events having taken place.”

“And I dare say they did too,” said Mrs. Elwyn; “notwithstanding that I have heard so much of that certain person’s goodness and virtue, you see I found out who you meant.”

“Your quickness of comprehension has often struck me with astonishment, as I was saying but this very morning to dear lady Laretta, and my charming and amiable young friend her daughter; never shall I forget the sweetly penetrating look which the dear Laretta gave me when she asked ‘whether I had seen Mr. Henry Elwyn?’”

Miss Lawson returned to Salcombe Lodge, better pleased with the success of her visit than she had herself expected to have been; for as notwithstanding Mrs. Elwyn's quickness of comprehension, she had no method of making her comprehend but by *speaking out* (as it is called), and as in this said speaking out there was great danger of committing herself, if she was not speaking *truth*, she had some few difficulties in her way, which she contrived to smooth over, as we have partly seen, by calling back her words, and amending her evidence. Miss Lawson, as we have had occasion previously to observe, *had* discernment; she saw that the impetuous nature and proud spirit of Henry Elwyn would take fire at the slightest imputation which should be attached to the character of Mary Ellis, whom he regarded with a *fraternal* affection, if it could not be called by a tenderer name; she saw too that his spirit would instantly resist itself against the interference of maternal authority, or even of maternal advice, with regard to his choice of a wife; and Miss Lawson was heartily glad to have her communications finally sealed, with a promise of silence and secrecy, but at the same time, of *strict observation* on the behaviour of the parties.

To those who are unacquainted with such characters as Miss Lawson, her taking so much trouble to so little purpose may appear very much exaggerated and very unnatural; but where there is an inordinate desire of raising our own consequence, and of gaining the favour of those who move in a superior station, no pains are spared for the accomplishment; and, in the present case, there was an additional motive, in the modest charms and unobtrusive virtues of Mary Ellis. To have seen these raised to the situation which they merited, would have been to see all the envious and rebellious passions roused in the breast of Miss Lawson. She could see Mr. Henry Elwyn married to Lauretta Montgomery, because she had a right to expect as good, if not a better connexion; but to see him lift a low-born orphan to his own sphere, and to be left in the distance herself, such a contemplation was insupportable.

Mrs. Elwyn had promised that she would be silent on the subject of Miss Lawson's conversation to the parties concerned; she kept her word; but in this poor lady's character there was so little delicacy, and so little depth, that her suspicions were open to the most casual observers; she followed Mary Ellis about whenever Henry Elwyn was in the house; she sedulously attended when Mary was using her applications to his hand; and then her excuses were so shallow, and her real motives so obvious, that poor Mary trembled with confusion and mortification at her coarse remarks; while Elwyn, though hurt at his mother's inuendoes, could scarcely help feeling some degree of satisfaction (such is the innate vanity of that lordly creature man) in attributing the embarrassment of the modest girl to the cause which his mother had *more* than hinted.

There was a sensitive timidity about Mary Ellis, which rendered her peculiarly susceptible of painful emotions; with regard to Henry Elwyn, she would have acknowledged her affection for him to the whole world; her most sanguine wishes were breathed for his happiness, and these wishes were entirely disinterested; but to be suspected of an attachment for him, which was to assume the name of love—to be suspected of nourishing an unrequited passion, this wounded her delicacy—this hurt her maidenly reserve—this probed her to the quick, and this made her *appear* the very thing she would not be; for though she had a strong mind, and an excellent understanding, she was so open and ingenuous in all her actions, and in the expression of her sentiments, so truly feminine and so truly modest, that she could not help feeling much mortification in finding herself a particular object of observation; and on such an account to disclaim it, would be almost to acknowledge it, as she had never heard Mrs. Elwyn give it utterance; but to be followed about, be looked at wherever she came, to observe the sly whisper

of Mrs. Elwyn, and the more sly wink of Miss Lawson, to see the latter lady place *herself*, with an air of sedulous caution, in the seat next Henry Elwyn, all this was most mortifying and humiliating; and the *suspensions* of those around her were converted into *certainities*, when they perceived the evident confusion with which she answered the most common address of Henry Elwyn; a more painful situation, independent of any serious distress, can scarcely be imagined, especially when we add that she had more than once caught the pitying glance of Henry Elwyn as he had observed her emotion, and that she had met the animating scrutiny of Fitzallan's eye. Publicity was soon given to Miss Lawson's report; Elwyn was joked on the subject of his conquests; and though he disclaimed them, with the gay air which a young man of his stamp well knows how to assume, yet in his heart he felt flattered and gratified.

Fitzallan had not been an unobserving spectator of all that was going on; and returning with Henry from one of their walks to Salcombe Lodge, he jokingly said—"For pity's sake, tell me, Elwyn, what are you going to do with these girls?"

"What girls?" asked Henry.

"Why that frivolous evasion of my question?" said Fitzallan; "you know that I mean Lauretta Montgomery and Mary Ellis—you know that they both *love* you, and you know not which to choose."

"Then you tell me what I do *not* know myself," answered Henry, laughingly.

"This Mary Ellis is a sweet girl," said Fitzallan, "and spite of what I once said concerning a *fortunate foundling*, I think the *man* would be *fortunate* who could make that *foundling* his; a man would have nothing to fear in uniting himself to such a woman; there is a steadiness about her which disarms censure; there is a gentleness which disarms anger; there is a softness which attracts affection."

"She is a good girl," said Henry, with warmth, "an excellent girl! she was educated by the first of women, and her conduct is the best commentary on the character of her protectress; she would ensure the happiness of her husband."

"And why not ensure that of my friend?" asked Fitzallan.

"And can *you* ask?—you who have seen—you who have heard—who have listened to the syren Lauretta?"

"Harry Elwyn," said Fitzallan, "spite of my rattle and my raillery, believe me when I tell you, that I have a serious regard for you; the question now seems to be whether you will choose a woman who will be your solace, your companion, your friend, your consoler, or one who will be your pride, your pleasure, your ambition? There is something dazzling, radiant, and imposing, in the elegant form, in the manner, in the grace of Lauretta: there is something mild, modest, placid, almost heavenly, in Mary Ellis."

"I never thought of Mary Ellis as a wife; I love her with sincerity; I would do any thing to promote her happiness; but consider, Fitzallan (and the proudly rebellious blood glowed in his cheek as he spoke), consider her low origin—consider the obscurity of her birth."

"That is of very little consequence, except in the eyes of the world," returned Fitzallan, "and such a woman would be *all* the world to you."

"While such a woman as Lauretta Montgomery would be able to give her husband eclat in the eyes of the whole world."

"Ah, my friend, I see which way you bear—I see which side the scale turns; but beware, Elwyn, beware lest you barter the *Substance* for the *Shadow*."

"I have no intention of marrying at all," said Elwyn.

“Then you are acting very wrong—*ungenerously* by Mary Ellis, as every day you stay near her may encrease her partiality (though, if I judge her rightly, she has strength of mind and resolution to bear her up against the tenderness of her heart); *cruelly* are you acting by Miss Montgomery, for she thinks you have serious intentions—her mother thinks so too. Can you resolve to relinquish Laretta?”

Elwyn paused a moment, then laying his hand on his heart with emotion—“No,” said he, “I cannot resolve to do that.”

“However you may decide, my dear fellow,” said Fitzallan, with warmth, “you have my sincere wishes for your happiness. I am about to quit you to-morrow; when *next* we meet——”

“Aye, when next we meet, my fate may be *decided*,” said *Elwyn*.

The lively pleasantry and sensible remarks of Mr. Fitzallan, had forcibly impelled the esteem of the family at the Hall. Mrs. Elwyn thanked him for his “very good company, and hoped he would soon repeat his visit;” Mr. Elwyn shook him cordially by the hand; and Mary held out hers with unaffected freedom as she bade him adieu; he pressed it with fervour, and hurried away, followed by the good wishes of his friend, who, to dissipate the ennui which was occasioned by the separation, hurried to Salcombe Lodge. Laretta was alone, all softness, all smiles; Fitzallan was not there to share them with him, they were exclusively his own; securely seated in her heart, he feared no rival, he dreaded no alteration in her sentiments, till she mentioned her mother’s intention of quitting the Lodge the following day, and trying the air of Malvern. “The general kindly attends us there, and afterwards we shall probably proceed alone; but to *what* place we shall bend our course, is yet uncertain.”

The intelligence was received as Laretta expected it would have been; Elwyn besought, entreated to be the “*compagnon du voyage*.”

Malvern was a public place; Laretta could not deny the request; general Halifax was quite pleased at the arrangement; lady Laretta said—“The presence of Elwyn would give a *charm* to the party, which it otherwise would have wanted;” and the pleased and gratified Elwyn hastened to the Hall to make preparations for the journey.

The next morning he took a respectful leave of his father, and a good-humoured one of his mother; but as he approached Mary, with “Well, my little doctress, Heaven bless and preserve you!” an undefinable emotion agitated his frame; like electricity he seemed to communicate it to Mary. The colour fled from her cheek—her lips quivered—her hand trembled as it felt the pressure of his lips.

Henry left the house; Mary retired to her apartment—she gave way to her feelings—she burst into tears. A fearful presentiment filled her bosom; she seemed to be forsaken by her only friend, to be once again an isolated and forlorn orphan. She anticipated trials and sufferings for herself; she did not anticipate *felicity* for Harry Elwyn—“Impetuous, headstrong, self-willed,” cried she, “his passions suffered to master his reason and his judgment, how likely is he to make a shipwreck of his happiness for ever!—Forbid it, Heaven!—forbid—preserve—and bless him!”

END OF VOL. II.

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