

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,  
But bold her mien, unguarded mov'd her eye.

VOL. IV.

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## SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW.

### CHAP. I.

“And no two birds upon the farm  
E'er prated with more joy than they.”

THREE days of quiet seclusion were beneficial to the health and spirits of Mary. Mrs. Ripley had kept to her word; she did not worry her with entreaties to go out, nor with apologies for leaving her to herself; in this respect *only* she seemed not to be considered, for in every thing which was requisite to her ease and comfort, Mrs. Ripley was mindful; and grateful for the friendliness of her reception, and willing to exert herself to appear so, Mary now declared that she was in a convalescent state, and offered to accompany her protectress to the evening's party.

“Stay at home one night longer, my dear,” said Mrs. Ripley; “to-morrow I attend the concert, and there you shall make your *debut*; no amusement is less fatiguing; you have only to get a seat, and you may there be as quietly engaged with your own reflections as if you were at home; the cramming and squeezing of a rout might be too much for you at first, and a ball might be tantalizing, as perhaps you would not like to sit still; yet I believe you are scarcely strong enough to dance: but why did I see that arch smile on your countenance, when I said you might be quietly engaged at your own reflections in the concert-room? I begin to suspect that you were laughing at me.”

“I confess I smiled at observing that you never once took the music into the account,” said Mary.

“I never do, my dear; I have no taste for music; nay, I confess to you that I am not fond of it.”

“Dear ma'am, you surprise me!” said Mary; “then suffer me to ask why you attend the concerts?”

“I shall surprise you more, Miss Ellis, if I add, that I firmly believe half those who attend them are of my opinion, though they are not candid enough to avow it: this is the age of harmony, and those who do not profess to like music, are thought ‘fit for treason, stratagems, and spoils.’ You know there are *professors* in all sciences; but observe, no sooner will one of the long pieces of music begin to-morrow night, no sooner will the first chord be struck, than, with one consent, all the company will begin to talk—it would seem as if they were *then* called upon to break the spell of harmony, that they were then to begin their attack, and to wage war with music. A concert is to me a very dull thing, but I never say so, because I hate to be particular; I always try to act, to look, and to speak, like other people; and I cry ‘charming,’ and ‘beautiful,’ at proper places, and clap with my fan, when I see others do the same. I have a very particular reason for going to-morrow evening: the concert is for the benefit of a public charity, and it would be thought very singular in *me* to stay away—it would look niggardly, and I hate to be counted mean or shabby.”

“But if you were to send your benefaction to the charity?” said Mary.

“That would not answer the end, my dear, for were I to *swear* that I had done it, I would not be believed; besides, I do not like to go out of the beaten track; every body would be asking where Mrs. Ripley was?—one would have seen me out in the morning—another would have lost

a crown to me the preceding evening; and then—‘how a woman of Mrs. Ripley’s prudence, and Mrs. Ripley’s regular mode of conduct, can answer it to her *conscience* for staying away from a charitable concert, is to *me* a matter of wonder and astonishment:’ this would be the language, my dear; I should be pointed at, and become a marked character:—no, no; I must go, and do a little penance, and undergo a little mortification, by sitting up like a mute at a funeral, in order to show myself.”

“Hard are the impositions of the world; a heavy tax is laid on those who live within its vortex,” said Mary.

“Not at all, my love,” replied Mrs. Ripley; “I am so used to all these things, that it is quite a matter of course; two charity concerts in the winter I look for, as naturally as for a fast-day before Lent; all Bath will be there, and it would not do for Mrs. Ripley to exclude herself.”

Mary listened to these sentiments without being a convert to them—“Mrs. Ripley lives indeed to the world,” thought she; “and without the motives by which its gay idols are usually actuated, she aspires neither at notoriety or eclat; her sole aim is to observe its laws, and to have respect unto its ceremonies—vain and futile labour! which thus engrosses every thought and every action of her life, and which she pursues with such persevering earnestness; for all that the world has to offer, neither to secure its applause, or to avert its ridicule, would I be thus chained down to the overbearing despot!”

The reflections of Mary were interrupted by a letter which was brought to her by the postman; the direction was evidently a female one, but the unformed hand, the uneven and cramped characters, proved that the writer was not practised in the employment; she broke the seal with some curiosity; it was dated from Elwyn Hall, and ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR MISS MARY,

“I take up my pen just to write a few lines to you, and to tell you I am very well, and very happy, and that I hope you are so likewise. I am not affronted that you went away from me, for I suppose you acted by Mr. Henry’s advice; but I was very much surprised, very so indeed; but he need not be afraid, I assure you, for indeed, Miss Mary, Mr. Timothy Piff is a very civil behaved young man, very so indeed, and clever and apprehensive; I thought him so, you may be sure, else I should not do as I have done; and sure, Miss Mary, you must allow that I was come to an age to chuse for myself, and to please myself; and Mr. Henry, he did not ask *my* consent; he married that Miss Lauretta all in private; and sure if he did not say any thing to me, I had no occasion to ask his consent; not that I believe I should ever have thought of Mr. Timothy, but only that when I first cast my eyes upon him, in his full suit of mourning, which he wore for poor dear Mr. Elwyn, he somehow put me in mind of his master, and certainly is rather like him about the chin and the mouth; he did put one in mind of poor Mr. Elwyn, very so indeed, for tears gushed to my eyes. Mr. Henry is very angry, I find; well, I can’t help it; he went away from me; he was no companion to his mother; I had lost my best friend; and as to the *new* Mrs. Elwyn, why you know, Miss Mary, my patchwork bed was ‘only fit to scare the crows:’ *she* must have a strange taste, I think, very so indeed, *such* a taste that I cannot well forget it; now, Mr. Timothy says he thinks all my patchwork is very beautiful, and very handsome indeed, and this he told me before I married him; so there now you see is the difference of tastes, Miss Mary. Well, I am not angry with you, Miss Mary, for may be, you would as soon have staid here as have gone to the sister of that comical and cross Mr. Munden; he was here when we came home, and he talked so odd, and was so full of jokes and earnest, that I hardly knew what to be at; and to be sure, poor Mr. Timothy was ready to creep into a corner, but law bless me! he had done nothing to be

ashamed of. A queer wedding it turned out, to be sure, for all the servants, it seems, envious no doubt at Mr. Timothy's advancement, chose to leave me, that was so good a mistress to 'em all, and this is the reward of my good-nature, and my bemeaning myself, as I always did, amongst 'em, without one bit of pride—well, let 'em go further, they may fare worse, that's all I can say; Mr. Timothy was very well pleased at their going; now we keep only a couple of maids, and a man as he knew, and could recommend, and we find 'em quite enough; for we shall go out very little, and when I want the carriage, why Mr. Timothy can drive me himself. Miss Mary, I bear no ill will to you, and I hope you are better, and that you will excuse all blots and blunders. Mr. Piff desires his compliments. I remain your very humble servant, and sincere friend,

“ELLEN PIFF.”

Mary had scarcely decyphered this curious epistle, when a servant put another letter into her hand; she recognised the writing of Henry Elwyn in the envelope, which ran thus:—

“MY DEAR MARY,

“I know you will be interested in the contents of our good friend Munden's letter. I fear the credulous and foolish being, whom I have the misfortune of calling mother, will soon have cause to mourn her imprudent conduct. I preferred sending you the letter, to calling, because, as I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Ripley, the verbal communication would have been repugnant to my feelings. Believe me always, dear Mary, your firmly-attached friend,

“HENRY ELWYN.”

Mr. Munden's letter followed:—

“DEAR HARRY,

“I kept my station, as I told you I should, and with a book and a blazing fire, I awaited the return of Mr. and Mrs. Piff; at length their carriage drove up, and the foolish titter of madam assailed my ear as she came into the hall; she walked directly into the parlour where I was sitting, holding by the arm of Timothy. I wish I could give you an idea of the crest-fallen look of this exulting bridegroom—when I got up from my chair, and saluted the bride with—‘Madam, I wish you much joy,’ and a low bow, he loosened himself from his new incumbrance, but found it a hard matter to stand by himself; my lady curtsied, and bridled, and tossed, and did not know what to be at; Mr. Piff seemed to be leaving the room, and to be leaving her to hear me out—‘Not so fast, if you please, Mr. Timothy Piff,’ said I, and the foolish ninnyhammer returned, with that air of servile and hacknied obeisance with which he had been used to await the commands of his master. I entered upon my business at once, and told them, that you permitted them to remain at the Hall, and all that; but I informed Mr. Piff, that he must arrange his own establishment, for that his *equals* I found did not chuse to become his servants—‘As they please, sir, as they please,’ said he, shuffling, as if he still felt for the napkin under his arm; ‘Mrs. Piff and I shall make ourselves very agreeable to every thing.’—‘Very true, very proper, Mr. Piff, very much so indeed, sir,’ said his complimentary spouse. She stumbled out something about you, Harry, and about your not having consulted her, and about the desertion of your little ward; but I took *that* all upon myself—‘Faith, madam,’ said I, ‘in the topseyturvy confusion of this house, it might have been hard work for any one to keep in their proper place,

so I thought it was best to send the girl under the care of my sister, who never stirs out of the beaten track, nor gets out of the perpendicular, but carries her dish even, go where she will.’— ‘Well, just as you please, sir.’— ‘It seems to have been *just as you* pleased, madam,’ answered I; so, giving Mr. Timothy to understand, in downright English, that Mrs. Piff would receive her jointure of five hundred *per annum* in quarterly payments at my hands, and that it behoved him to conduct himself with respect and attention towards her, as to her he must look for his maintenance, and having specified a few other things which I thought necessary, I bade adieu to the happy pair. I have since been making some inquiries into the character of this hopeful Timothy, and find that amongst his fellows he was always considered cross and selfish, very mean-spirited, crouching to his superiors, though a very tyrant where he could domineer and exert a little *brief authority*. What a fine old fool this mother of yours has been! before the honeymoon has elapsed, she will repent her bargain. Call me a croaking old bachelor; but so I mean to continue; while I see so much headstrong folly in one sex, so much weak credulity in the other, I mean to keep clear, if I can. I suppose this Mary Ellis, who really appears one of a thousand, I suppose she goes on soft and smoothly with madam Ripley; only let her keep quiet, and follow the lead of the other, and not traverse her schemes, nor alter her plan for the next day, and the day after, and so on to that day month, and she may jog on as quietly in the Bath round, as any horse in a mill; Mrs. Ripley will never draw her aside; and to *this* girl her *perseverance in pleasure* will do no harm, for I take it that the turn of her mind is above par.

“God bless you, dear Elwyn! Deuce take me, if I can think of one syllable time enough to say to your *fine* lady, who always overlooks blunt and homespun

“HUMPHREY MUNDEN.”

“P.S. I will send my love to Mary Ellis. I have not forgiven you for giving up that respectable old mansion to Piff; what, in God’s name, will he do with it? five hundred a year can’t maintain it properly, though he ought not to have reckoned on one-fifth of that sum; and, in God’s name, who will go to visit him? fine parlour company will never be seen in those rooms, where that girl’s friend, and every body’s friend, poor Clara—but no matter, for I have already prosed to the end of my paper.”

Amidst the unpleasant ideas which Mr. Munden’s description of Timothy Piff had called up in the mind of Mary, though there was something pleasing and consolatory to her heart, in the knowledge of possessing the regard and good opinion of this worthy man, yet she could have wished that he had restrained the bluntness of his manner, and not so obviously expressed his meaning with regard to Laretta—“The quick apprehension of Henry,” thought she, “will instantly perceive that Mrs. Elwyn is not looked upon with so indulgent an eye by his friend as is Mary Ellis; this will wound his pride and his sensibility; I wish that Mr. Munden had withheld his pen—I wish that he had not mentioned my name. Mrs. Piff’s letter is characteristic; she is a weak and foolish woman—she means no harm; but she is vain and credulous—she is now likely to grow wiser from experience. It would be no comfort to Henry to see the letter of his mother; he could derive no satisfaction from it; on the contrary, he would find every unpleasant feeling recurring with the perusal—he must not read it.”

## CHAP. II.

“Their only labour was to kill the time,  
And labour dire it is, and weary woe.”

DISMISSING these subjects as much as possible from her mind, Mary arrayed herself in decent simplicity, and with a cheerful countenance, and the hue of rosy health returning to her cheek, she was ready to attend Mrs. Ripley to the concert—“I go tolerably early,” said that lady; “I hate to be particular; some people I believe carry their dinners in their pockets (their ridicules, I should say—I forgot that pockets were exploded), because they *will* have front seats; and others make a point of coming in when the room is crowded, and when the silence observed during a solo song of some favourite singer is considered a propitious moment for drawing on them the notice of the whole room; for my part, I have not patience for the first, or assurance for the last; I dislike singularity, and therefore I go time enough to get a seat near enough to the orchestra, in order to be able to hear what’s going on, if I like it.”

Mary agreed with Mrs. Ripley in thinking this middle course the best, and they got to the concert-room at the time they wished, and were pleasantly seated, very near the front of the orchestra.

The bench which they fixed on had vacancies only for two—“You are to go outside,” said Mrs. Ripley; “it is the custom for the *young ladies* to sit at the ends of the seats; they are then seen by the beaux as they lounge up the room.”

“Oh,” cried Mary, whose modest nature recoiled at the idea of placing herself purposely to be looked at, “if you please, madam, I would rather sit inside.”

“Oh, but indeed you must not,” answered her friend; “I assure you it is not the custom; and I never do any thing which may look particular, or different from other people.”

Mary acquiesced in silence; and was much amused at seeing the company enter, and in watching the gradual filling of the room: she had once attended a Bath concert with her beloved protectress, but she was then too young to make many remarks, and most of the present performers she had not heard. Mary was *really* fond of music, though she did not talk so much about it as many who were less sensible of its soothing and bewitching powers, and she anticipated much sublime delight from some of the choruses of the immortal Handel, and one or two of his chastely-pathetic songs, which she saw announced in the bill which she held in her hand; to Italian music she was not so partial; she did not understand the language, and her simple ear was not alive to its scientific beauties.

Mrs. Ripley amused herself with telling Mary the names of different persons as they passed in rotation up the room, with pointing out *particular* characters, and with curtsying to her own regular acquaintances, till the music began, when she was *mute* attention, whispering Mary—“You remember what I told you yesterday; I always make a point of *seeming* attentive; you shall hear me talk again, when this act is over; but if you should see me nodding, have the goodness to step upon my foot; it would not do to fall asleep—that would be too particular.”

Mary was much pleased; even in a long concerto, she found beauties, for the subject was pretty, and the variations were not complicated; but when, after a full and rich chorus of sacred melody, the “quelled thunder died upon the ear,” and Mrs. ——— stood up with a voice and manner which did justice at once to the pathos, simplicity, and tender sweetness of “Farewell, ye limpid streams,” the full hear of Mary overflowed, and she became *particular*, for tears of

tender, yet pensive, pleasure gushed from her eyes: luckily Mrs. Ripley did not observe her, but another did, for a loud laugh assailed her ear at the moment when she was wrapped in harmonious trance, and turning about, she saw Mrs. Elwyn; Laretta's eyes were fixed upon her, and the sarcastic look which accompanied the scornful toss of her head, as she scarcely deigned to notice the modest inclination of Mary's, proved that she had been at once the object of her observation and her mirth.

Laretta would have leant on a gentleman's arm as she tried to walk up the crowded room, but finding it impracticable, she hastily relinquished it, saying—"Do, for Heaven's sake, put a chair near the orchestra; I should be suffocated were I to try to get amongst this cram."

The gentleman, who was a stranger to Mary, looked smiling obedience to the all-imposing commands of this sovereign lady; never did a smile more happily show two severed rows of pearl; the figure, the air, the manner of this beau, was that of a perfect Adonis; the care with which his flaxen hair was parted on his brow, the delicate carmine on his cheek, the nicely-disposed cravat, the elegant and sparkling broche which fastened his shirt, even the patch on his chin, was levelled at the ladies: warding off the crowd on either side of him with his huge opera hat, he moved with tip-top caution along; all the belles eyed him as he passed, many a fine eye languished to catch a glance of his, for the elegant, the charming, the *beautiful* Narcissus Finlater was the *beauty* of the present season.

With a half-languid, half-careless air, Laretta let him precede her, and then catching the arm of another gentleman, who followed close behind her, she said, "do lend me your assistance; I have sent Finlater on to get me a seat."

This gentleman, directed by the laugh of Laretta, had followed the object of her rude observation; his eyes had fixed on the softened countenance of Mary, and they appeared to be rivetted upon it. Mary did not observe him, for she had been too much confused by the repulsive *hauteur* of Laretta to venture another look towards her party; but Fitzallan, for he it was who followed Mrs. Elwyn, now caught her by the hand as he passed, saying—"Is it possible that I see Miss Ellis? this is an unexpected, an unhoped-for happiness."

"You are very good in thus recognising me," said Mary, with that air of freedom which the natural and ingenuous manner of Fitzallan called for.

"Pray make way," said Laretta, in a tone of impatience, which evinced that Fitzallan's friendly notice of Mary Ellis did not contribute to her satisfaction, "I cannot stir a step."

Fitzallan did make way, and other dashing belles, followed by splashing beaux, whom Mary did not know, seemed to follow as of the same party; in the rear came Henry Elwyn, escorting a fine bold-looking female, whose widely uncovered neck and shoulders displayed nothing delicate or attractive—"This is the deuce of a squeeze," said the lady, in a loud and coarse tone of voice; "I shall not be cool again to-night."

"You will have more room towards the orchestra," said Elwyn; "I think Mrs. Elwyn has already got a seat."

Elwyn did not see Mary; he moved on a few paces, and having procured a chair for his companion, she observed him addressed by Fitzallan; a look of pleased surprise illumined his countenance; and putting his arm through his friend's, they both walked immediately towards Mary; lucky was it for her that the first act was closed, as it was not *particular* to talk.

Both Elwyn and Fitzallan were introduced by her to Mrs. Ripley, and their conversation, lively, sensible, and well-bred, impressed that lady in their favour.

The easy manner in which Mary addressed Elwyn, the tone of modest and unembarrassed familiarity in which she answered him, were observed by Fitzallan with the most undissembled

satisfaction; and when, after chatting a few minutes, Elwyn returned to the party he had quitted, Fitzallan remained stationary at the side of Mary, and leaning on the end of her seat, and amusing both ladies with his animated remarks.

“Who is the lady whom Mr. Elwyn escorted up the room?” asked Mary.

“Why, you amaze me by the question,” replied Fitzallan; “I thought *every* body knew her.”

“But I am *nobody*,” said Mary, smiling.

“And this lady, whom you will allow to be *somebody*,” said he, “is lady Sawbridge.”

“Lady Sawbridge!” repeated Mary, Miss Letsom’s anecdote of that lady recurring to her memory.

“Lady Sawbridge,” said Mrs. Ripley, “has made herself very *particular*; she was much talked of in the lifetime of sir James, with lord Overton.”

“My dear madam, we must not be *too* particular,” said Fitzallan; “we must not look back; lady Sawbridge is now a rich and an unincumbered widow—lord Overton is married, and no lady is more followed in Bath.”

“I do not follow her,” said Mrs. Ripley, “because I think her a *particular* character; as far as I can, I make it one of my rules not to get acquainted with particular characters, or with particular-looking people; I no more like to have it said Mrs. Ripley was intimate with such a lady, after her *faux-pas* with lord such a one, than I would be pleased to have it asked me who that comical looking creature was that I chaperoned to a ball? I know a lady who really likes to get acquainted with oddities of all sorts, and all kinds; her routs always look to me like the Bath hospital, for I have seen the lame, the halt, and the blind there; and as to the conversation, it has resembled nothing but ‘confusion worse confounded,’ for she does not mind whether her guests come from east or west, from north and south, so they *come* to her; of divorced wives, and faithless husbands, Doctors’ Commons could not produce a better assemblage; and as to her lean authors, and half-starved poets, she appears to have had the whole range of Grub-street.”

“A charming mixture,” said Fitzallan, laughing.

“A very *particular* one, I think,” said Mrs. Ripley; “your people of genius, as they are called, are in general such odd out-of-the-way looking beings, that I always endeavour to keep clear of them.”

“Really, my dear madam,” returned Fitzallan, “in this place, and with this large exclusion, your acquaintance must be very limited.”

“By no means,” said Mrs. Ripley, “as Miss Ellis here can testify, by my engagements, and by the knocks at my door of a morning; no, no, I jog on very gently, with regular beings, who dress, play cards, and look, and speak, and move, like other people.”

“Pardon me,” said Fitzallan, “if I suggest that yours must be a flat collection; and I think would forcibly remind one of the three hundred and sixty-five wax-work figures at Mrs. Wright’s, who all came at a birth, *as the story goes*, and were all called John and Mary.”

“I will give you leave to laugh at me,” answered Mrs. Ripley, who was a good-humoured woman, “so that you do not call me eccentric, or particular; and I will give you an invitation to one of my routs, and you shall view my Johns and Marys.”

“If all of them are like the one I see at this moment,” said Fitzallan, with animation, “I should never tire of the charming prospect.”

“Well, that is very politely and promptly said, is it not, Miss Ellis?” said Mrs. Ripley.

“And, besides,” added Fitzallan, “under this obliging invitation, I find a great deal conveyed; remember, that I am not to understand myself as *lame*, or *halt*, or *blind*—neither a

lean author, or an half-starved poet—a man of *gallantry*; or a *man of genius*,” and he bowed with an air of mock gratitude to Mrs. Ripley.

“I believe we must go into the tea-room, if we wish to get any tea,” said that lady; “and if I stay, perhaps you will make me recant my opinions; your *genius* seems to have a design that way.” Mrs. Ripley moved on, not displeased at having a *beau*, who was not *particularly* ill-looking, for her escort.

They easily procured a disengaged tea-table; and while Mary was amused by the lively rattle of Fitzallan, and Mrs. Ripley was preparing their beverage, amongst the crowd who passed in review before them was Mrs. Elwyn and her party; she was still escorted by the *beautiful* Mr. Finlater: Elwyn had relinquished the care of lady Sawbridge to another beau of the party, and followed close to Laretta; with great *nonchalance*, Mrs. Elwyn tapped Fitzallan upon the shoulder with her fan, and in no very pleasant tone of voice, said—“You seem to have forsaken your party, sir.”

“Here is my apology,” said Fitzallan, pointing towards Mary, with easy gaiety; “I left you doubly guarded, and in attending to the ward of my friend, I considered myself to be obliging him.”

“And yourself at the same time, I suspect,” said Elwyn, as he good-humouredly shook the hand of Mary as he passed along.

“Who is that young lady?” asked Mr. Finlater, applying the glass to his eye, which was suspended from his neck by a wide black ribbon.

“Can you ask?” said lady Sawbridge; “surely, Narcissus, you *must* be blind; can you not *see* that she is a relative of Mrs. Elwyn?—and are you not deaf likewise, for you have just been told that Mr. Elwyn is her guardian?—and the likeness is so very apparent——”

“Very apparent, without doubt,” said Mrs. Elwyn, biting her lips, and trying to conceal her mortification by going on, but the crowd at that moment prevented her; turning to Mr. Finlater, she said—“*You* perceive this striking likeness, no doubt?”

“No, on my sacred honour,” said Finlater; “but, pardon me, if I think that Mr. Elwyn is *trying* to discover it.”

“Oh, *he* discovered it long ago,” said Laretta, in a tone which was understood by Elwyn.

He gave a parting bow to Mary and to Fitzallan, and as he proceeded slowly on, his lingering look seemed to betray the pleasure which he would have felt in still remaining.

“How is it that Mrs. Elwyn is not more sociable with you?” asked Fitzallan.

“That question I cannot answer,” said Mary, colouring.

“Situated as you are,” said Mrs. Ripley, “it would be the most natural thing in the world for her to be on an intimate footing with you; and it would be proper and decorous, and it certainly looks *particular* not to be so.”

“Your guardian would wish it,” said Fitzallan, looking at Mary with that searching earnestness which would have read her inmost soul; but he found nothing there which “angels might not hear, and virgins tell.”

“The friendship and regard of Henry Elwyn,” said she, “I reckon amongst the greatest blessings of my life; you know, Mr. Fitzallan, and Mrs. Ripley also knows, that to the extraordinary kindness and benevolence of the deceased Mrs. Elwyn, I am indebted for every thing; but on the present lady I have no claims; she knows little of me——”

“And less she is inclined to know, it seems,” said Mrs. Ripley, interrupting her; “it would do her no harm, methinks, to pay you a little civility; but perhaps that is a coin which is not current with her; for my own part, I am not sorry for it; on my own account, I don’t wish to lose

your company, for I am sure I find you very accommodating, and agreeable, and steady, and all that; and if Mrs. Elwyn took it into her head to be polite, I must come in for a little of it; and lady Laretta Montgomery, I have been told, is a very particular character, and has made herself much talked of, both with regard to her airs of romance, and also for her fondness for that East-India general (Halifax); I am told she lives with him now; perhaps by-and-bye, the daughter may do something or another altogether as odd, and then I am sure I shall be glad that I did not know her.”

“I trust not,” said Mary; “I believe she is very much attached to her husband; and her little errors have their origin in the indulgence and overweening fondness with which her mother brought her up; these will be corrected by experience.”

“Well, well, it is all very proper and very pretty in you to say what you can in her extenuation, as she is your guardian’s wife, and so on; I really should like well enough to be acquainted with *him*; my brother Humphrey is mighty partial to him, and speaks very much in his favour; and then too, as guardian of my visitor and inmate, it would be all very well to see him now and then; but as I do not know his wife, his visiting alone would have a *particular* look, and certainly would not be quite the thing.”

Nothing *particular* occurred during the remainder of the evening; the two ladies were seen into their chairs by the pleasant Fitzallan; and, with the exception of the transient mortification which the scornful behaviour of Mrs. Elwyn had raised in the breast of Mary, she returned home well pleased with the evening’s entertainment.

Fitzallan took an early advantage of the permission which Mrs. Ripley had given him, of paying his respects to her, and going at an unfashionable hour, he found both ladies at home; from that period he became a constant visitor in Gay-street, and the invariable attendant on Mrs. Ripley and Mary when they appeared in public; he was amused by the *even tenor* with which the former pursued the *business of pleasure*, and he was pleased and interested in the sensible and modest conversation of her young companion.

### CHAP. III.

Sir, if your drift I rightly scan,  
You'd hint a beau were not a man.

SHENSTONE.

WITH much liveliness, and a sportive imagination, Frederic Fitzallan possessed sound principles and undeviating integrity. His father, sir John Fitzallan, had run the career of fashionable life, and fashionable indulgences, to the injury of his fortune, his constitution, and his peace of mind; at the age of forty, he thought of replenishing his exhausted purse, of patching up his shattered frame, of soothing his upbraiding conscience, and becoming a married man.

A lady was soon found, who, yielding to the ambition of her parents, consented to be led to the altar by a man to whom she was indifferent; she gained a title, and she found an early grave, leaving one son, an infant, in the cradle.

Sincerely attached to his youthful wife, her death overwhelmed sir John Fitzallan in affliction, and affliction was salutary to his soul; hitherto, his "compunctious visitings of conscience" had been transient, and soon passed off with the return of health and spirits, or with the replenishment of his purse; and when he was able to pursue his enjoyments, he had contrived to banish all tormenting regrets; but *now*, he looked inward on himself, he seriously asked whether he had lived to one rational purpose, and what account he could render for perverted talents, and mis-spent time? and he looked back on the mercy of that God who had continued him in the world—who had given him *time* for repentance and amendment of life, while he had cropt that lovely flower, which was fitted for an early tomb—her memory, her sacred, her virtuous, her sainted memory, he loved to contemplate; he remembered the filial obedience which made her yield her reluctant hand to him—he remembered the angelic sweetness with which she tried to *show* that she was happy—he remembered the patient sufferance which she manifested when stretched on the couch of pain, and the unclouded faith with which she faced the king of terrors.

Such retrospections were mournful, yet beneficial; sir John Fitzallan became an altered character; he now devoted his time to the care and education of his son; he resided wholly in the country; and in beneficence to those around him, and in acts of devotion and of sincere and genuine repentance, he tried to "acquaint himself with God, and be at peace;" that God, whom he sought with sincerity, seemed to hear his petitions, and to behold him with an eye of mercy.

Frederic Fitzallan grew up all that his father's most sanguine wishes could have hoped; and while, as he advanced towards manhood, his cheerful and happy disposition led him to partake in the pleasures that were offered to his acceptance with the avidity of a youthful mind, his principles were uncorrupted, his morals unperverted. Sir John Fitzallan had purchased experience from his early errors; these had partly arisen from the indiscriminate indulgence of his parents; he adopted the happy, the golden mean in his conduct towards Frederic; and by restraining him properly, and indulging him judiciously, he preserved him from those rocks and precipices so dangerous to misguided youth.

There was something in the sanguine and enthusiastic manner and the agreeable qualities of Henry Elwyn, which had irresistibly drawn the regards of Frederic Fitzallan; and, as we have seen, he paid him a visit in Gloucestershire. *There* Fitzallan also had seen another object which had interested him: dazzled and confounded by the bright display of Laretta Montgomery's

charms, there was a peculiar pleasure in turning from them to the contemplation of the retiring and softened graces of Mary Ellis; Fitzallan felt deeply interested in her happiness, for he believed that it depended on his friend; he believed that her youthful affections were centered in Elwyn; and he grieved at the wreck of peace which must ensue, when she should awaken from her early dream of peace and safety, when she should behold the truant heart of Henry plighting its vows to another, when she should see herself deserted, lonely, and forlorn.

Such was the picture which often presented itself to the fervid imagination of Fitzallan—"The tender mind, the delicate frame of this gentle girl, cannot bear the shock," thought he; "like a bent lily, she will droop her head, and sink into the earth, the artless victim of hopeless, of unrequited love."

In all these reflections, Fitzallan imagined that pity, and only pity, was his inspirer; and actuated, as he thought, by this motive, prior to his leaving Elwyn Hall, as our readers may remember, he conversed with his friend on the subject; and with much of that friend's enthusiasm, he described the attractions and the gentle virtues of Mary Ellis, as they appeared to him, and opposed them to those of her more resplendant rival: we need not recapitulate, as we are all well aware of the result.

The events of Mr. Elwyn's death, and of his son's marriage, had both been communicated to Fitzallan at the same time, and when his filial duties were all demanded for his father, who was suffering from a tedious and painful illness; but even in this period of duteous anxiety, Fitzallan heaved a sigh towards that tender maid "whom Henry left forlorn," and fervently prayed that her happiness might not suffer from what he imagined the wreck of her earliest hopes.

When sir John Fitzallan was sufficiently recovered to bear the journey, his medical attendants advised him to try the Bath waters; and he came down to that city, attended by his son: in the pump-room, the first morning after his arrival, Fitzallan had met Elwyn; and, mutually pleased at this unexpected meeting, the former had accepted his friend's invitation to dine, and to accompany the party to the concert in the evening.

Dressed for conquest, in all the pride of youthful beauty, Fitzallan now again saw the lovely Laretta; as he looked at her, the softer, the milder countenance of her likeness, Mary Ellis, recurred to his imagination; but placed at the right hand of the hostess, Mr. Finlater on the other, and Elwyn engaged in doing the honours to his guests, it would not be gallant to ask Mrs. Elwyn a question which should prove his recollection of another lady, while sitting in her all-imposing presence, *that* other contemned and scorned by her; neither would it be friendly to call up her remembrance to the mind of Elwyn, as perhaps it might be accompanied by some unpleasant attendants.

Fitzallan attended his friends to the concert; who can speak his surprise on seeing Mary Ellis?—who can speak the pleasure with which, on his return to her with Henry Elwyn, he perceived the easy unembarrassed manner with which she answered his address, and the tone of familiarity, yet modest confidence, in which she spoke to him?—Pity was now succeeded by unqualified admiration in the breast of Fitzallan; the ingenuous and artless tones in which Mary Ellis afterwards tried to palliate the rude and insolent impertinence of Mrs. Elwyn, had raised this sentiment to its height; and while he thought Laretta the most envious, the most narrow-minded, and the most selfish of women, he was inclined to raise his ideas of Mary Ellis to something very much above the common class of created beings.

Fitzallan was very candid and unreserved; he continued to visit on an intimate footing at the Elwyns; and as his thoughts were frequently reverting towards Mary Ellis, and as he was

very often in her society, it was natural for him to mention her name in the course of conversation, and he invariably did so in terms of approbation and respect.

Mrs. Elwyn could scarcely rein in her indignation at these instances of his partiality for Mary; the narrowness of her disposition made her envious of every other female, and of Mary Ellis in particular, whose unfortunate likeness to herself, and whose being beheld with regard by Henry Elwyn, had excited her hatred and aversion. She was never easy if she did not possess the exclusive regard and attention of every one who approached her: this rage for universal conquest and profound homage was just as violent now as it had been prior to her marriage; and though indifference towards her husband might have been supposed to be taking place of affection, by those who observed the pains which she took to attract the attentions of other men, yet to hear Elwyn bestow any thing like an eulogium on another female, to have seen him show a kindness to *Mary* Ellis, would have been to see the lovely features of Laretta overspread with mortification and jealous ire.

Narcissus Finlater was her devoted slave, as far as his devotion could be abstracted from his own *sweet* person; Mrs. Elwyn was decidedly the very prettiest woman that had appeared for *the season*—he was the *beauty of the ladies*, and as he could not flirt with all the *girls* who were *dying for him*, why they might look on and *die*; it would perhaps be *safer* for him to attach himself to Mrs. Elwyn; she was a newly-married woman, and to be understood to have a *tenderness* for her, would give him great *eclat*; and there was so much trouble in following *up* the single ones, that he would rather send half a score of *them* to the Bristol Hot Wells, and keep his station by Mrs. Elwyn, thus destroying all their hopes.

But though the foolish and coxcomical attentions, and the flimsy flattery, of Finlater was very acceptable to the greedy palate of Mrs. Elwyn, and though his constant attentions to her in public were very smilingly received, yet she could not be easy, when she saw Fitzallan a guest at her table, and a visitor at her house, and heard him have the effrontery to praise a low-born and insignificant chit in her hearing. Sir John Fitzallan was in ill health; at the death of his father, Frederic would succeed to a large fortune, and to a title—lady Fitzallan!—oh! all ye powers of female mischief and malice, combine to prevent Mary Ellis from being raised to such an height! a height beyond herself—a height which perhaps she might have attained, had she not previously taken Elwyn in her toils: something must be thought of, something must be achieved, and *that* too quickly; for already the Bath world had called it a *done* thing, already she heard Fitzallan rallied upon his predilection, and already he appeared covertly to acknowledge it.

While Laretta was thus suffering the baleful passion of envy to make wide inroads on her peace of mind, her husband was exerting his utmost resolution and all his fortitude to stifle its first suggestions; his proud spirit dared scarcely yet acknowledge that he had mistaken the path to happiness, but the daily display of Laretta's character too forcibly proclaimed it; tasteless apathy, almost disgust, had ensued to that fervid admiration with which he had once regarded her; and his impetuous nature was ill calculated to bear the weight of that tyrannic sway by which she would have held *his* every look and action in servile bondage, while at the same time she exercised the most unlicensed freedom for herself.

A bitter emotion, such as Harry Elwyn had never felt, had never known before, seemed to pervade his soul, when he thought of Mary Ellis and of Fitzallan; hastily did he turn from the bright perspective of felicity which seemed to open before *them*; he wished, yes, he was sure that he wished their happiness, yet he did not *think* that Mary Ellis could so soon—"What then," cried he, "am I such a wretch?—would I keep *her* a hopeless, a solitary being, unconnected and

unattached?—have I ever had reason to suspect her of a more tender attachment towards me than what our respective situations authorised—and did I ever hope, did I ever wish——”

Elwyn could not pursue such reflections; and we are *loth* to confess, that having once found easy entrance there, he frequently rushed from them, and from himself, to —— House; *there* was he welcome received; and in the mad intoxication of successful play, or the fermentation of spirit produced by the contrary transition of fortune, he spent many of those hours which were passed by his thoughtless wife at the scenes of public amusement, under the close escort of Narcissus Finlater, and in the society of his sister, lady Sawbridge; no longer the enraptured, the confiding husband, he resisted the inquiries of Lauretta, in that tone of decided refusal, which even intimidated *her* from being too inquisitive as to his private engagements.

While all the Bath world, and even the prudent Mrs. Ripley, had given Mr. Fitzallan to Mary Ellis, she only had no suspicion of the kind; the genuine humility, which had, under the happy instructions of her beloved protectress, formed a component part in her character, preserved her from the indulgence of an idea which she would have considered as absurd and extravagant. She always remembered what she *was*, and the disparity which existed between her origin and that of almost every individual with whom she conversed; she felt particularly obliged to Mr. Fitzallan for his kind notice; she supposed that the natural goodness of his disposition induced him to bestow it, from having observed the wounding neglect of Mrs. Elwyn's manner, and the consequent distance which had been adopted by her guardian; this kind attention gave her confidence in herself; she was grateful to Fitzallan, she felt pleasure in his society, she was amused and instructed by his cheerful and enlightened conversation.

Fitzallan had an opportunity of seeing *her* divested of that restraint and embarrassment, which her knowledge of the general opinion, or of his private sentiments, would have certainly produced. In the present enfeebled and precarious state of his father's health, demanding, as he did, the utmost attention of his son, Fitzallan could not form an immediate plan for changing his situation; but to secure an interest in the pure heart of Mary Ellis, was now become his most sanguine wish; and he set about it, not in the usual and hacknied way of flattery and compliment, and in the language and with the air of a lover, but he sought to make himself agreeable to her by manly confidence, by the honest display of his sentiments and opinions, and by a respectful mode of behaviour. This conduct combined with the unconscious modesty of Mary to hush all suspicion in her breast.

We do not pretend to recount all the routs, and the plays, and the balls, which Mary Ellis visited with Mrs. Ripley; neither one-tenth part of those to which the blooming Lauretta was led by the *sweet* Mr. Finlater and his sister: the description of such scenes and such parties has been read and *reread*, described and *redescribed*, till there is nothing left for us; and our book is more a history of feelings and of sentiments, than of incidents and adventures.

Miss Lawson now made her appearance at Bath, as the companion of a second-hand dowager of the name of Onfield; and can it be believed?—yes, for it was a fact—Lauretta extended to her the hand of amity; and Miss Lawson stooped to *kiss* that hand which but so lately *smote* her.

The first evening on which Miss Lawson made her appearance, she attended, with her friend Mrs. Onfield, a party to which Mrs. Ripley and Mary had been previously invited; all joy, all ecstasy, at seeing her “dear Mary,” the voluble Lawson hastily approached her, and in all the rapid professions, of which she was so extremely diffuse, *expressed* her *delight* at the unexpected meeting—*lamented* “sweet Ellis's” leaving the Hall without having given her an opportunity of bidding her adieu—*pathetically* mourned the misguided conduct of poor Mrs. Piff—*mournfully*

predicted that she would suffer for her folly—*indignantly* spoke of the already-discovered tyrannical and miserly disposition of her husband—*sorrowfully* bewailed the sad state of Mrs. Halifax, who was fast going to the grave—*sentimentally* glanced at amiable Miss Letsom's *daily* death—*angrily* reprobated general Halifax's neglect of his lady, and the shocking publicity of his connexion with lady Lauretta—*prophetically* descanted on the sad consequences which must ensue to the extravagant dissipation of her daughter—and *presciently* mourned over the ill-starred fate of dear interesting Elwyn—and almost *passionately* depicted his rude neglect of her beloved and interesting young friend.

Mary was not surprised at this torrent of declamation, because she had been accustomed to it, and knew pretty well how much of it she might credit; she answered Miss Lawson with her usual modest civility, but took care not to touch upon any of the *numerous* points on which she had enlarged so freely.

*Two* evenings subsequent to this interview, Mary again saw this lady, but in public, and in the party of Mrs. Elwyn; she saw her leaning on the arm of the "*extravagant*" and "*dissipated*" Lauretta; and can it be wondered if her "*dear Mary*" was suffered to pass and *repass* in the crowd, *unseen*, unnoticed? Mary had been inured to the ague-like transitions of this lady, and was as little mortified with the *cold* fit, as she had been exhilarated by the *hot*.

If there was a human being for whom Elwyn had an utter contempt, it was Miss Lawson; Lauretta had frequently heard him express his dislike of her cringing and time-serving character; but Lauretta was now emerged from the controul of her husband; his opinions had ceased to have any weight with her, if they came in contact with her own pleasures or her own designs; and with the civility which is ever due from the master of the house to his guests, Elwyn was constrained to treat Miss Lawson, whom with surprise he saw at his table, by *him* at least, an uninvited guest; to express his disapprobation to Lauretta, would be to call forth those childish whimperings and those fretful bewailings which ever ensued to the gentlest expostulations; her present situation, which was calculated to excite all the tender interest of such a heart as his, and his ardent wishes for a child who might perpetuate the name of which he was so proud, restrained him from giving his opinion. Lauretta's intimacy with lady Sawbridge had not pleased him; he had noticed it to her; but the wonted paroxysms had followed, of tears, upbraidings, and sullen waywardness; she had asked him if he meant to take from her every thing and every body whom she loved? he had made her forsake her dear, her *dearest*, her *good* mamma already; and now, because that he saw she liked lady Sawbridge, he wanted her to relinquish her acquaintance; but she knew what it was, and if lady Sawbridge had not got a *brother*, her intimacy would not have been thought improper.

"No, Lauretta," cried Elwyn, with some asperity, and all his proud superiority glowing in his reddening countenance, "he must be a wretch indeed, a *low contemptible* wretch, who can for a moment feel a rival in that shallow, brainless coxcomb."

Lauretta pouted; she did not like to hear the pretty Mr. Finlater called names; but she could not take his part openly, though she determined from that hour, that if her husband did not feel a *rival* in Finlater, she would make him feel his power of teasing and of disturbing him whenever she chose.

After this conversation, our readers will have seen that it was not from Elwyn's subjection to Lauretta that he kept silence on the subject of Miss Lawson, but because he knew his representations would be fruitless, and that his humanity inclined him to spare Lauretta from any agitation at the present period. But, *must* we say it? the empire of Lauretta daily slackened in his heart; he now beheld, with a sort of cool indifference, behaviour which would lately have

created in him the most lively uneasiness; and when his sickened fancy, his disappointed hopes, his faded prospects, all conspired to raise a tumult in his soul, when he turned with retrospective eye, and saw the tender placid figure of Mary Ellis, like the *shadow* of departed joys, he would start from the momentary, the dangerous contemplation, and fancy that he had attained a victory over himself when he resorted to — House; alas! *that* victory could only be perfected by applying for assistance where only it is to be found, but where it is seldom sought by men of the fashionable world.

If Laretta insulted Miss Lawson in the country, what could be her motive for courting her in Bath? is the natural inquiry of our readers: is there a more engrossing, a more busy passion than envy? if it once gets possession of the female breast, is it not a fell usurper? To break the spell by which Fitzallan was bound to Mary Ellis, to prevent her from rising to a situation which *she* had not attained, had been the fixed determination of Mrs. Elwyn, from the moment in which she had believed that there was a probability of the kind; but to blacken the character of Mary Ellis with her husband, would not do; Fitzallan and Elwyn were on the most intimate terms; they had an implicit reliance on each other's honour. The circumstance of Mary Ellis's adoption by her protectress, had excited the interest, rather than chilled the predilection of Fitzallan; his chivalric spirit liked the idea of defending the orphan; and the conscience-stricken one of his father might perhaps weakly yield his concurrence to the wishes of a son on whom he *weakly* doated. Vainly racking her brain for an expedient that might be feasible for her adoption, and which might at the same time prove a serious obstacle to Mary's elevation, Laretta accidentally met with Miss Lawson: to make up for her late rudeness, would, she knew, be an easy matter with the *placable* Lawson; but doubly, trebly did she do so, by singling her out as the object of her marked attention at the well-thronged ball, and by leaning and lounging on her willing arm during the whole of the night.

Miss Lawson had never before been so delightedly happy; she saw that her *charming friend* was the object of universal attention; and as her sparkling brilliants emitted some faint rays of their splendour on the hitherto-tinselled brow of Miss Lawson, so, in the multitude of charming things which were said to Mrs. Elwyn, she came in for some *small* portion, as being the *favoured friend* of the *fairest fair*; and if there was any thing of *substance* in the professions which were made to Mrs. Elwyn, surely the *shadow* must devolve on the gratified Lawson.

Laretta was not without a sufficient portion of art; her object, in thus noticing Miss Lawson, was to get her to detail, in the hearing of Fitzallan, the story concerning the mystery of Mary's birth, and her adoption by the benevolent Clara, which the mischievous spleen of the ladies of Norton had surmised, and which the invidious spirit of Miss Lawson had tried to stamp with authenticity. If Laretta herself were to relate it, Elwyn might fathom *her* motives, he might sift them to the bottom, and his indignation would be poured upon her; but Miss Lawson, with an air of confidence and secrecy, should be the *warning friend* of Fitzallan, *she* should be the guardian genius which should interpose and save him from forming so disgraceful a connexion; the poverty of Mary Ellis's pretended parents, the obscurity of her origin, might be thought of no moment, when weighed in the balance with her matchless excellencies; but would the *scrupulous*, the *fastidious* Mr. Fitzallan, ally himself to the child of *shame*, to the illicit offspring of a woman, who palmed herself upon the world as a creature of perfection? would he like to call *her* wife, who never knew a father? and would he not fear to see in every hoary-headed libertine who approached him, the *man* to whom his peerless Mary owed the *infamy* of her existence? This was *strong* language, and such language, such *searching* questions must probe the breast of Fitzallan; while the jealous spirit of Henry Elwyn, which would be roused at the slightest stigma

which should attach to the name of a woman whose memory he had almost deified, must be conjured up to deter Fitzallan from breathing a hint on the subject in his presence.

Miss Lawson was well tutored; she played her part to admiration. Mrs. Elwyn was not *direct* in her confidence, even to her dear Lawson, but inuendoes and hints were well understood, and the motive of Laretta was evidently apparent to her active coadjutor—active, because a similar spirit impelled her, for our readers need scarcely to be reminded, that the modest attractions of Mary, when likely to draw the serious admiration of the other sex, had long ago drawn on her the envy of the *delectable* Lawson.

An opportunity was not long wanting; with the *profuse* expressions of feeling, sympathy, and humanity, which are always to be received with *doubt* when they are poured forth in such abundance, Miss Lawson gained the private ear of Frederic, and there her tale unfolded. It harrowed up his soul—even though his better reason refused to give it credence, he was too prudent and too wary to commit himself to his *curious* informant, by giving her his sentiments on the subject of her communication, or by unfolding his secret wishes relative to Mary Ellis. To Miss Lawson he seemed to deport himself as one who had merely been listening to an extraordinary relation, in which he was not interested; and the self-satisfied agent returned to her employer, and avowed her belief in Mr. Fitzallan's perfect indifference to the heroine of the little tale which she had invented.

Laretta could not be of the same opinion; however, Fitzallan had now had a warning; if he fell into the snare with his eyes open, he must abide the consequence.

The increased illness of sir John Fitzallan demanded the assiduous attention of his son; and as he had previously determined to make some inquiry into the foundation which existed for Miss Lawson's narration, ere he hazarded an avowal to Mary Ellis, which might put it out of his power to retract, he was not sorry to be at present debarred from those opportunities of daily intercourse, which he was well aware would encrease his passion, and render it more difficult to conquer. To the child of honest parents, to the orphan daughter of virtuous poverty, his father would have no objection; and for his own part, he should greatly prefer raising the gentle Mary to a situation, which she would grace by her merits, to carrying off the high prize of fashion or of title, which often came within his grasp; in *obscurity* there was nothing which he dreaded—but mystery and infamy, his feelings revolted at the bare idea: how could he frame his words, how could he approach his father, and ask his countenance, his paternal sanction to such a connexion?—"I will fairly investigate the matter," thought Fitzallan; "surmises, conjectures, and suspicions, shall not interpose between me and happiness; I must have *proofs* of the guilt and depravity of my Mary's parents, for numberless, *countless* are the *proofs* of her goodness and her virtues."

#### CHAP. IV.

Constant occupation, perpetual engagement in the active scenes of life, continued and unwearied attention to the important duties of his station, form at once the happiness of man, and the test of his obedience.

BREWSTER.

THE unconscious object of all these plans and all these ruminations, was meanwhile pursuing the “even tenor of her way” in modest meekness; but, spite of her natural disposition to be pleased, and to repress all fastidiousness of taste, Mary Ellis could not but feel that Mrs. Ripley’s life was not the life for her: the constant round of insipid amusement, the constant repetition of vapid conversation, and of pursuits in which the mind had no share, and which contributed to no good purpose, was not at all congenial to her taste, nor in unison with those principles of usefulness and of beneficial activity which had been firmly grounded with the first rudiments of education by her departed friend: with no little solicitude she looked forward to the period when Mrs. Ripley should leave Bath; as she was immediately going to visit some friends, their separation must naturally take place at that time; and any cottage in the country, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of her own pursuits, the uninterrupted disposition of her own time, was preferable, in her sober estimation, to the haunts of the world, and the shackling sameness of fashionable life: but with the *cottage*, the idea of Elwyn Hall was invariably annexed in her idea; could she but procure a little retreat in *that* vicinity, she might have the faithful Scot for her friend and her housekeeper; she might retain the attached Susan for her attendant; again might she wander amongst the woods and lawns she loved so well—again might she retrace the paths which Clara had trod—again would her beatified spirit seem to hover over her, as she extended the assistance which was still within her power to the humbler objects of *her* care and of *her* discriminating bounty.

Henry Elwyn had told Mary to prepare some plan for his acceptance, and surely *such* a plan would meet with it. The occasional enjoyment of Miss Letsom’s conversation was amongst its greatest desideratums; and it would be no objection to Mary that she should be contiguous to Mrs. Piff; for her universal benevolence led her to be anxious for the welfare of this poor inoffensive woman, independent of her near connexion to Henry Elwyn; she could be on terms of civility and kindness with *her*, without being on an intimate footing at the Hall, or subjecting herself to a familiar intercourse with her husband; and surely even Elwyn would see nothing objectionable in this; rather would he thank her for this attention to his mother.

The pleasure which Mary had found in the society of Miss Letsom, and the interest which she had felt in the history of her early misfortunes and the singularity of her present situation, were not put to flight; when new scenes and new characters flitted before her eyes, her attachments were more stable and more constant. Soon after her arrival in Bath, she had written that lady a long and communicative epistle; with Miss Letsom she had no reserves; and having lamented the imprudence of Mrs. Piff, which had made her acceptance of Mrs. Ripley’s protection almost a matter of necessity, she proceeded to give an account of things as they presented themselves to her observation, but without “setting down aught in malice,” though we *dare* not say without extenuation; she cursorily passed over the disregard of Mrs. Elwyn, and while she softened it down, and imputed her rude behaviour to youth, to inexperience, and to

thoughtlessness, she bore ample testimony to the respectful deportment of her husband, and that friendly interest in her happiness which had evinced itself in actions, but did not lose itself in words. For the kind notice and pleasing attention of Mr. Fitzallan, she also expressed her gratitude—"To receive his notice," continued she, "while I daily see him courted by the titled, the wealthy, and the beautiful, is very flattering, for the obscure and humble foundling, Mary Ellis, has no claim upon it; but *his* mind is superior to all factitious advantages; and I firmly believe, that he feels a pleasure in noticing me, because he sees that it is not the way of the world to pay attention to those from whom no *eclat* can be derived. Oh, Miss Letsom, novice as I confessedly am in all the (may I not call them) follies of fashion, judge my astonishment, on hearing lady Sawbridge announced at a private and select party! I started—but your description, faithfully given, was faithfully remembered by me—'the meridian of life, the bold dashing air, the handsome countenance'—I could not be mistaken; it was the inhabitant of the marine cottage whom I saw: no woman seems more admired in this place—no woman receives more universal suffrage. Sir James Sawbridge is dead, it seems, and has left her a fine fortune, which she knows how to spend like a princess; and though *every body* talks of her *affair* with lord —— as openly as she did to you, and though *every body* wonders that sir James Sawbridge did not procure a divorce, which was in his power, yet *every body* goes to her balls and suppers, *every body* is glad to have a name on her visiting list, and *she* is glad to see *every body's* name there. Mrs. Elwyn seems to have selected this lady for her most intimate companion, and they seem to exist only when together—surely Henry Elwyn cannot know her former history, surely he cannot be indifferent to the characters of those with whom his Lauretta associates? I should fill a volume, were I to descant on all the contradictions and the inconsistencies which strike my unaccustomed eye—I frequently turn from the contemplation with rather more disgust than I wish to indulge—for believe me, dear Miss Letsom, when I declare that I would not knowingly cherish a splenetical or a cynical disposition; *if* I know myself, I am more fitted for society than seclusion, and my enjoyments are always enhanced, if they are shared with others; but Mrs. Ripley's society is *not* society; all subjects, not merely of rationality, but even of trifling and amusement, are swallowed up by the card-table; and cards being the settled purpose for which the company meet, and being expressly *mentioned* in their invitation, is it not natural, that when drawn into the magic circle of action, the attack should commence, and that the combatants should pursue it with unceasing avidity? But though you may be inclined to think that I have learnt to be rather too severe in my strictures than becomes my age, my inexperience, or my situation, believe me when I tell you, that my full heart is very grateful to that good Providence who has poured his benefits upon me; and that, in numbering these, I do not *undervalue* the comfort and security of being under the care of Mrs. Ripley, whose character stands high in the estimation of all persons for prudence and respectability: she is extremely kind to me, and very easy in her manners; I feel quite divested of restraint in her company; yet, I will confess it to you, that I cast a longing eye towards the shades of Elwyn; and that frequently, when drawing a bright perspective of quiet peaceful days in that much-loved vicinity, the figure of *Miss Letsom* starts fresh as life upon the foreground of the picture; more than once has it seemed to point at the difference of our respective situations, and while it has portrayed the sad, the trying monotony of her tedious and never-ending duties, I have felt the wholesome reproof, and sought to stop the progress of my castle-building anticipations, in the certainty of present comfort. Let me now stop the progress of my pen, if I would not tire my friend, after assuring her that I feel for her the sincerest regard, and take the liveliest interest in her happiness."

Although it was soon after Mary Ellis's arrival in Bath that she had written to Miss Letsom, a considerable time elapsed, and she received no answer; she began to imagine that she was wholly forgotten by her; for surely the most assiduous attention on her aunt would enable her to spare *one* half hour to the calls of friendship? Mary was wounded and mortified at this seeming neglect; her plans of enjoyment in the environs of Elwyn were clouded by the idea of Miss Letsom's silence; what prospect could she have of maintaining a personal intercourse with a woman who had not found time to write one line in a period of nearly two months? At length, however, Mary Ellis received a letter, which fully accounted for her silence; it ran thus:—

“MY DEAR MARY,

“You must ere this have accused me of great neglect and ingratitude, in not sooner noticing your kind and affectionate letter; but it reached me when every moment of my time was engaged in an attendance on my poor aunt. The mourning emblems which accompany this letter, will shew you that these painful duties are over; Mrs. Halifax has for ever closed her eyes on this earthly scene; she is no more—her last illness was slow, but certain in its progress. I was aware that her symptoms were serious, and in an early stage of the disorder, I communicated my suspicions to Mr. Leonard; he told me that I was not mistaken; for though he could not ascertain the period, yet dissolution must eventually succeed to her present attack: this information, my dear young friend, was not calculated to make me relax in my attendance, or to falter in my exertions—I determined, by the most undeviating attentions, to try to sooth the couch of pain, and to smooth the pillow of death. I considered the relation in which I stood to the poor sufferer as an imposing claim on me for every thing which I could bestow; yet I thought it incumbent on me to acquaint general Halifax with the illness of his lady, and to propose to the invalid to send for him; she would not hear me on the subject—‘I want not to see *him*,’ said she, ‘and he does not wish to see *me*; he has estranged himself from me—that lady Lauretta engrosses all his attention; I do not want to see him—I do not want even to upbraid him, for I am rightly served; I have only reaped the fruits of my own imprudence; I see things *now* as they are—I can no longer deceive myself; general Halifax can no longer deceive *me*. More than thirty years ago, I married a man whom I did not love—money was the tempting bait; lured by ambition, I left my native country, my friends, *my mother*, and crossed the seas. I soon secured a wealthy prize—let my fate be a warning to all adventuring girls; I enjoyed no happiness or peace of mind; my husband was old when I married him—but years rolled on, and he *lived*; oh think, what must have been the sad state of *that* mind, which *saw* him live with secret discontent! I did not like to nurse him; his infirmities were the subject of my ridicule—I thought it beneath me to practise the domestic duties, and I frequently left him, when stretched on a sickbed, to make one in any party of amusement which should offer itself to my acceptance. He died—and I was liberated. My vanity inclined me to believe those professions of regard, which were directed merely to my purse; the handsome person and insinuating manners of Halifax interested me; I listened to his vows of eternal love and constancy; and though I retained some part of my handsome jointure for my own exclusive use, yet there was enough remaining to make him accept my hand with transport. But happiness was now gone further from me than before; a violent fever brought me to the verge of the grave; and though I at length recovered, yet my person was so altered, so reduced, and the hue of my complexion so completely changed, that I scarcely dared look at myself, while I had nearly lost the faculty of hearing. The attentions of Halifax were confined to the common-place politeness which shewed itself before witnesses; in private, he was careless

and negligent; while on the wife of his friend Montgomery were lavished all those insinuating gallantries, which, in the days of courtship (and in those days *only*), had devolved on me. I did not then view things in the light in which they are presented to me at this moment; I grew peevish and fretful; you, child, must have observed how this disposition has grown upon me, how disagreeable it has made me to others, how uncomfortable to myself; but in *myself* my whole thoughts were centered; I fancied that the weak state of my health required my whole attention, and that my comforts ought to be the exclusive study of all who approached me; I did not remember how frequently I had accused poor Mr. Manning of selfishness, how frequently I had laughed at *his* infirmities—but this was retribution!—even in *this* world there is retribution!—but it is only within these few days past that such thoughts have struck me.’

“Affected by the manner of my poor aunt, and pitying the sad state of her perturbed and self-accusing mind, I did every thing in my power to give her comfort and consolation; and was much pleased at finding that she shewed no aversion to talking on religious subjects. What a deep impression have these conversations made on my mind! and how thankful, how grateful, how *truly* grateful am I to that good God, who guided me here, who afforded me the sacred, the *pious* pleasure of awakening the mind of my nearest relative to the great truths of his Gospel!

“Although Mrs. Halifax had expressly told me that she by no means wished to see the general, yet I thought it my duty, from time to time, to communicate to him the progress of her disorder; he answered me with regularity and politeness, lamented the illness of ‘poor Mrs. H.’ and *requested* me to continue to favour him with my obliging communications.

“You will not wonder, my dear Mary, that while engaged in the arduous duty of confirming the faith, and speaking peace to the soul, of this conscience-stricken sufferer—you will not wonder that I scrupled to allot the least portion of my time to another, even though that other was one for whom I retained a warm regard, as assuredly I do for you; but, had I addressed you in this trying and anxious period, I *could* have written you merely in a cursory manner, and your benevolent heart would have been eager to have heard further.

“A few days previous to the dissolution of Mrs. Halifax, she expressed great anxiety to see Mr. Sargent; he was closeted in her chamber some time; when he quitted her, she seemed more composed and cheerful, and taking my hand in a more affectionate manner than I had ever remarked in her before, she said—‘Child, I have done what I could;’ I did not understand her meaning, but it was soon explained to me. From this hour, the disorder of Mrs. Halifax made rapid strides; her bodily sufferings were very great, and at times her mind seemed lost and bewildered. General Halifax was, I conclude, at length impelled by the calls of decency; he arrived at the Lodge when his wife was nearly expiring; a deathbed was not a contemplation which he would willingly have encountered; he did not approach the sufferer, but started back as if affrighted and appalled, as his eye scarcely glanced upon her livid countenance. She did not see him; an accession of strength and self-possession seemed to reanimate the dying—‘Letsom,’ said she, addressing me, ‘receive my thanks for all your kindness and attention; from my *nearest relation* I could not have *demand*ed it—on *you* I had no claim. I have done something for you, child, a little—would to Heaven I had the power of doing more! but I have a *niece*—though unknown to me her place of residence, or her name, yet I *believe* a daughter of my only sister now exists; between you and her I have bequeathed a little sum, which Mr. Sargent tells me I have a legal right to dispose of; I do not rob my husband of it; he knew not that it was mine, and surely he will not grudge to my nearest relative, and to my *best* friend, these trifling memorials of my regard.’ I naturally looked towards general Halifax, but he seemed afraid to venture near the bed. ‘Could I have beheld my niece before I died,’ continued Mrs. Halifax, ‘could I have

evinced to *her* that she was not *quite* forgotten, it would have afforded me great satisfaction, but that must be denied me, for I know not where to find her.'

"At this moment I was taken off my guard—the period of my self-imposed silence seemed to be ended; my heart throbbed violently at my side—my emotions nearly subdued me, as throwing myself upon my knees at the side of the bed, and pressing my lips upon her hand, I sobbed out—'Behold your *niece*—behold the daughter of your sister; I am the child of ——'—'You, you are my *niece*?—oh! speak louder—speak louder, tell me so again—tell me that I hear aright—and is it indeed my *niece* who has thus attended, watched, and *prayed* for me?—and art thou my *very* *niece*?—oh! speak again—pray, pray tell me so again?' I repeated the words, I related the accident by which I became acquainted with her situation; I told her, as succinctly as I could, my reasons for changing my name: she embraced, she blessed me.

"Mr. Leonard was in the room at the time; he besought me to compose my agitated spirits; I did so, for I feared for the effect which might be produced on my dying aunt. Never did I see greater terror expressed than on the countenance of general Halifax—never did I see it so completely divested of that *genuine* compunction which 'maketh the heart better.'

"Again I approached Mrs. Halifax; and while I addressed her, for the first time, by the endearing name of aunt, I asked if she would not like to see her husband, and mentioned his being arrived—'No, no,' said she; 'his presence can do me no good; I forgive him—I wish him well; but tell him,' said she, with emphatic earnestness, 'as he values the forgiveness of a dying woman, as he would find peace in *his* last moments, let him by no means attempt depriving this poor child of the small sum which I have bequeathed to her; it was produced from the sale of my jewels, which were presented me by Mr. Manning when I married him—oh! I bartered *much* to gain them! little did I then think that they would be turned to so profitable an account.'

"Mr. Sargent now spoke to general Halifax; and after a moment of irresolution, he advanced with hurried steps towards the bed, and scarcely glancing towards his expiring wife, he said—'I promise you, that Miss Letsom shall securely retain the sum you have bequeathed her.'—'I am satisfied,' said Mrs. Halifax; she sunk on the pillow, and spoke no more.

"My feelings had been severely tried in the scenes which I had gone through; and enfeebled by agitation, and exertion of mind and body, three days have gone by, and I could not attain resolution to write to you.

"General Halifax returned to London on the decease of his wife; the melancholy spectacle of a funeral would have been too much for his fine feelings; and I have been left alone to the contemplation of skulls and coffins, epitaphs and worms—but not wholly to this, dearest Mary; a sensation of pensive satisfaction steals over my mind, as I reflect upon my late conduct; and a sensation of *security* in the attainment of a genteel competency, for which I have neither bartered my principles or sullied my character. I derive indescribable satisfaction from these reflections, and am sometimes erecting a pretty little edifice of enjoyment and contentment, where the *picture* of Mary Ellis stands linked arm-in-arm with mine on the *foreground*; what say you, my dear girl, shall it be realized? will your prudent and vigilant guardian think me a competent chaperone for his ward? will he think the seclusion of this place too entire a seclusion for youth and loveliness? we will not forswear the world, we will not make vows of celibacy; but we will make our own terms with it (with the world, I mean), and use it in our own way: the generous bequest of Mrs. Halifax amounts to four thousand pounds; she had bequeathed the half of this sum to me as her *companion*, the other half to me as her *niece*.

‘Oh, (Mary), will you come with me,  
Nor sigh to leave the flaunting town?’

Make your determination, dear friend, without referring to *my* pleasures or my enjoyments; but if you really *wish* for a place where you may do as you like, and a companion who will let you do as you like, I can tell you where you may find both: a neat cottage, of a parlour, a kitchen, a garden, a trim little garden, is now vacant, by the death of old Mrs. Parker; I *need* not tell you that it stands near Elwyn park-gate; faithful Mrs. Scot would be so happy to serve *you*, and I should be so happy to rid my brain of all the petty troubles of housekeeping items, dittos, and *per contras*, and using my pen and ink for *other* purposes; once again should I mount my Pegasus, and give way to my *sublime flights*, for they seem to crowd much thicker on me from their late dispersion, remember I do not insist on your mounting my high-flowing steed; ‘here shall meek Charity reside,’ and *here* shall I watch, approve, and poetize her actions; and we will have some sober realities, and some domestic avocations, as well as fairy dreams, and mental enjoyments. Behold the enthusiastic spirit which has impelled me on, till I have nearly got to the limits of my paper; I can scarcely steal one line to tell you, that report has it that poor Mrs. Piff already rues her choice—and that I am always your sincerely attached friend,

“MARIA LETSOM.”

## CHAP. V.

Of feeling void, and void of mind, void of the all-subduing look of soul, the emanation of Divinity.

KLOPSTOCK.

REPROACHING herself for having accused Miss Letsom of neglect, sympathizing in her late distressing feelings, rejoicing in her liberation and the comfortable provision which her aunt had made for her, Mary felt as eager, and almost as sanguine, as her friend, to put in execution the pleasant plan which they mutually seemed to have suggested, and she found it almost difficult to rein in her impatience, so as not to appear to be ungrateful to Mrs. Ripley for her kindness. It was with emotions of the most pleased and the most pious thankfulness that Mary observed how the dispensations of Providence had been working for her good; when she had first thought of retirement, and of the occasional enjoyment of Miss Letsom's society, could such a prospect, could such a plan as the present have occurred to her most sanguine hopes? She was eager to have the concurrence of Elwyn, though she was well aware that he would enter no protest against it; with him she had no reserves, and she thought he would gain a more perfect insight of her friend's character (in which, if there *gleamed* a few author-like eccentricities, there *blazed* some brilliant virtues) by reading her letters, than he could from any description which she could give him; she therefore enclosed it in an envelope, in which she explained to him the intimacy which had taken place between herself and Miss Letsom, and which had been followed by an early proof of the confidence of the latter; but that while Miss Letsom chose that her relationship to Mrs. Halifax should remain a secret, she had thought it a breach of friendship to mention it even to him. Mary did not scruple to avow that her heart was very much in Miss Letsom's plan, and that it entertained no fears of her guardian's concurrence.

Not very frequently did Mr. and Mrs. Elwyn sit down to a *tête-à-tête* meal, and the sober enjoyment of each other's society; Elwyn had no pleasure in the conversation of a woman who was never pleased but when petted and indulged; he found that he had wholly mistaken her character, and that the affection which she had felt for him had long since evaporated; whether it had ever existed, was a matter of doubt, for *what* opinion could any man have of a wife who seemed to take every opportunity of teasing and tormenting him—who hearing him express his contempt of Narcissus Finlater, was for ever praising him in his presence, and inviting him to attend her—and who knowing his aversion to Miss Lawson, had instantly fastened upon her on her coming to Bath, and seemed to select her for her bosom companion? The indignant, the irascible spirit of Henry Elwyn, was still unsubdued, and if he restrained its ebullitions, it was with the utmost difficulty; and frequently he chafed his passion, and *tried* to smother it, because he would not let Laretta have the little triumph of perceiving that she hurt him, because he would not *appear* to notice the attentions of a silly coxcomb whom he despised. To the *mother* of Laretta, Elwyn dared not apply for redress; *she* was living, with unblushing and shameless effrontery, a life of *guilt* (though she might try to call it Platonism and friendship), the companion of a married man; she *could* not rebuke her daughter, she would *see* nothing to rebuke, for her unlimited and blind indulgence had been that daughter's bane—it had unfitted her for a wife, it had kept her in ignorance of the duties of her station, almost of the duties of a reasonable being. To Fitzallan should he unburthen his full heart? no: Fitzallan had seen, had warned him of his danger—Fitzallan had pointed to a better, a firmer path; he had disregarded

his advice, and *now* he *dared* not tell him he lamented it. He *dared* not turn to Mary Ellis; an host of never-to-be-forgotten circumstances prevented him—an host of tumultuous, of opposing, of rebellious feelings restrained him. Where then could he fly to rid himself of the oppressive sensations of disappointed happiness?—alas! where they were not obliterated, where they were not stifled, but where action seemed to draw his mind from contemplation, but where the temporary interest which he felt was *sure* to be succeeded by lassitude and wretchedness, where he hurt his fortune, and impaired his health. Though not become an absolute votary, yet he was now become a constant frequenter of the gaming-table; his haggard countenance and altered appearance would have called forth the inquiry of apprehensive affection; but Lauretta’s inquiry of *curiosity* had not been gratified, and she sought no further. She found it no easy matter to supply the numerous demands which were made on her purse, and she saw, with much ill humour, that she was frequently obliged to repeat her applications, ere she could get Elwyn to replenish it.

Lady Sawbridge, Miss Lawson, and Finlater, were seated round the table after dinner, when the letter of Mary was presented to Elwyn; he recognized the writing, and without asking permission of the company, he hastily broke it open; his surprise and emotion as he read were visibly expressed on his countenance.

“You seem to have got a letter from an interesting correspondent,” said lady Sawbridge.

“I agree with your ladyship in that opinion,” said Miss Lawson.

“At any rate, *we* are not to be favoured with particulars, it seems,” said Lauretta.

“Don’t pry into secrets of state,” said Finlater.

“Now only see, Mr. Finlater,” continued Lauretta, “what an odd unaccountable husband I am blest with; but if he will not tell us about that letter, he shall not hear the conundrum which Mr. Finlater asked me this morning—now shall he, Finlater? and I assure you, Elwyn, it is an extreme good one.”

“Oh, you are an agreeable bewitching flatterer,” said Finlater, as he took out an ivory toothpick-case, and adjusted a stray lock by the glass in its lid.

“Narcissus deals in conundrums and charades,” said lady Sawbridge.

Elwyn put the letter into his pocket.

“I *must* give you the conundrum, if it be only to teaze you,” said Lauretta.

“A very *kind* reason certainly,” said Elwyn; “but query whether it will have the effect designed.”

“Finlater’s question was *this*,” continued she, “Why should Mr. Elwyn have been an *old* man, rather than a *young* one?” now you must all guess, for I assure you it is very deep.”

Elwyn made rather a sarcastic inclination of his head.

“Lady Sawbridge, you must say what your answer would be?”

“Oh, I should say, because he has the gravity of an old man,” answered her ladyship.

“No, that is not it; and that would not do, because many *old* men are gay enough; there’s general Halifax; I am sure he is fifteen or twenty years older than Elwyn, yet in his manners he is fifteen or twenty years younger—isn’t he, Lawson? but how will *you* answer the question?”

“*Why* should Mr. Elwyn have been an *old* man rather than a *young* one?” repeated Miss Lawson, with an air of intent study; “because he has already attained the *wisdom* of age; surely *that* must be the answer.”

“Not at all like it,” said Lauretta: “now we *must* have Elwyn’s answer—he shall tell us himself, ‘Why he ought to have been an *old* man?’ shan’t he, Finlater?”

“Because he would have been nearer the end of his existence,” said Elwyn, in that hasty and irritable tone which proved that his temper had been tried to the utmost.

“What a misanthropic answer!” said lady Sawbridge.

“Barbarous, barbarous!” said the charming Narcissus.

“And not the least like the *real* one,” said Lauretta. “Well, good people, now you all give it up, I suppose: ‘Why should Mr. Elwyn have been an old man, rather than a young one?’ observe, that is the question; and now for the answer—*because* he *should* have been *man-aged*. Now, is it not an excellent good one? Finlater, you shall set it down in my memorandum-book, for fear I should forget it,” and she threw him over a pocket-book and pencil from the bag which was suspended from the arm of her chair.

The eyes of all the party seemed to be turned upon Elwyn, and he thought not without some degree of ridicule; he sat upon thorns, but he felt that it was unworthy of a man of sense to notice such insignificant behaviour; he tried to laugh off his chagrin, and to hide his wounded feelings under the semblance of raillery—“Well,” said he, “now Lauretta, I will give you a piece of news, which I have just learnt—the death of Mrs. Halifax.”

“Of Mrs. Halifax!” repeated Lauretta, “oh, I am *so* glad!” and she clasped her hands in an ecstasy; “I am so glad, you have no idea.”

“Lauretta!” said Elwyn, in a severe tone.

“Now, only behold the *aged man*, though, alack-a-day poor me! *not* the *managed*; is it not natural to rejoice? why, Mr. Finlater, Mrs. Halifax was old, and ugly, and cross, and deaf, and disagreeable.”

“Oh, I am sure she has most wisely taken herself off,” said Finlater, shrugging his shoulders.

“And ‘Richard is *himself* again,” said lady Sawbridge, giving what is called a *knowing look* at Miss Lawson.

“The dear general is such a nice agreeable creature,” said Lauretta, “and he has been tormented long enough with that tedious ugly old woman, I am sure.”

“But the *ugly* old woman had a good jointure, I believe, Mrs. Elwyn,” said her husband, who found it impossible to restrain himself.

“What will now become of that poor know-nothing young woman who lived with Mrs. Halifax, I wonder?” said Miss Lawson, in an affectedly-humane tone.

“Oh, aye, there was some automaton thing, I remember, that walked about the house, pulled the bell, poured out the tea, and *carved* for the company; she must get another situation, I suppose,” said Lauretta, “for I am sure the dear general cannot want her.”

“It is a letter from that *automaton* thing which I have been reading,” said Elwyn, in a firm and severe tone of voice; “she proves to have been the *niece* of Mrs. Halifax; she attended her from motives of duty and humanity; she did not discover her relative claim on her aunt, till that aunt had made a disposition of her property—indeed, not until she lay on her deathbed; but she is rewarded for her long and duteous attendance, by the gratifying plaudits of her own heart, and Mrs. Halifax has bequeathed to her a comfortable provision.”

“Well, if I *ever* heard so ridiculous or so romantic a story!” said Mrs. Elwyn; “now is it at all probable that she should be the niece of Mrs. Halifax, and that she should not know it? if relations start up like mushrooms from every dunghill, in this manner, perhaps you, Elwyn, may some day bring me home a cousin, or a brother, or a *sister*, that I never knew before; really he adopts quite a quixotic spirit and tone, when talking of this new-found *dulcinea*.”

“The age of chivalry is *not* past,” said Finlater.

"I always pitied Miss Letsom," said Miss Lawson; "there was something in her cast of countenance which was interesting, and above the *canaille*."

"Because the *canaille* know *something*," said Elwyn.

"Exactly so," said the cameleon Lawson; but she could not get any attention from Elwyn, court it as she would, for he beheld her with the most sovereign contempt.

Although Henry Elwyn had been much hurt at perceiving the unfeeling exultation which Laretta expressed on hearing of the death of Mrs. Halifax, yet he concluded that her satisfaction had arisen from the idea of her mother's now becoming the wife of the general, and thus regaining the situation in society, which she had nearly forfeited by her improper attachment to a married man. Elwyn allowed a great deal for the pleasure which might naturally ensue to such a prospect in the breast of her daughter; he was pleased at it himself, for though he had resolved that he would never suffer Laretta to visit her mother while she maintained her disgraceful intimacy with general Halifax, yet he should not wish to estrange her from visiting her as his wife; he had seen enough of the lack of morality of the fashionable world, to know that lady Laretta Montgomery would be completely whitewashed, as soon as she should become lady Laretta Halifax, and that in her turn she might then be as much courted and as much followed as lady Sawbridge now confessedly was.

He dared scarcely acknowledge to himself that he felt *pleasure* in perceiving Mary Ellis's earnest wish of leaving Bath; that Fitzallan loved her, he was certain; perhaps he had made a declaration of his passion—perhaps, too, as the present state of sir John Fitzallan's health precluded his son from quitting him, Mary Ellis might judge it proper to reside in privacy, and *such* a proof of prudence and affection would no doubt be highly gratifying to her lover. Elwyn felt an invincible repugnance to speaking on this subject to his friend; he *hoped* he did not envy him his prospect of happiness, but it would open soon enough to *his* melancholy vision, without forestalling it by fruitless inquiry.

His answer to Mary Ellis's letter was penned in that generous strain, which had always actuated the spirit of Henry Elwyn, when it was not fettered by passion, or embittered by mortification; he congratulated her on Miss Letsom's nobly-earned independence, and bestowed a warm compliment on her disinterested conduct; he bade her consider the cottage at the park as hers and her friend's, as long as they chose to occupy it, singly or together, and said that he would immediately write to his steward, Simpson, and order every thing to be properly arranged for their reception: he slightly, but with evident marks of feeling, touched upon the subject of his mother, and delicately hinted that the attentions which Mary bestowed upon her, if she could bestow any without exposing herself to unpleasant feelings, would be gratefully acknowledged by him.

Mary was highly gratified with this letter; she immediately wrote to Miss Letsom, and agreed to join her in a fortnight, which was the period when Mrs. Ripley proposed leaving Bath.

Fitzallan heard her intention, without endeavouring to dissuade her from it; he could not at present quit his father, to make the inquiries which were so near his heart; he *scarcely* knew that he had made himself an interest in that of the gentle Mary, and he dared not ask the question; his sense of honour forbade him; it determined that the language of *friendship* only must be adopted towards her, till the cruel insinuations of Miss Lawson were controverted or authenticated. The leave which he took of our heroine was impressively affecting—"Forget me not, dearest Miss Ellis," said he, "forget me not, I beseech you; in the whole world, you have not a sincerer friend, nor one who is more warmly interested in your happiness: you know the duties which engage me, you know that my whole time is at present devoted to them; but if a period, a

happy period of leisure should arrive, will my amiable young friend receive me—will she admit me in her rural retreat—will she extend to me the hand of amity—will she, oh! will she feel any portion of the pleasure with which this heart will glow in the renewal of our intimacy?”

“Indeed,” replied Mary, withdrawing the hand which he had taken, and confused and affected by the earnestness of his manner, “indeed, Mr. Fitzallan, I should be very unworthy of your kind notice, did I not feel a grateful sense of it; you have contributed very much to my enjoyments during my residence in this place.”

“Oh that I might *always* contribute to them!” said Fitzallan, with impassioned fervour, as he tore himself from her, and hurried out of the house.

Mrs. Ripley declared she was very sorry to part with her agreeable inmate—“You have been very accommodating and very regular, I’m sure,” said she, “and I shall thank Humphrey for his introduction of you. I shall always be glad to see you when I am here; you know my time of coming, and if you are unmarried next winter, I shall depend upon seeing you; indeed, I did think that Mr. Fitzallan would have made you proposals before you quitted Bath; nay (perceiving Mary’s confusion), perhaps he *may* have done so—but remember, I ask no questions, though certainly his conduct to you was a little *particular*.”

“My dear madam, you must suffer me to say, that Mr. Fitzallan has not made me *any* proposals; and whatever you may have thought, I assure you, neither his behaviour or his conversation have ever gone beyond the bounds of friendship.”

“But friendship with woman, you know, is sister to love, my dear,” said Mrs. Ripley, laughing; “however, I ask no questions; you have conducted yourself just as I could have wished, I am sure, and that is saying a great deal for a young lady who has been three months in Bath.”

Elwyn had sent to let Mary know he would see her before she set off in the morning. Mrs. Ripley made it *a point* never to get up before her accustomed hour, and as the chaise had been ordered at eight, Mary took leave of her overnight. Elwyn had been informed at what time she meant to go, but his nocturnal vigils had made him heavy in the morning; he did not appear, and she was not sorry to be spared from an interview which could have given her no pleasure; she knew that he was not happy, and with this knowledge was added that of the hopelessness of his case, for unless he could subdue his own passionate and impetuous feelings, or prevail upon Laretta to adopt a rational and conciliating mode of behaviour, there was no chance of an amelioration in his situation.

## CHAP. VI.

### O'erhung

With all the varied charms of bush and tree."

WE will not describe an uninteresting journey, in which Mary Ellis met with no accident worth relating, especially as we have *some* idea that her Bath visit will not have answered our readers' expectations—"Not one adventure," say they, "not even an incident to enliven the monotonous scene—not *one* lover to give a glow to the picture." We must again remind them, that our intention in framing this humble work has been to describe the sentiments, the feelings, and the opinions of our characters; and that if in the general run of these there is not much to raise wonder, to excite interest, or to attract admiration, "their stars are more in fault than they."

At the door of the park cottage, Mary was hailed by her expecting, her delighted friends; and while the enthusiastic Miss Letsom threw her arms round her neck, and wept upon her bosom, the honest Scot caught hold of her hand, as if determined to retain a part of her dear young lady to herself, and almost smothered it with kisses.

A group of children, the innocent objects of Mary's kind attentions, were in waiting to see the chaise drive up; and no sooner did it come in sight, than, running off with the swiftness of mountain kids, they disappeared, and the next moment the merry village bells rang round.

Mary could not suppress her emotions at this proof of grateful affection from her poor neighbours; she entered the cottage, and burst into tears. But these were soon dispersed; she looked around her—all was the work of magic—"This Mrs. Parker's cottage?" said she, "surely I am in fairy-land!"

"Oh, what a pigmy palace of enchantment have we here!" cried the delighted Miss Letsom.

"And all *your* doing," said Mary; "oh, what taste, yet what simplicity, what neatness!"

"No, my love, not *my* doing," said Miss Letsom; "guess again."

"Oh, you must not spend time in guess-work," said Scot; "it is all my young master's planning, and ordering, and chusing; and the steward has overlooked it, and I have helped to put up the furniture, and Miss Letsom was not let to come near it herself till yesterday: oh, but now look here, Miss Mary——"

"Aye, look here," said Miss Letsom, leading her up stairs into a sweet little sitting-room, which looked into Elwyn park.

"This Mrs. Parker's? impossible!" again repeated Mary, as she glanced her eyes round the room, as she saw the well-chosen library, which was ranged on shelves, which were affixed in small recesses on each side of the fire-place, as she trod on the green baize, with which all the floors were neatly covered, as she looked at the subdued and clean grey of the walls.

"No, this is *not* Mrs. Parker's," said Mrs. Scot, with smiling exultation; "but it is Miss Ellis's and Miss Letsom's; and all the planning, and ordering, and chusing of my young master."

"Oh, what a noble spirit is here displayed!" cried Mary, and a sigh of pensive retrospection escaped her bosom. "I wish," continued she, after a pause, "I wish he had not done it."

"Don't wish nothing at all about it, my dear Miss Ellis," said Mrs. Scot; "I dare to say he found more pleasure in going to the shops, and in buying these things, and in scheming this agreeable surprise, than in all the balls he has been at since he went to Bath."

“I believe it indeed, my good Scot,” said Mary.

“And do but think, now, Miss Ellis, if that dear angel in heaven, my good mistress, was permitted to see him, do but think, if she would not have blest him.”

Mary once more gave way to her tears; and in the multitude of her overflowing sensations at this hour, she forgot not to offer up her fervent thanks to the Giver of all Good for the comforts, the pleasures, which were now within her reach.

The little establishment of our two friends was soon arranged: Scot was to be purveyor, housekeeper, and steward—Susan was to be the active attendant; within the house, Elwyn had left nothing for its possessors to do, but the garden; which was merely a piece of ground railed off from the park, and which the late tenant had sadly neglected, was a spot which, under the auspices of Mary, who delighted in the amusement, would soon be converted into a Paradise of sweets.

After an evening spent in the most unreserved and gratifying converse by our two friends, and in a minute detail of all the wonders of Bath by Susan, and the *miraculous transformation* of the park house by Mrs. Scot, the female household were convened together by Miss Letsom (who acted as the mistress, being several years older than Mary, and having assumed the character of her *chaperon*), and having joined in the last duties of the day, they retired, with thankful hearts and contented minds, to press their snow-white pillows. Miss Letsom and Mary had separate apartments; their two domestics were lodged together.

Mary awoke in the morning refreshed and happy; the birds were already straining their little throats in carols to the early spring. She opened the casement of her chamber; what a feel of freshness had the air, in comparison with that which she had just been respiring! and what a renovation was taking place in that diversified and interesting landscape which she had quitted when despoiled of all its verdure, stripped of its foliage, and suffering under the iron gripe of sterile winter! but “kind nature the embryo blossom had saved,” every bud seemed bursting forth anew, and gave fair promise of rich and abundant beauty.

The grateful heart of Mary was impatient to impart the sensations of pleasure which she had felt on entering her new residence, to Henry Elwyn, and to offer him her warm thanks for such a pleasing proof of his friendship and regard; but she considered that it would be proper that she should first visit Mrs. Piff, because he would naturally expect to hear something concerning her. After taking her breakfast, therefore, she immediately crossed the park towards the Hall.

“Aye, aye, much good may it do you,” said Mrs. Scot, as she watched her from the door; “I suppose she will see you, though I hear it isn’t many that she *will* see, or that she is *let* to see, I don’t know *which* of it is the right, for my part.”

Elwyn Hall was about a mile from the park house; the road to it was that which had been almost daily trodden by Mary, when she had attended her beloved protectress, and stolen poor Clara from *herself* by her infantile gambols, or when she had gone on errands of kindness and of mercy to the villagers who resided just beyond it. Every sound which reached her ears was natural to them, and was associated with many tender recollections on her memory; the cawing of the rooks, as they were assembling in black troops, and busily engaged, as it appeared, in consultations concerning their intended habitations, was not uninteresting to her; affecting localities rushed upon her mind, and almost subdued her; her departed friend had once been a severe sufferer at this season of the year, and her youthful heart had then felt its prescient warnings of the event which at length took place. As she approached near to the Hall, she became perplexed and embarrassed at the idea of encountering Mr. Piff; how could she reconcile herself to the address of familiarity from the man whom she had been accustomed to see behind

her chair?—and how could she receive it with coolness, when she recollected that Henry Elwyn's mother had chosen him for her husband? The hall-door was open; Mary's gentle rap was answered by a dirty girl, whose pretty face did not compensate for her slatternly appearance: to Mary's inquiry of whether Mrs. Piff was at home? she was answered—"Oh yes, she *be* at home;" and the way was led to the breakfast-parlour, where Mr. Piff was sitting by the fire; his person, never very handsome, was not improved since Mary had last seen it; and his unbuttoned knees, his tumbled hair, his coloured handkerchief carelessly wrapped, but not tied, round his throat, did not add to the beauty of his contour; he started with some surprise on seeing Mary, and said—"Oh, 'tis *you*, is it, Miss? how do you do? I hope I sees you well?"

"Pretty well, I thank you;" said she; "how is Mrs. Piff?"

"Oh, Miss, she is mighty well and bonny; I thought as how you must have met her in the hall, for she's but just gone out of the room. I'll ring the bell," pulling it; "though, now I think *on't*, I may as well give her a call myself," and he went out of the room, calling all the way "my dear, my *missess*, my Mrs. Piff, here's somebody come."

Mrs. Piff did not immediately attend the summons, however, and Mary had an opportunity of looking round the room, and of observing evident marks of inattention and slovenliness: a dirty bespattered pair of Mr. Piff's boots lay in one corner; pipes and tobacco, and a jug, were placed on one of the tables, which still retained the marks of glasses and spilled liquor, which had been left there overnight; several panes of the glass in the windows were broken; the grate, which had used to *shine* under the directing attentions of Mrs. Scot, now appeared to be bronzed; the carpet was dirty and littered; the chairs were scattered confusedly about. At length Mrs. Piff made her appearance, tying on her apron, pulling in her cap at the ears, and smoothing her handkerchief—"Well," said she, "you have somehow caught me in a fine mess, a sad pickle indeed; and so, how do you do, Miss Mary? Look, my dear," said she to Mr. Piff, who followed her into the room, "what sad disorder every thing is in, very so indeed; can't you just put back the chairs a bit, Mr. Piff, and settle things a little to rights? it is good to be doing, isn't it, Miss Mary? you remember I always used to keep myself employed; the fire is nearly out, not that I know it is cold, but Mr. Piff was rather chilly this morning," and she began to stir the fire, and to sweep up the hearth.

Piff seemed to loiter about, as if he did not mean to leave the ladies to themselves.

"I am come to stay in this neighbourhood again," said Mary.

"Are you so indeed, Miss Mary? where are you come to then?"

"Didn't I tell you, my dear, that Miss Ellis, and tother *Miss*, was a-coming to the Park house along here? but you are so *deaf*."

"Oh, very so indeed, Mr. Piff," answered his lady.—"Well, Miss Mary, I am glad to see you, very glad indeed, and I hope you'll come often; I hope you'll come to see me, if only for old acquaintance-sake, you know."

"I hope you will come and see me," said Mary.

"Mrs. Piff, *she* goes out very little indeed," said her husband; "she likes best to stay at home, don't you, my dear *missess*? and perhaps when folks be a little *advanced*, a little *onward*, or so, you understand me, Miss, why perhaps so best; but Mrs. Piff is very well, and very hearty, and as brisk as a bee, ben't you, my dear?"

"Oh, very much so indeed, sir," returned his wife.

"I hope you are well off in servants?" said Mary, "and that you have got those who are attentive and diligent?"

“Why, have you *heard* any thing?” asked Mrs. Piff, with quickness; but starting, and seeming to recollect herself, she cast a frightened sort of look towards her husband, and said—“Oh, yes indeed, very much so, very much so indeed.”

“If they were *not*,” said Mr. Piff, in no very gentle tone, “I should *soon* send them a-going.”

“Oh yes, that’s what you would, my dear,” said his lady; “but Nanny *is* a very attentive decent girl, isn’t she, Mr. Piff?”

“Yes, yes, for aught I knows” returned he.

“And so Mr. Henry is still in Bath, I suppose, and his lady,” said Mrs. Piff; “not a single line have I had from my son; well, just as he chuses; I bear him no ill-will, none in the world.”

“You go on with your favourite employment, I suppose?” inquired Mary, willing to change the subject.

“A little, Miss Mary, a little.”

“A good deal, I think,” said Piff, “for I’m sure I often sees you at it.”

“Oh yes, often at it, often at it indeed,” said she.

Mary saw that Mr. Piff would not give her an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Piff but in his presence, and that he would scarcely suffer his wife to answer any question which she asked her; so, promising to call often, she rose to take her leave.

Mrs. Piff followed her to the door, and her husband stepping before her to open it, she seized the hand of Mary, and gave it a sudden and emphatic pressure; startled at the action, Mary looked in her face, and thought she saw her eyes filling with tears; but Mr. Piff turned round at the moment, and she said—“My love to Mr. Henry when you write; tell him I am very happy, very much so indeed; say that Mr. Piff makes a most excellent husband, very much so, don’t you, Mr. Piff?”

“I *tries* at it,” said he.

“I am glad to see you well,” said Mary. “Mr. Piff, good morning to you.”

As the heavy door closed on its creaking hinges, and its reverberating echoes resounded through the spacious old mansion, Mary could not help thinking that she had given up a helpless prisoner to the controul of a harsh and savage keeper; she found, on her return home, that this was the general opinion. Mrs. Elwyn’s social disposition was well known, but she had resisted all the overtures which had been made to her by the second-hand gentry, and had never been visible when they had called: those who knew Mrs. Piff were well aware that this did not proceed from any fastidiousness of taste, or from any humiliating feelings with respect to the connexion she had formed, for her sensibilities were not so acute; and hence her behaviour was referred to the *will* of her lord and master, who was said to be fond of enjoying the society of his own companions; and whether at the village ale-house, or at Elwyn Hall, the same party always met, and the same amusements of *smoaking*, drinking, and playing at All-Fours, consumed the live-long night.

The niggardliness too of this quondam footman was a universal topic with the old servants, who had quitted the family on his assumption of dignity, and who were naturally curious in making inquiries concerning his proceedings; the drudge of a girl who had been seen by Mary, and another, who was usually drest smarter than her mistress, and suspected to be the favourite of her master (as she was one of his procuring), these, and a scout of a boy, with unshod heels, and ragged pole, who ran on errands, and worked in the garden, made up the establishment at Elwyn Hall.

This was a subject on which Mary could not enlarge in her letter to Elwyn, but she did not endeavour to palliate; and spite of herself, and notwithstanding her natural benevolence led her to pity the unfortunate Mrs. Piff, it was easy to perceive that her regrets were excited at seeing the once-respectable, the still-venerable Elwyn Hall, disgraced by having such an occupier as Mr. Piff; with these feelings were naturally blended the expressions of sacred satisfaction which had arisen in her full heart, at receiving those simple proofs of regard from the poor neighbours of the Hall, which evinced that former kindnesses were still remembered. Her letter concluded with the most cordial and unaffected expressions of gratitude and thankfulness for his generous and attentive friendship; and she offered up her warmest wishes for his happiness, and also for that of Mrs. Elwyn.

Mr. Munden soon stumped over to call upon the two ladies—"Well," said he, taking Mary's hand, and looking round the room, "and how long will this last? a fine hoity-toity scheme of love in a maze, of groves, and birds, and fields, and streams—two shepherdesses, without sheep or shepherds; well, well, and so you mean to stay, I suppose, till *Mr. Suitable* appears?"

Mary blushed, for at the moment Fitzallan's parting words came across her mind; she always endeavoured to repel these suggestions of "busy meddling memory," but she had found them very officious since she quitted Bath: without giving way to any visionary or romantic ideas, she thought she might reasonably and safely hope to see Fitzallan again; and she felt that in such a meeting she should experience no common satisfaction.

"Well, I don't know what you are all at, or what mother Ripley was at, for my part, that she did not get you a husband in Bath," said Munden, "but I believe the devil has got possession of every body. As to that poor fool yonder, at the Hall, she is boxed up safe enough, I believe; and though she looks as miserable and as lean as a half-starved cat already, she is not suffered to cry mew; the gardens, the house, all of it is going to ruin; I have had two or three *tustles* already with Tim Piff; he can't afford to keep it in order, and so forth—and the *repairs* must come out of Elwyn's purse, I suppose; and, by what I hear, timber marked—leases granted—shake-about work, shake-about work, I fear," holding up his hand, and imitating the shake of a dice-box. "Well, well, the world is turned topsy-turvy—I've long thought so, and said so, and I suppose it never will get into the old way again; but nobody listens to me—I only prate to the winds, and to two pert minxes who are just ready to burst out a-laughing in my face."

Miss Letsom soon fell in with the odd humour of Mr. Munden, and his friendly visits became very chearful breaks on the retirement of the friends; but he was not their only guest; drawn by curiosity, the Lumleys, Mrs. Buxton, and others of the villagers, who had been used to assemble at Mrs. Piff's teatable, came to peep about the cottage, and to peer about the cottagers; while several families in a superior station, who had kept aloof from Elwyn Hall since the death of the elegant Clara, and who had been cautious of visiting the new family at Salcombe Lodge, were not tardy in showing attention to two young persons, whose prudent conduct, in peculiar and trying situations, had not been untold or unexplained by their rough but zealous champion, Mr. Munden.

Mary Ellis had a taste for society; her temper was naturally chearful; and though she did not shine in large parties, yet, in a small circle, the ingenuousness of her sentiments, and the *naivette* in which she delivered them, rendered her very interesting and pleasing; while the more lively and brilliant imagination of Miss Letsom, no longer shackled by a fear of discovering itself, or by painful feelings of humiliation, shone forth with redoubled lustre, like the sun after a transient cloud; if a sudden turn of thought struck her fancy, she might now hazard it, without being deemed censorious, sarcastic, or impertinent—a weight seemed removed from her mind,

all care from her heart; her person improved in proportion with her spirits, and her eyes, which had hitherto looked sunken and depressed, were now by turns dancing with arch vivacity, or filling with thankful sensibility; and frequently, with romantic enthusiasm, she would exclaim—“Oh, Liberty, dear Liberty, how do I prize thee!—the captive is now free!—unshackled is my mind, and light as air seem all the movements of my soul!” and then, with all the playfulness of fancy, which seemed to emit itself the more frequently from having been so long repressed, she would seize the hand of Mary, and sing “together let us range the fields.” In these moments of her almost *transported* happiness, as Mary’s eyes were fixed on her once suffering, but *now* exhilarated countenance, she would mentally, *piously* hope, that the errors of Mrs. Halifax might be cancelled, by the overflowing happiness which her deathbed restitution had bestowed on her niece.

As we shrewdly suspect that we have already worn our readers’ patience threadbare by our prolix *narrations of nothing*, we will not unnecessarily tamper with it, but desire them to fancy the beautiful and fresh months of spring stealing away at the Park house in the manner we have described, “blessing and blest.” *Some* alloys there must always be to human happiness; of this Mary Ellis had been fully aware, since her mind first opened to perception; the interest which she still took in the welfare of her early friend and guardian was one of these: public report did not give a very flattering picture of his domestic comforts; and Simpson, the steward, with prophetic shakes of the head, had often insinuated that his master was going on too fast—while Mr. Munden, who was rather more direct in his communications, had confirmed the insinuation by an oath, which we will not attempt to palliate or excuse, although it proceeded from the excessive interest which he had ever taken in the imprudent Henry.

Mary seldom saw Mrs. Piff, never but in the presence of her husband; there, of course, her conversations were nothing more than *questions*, which were answered by simple affirmatives or negatives. She had several times called, and not been admitted; she had been told that Mrs. Piff was not at home, though she knew that she never went abroad; and it was confidently reported that her husband grudged her even the necessaries of life, and that he was scraping up every thing together, in order to make a purse for himself, on which to revel after her decease. The coach-horses he had sold, on pretence of Mrs. Piff’s being afraid to be drawn by them; and no interference seemed likely to be of any avail, as, intimidated and cowed by him, Mrs. Piff always *said* she was “very happy, very so indeed,” and Mr. Piff made her “a most charming husband;” while at the same time her fearful glance towards him, and the malicious scowl of his surly brow, gave the lie to her words.

We will not say but that sometimes a little very *natural* regret stole over the placid countenance of Mary, when she recollected that this beautiful season of enchantment had been passed by Fitzallan in attending the sickbed of his father, for she could not imagine that the sufferings of sir John Fitzallan had experienced any material alleviation; at least the *happy* period which his son had so sanguinely anticipated had not yet arrived—perhaps indeed it never might—perhaps Fitzallan had forgotten her!—an unbidden sigh would force itself, to be stifled ere it was breathed; and, calling off her thoughts, she would immediately engage in some active pursuit.

## CHAP. VII.

Connubial love, parental joy,  
No sympathies like these his soul employ.

PENROSE.

JUNE, with its roses, was scarcely expired; Mr. Piff had been unusually urgent with the steward to be paid the quarterly allowance of his lady, in conjunction with Mr. Munden (who made a point of giving Timothy some *rough wipes*, and who insisted on having it paid into Mrs. Piff's hand, and who reminded her husband of the gratitude which was due to her, who thus enabled him to *live in clover*). This was done; three or four days elapsed, and it was observed that not a creature had been seen stirring at the Hall. Mr. Simpson at length went to see if any thing was the matter; he found the doors and windows closed; in vain he knocked and rang; he could not gain admittance, but he discovered a key lying on the step at the door; a letter was tied to it; it was directed to him; he opened it, and read as follows:—

“MR. STEWARD,

“You may tell my son, Mr. Henry Elwyn, that I return him many thanks for his kindness, but that I find the Hall much too large and too cumbersome for me and Mr. Piff, so we give up the key and possession to him; we are going to some little convenient bit of a place near London; and when we have settled ourselves, you shall hear again from me, as I beg you will be punctual and exact in sending me my quarterly payment: so, with compliments to all friends, I remain your humble servant,

“ELLEN PIFF.”

Mr. Simpson immediately took the key and the letter to Mr. Munden; and Mr. Munden proceeded to Mary; dancing into the room, and holding up the key, he cried—“Here's for you—here, see what I have got; *this* key may save our friend Harry from ruin; oh, this is a devilish lucky hit.”

Mary was some time in comprehending the nature of his joy, and when she did, she had nearly made him angry by the tears which she shed in commiseration of Mrs. Piff—“Oh, sir,” said she, “look, only look! this is every syllable dictated by that low wretch, although he has made her write it.”

“Well, and don't I know that?” answered Mr. Munden; “but why should you take on so? the old simpleton is rightly served—she had one husband as easy as an old shoe, and he did not content her; and *now* she has got one that pinches; now she knows the difference between a gentleman and his servant.”

“But can nothing be done, sir, to extricate her from this dreadful fate?” cried Mary.

“Stop a little bit, and don't be in a hurry,” said Munden; “there is no finding her *now*, but by-and-by, when the letter comes from my gentleman for the next quarter's remittance, why *then* may be we shall contrive to be even with him.”

“But three months!” cried Mary, clasping her hands together, “three months of agony! poor creature, she may be killed by inches before that time.”

“No, no, don’t you fear that; she’s pretty tough,” replied Munden; “and besides, you know it is master Timmy’s own interest to keep her alive as long as he can.—But how I am wasting time in answering such a foolish chit as you! why, I ought to be writing Harry Elwyn; if he does not come back to his own house again now, I’ll give him up—yes, devil take me if I don’t give him up for ever and for aye; now he has a fair opening; I hear he’s only at Cheltenham, and I’ll send off an express to him within half-an-hour: *do* you wish me good luck, child alive?” said he, pinching her cheek.

“I *wish*,” said Mary, “but *fear*. Mrs. Elwyn hates the country.”

“And I hate *her*,” said Munden; “I always did, and always shall; she is a vain, conceited, envious toad.”

“Oh, what vile names!” cried Miss Letsom; “out, out upon you for a naughty man.”

“And out and out I *am*,” said he; “and when you see me *next*, you shall have good news, or my name’s not Humphrey Munden.”

When the Bath season was expiring, lady Sawbridge went to London; thither Laretta also wanted to go; but Elwyn exerted the authority of a husband in putting a decided negative on the proposition; and a consent could not be extorted even by the tears which flowed from the bright eyes of Laretta, even though she told him she believed he wished to *kill* her, that he might marry his favourite Mary Ellis.

Such a speech was calculated to excite the contempt of Elwyn, but not to bend him to her wishes; and Laretta found that neither sorrow nor sullenness could procure a journey to London; he had determined on never taking Laretta to any place where she was likely to meet her mother, till general Halifax had made her his wife; the general perhaps might let some *decent* time elapse after the death of one wife before he took another, but in this case a respect to public decorum would be more honoured in the breach than the observance, for in his intimacy with lady Laretta Montgomery, he had long seemed to set public opinion at defiance.

It was not, however, Elwyn’s design, any more than Laretta’s wish, to remain in Bath; the society to which he might now be said in some sort to have attached himself were flying off, and some of them, with well-fledged wings, to Cheltenham; thither he followed them, and there plunged with greater avidity than before into the infatuating vice of play; but he could not fly from himself—his imprudence daily haunted him—reflection would force its way—and even the prospect of paternal pleasure had lost its wonted effect on his jaundiced spirit, for he felt that his excesses were injuring his future offspring; he felt that his affection for Laretta was weakened, and that the delight with which he had once anticipated the reception of an infant resemblance of her lovely self, had now sunk into something nearly allied to cold distaste; he saw that Laretta’s heart was incapable of a firm or a lasting attachment; he now discovered, now when it was too late, now, when it made him almost frantic to think of it, that she subsisted only on flattery and admiration—that she was selfish, wayward, even childish—that she was jealous of any other person who received the smallest mark of attention, not from him alone, but from any person who surrounded her. The ridiculous and almost idiot-like flummery of Narcissus Finlater had been greedily swallowed by her; she had seemed always to be pleased in his society; nay, Elwyn had often thought that she regarded him with partiality; while her taste for extravagant dress and costly ornaments grew every day to a more inordinate extent; and when Elwyn had represented to her the utter impossibility and imprudence of satisfying all her unreasonable demands, she had scolded or pouted, and perhaps renewed the attack in another form, by telling Narcissus Finlater, in his hearing, how cross and how cruel Mr. Elwyn had behaved to her: such an unusual, such a strange application had its effect—though against his better judgement, he had complied with her

wishes, though most ungraciously, and his breast swelling with passion, *because* he could not bear to be the object of the *would-be* sarcasms of a fool. Laretta's forced separation from her mother would have demanded all the considerate sympathy of Elwyn's generous disposition, could he have believed that she felt a moment of serious uneasiness from it; he plainly perceived that it was only husbanded in her mind, in order to produce as an instance of his harshness, when she had a mind to quarrel with him.—“Oh, Mary, Mary,” would he say, clasping his hands together, and then striking them on his forehead with emphatic violence, “oh, Mary, and have I for *this* thrown away the rich gem of thy affections!” Such an apostrophe was followed by something little short of madness; and the gay, the handsome, the *self-approving* Harry Elwyn, would sometimes cast himself to the ground, and give way to all the violence of his uncontrolled passion.

Finlater was the *shade* of his sister, lady Sawbridge; he had a very small fortune, and a profession by which he might improve it was beyond the power of his application, it might be said capacity; on his handsome face depended his chance of making a fortune; and some ladies had thought that he had already over-stood his market (notwithstanding that he had worn *stays* the last six months to suppress his redundancy of flesh, for it had been whispered that what Mr. Finlater had *gained* in that point, he had *lost* in beauty; yet he still held out, and had refused to capitulate to a ten, a fifteen, or a twenty thousand pounder, saying that he valued his *person* and *attractions* at thirty; and till he could gain it, he preferred ranging in happy liberty, and paying attention to the *married women*, whom he found quite as fascinating, and much more easy of access than the single. When lady Sawbridge left Bath for London, the *tender* and *lovely* Narcissus took his sentimental adieu of Laretta; and though Elwyn wondered at himself, he felt relieved and *more* easy when he was gone—“And is it possible,” thought he, “that a butterfly—a moth—a drone, can annoy Harry Elwyn?”

However, Finlater's having taken the road to the metropolis was an additional reason for Elwyn's going to Cheltenham; and he had been passing the last six weeks there, plunging every night yet deeper into the vortex of gaming, and awaking every day more eager to return to it again, to avoid the oppressive weight of *self-reflection*. Sick at heart, and almost overwhelmed by his acute and disapproving feelings, Elwyn was just wishing to tear himself from the contagious atmosphere he now enhaled, and to break off at once from his associates, when Mr. Munden's letter, which was couched in all the warmth and energy of blunt sincerity, was put into his hands. At the idea of Piff's brutal tyranny over his mother, he was almost roused to violence; but when he recollected that he could not revenge her wrongs by a horse-whipping (which, had Mr. Piff been in his presence that moment, he would certainly have inflicted with the utmost of his manual exertion), and that the steps of the fugitives were untraced, he sat down vexed and disappointed; any change offered a prospect of relief; and he had now a feasible pretext for leaving Cheltenham; so, writing a few lines to Mr. Munden, desiring him to give orders to Simpson to prepare the Hall for his reception, and to recall as many of the old servants as were still disengaged, he dispatched it, and with very little preface acquainted Laretta with his determination. Tears and pouting produced no alteration in it—“Once more, my dear Mrs. Elwyn,” said he, “I talk to you in the language of reason; my affairs urgently require my presence at the Hall, and my fortune cannot support the constant expences we are incurring.”

“Very few have been incurred on *my* account,” said Laretta; “but if *men* will frequent the *gaming-table*, and fit up *cottages ornée* for *favourite ladies*, it is not to be expected that *any* fortune can support it: and now that I suppose your *Miss Mary* wants you to come down to see her, now that she has got sick of solitude, your *affairs* require your presence;—but I am not to be

so imposed upon, nor will the world blame me for refusing to go where I shall see my rival set up just under my nose."

"Lauretta," said Elwyn, sternly, "I am as *well* convinced that you do not believe *one* syllable that you have been saying, as if I could look into your heart; you know that Mary Ellis is pure, is virtuous as an angel—you *must* know that I have been scrupulously guarded in my conduct towards her; but was she not left to my care?—do I not, ought I not to consider the trust as sacred?—should I be blamed for adding in a trifling instance to her comforts, and those of her present deserving companion? And, in fact, I have merely been benefiting myself; the park house is, you know, my own property, and the little alterations I have made in it will render it more eligible for another tenant. Mary Ellis is not likely to continue there long; the death of sir John Fitzallan, which I have this morning seen in the papers, will enable his deserving son to make a proffer of his hand to the amiable object of his regard. Would to God," continued he, clasping his hands, "would to God that I had no other subject of self-accusation!—would to God that *all* my extravagancies could be referred to the park cottage! then should I be happy."

"Lady Fitzallan?" said Lauretta, "impossible! he never *can*, he never *will* make her his wife—he *dares* not."

"*Dares* not, Lauretta?"

"*Dares* not! what, defy the censures, the opprobrium of the world, and raise the illegitimate child of Clara Elwyn to a *title*, whom *she* palmed upon her foolish dotard of a husband for an orphan foundling?"

"Hold! hold that tongue!" cried Elwyn, with frantic vehemence, putting his hand before her mouth, "nor let me suspect that with an *angel's* face you bear the *malice* of a fiend; oh, what base — what cruel — what slanderous tongue dared whisper so infamous a suggestion? Lauretta," and he seized her hand with an eagerness which almost made her tremble, "give me the author of that base, that hellish falsehood, or I will *swear* it is yourself!"

"Oh, I heard it from the time I first went to Salcombe Lodge," said Lauretta; "it is generally believed, I fancy."

"*Fancy* is not *certainty*, madam," said Elwyn; "neither will *general* information be a satisfactory answer to my question: be so good as to be *particular*, and name your informant."

"Miss Lawson, if you *must* have it," said Lauretta.

"I thought as much; oh! weak and feeble agent of the *wicked one*, thou art below my anger!"

"She is out of the reach of it, however," said Lauretta, resuming her courage, and with it her wish of teasing; "*she* is in London, with *dear* lady Sawbridge, with charming Narcissus Finlater, and *she* sees my own beautiful sweet *good* mama, who never scolded nor contradicted me in all her life, but used to call me the light of her eyes, and the joy of her heart, she did; and you—you are a naughty, and a cruel, and a barbarous man, you are—and you want to kill me, you do, that you may be beforehands with your friend Fitzallan, and marry Mary Ellis yourself; but I'll live, if it be only to spite you—and I'll go to the Hall, if it be only to spite you and that good-for-nothing girl—and I'll, yes, I will, I'll do all I can to teaze and to torment every body, for you use me like a brute, you do;" and the loud and blubbing passion of the *sweet* Lauretta, whose countenance once shone in sunny smiles, the harsh and discordant tones of that harmonious voice, which had once thrilled through his soul with rapture, now drove the miserable husband from her sight.

The intelligence, which Mr. Munden lost no time in communicating at the park cottage, gave much pleasure to Mary; *she* did not fear the proximity of Lauretta; she was conscious of

never having given her the least *just* cause of offence; and if she persisted in her rude behaviour, it would not mortify Mary, for she had never derived any pleasure in her conversation; and if she were to see daily instances of her total unfitness for domestic enjoyment, her regret must be forcibly excited, for she must deeply lament the unfortunate lot of Henry Elwyn.

Mary had always satisfaction in contributing, though in the slightest way, to the accommodation of others, and she let Mrs. Scot go immediately to the Hall, in order to make arrangements for the reception of the family, to put the new domestics in their departments, and to welcome those of the former establishment who returned to their stations; amongst these was the faithful old butler, who declared that he would always stand by the sideboard of his dear master Harry while his legs would support him there. Mrs. Scot had previously declared that if Mrs. Elwyn would go down of her bended knees to *her*, she would never leave her dear Miss Mary, the favourite of her noble, good, and *real* lady of a mistress. These preparations gave a little bustle and interest to the inhabitants of the cottage; and the almost hourly tales of confusion, dirt, squandering, and *confounding*, which were brought by Mrs. Scot—and of plate, linen, and valuables, which were missing at the Hall—and the constant visits of Mr. Munden, who was always stumping backwards and forwards to see that there were “no idle hands,” and that every body “kept moving,” pretty well engrossed the time of our heroine.

By a singular coincidence, the same evening that Mr. and Mrs. Elwyn arrived at the Hall, general Halifax and a splendid retinue reached Salcombe Lodge. The bells struck out to welcome the lord of the manor; but the liberal *douceurs* which were sent to the ringers from the Lodge, and the white favours worn by the postillions, soon set the merry chimes to quickened measures, and proclaimed to the whole neighbourhood that a new lady was brought to the Lodge.

Miss Letsom was much entertained with the idea of writing a burlesque epithalamium on lady Lauretta’s marriage, merely for the amusement of Mary; and without acquainting her with her mischievous intention, she assumed a serious look; and telling her she must retire to woo the muse in some pensive stanzas to suit the solemn tone of her present meditations, she desired not to be interrupted.

Mary left the poetizing lady in the upper room, and descended to their little parlour; at a large casement window at one end of it, she sat down, and contemplated “silent sober evening” as it stole over the landscape; she could here just catch a glimpse of the Hall, and the lights in the windows, which she had rarely seen there of late, inspired at once cheerful and pleasant ideas. Mrs. Scot had gone there to see that every thing was in *order*, and Susan had accompanied her: a quick step approached the front of the cottage; the next moment a gentle rap was heard at the door.

## CHAP. VIII.

Modest flowers adorn  
The spring, and in the spring of life no grace  
So sweet as modesty. MRS. WEST.

MARY rose, and in the indistinct light, she saw a gentleman, and not doubting but that it was Elwyn, she caught his hand, saying—"This is indeed very good of you to come so soon." But the next instant, she would have retreated, only that her hand was firmly held, was pressed to the heart and to the lips of Fitzallan; confused, and scarcely knowing what she said—"Is it you, Mr. Fitzallan?" asked Mary; "I did not know—I did not think—indeed, I did not expect to see you."

"But tell me that you are not displeased at the intrusion," said Fitzallan; "tell me you are not angry—tell me—oh, Mary, tell me, though unexpected, I am not unwelcome."

"I will ring for lights," said Mary, with some embarrassment; but recollecting that there was no one to bring them, she sat down.

"We want none," said Fitzallan; "only give me *light* upon this one interesting subject—only say that you are glad to see me."

"To be sure I am," said the timid girl; "but I have a friend up stairs—you remember Miss Letsom?"

"I know, I know it all," said Fitzallan impatiently; "but my *present* visit is to Mary Ellis, to *her* alone. Say you will hear me with attention," said he, "that you will treat me with that ingenuousness and candour, for which I have frequently admired you?"

"Oh," thought Mary, "this fearful preface! to what does it lead?"

She began to rejoice that there *were* no candles; and though the light was now merely the faint gleam of twilight, yet she averted her head when Fitzallan drew his chair close to hers, and again took her hand—"On my last visit to this place," said he, "I was not insensible to your many artless attractions, and I confess to you, that I thought it very likely that my friend Henry would acknowledge their power, and that Lauretta Montgomery would wear the willow; but it seems *fate*, or the inauspicious star which ruled at Elwyn's birth, forbade it: this idea, however, prevented my courting your society, and trying to dissipate your timid reserve; and I left the Hall, with fervent wishes for your happiness. When I again met you in Bath, I met you in happier, in brighter circumstances; every charm was improved, every grace was heightened; and I had reason to believe—I *still* have reason to believe—I know—I am *sure*, that your judgment, your understanding, and your strength of mind, are far above the level of ordinary characters. I no longer resisted the magnetic influence of your conversation; you soon admitted me to a friendly and confidential intimacy; and the preference which I had from the first felt in your favour was confirmed into an ardent and *lasting* attachment—Start not, dearest Mary, do not thus coldly withdraw your hand; suffer me to retain it *now*—and for ever."

Trembling and confused, poor Mary hung down her head; that Fitzallan did not misconstrue her silence, might be guessed, by the animated manner with which he resumed the subject—he ran through a brief detail of his recent affliction on the death of his father: and then, in all the pleading powerful oratory of real affection, he besought the astonished Mary to share his fortune, his title, and to accept his hand; he waited for her answer—but for some moments he felt only the warm tears of modest sensibility which fell on his hand—"How am I to interpret

those tears, oh, dearest, amiable Mary—tell me how I am to interpret them—have I then distressed you?”

“Yes,” said Mary, assuming some resolution, “yes, noble Fitzallan, you *have* distressed me by your overpowering generosity; oh! sir, do you reflect *who* Mary Ellis is?—do you consider the obscurity of her birth, her low origin, the mean occupation of her parents?”

“They were honest—they were *virtuous*,” said Fitzallan, in a manly tone; “if these—if these, Mary, are *all* your objections——”

“Oh,” said Mary, “how can I ever believe it possible!—when such ideas, such *extravagant* ideas, have forced themselves upon my mind, how have I struggled to repel them!”

“And *have* they forced themselves upon your mind?” asked the transported Fitzallan; “sweet child of ingenuousness and virtue, say those blessed halcyon words again.”

“What have I said?” asked Mary, hastily rising, and endeavouring to leave the room; her enraptured lover would not let her go; and Mary at length confessed that she had taken more pains to drive his image from her mind, than she should use to *reinstate* it, with the candour which always marked her words; and with an ingenuousness which showed her partial confidence in her hearer, she confessed that to those genuine principles of *humility*, which had been firmly rooted in her breast by her beloved protectress, she was indebted for not having become the victim of a hopeless passion—“I loved my youthful companion, Harry Belford,” said she, “with fond affection; I still retain the warmest interest in his happiness; but if I had cherished hopes which were incompatible with my situation in society, if I had given way to ambitious views, whither might they have led me? I restrained them—I smothered them in the bud; and if I dared not lift my humble eyes towards Henry Elwyn, could I have suspected—could I have imagined, that *his* friend——”

Fitzallan’s grateful emotions prevented Mary from proceeding; and when at length Susan returned and brought the candles, his delighted eyes sought those of the retiring Mary, as if once more he would have read in *them* the sweet confirmation of his dearest hopes.

Susan recognised Fitzallan, and instantly ran up to Miss Letsom, to tell her who was below, and to acquaint her with the news which she had just heard at the Hall, of his having lost his father, and being just come into a fine title and fortune.

Miss Letsom had long suspected the *event* of Fitzallan’s attentions to her blooming friend whilst at Bath, but Mary would never suffer her to breathe a hint on the subject, so cautious was this vigilant guardian of her own heart of admitting sentiments which might be inimical to its peace—“The burlesque epithalamium may now be converted into a downright earnest one,” thought Miss Letsom, “and much freer will flow the pen on such a subject—more pleasing will be the theme—more propitious my muse, for friendship, honest friendship will inspire the lay.” She did not think fit to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*; and when at length Fitzallan departed, and Mary came to seek her, she asked no questions; but Mary’s tell-tale eyes revealed the trembling story; and while she hid them on the bosom of her friend, she gently, yet with some archness, whispered—“Fitzallan has been teaching me all that I have been trying to *forget* for the last three months.”

“And has he found it a *difficult* task, and are you a *dull* scholar?” asked her mischievous hearer; “my prophetic spirit,” continued she, “has long foreseen this day, and my delighted heart rejoices in the prospect of my Mary’s happiness.”

“Happiness! happiness!” repeated Mary; “but *this*, this such a strange reverse, such an elevation of fortune—can I ever know myself again? Oh, my dear, lost Mrs. Elwyn, if it be given

to thy pure spirit to witness the felicity of thy child, hover over her, watch her, guard her, keep her from forgetting what *she was*, and what she might have been, had *you* not saved her.”

At sir Frederic Fitzallan’s return to the Hall, his exhilarated countenance proved to the penetrating eyes of Elwyn that his visit had not been in vain; for a few moments he hesitated ere he could resolve to extend his hand in cordial congratulation; but though his spirits were agitated and harassed, though his mind was not in tone, yet the generous disposition of Harry Elwyn would discover itself—why should he envy his friend a blessing which was not within his own reach? he hastily turned towards Fitzallan, and the firm grasp of his hand spoke volumes, though his tongue was silent.

Lauretta was in the room; she had not been officially informed, though perhaps she guessed, that Fitzallan had joined Elwyn at Cheltenham, and accompanied him to the Hall, merely to facilitate a meeting with Mary Ellis. She had pouted and frowned during the journey; but on hearing that general Halifax was just arrived at Salcombe Lodge with his bridal retinue, her spirits suddenly rose; she guessed that Elwyn’s would experience the reverse, and that he would not have brought her into the country, had he known that her mother would so soon have been her neighbour; but here she was mistaken; as the wife of general Halifax, Elwyn did not wish to debar her from an occasional intercourse with lady Lauretta; and when she mentioned her intention of going to the Lodge the following morning, instead of expressing disapprobation, which she had expected, he said he would accompany her.

A letter, which sir Frederic Fitzallan had written to Elwyn at Cheltenham, and which had preceded the writer by one day, we shall copy for our reader’s perusal in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAP. IX

On the sea—beat rock,  
Remov'd from ev'ry foam and sound of man,  
In proud communion with the fitful winds,  
Which speak, with many tongues, the fancied words  
Of those who long in silent dust have slept.

*Family Legend, JOANNA BAILLIE.*

“THE papers have ere this informed you, dear Elwyn, that I have lost my father; you have frequently heard me mention him with filial affection and respect, and as I believe you do not suspect me of that insincerity which expresses more than it feels, you will believe me when I tell you that I have been deeply affected; but at the same time, my consolations have been great; the knowledge that the poor invalid is at length released from the arduous and painful conflict which had long subsisted between life and suffering, his perfect resignation to the Divine Will, and a certain soothing something at my breast, which tells me I have done my duty—*these* are the palliatives which I have extracted from that bitter pill in human destiny, the loss of a father.

“I will not detain you on this subject, for *you* have experienced my sensations; to a brighter side of the picture I must now lead you—fancy me, dear Harry, writing from a room which overlooks the Steine, at Brighton; though the lucid waves are now calm and bright as vernal morn, yet I can still revert to the time when they rolled in tempestuous billows, when they were carried up almost to the heavens, and when they returned again to overwhelm, by their tremendous violence, an happy, an honest, and an humble pair, who trusted to the deceitful flattering promises of old Ocean's tide, and who ventured once too often on its treacherous bosom; does not the tale recall some affecting associations of early memory to your mind?—and do you not at once perceive the benignant form of Clara Elwyn starting forth as an angel of Mercy, to succour and to save?—yes, yes, you know it all; and ere this you have guessed that this interesting subject impelled me here.

“I think I once told you, that a man would have nothing to fear in uniting himself to such a woman as Mary Ellis—but what say you

“To the world's dread laugh,  
Which scarce the firm philosopher can scorn?”

I am no philosopher, Elwyn; but as to marrying an orphan, or a foundling, I could have been *firm* enough in resisting all its sneers and laughs; but an insinuation of the most infamous kind had been breathed into my ear, with all the *apparent* kindness of friendly caution; and though I could not be imposed on, in fancying that I could be an object of *anxious interest* to a woman with whom I had scarce had any conversation, yet to investigate the truth of this wicked, this almost *blasphemous* aspersion, on the character of the sainted, yes, friend, *you* must have guessed the word, of the *sainted Clara*, was the ‘determined purpose of my soul,’ and ‘hither, and to that intent, I came;’ but while I resolved to dispel every shadow of doubt, I felt that it was a needless task which I had imposed upon myself; and I constantly, incessantly, repeated to myself the words which you once used in a never-to-be-forgotten conversation which we held, when I was

putting my disinterested regard for Elwyn to a proof, which I scarcely thought—but no matter, I will not be the trumpeter of my own fame—do you remember these words—‘She was educated by the first of women, and her conduct is the best commentary on the character of her protectress?’ yes, on the sands, on the Steine, in the streets of Brighton, as I wandered for three whole days, my inquiries without avail, my hopes, my spirits, would have sank, but for these magnetic words; and as I said them over and over, I would add—‘and if there be virtue, if there be *truth* in human nature, Clara Elwyn *knew*, she taught, she practised it.’

“But in the lapse of nearly eighteen years, what a total revolution takes place!

“Old times were past, old *faces* gone,  
A stranger fill’d ‘The Rose and Crown,”

for *that* was the sign of the little alehouse to which I directed my steps, and which, from description, I had guessed to be the birth-place of Mary Ellis: at length, when almost despairing of procuring any intelligence on the subject, it occurred to me, that by examining the parish records, I might discover who had been the parish overseers during that year, and that period of singular *destruction*, and as *singular* preservation: the examination was made, the discovery took place, and in a narrow and obscure street, I was directed to a home where, in a great armed chair, tortured by ‘gnawing gout,’ and bloated by intemperance, sat a man in the *sear*, but *not* the *yellow* leaf, for his carbuncled countenance and fiery nose proclaimed a hue more sanguine—‘Yes, yes, I remembers it well,’ said he; ‘’twas the year I was overseer, sir; very true; oh yes, yes, I remembers all about it; two cursed fools of woman were taken with the *romantics*, you see (plague take this cursed gout, it is tearing me to pieces), and so our parish got rid of two squalling brats that would have been chargeable, you see; well, well, ’tis a bad wind that blows nobody good, as the old saying has it; I remember it as though ’twere but yesterday; yes, yes, we got clear of ’em both, as I was saying afore; one of the fine ladies played me a rum trick, and was off, you see, with *her* booty before one could say Jack Robinson; however, nothing was ever heard of she nor the child to trouble the parish *arter*, you see; I take it as how she went by an *alias*, and didn’t very well know which name to give in; howsomdever, all’s well that ends well, as the saying is—they weren’t chargeable to the parish; but the other lady was quite genteel behaved, and very ready to tell where she lived, and all about it; I see’d her times after and before too; she was one madam Elwyn, out of Gloucestershire; but the other madam never came here no more, as I ever heard of.’—‘What kind of a lady was she?’ asked I, my curiosity excited.—‘Lord, sir, I’ll tell you where you may have a story about it, as long as my arm; old Moll Stevens, who nursed the children, and who staid by the cradle till they were taken by the ladies, is alive now; I do verily think as she must be upwards of four score, but she is mighty recollectful and long winded; Moll has got a little maintenance, I believe, and what with a little trifle of begging, and a little trifle from the parish, she contrives to make out, *snuff* and all.’

“Elwyn, you will begin to wonder at my patience and my memory; but untired is my patience, faithful is my memory, in this instance, and even in this vulgar recapitulation I find interest; but we will now change the scene to

“The sad historian of the pensive *main*,”

though wrinkled was her brow, yet it was not furrowed by old age—‘Do I remember the sweet babes indeed! oh, good lack! and do I remember their father and mother, and *his* father and mother belike; *remember* the poor brats, aye, and the good madam *Elwyn* too; and didn’t she

give me the gown I have *on*?" looking at her sleeve; 'no, no, not this one neither, but the one that's up in the box; and when she walked the streets here in Brighton, weren't the people ready to fall down on their knees and bless her? I hear she is *gone*,' wiping her eyes; 'somebody said as they saw it in the papers, and the tears which were as salt as the sea yonder which I shed for that tender-hearted Christian; but God his will be done!'—'You were here at the birth of the children?'—'To be sure I was; and if I was to live to the age of Methusalem himself, as is mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, I should know one of the dear bantlings again, meet her where I would.'—'Indeed!'—'Not she as Mrs. Elwyn did take to, sir, but she as was kidnapped away belike by that *sensical* lady; yes, she was the eldest of 'em. I shall never forget Kitty Ellis; Kitty was mighty sober and religious, and read the Bible she did, and the Testament too, for all she hadn't much learning or bringing up, poor soul, worse luck; but Kitty she had a willing heart—'Nurse Stevens,' said she, 'I *will* call the dear babies by scriptural names, and that shall be Martha, and this shall be Mary.'—'Then Martha be the eldest,' said I, 'for this came into the world first.'—'Then tie a scarlet thread about her arm,' said Kitty, 'that I may know my Martha from Mary,' says she.—'Oh, there's not much occasion for *that*,' says I to her again, 'been here be two marks on her arm, just in the middle between the shoulder and the elbow, as no time nor chance will ever put out of it.'—'Ah,' said Kitty, said she, 'what is it, dear nursy? is it any thing frightful?' said she again, in a hurry.—'Just as frightful as the two eyes of a whiting,' says I, in a joke-like, and a sort of a *jokelane* way; 'for here they are like two *white pearls*, just side by side, and they feel in the tender skin as round and as firm as two pease, they do; no, my dear baby,' and I gave it to its mother, and she kissed the place twice, 'you'll want no more markings, nor scarlet threads, for thou'lt carry thy two jewels with thee, even if thou go'st to the Indees;' but my Mary, I warrant, was spick and span smooth, without whiting or pearl, and that, sir, I noted down as something comical, for *if* Kitty Ellis *did* long for whiting, why was not one marked as well as the other?"

"I did not enter the lists with so formidable and experienced an opponent, on the subject of *longings*, but I turned a listening, a willing ear to her thrice-told tale, and am but just returned from her; and if I felt a contented heart in the hut of Mary Stevens, I feel a *happy* one now bounding at my side.

"And now, after all this length of prosing, you *must* bear with me a little longer. I do believe, Elwyn, and I have formerly told you so, that I should have had no chance with Mary Ellis, had you sought her in a proper way, and made her an open manly proffer of your hand; but this you did not do; and taught to think *humbly* of herself, by one who *knew* this was to think *wisely*, taught to guard the avenues of her own heart from the entrance of an hopeless passion, delicacy and resolution both came to her aid, and assisted her in conquering her first predilection: her unrestrained, her unconscious, her modest manner of addressing and conversing with you in Bath, at so early an era after your marriage, I can never forget; it has always appeared to me, as that nice distinction between prudery and freedom, between familiarity and constraint, which few women, in her particular situation, could have attained, while the terms of regard in which she always spoke of you, neither forcing the subject uncalled, nor shunning it when it was naturally touched upon, and the terms of respect with which she mentioned Mrs. Elwyn, these *riveted* my former partiality, and confirmed it into an attachment, which I think, and hope, will end but with my life.

"And now, dear Elwyn, having, as in 'honour bound,' *first* made my application to the doughty guardian of my peerless damsel, and having filled a sheet of paper, from which he will have gathered my meaning (if I have not been very deficient in making myself understood, and

Heaven knows *that* may be the case, for I am not able to be very methodical at this moment); and now having finished this long parenthesis, it is necessary to tell you, that the day after you receive this, I mean to await your answer in *person*, at Cheltenham; and *should* it be propitious to my suit, the day succeeding will see me ‘gallop apace on fiery-footed steeds’ to *Mary’s* mansion, to the romantic shades, the verdant glades,

“Where first I saw my charmer’s face,  
Matchless in each native grace.

“Oh, what a semi-dismal farrago of nonsense is here conjured up to fatigue poor Henry Elwyn! Adieu, my dear friend; all happiness, all pleasure, betide you, so sincerely prays

“FREDERIC FITZALLAN.”

## CHAP. X.

Fool! the world  
Has other business than to look on thee,  
Save with one casual glance of hate or scorn.

MRS. WEST.

ERE breakfast had began, Mr. Munden bounced into the Hall to give Harry Elwyn the cordial greeting of his honest hand; he staid only a few minutes, for on seeing Laretta enter the room, he looked at his thick and dirty shoes, and his ungloved hands, and perceiving that *she* did not advance with easy familiarity to welcome him, he made her a distant sarcastic bow; and to Henry's desire of his longer stay, he said—"No, no; I perceive I am not a fit companion for a fine lady, so I will just walk across to see the *girls* at the cottage." In the hall he encountered Fitzallan, and the sly whisper of Elwyn sent the rough and eager Munden back a few paces to grasp his hand, and to say—"You are a noble fellow, and you have pitched upon a noble girl; remember I tell you she's one of a thousand;" and away he walked, more determined than before to go to the park cottage.

Laretta set about preparing the breakfast, saying that Mr. Munden always made himself so disagreeable, that she was glad he was gone.

Elwyn was going to make her some answer, when the door was opened, and Miss Lawson was announced, dressed in all the *extreme* folly of fashion, which is so generally adopted by half-bred characters, with a lace favour pinned to her left breast, and a semblance of ecstatic pleasure; that lady advanced to her "dear interesting Mrs. Elwyn," who did not seem to be equally transported, for languidly saying—"In the name of fortune, where did you come from?" she scarcely turned her head.

Miss Lawson pointed triumphantly to her favour, saying—"Don't you see? from town—from town, my dear creature; I came with the bride-folks last evening."

"Did you indeed?" said the no longer *half*-interested Laretta; "oh do let's hear it all, do tell us all about it; for though I am going to the Lodge myself presently, yet I am *dying* with impatience."

"I thought you would go, I said you would go; I knew you were a dear, amiable, tender creature," said Miss Lawson; "and some of them are quite *au de despair* till they see *you*, that I will vouch, but," looking round, and making her curtsies and compliments to the gentlemen before she seated herself *close* to Laretta, "but surely I have been remiss," addressing Fitzallan. "Sir, I am most happy to see *you*, and to have an opportunity of *condoling* with you on the death of your worthy father, and of *congratulating* you on your accession to his title and fortune; every one who knows sir Frederic Fitzallan *must* be interested for him."

"And every one who knows Miss Lawson," returned Fitzallan, "must have learnt how to estimate such obliging professions."

But not understanding the sarcasm of the speech, neither that which was conveyed in the bow which accompanied it, the self-satisfied Lawson, who had derived no small portion of consequence from having left *town* in the bridal train of general Halifax, turned again towards the eagerly anticipating Laretta, and resumed her story; while Elwyn stirred his tea round-and-round again with his teaspoon, as though he would have drowned such an overflowing torrent of conceit and volubility—"And so, my dear creature," said Lawson, "you did not expect to see

me? well, to be sure, it was a desperate push for me to leave the dear delights of the metropolis, for I met with so many extreme pleasant, I may say, *superior* people, and I was so particularly distinguished by them—but then, my dear, *what an opportunity!* such an one might not offer again during the whole course of one's life!—and I do say, I had the most delightful journey; nay, I could almost have fancied myself the bride——”

“Indeed!” said Fitzallan, with an expression upon his countenance which Elwyn understood.

“The weather too was so lovely, not a cloud to be seen, quite an *Italian sky*, as the general observed; but look, how I am burnt, sadly burnt; and my sweet companion also, notwithstanding that he took the three several precautions, of a white hat, a silk umbrella, and a green veil, he is sadly bronzed, I assure you——”

“And who may this knight of the green veil be, Miss Lawson?” asked Fitzallan.

“Why, how *very* curious you are!” said she. “Mrs. Elwyn guesses, I dare say; but you shall all hear:—quite by accident, the interesting Narcissus Finlater told me the day when general Halifax was to be married; and as Mrs. Orfield had been ill for ten days or a fortnight, and did not seem likely to get about again in a hurry, and as she was going to Northumberland, quite a contrary route to mine, why I thought it would be a good opportunity of getting down, by joining myself to the bridal retinue. Finlater was delighted, you may be sure, as he was to be bridesman; and so it was all settled by his interference: the general and her ladyship were *so* pleased to have me of the happy party, you've no idea; *they* travelled in the chariot, Finlater and myself in the dicky, and the general's four beautiful Arabians bore us along; abigails and valets followed in a post-chaise. Finlater and myself were so happy, and so amused, and he made so many conundrums, and said so many droll things, I shall never forget him—to be sure, he is a most interesting youth; poor fellow, he was sadly jolted, and complained of being tired last night; but I have not set eyes on a single soul of them this morning, for I stole a march, in order to embrace my beloved Mrs. Elwyn, and to see that my house was not run away in my absence. I am a sad gadabout, that's a fact, my dear. But you cannot think how the Lumleys and Mrs. Buxton *did* stare at me as I passed through Norton, last evening, mounted upon the dicky; I do believe that they began to think that Lawson was no longer *obdurate*, in other words, that I was the bride.”

“I hope the dear general will be happy,” said Laurretta.

“I have no doubt of it,” said Miss Lawson; “he certainly has *now* married the woman of his heart; and such a fine woman too, as I said to Finlater—‘She is of a superior order of beings.’ Well, Finlater will come to call of *you*, before this day is out, I dare say.”

“You forget that we are going to the Lodge, madam,” said Elwyn, in a serious tone.

“Oh true, I am very forgetful, I assure you, and the sound of the wheels is yet in my ears.”

“And how *is* my dear sweet beautiful mama?” asked Laurretta.

“Who, my dear?”

“I ask how is my dear lovely mama?” repeated Laurretta.

“She was quite well, I believe, when I last saw her; but as I happened *then* to be in the party of lady Sawbridge, and as I saw pretty nearly how matters were going on, why I thought it the *safest* plan, that is, I passed on as hastily as I could, and did not much notice her ladyship—a fine woman though, certainly a fine woman, Mrs. Elwyn.”

“I don't understand you,” said Laurretta.

“I am talking of *your* mother, my dear, of ‘our lady of Loretto,’ as that witty creature, Finlater, calls her; surely you agree with me in thinking her a fine woman?”

“And I asked after *her*,” answered Lauretta; “didn’t you tell me you came down with her to the Lodge last evening? didn’t you say you came down with the general and with lady Lauretta Halifax? and yet, afterwards, you said that you had not seen her lately.”

“Oh, my dearest, dearest love, what a gross misunderstanding!” cried Miss Lawson; “of course I thought you knew who the bride was; lady Sawbridge, lady Sawbridge, my dear sweet love, is now the happy bride of general Halifax.”

“Villain!” cried Elwyn, as he rose hastily from his seat, and walked to the window.

Fitzallan looked surprised and astonished; while Lauretta said—“I am sure my own dear beautiful mama expected to be his wife; I am sure they must have stolen this match without her consent; it is very odd, but I shall go to the Lodge, and inquire all about it.”

“Lauretta,” said Elwyn, and he walked to her, and laid his hand with emphasis on her shoulder, “you *must* not, *shall* not, go near the place.”

“*Shall* not, Mr. Elwyn?” repeated she, reddening, and biting her lips; “you delight to contradict, and to make me look like a brow-beaten simpleton before witnesses.”

“Before the *whole world*,” said he, “would I tell you, that you shall not go to Salcombe Lodge; how could you suggest such a thing?”

“Why, Lord bless me, because I wanted to see the general; and sure there’s no harm in going?”

“*Harm*, there is *infamy*!” said Elwyn, as with strong emotion he left the room.

Fitzallan followed him, and the two ladies were left *tête-à-tête*. Who can describe the tumult of passion which agitated the breast of Henry Elwyn? he vowed that he would instantly call general Halifax to an account for his base desertion of lady Lauretta Montgomery; but Fitzallan succeeded in dissuading him from such a purpose—“Your life,” said he, “is of too much consequence to hazard it in a contest with *such* a man as Halifax; if *he* defies the laws of God and man, my friend should still respect them. Perhaps general Halifax may never have bound himself by any promise to lady Lauretta, and in that case the odium of the *world* will not fall on him: at any rate,” continued he, “her ladyship sinned with her eyes open—when she *braved* its censures for Halifax, *he* was a married man; I could pity the betrayed and confiding victim of the libertine, *her* wrongs would rouse my arm, if I did not stedfastly believe they would be referred to a high and unerring tribunal; but lady Lauretta Montgomery, *she* who unblushingly exhibited her lawless attachment to a married man, who exhibited it to a *daughter*—such a woman must reap the fruits of her actions. Put up your sword, dear Elwyn——”

“But Halifax is a villain,” interrupted Elwyn.

“A *worthless* one,” returned Fitzallan, “as such, beneath your notice—leave him to himself; if lady Lauretta should adopt a regular, a proper mode of conduct, if she appears to repent of her errors, if she modestly retires to privacy, she will be more worthy of your returning friendship, of the countenance and respect of her daughter, than if she had risen triumphantly in *vice*, and *blazoned* out her *shame* as lady Lauretta Halifax. Come, come with *me* to the park cottage,” said Fitzallan, gently drawing his friend’s arm through his, “and let us see if Mary Ellis is not of my opinion.”

Elwyn did not resist, though he scarcely consented; his mind was in a chaos of confusion; and while at one moment he was burning with the desire of avenging the wrongs of lady Lauretta Montgomery, at the next he was ready to pour his imprecations on that hapless day when his eyes first lighted upon her, and her bewitching daughter; the foolish, the unfeeling, the indelicate, behaviour of the latter on the recent discovery, filled him with extreme disgust; and he could

scarcely credit his senses, that this was indeed that being whom he had once fancied as perfect as she confessedly was still lovely.

## CHAP. XI.

Levity and her twin—witch,  
Pale Dissipation, people home with fiends  
And spectres. MRS. WEST.

MARY Ellis was not at the park cottage, and the two gentlemen were directed by Mrs. Scot to follow her to the park-keeper's house, which, though in another direction, was nearer to the Hall, and lay in the road towards Salcombe Lodge.

After Mary had, with no little embarrassment, received the blunt congratulations of Mr. Munden, who told her, that he found her love would soon be out of its maze, that Mr. Suitable was arrived, and many other things to the same purport, which her knowledge of his odd character and his genuine goodness of heart enabled her to parry, though not with *unblushing* confusion, she received an express summons from Jane Osborne, the wife of the park-keeper, desiring her immediate attendance, as a little child whom she had been visiting for some days, and prescribing for a feverish complaint, to the best of her judgment, had in the night been seized with convulsions, and was at present alarmingly ill.

Mary was ever active in the cause of humanity; she partly expected to see Elwyn that morning; it was not *very improbable* that sir Frederic Fitzallan would accompany him; but no selfish motives detained her; and tying on her hat, she "brushed with hasty steps the dew away," and soon arrived at the sick house. The poor little child lay extended in the cradle a miserable spectacle; an eruption, which Mary instantly knew to be the smallpox, had now appeared all over its body; the face was particularly visited by the distemper; and the swollen lips, the distended cheeks, the inflamed and almost closed eyelids, rendered the so lately blooming and sprightly boy a loathsome and disgusting object; but such a sight was not calculated to intimidate Mary, though her humane and compassionate heart was melted by its innocent moanings, and the sight of that suffering which she could not alleviate; telling the mother her opinion with respect to the nature of the disorder, and confessing her own irresolution to administer any further towards its recovery, without medical advice, she desired her immediately to send for Mr. Leonard.

The poor terrified mother, who had been a witness to the fatality of a malignant smallpox, ran like one beside herself to a neighbouring cottage, to get some one to dispatch for Mr. Leonard, and Mary promised to remain by the cradle till her return.

The child, who had just sufficient perception left to know that his mother had quitted the cottage, now began to cry out—"Mammy, mammy, take me out of the cradle, take me out of the cradle;" this he incessantly screamed in Mary's ears; fearing that he would again relapse into convulsions, she endeavoured, by every means in her power, to pacify him, but without effect; till taking him from the cradle, she hushed him to silence, and meek as a lamb, he soon fell asleep on her lap: scarcely breathing, that she might not disturb him, as she anxiously dreaded his again awaking till his mother's return, she sat in melancholy contemplation of her wretched little burden, when she heard the pleasing sound of advancing footsteps, but these were accompanied by mingled voices; she distinguished Laretta's, Miss Lawson's, and a gentleman's—"Let us get in here," said Laretta, "and perhaps they will not see us."

"Aye do, do, for Heaven's sake," said Miss Lawson.

“They look *barbarously* savage,” said Narcissus Finlater; and the next moment all three of them precipitated themselves into the little room where Mary was sitting, and almost overturned the low and crazy chair on which she held the infant invalid.

“What have we here?” cried Miss Lawson; “dear me, Miss Ellis, as I live! who should have thought of seeing you?”

“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” said Finlater, shuddering, as he scarcely glanced at the child.

“Miss Ellis!” said Laretta, in no very conciliating tone; “and *your* child, I conclude,” with malicious quickness of manner; “some little *orphan protégée*, eh, Lawson?”

“No,” said Mary, with firm unconscious modesty, “a poor little thing, who is likely to suffer severely, if not to lose its life, from what appears to me to be the small-pox, and that too of a most malignant kind.”

Mrs. Elwyn’s eyes rested for a moment on the child, and then springing out of the cottage, with a fearful, a piercing scream, she cried—“I dare say I am dead! *this* is my death-blow—I *know* it is my death-blow; I have taken the small-pox—I shall die—I know I shall die!”

Miss Lawson and Finlater both tried to pull her back, and to arrest her progress; but she seemed to hear them not; she seemed to see nothing before her; she ran into her husband’s arms.

“Laretta!” cried Elwyn, his rising tenderness somewhat quelled as he discerned the form of Finlater behind her; “laretta, say, what means this disorder? tell me what has thus alarmed you?”

“Oh! that child, that cottage!” said she; “I have taken the small-pox—I dare say I never had the disorder, because I remember nothing at all about it; I always thought that Mary Ellis would contrive to be the death of me, in one way or another, and *now* she has effected it.”

“Mary Ellis! what of her?” asked the apprehensive Fitzallan; she heard his well-known voice, and as he approached the door of the cottage, she motioned to him not to disturb her sleeping charge; he mentally called down a blessing on her benignant spirit, and joined the group without the door.

“What *is* all this?” said Elwyn, impatiently; “tell me the meaning of this extravagant behaviour?—cannot *you* explain it, sir?” said he, turning fiercely round to Finlater, who turned pale, and almost trembled at his hasty address.

“*Accidentally* meeting these two ladies, sir,” said he, pointing to Laretta and Miss Lawson, “and escorting them a little way, we *merely* turned into this cottage——”

“On seeing *me* approach, I guess, sir,” interrupted Elwyn.

“And there we saw a young lady,” continued Finlater, “nursing a poor animal in a sad pickle indeed, and which has terribly frightened Mrs. Elwyn—the whole truth, *’pon honour*,” laying his hand on his breast; “and why Mrs. Elwyn should be frightened, unless she knows she has not had the disorder, I can’t divine.”

“Oh, but I don’t remember *when* I had it,” cried Laretta; “and perhaps I never had it, and then I *must* die.”

The poor woman now returned to the cottage; and resigning the unconscious object of all this tumult to *her* care, Mary came to the door, where Fitzallan was waiting for her; she accepted his proffered arm, but kept aloof from the rest of the party, lest Mrs. Elwyn should dread the contagion in her near approach.

“Unless you know you have not had the disorder, such alarm is very weak and childish,” said Elwyn.

“Unless I know I *have* had it—I *will* indulge it,” said Laretta, breaking out into a passionate flood of tears; “for I *know* I shall die.”

“*I’ll* ensure your precious life,” said Miss Lawson, hastily pushing up the loose muslin sleeve of Mrs. Elwyn’s gown some way above the elbow; “look here, look *here!* good people all, and now see what I can shew you; here is the mark of the lancet, and more than that, see under two bright round spots, the size of *pearls*, and just as *white* and just as *hard*.”

Elwyn hastily put Laretta from him; he seized the arm which Miss Lawson had uncovered; he looked at it; he put his hand upon the place; with frenzied vehemence he almost threw her from him; he struck his clenched fist upon his forehead—he caught, he grasped, the hand of Fitzallan—“Look there—look there,” cried he, “and read the damned proof!” and frantically darting towards a gate which opened in a lane that led towards Salcombe Lodge, he stopped, for at the same moment a chaise stopped also, and lady Laretta Montgomery, all loose and wild in her attire, sprang from it; darting towards her daughter, she cried—“Oh, jewel of my soul, see—see your despairing mother.”

“Oh, see your dying child,” said Laretta, falling on her bosom with an emotion not wholly natural.

“And see the weak, the wretched *tool* of your complicated wickedness,” cried Elwyn, seizing the arm of lady Laretta; tearing his wife from her embrace, and giving her to the care of Fitzallan—“tell me,” said Elwyn, “and do not believe that any further deception will avail you—tell me, and beware how you cling to any subterfuge—tell me, is *she* your daughter?”

“My daughter! my daughter!” repeated the agitated lady Laretta “who doubts it?”

“*I* doubt it,” replied Elwyn; “*I doubt* every thing, *because I know* every thing; *I know* that, eighteen years ago, *you* stole this child, an *orphan* child, from Brighton; *I know*——” (Mary Ellis now began to tremble all over—a presentiment, a *natural* presentiment assailed her)—“*I know your* tender mercies; in what have they ended?—in *cruelties*; your blind and foolish fondness, your strange and eccentric example, prevented her mind from every thing valuable; and while the sainted Mrs. Elwyn converted *her* child of adoption into an *angel*, you changed yours into a——”

“Oh! is she—is she then my sister?” interrupted Mary; “oh, Mrs. Elwyn, poor Laretta, who could have thought it?—and are you, are you *indeed* my sister?” and she burst into an hysterical flood of tears, which alarmed her anxious lover: “why not *say* she was my sister before?—why, why not tell us so,” said Mary, appealing to lady Laretta; “we should *then* have loved each other like sisters, we should have existed for each other—one will, one heart, one *soul*, would have united us; how have I longed, how have I wished, how have I *prayed* for this discovery! and now—oh! now, dearest Laretta—dearest Mrs. Elwyn, see, acknowledge, *love* your sister.”

“Never!” cried Laretta, with vehemence, “never will I own a relationship to a being whom I detest; and I don’t believe it—and I won’t believe it; and though my own mama was to *swear* it, I would not credit it; I am the grand-daughter of the earl of Levensdale, *I know* I am—I know I am not related to that trumpery girl; Elwyn only says so to break my heart, and to kill me; but it is not so—and though my own mama was to swear it, I would not credit it.”

“She *dares* not disavow it,” said Elwyn, “for I can *prove* my words. But why, oh why,” continued he, addressing himself to lady Laretta, “why put such an imposition on the world?—why pursue—*continue* it? if your heart was capable of an act of benevolence in adopting an helpless orphan, why not avow it?—it would not have disgraced you.”

“But *disgrace* might attach to an union with the daughter of a *Brighton fisher*,” said lady Laretta, tauntingly, yet almost incoherently, “while *eclat* would ensue to a connection with the grand-daughter of the earl of Levensdale.”

Elwyn sighed—he almost groaned; he looked at Mary Ellis; he felt the severe, the cutting truth of this remark; his curved, his rumpled brow, his fury-flashing eye, were dreadful *apparitions* of inward horror; he tore himself from the whole group, and ran with wild and hurried footsteps through the park.

Finlater now began to amble off towards the Lodge; and Miss Lawson making her compliments to the party, followed him, eager to communicate the events of the morning to lady Sawbridge; the beau took *her* arm, and whispered in her ear as they went through the gate—“Pon my honour, I think the general manoeuvred well to relinquish our lady of Loretta, and to cut the connexion altogether.”

Miss Lawson’s assenting nod spoke her similarity of opinion.

Laretta poutingly took hold of her ladyship’s arm, who seemed plunged in *wild reverie*, and to concern herself very little about the recent discovery.

Mary would fain have accompanied the ladies to the Hall, as she tenderly commiserated Laretta, and already felt towards her the yearnings of a sister; she was apprehensive of the effects of agitation in her present situation, but she found that *her* attentions would not be received; so resigning them both to the care of Fitzallan, who in a few words had been giving her the history of the circumstance which led to this extraordinary *denouement*, she retraced her weary “melancholy way” to the park cottage, and there almost “froze the young blood” of her friend, as she recounted the strange events of the morning.

## CHAP. XII.

“Thy bonny braes, thy dales,  
Each haunted by its wizard stream.”

TWO things engrossed the earl of Levensdale’s whole time, hoarding up riches, and warding off the gout; and though family-pride had a large share in the formation of his character, yet this was frequently rendered subservient to his avarice.

His wife had been dead some years; she had left him one girl, who had been cooped up with an old snuffy-nosed French *madame* till she was past eighteen, and who had learnt to prattle the language of her governess like a parrot, by rote, and had read every French novel which she could finger: but by supplying his daughter with a governess, and by keeping her in seclusion, the earl imagined he was performing the part of a careful and tender parent; and probably lady Lauretta would have continued with *madame* till the earl had made some matrimonial *bargain* for her, if the besetting sin of his soul had not induced him to change her residence.

A gentleman returning from Scotland, accidentally met the earl in company, and told him that he found his father’s sister, lady Deborah Candiddoc, was in a very precarious state of health, that her faculties were very near their dotage, that she was surrounded by servants and mercenaries, and if there was any thing at her own disposal, in all probability it would devolve to strangers, unless it was looked after by some of her family.

The earl was roused; in a retirement in Scotland, Lauretta would be as safe as in a retirement in England; lady Deborah would be as good a *chaperone* as *madame*, and he should be saved the expence of maintaining the latter; so, writing a most *affectionate* and *dutiful* epistle to his *dear* aunt, he sent his little Lauretta to be her nurse and her companion, to enliven her solitude by her conversation, to administer to her wants with attentive tenderness.

Lauretta was tutored to perform her part by the anxious father, who *then* first gave her his *paternal instructions*, and she was packed off for Scotland under a safe escort. Any change was delightful to Lauretta, any companion preferable to *snuffy madame*; the little knowledge she had gained in her reading had served to give her mind a most romantic bias, and she anticipated adventures on every heath she passed, and expected lovers to pass from behind each bush; but heath and bush were harmless, and she arrived in safety at Candiddoc.

Lady Deborah was surprised, but not displeased, at seeing her—“I hope you can read well, child,” said she, “and then you will be a great help, for poor Duncan Montgomery is sometimes tired to death, and I can’t see to read myself, so you must take it in turn; Duncan is gone to Edinburgh for books to-day, and I hope he will bring something new and pretty, and you shall begin off hand.”

Candiddoc, though only nine miles from Edinburgh, was situated in the most lonely solitude; it was a large and old-fashioned mansion; and as on her decease it devolved to the earl of Levensdale, her nephew, lady Deborah did not pay much attention to keeping it in repair; her income was good, but her temper was the reverse of her nephew’s; she was very easy about her affairs, so that she could go on in her own way; and though she had domestics, hangers-on, helpers, and retainers, enough to fill a *palace*, she was very contented while maintaining them all; she saw no company; her whole time was given up to the hearing of novels and romances; and Duncan Montgomery, the son of her bailiff, being a young and idle man, was kept in her pay merely to read to her, and to go to and from Edinburgh to change the books.

Duncan had a fine person, and a pleasing address; Lauretta saw him enter with pleasure; he cast his eyes on her dark and piercing ones, on her elegant person and shape; she was the personified heroine of all his studies.

The *volume* was opened, the *romance* was began, and the future colour of Lauretta's life was determined. Castles, spectres, ghosts, foundlings, orphans, and knights, were the favourite subjects of lady Deborah's entertainment; and ere a few weeks had elapsed, Lauretta was as completely in love, as romantic, as visionary, and as destitute of common sense, as any heroine which she had been reading or hearing about.

Montgomery was, or fancied himself, as much attached as the heroes; but some of the worldly ideas for which his countrymen are noted, whispered to him that his future interest could not be *hurt* by an union with lady Lauretta Candiddoc.

We will not follow this young couple through all their *readings*, which, though carried on from morn to the dread hour of midnight, all turned on the same subjects, and all ended in a wedding. Poor lady Deborah was taken off by a fit of apoplexy; her will was opened and read by the father of Montgomery; she had nothing to bequeath but a small sum which had been deposited in a bank at Edinburgh; this she had divided in legacies to her servants, and those who surrounded her; five hundred pounds she had given to Duncan Montgomery, and a thousand pounds to her grand niece, Lauretta Candiddoc.

The legacies were to be paid immediately; and before the earl of Levensdale, could summon resolution to wrap up his gouty feet, and to take a journey into Scotland, to see after his aunt's effects, and to bring back his daughter, the young and thoughtless couple were married, and were arrived in England, fancying themselves as happy as *princes*, and as rich as Jews, with fifteen hundred pounds in their pockets.

The earl of Levensdale threatened Montgomery with his utmost vengeance; and having married his daughter under age, and without her father's consent, there existed too much probability of his being able to wreak it on their defenceless heads; and lest they should be discovered, they changed their names, and lived in retirement; but the utter ignorance of lady Lauretta in every domestic duty, her contempt of custom, her romantic notions, and her multifarious whims, soon led the wary Scotchman to perceive, that fifteen hundred pounds were not inexhaustible; he would not lay the least embargo on her inclinations, because he dreaded an appeal to her father, which might be succeeded by a separation, and by his ruin; and he quietly saw her purse an unlicensed course of extravagant expenditure, which was much beyond the stretch of his moderate calculations. Turning over in his mind the likeliest means to better his fortune, and having some ambition in his spirit, which the high connexion he had formed had strengthened, he got a distant relative of lady Deborah, whom he had once seen at Candiddoc, to interest himself in getting him an appointment in India.

It suited the tone of lady Lauretta's mind to *brave all danger* with her husband; India she had figured to herself as the mine of gold, and pearls, and diamonds; and she was delighted at learning that Montgomery was going in a military capacity, because the very sound of soldier was heroic.

Montgomery was obliged to be in London to negociate the business in private, as he feared the earl of Levensdale might otherwise contrive to throw an obstacle in his way; and seeing Lauretta safely within a stage of Brighton, he quitted her for the purpose of making the last preparations previous to his embarkation.

There we have seen his lovely and singular-looking bride, and there we have seen her singular behaviour; lady Lauretta thought it a most charming and delightful *adventure* to take the

orphan infant under her care, and to bear her over the seas to India, and marry her to some *prince* at least.

On meeting Montgomery with this new-found treasure, *he* was not equally transported; he saw the folly of adopting a child in *their* peculiar situation; he saw that if such a circumstance were to be known, it would effectually steel the hearts of Laretta's family against them; but he talked to the winds; common prudential motives found no entrance in her high-wrought soul, and her violent temper, which asserted her *right* to follow her inclinations, intimidated her husband, and obliged him to accede to her wishes: to her proposal of passing the child as their own upon the world, he did not urge any dissuasive, for if she was determined to adopt it, it would be the only way of concealing her romantic folly from her family, and the knowledge of her having an helpless infant to maintain might melt the hearts of some of them in her favour; at any rate, the deception might be continued till they arrived in India; and when there, the *natural* increase of her family, change of opinion, or many other circumstances, might, and probably would, occur to induce lady Laretta to cast off the infant from her favour.

The romantic pair embarked, and during a long voyage, Laretta found infinite amusement in playing with her little *protégée*. On her arrival in India, she found herself much noticed, and great attention paid her, both on account of her rank and her beauty; her singular notions and high ideas rendered her peculiarly susceptible of flattery; she grew vain of the notice and distinction she received; and by degrees, the wild and unformed visionary grew into the vain, the imposing, the capricious woman.

Montgomery's love, which had always been a secondary feeling to his views of interest and promotion, was cooled down into something nearly allied to indifference; and he sedulously pursued the military career, in hopes of preferment; though he perceived with great concern that no inducement could prevail on lady Laretta to adopt any mode of economy or common sense. Little Laretta, as she was called, was still her favourite *plaything*; and as no other appeared to divide the palm of affection, she was more steady in her fondness for her than could have been expected; but the education which she gave her was just what may be guessed from a woman of her character: "to dress, to dance, to trol the wanton eye," to appear the thing she was not, to dissemble that she was, to do every thing for *effect*, to pant for admiration, to sigh for flattery, these were the maxims which, both in practice and precept, lady Laretta recommended to her "heart's idol," her "angel," Laretta.

We will not detain our readers, or sully our own pages, with the growth of that passion for the handsome and insinuating Halifax, which made such disgraceful ravages in the breast of lady Laretta, and which not unfrequently had communicated a feeling of uneasiness to that of her husband; but Halifax was the superior officer of Montgomery, and had shewn himself his friend in many pecuniary difficulties, and he had not the courage to resent his perfidy.

The ardour with which Montgomery had pursued independence, even "to the cannon's mouth," had been constantly retarded by the wild profusion of lady Laretta; and had not a maiden sister of her father's died, and bequeathed to her an annuity during the life of her child, his utter ruin must have ensued; the adoption of the child was therefore the luckiest circumstance which could have happened; and Montgomery's principles were not of that "*penetrable stuff*," that could be proved, by the *slight failure* in rectitude, of palming an imposture upon the world, in order to retain an annuity to which he had no right. At *his* death, lady Laretta saw the policy of continuing the deceit, and of trying to secure Laretta an advantageous matrimonial establishment; she began to feel the care of her *heart's idol* too imposing a charge, and this care

often came in contact with that engrossing passion, which she had suffered to “rage without controul,” and to which she had fearlessly sacrificed every thing which she should have valued.

Under the escort, and in the splendid suit of general Halifax, she came to England; and while he swore, a thousand and a thousand times, that the instant he was liberated from “durance vile,” he would make her his bride, lady Lauretta saw that the disposal of *her daughter* by marriage would not be unpleasing to Halifax, as a prelude to the *arrangements of felicity* which were to ensue, on the eagerly-anticipated demise of the superannuated Mrs. Halifax.

On seeing Elwyn at Cheltenham, and hearing his expectations, he was fixed on as the happy mortal on whom the peerless Lauretta was to bestow her hand: eager to be her *own* mistress, pleased with his handsome person, enchanted by his elegant flattery, she fell warmly into her mother’s wishes; and though they almost despaired of meeting him again, after his sudden disappearance at Cheltenham, yet no means were left untried of discovering his movements: the meeting at the Opera-House was contrived, as was the hasty departure from London on the following morning; Salcombe Lodge was taken for *Mrs. Halifax*, because it was in the vicinity of Elwyn Hall.

We have seen the success which ensued to these schemes; but the likeness so generally observed between Lauretta and Mary Ellis, and which lady Lauretta only could account for, filled her with the utmost dread and anxiety; should a discovery by any means take place *before* her daughter’s marriage with Elwyn, it would, in all probability, entirely prevent it; should this discovery happen before the death of Mrs. Halifax, she should be deprived of her annuity, and be dependent for every shilling upon her lover; the idea was terrible; so, by a dexterous manoeuvre, she got off Lauretta from the neighbourhood of her likeness, lured Elwyn there also, and by a sudden marriage, effectually secured him to her *heart’s idol*.

Mrs. Halifax at length paid the *debt of nature*, and the general had promised to pay the *debt of gratitude* to lady Lauretta; but the general found he was risen in value an hundred *per cent* since the death of his wife, and that though he might owe a *great deal* to lady Lauretta Montgomery, yet that he owed a *great deal more* to lady Sawbridge, who had “*unsought* been won,” and whose handsome fortune she had fairly owned to be, with her charming self, at his disposal.

Lady Lauretta had no suspicion of his base desertion, till the fact stared her in the face; then she gave way to a fury as uncontrouled as had been her affection; and scarcely knowing what she did, she had flung herself into a chaise, and travelled night and day till she arrived where we have seen her; the violence of her emotion had subsided on seeing Lauretta, and the group which were gathered round her, into something like sullen despair; and though she answered the questions of Elwyn with some degree of art, yet she did not discover the deceit which she had practiced; folding her arms across, she walked to the Hall at her daughter’s side, her eye glaring, and her mind buried in profound reflection.

### CHAP. XIII.

Pride, Ambition, idly vain,  
Revenge and Malice swell her train;  
Devotion warp'd, affection crost,  
Hope in disappointment lost.           PENROSE.

ALL was confusion and dismay at Elwyn Hall—Lauretta continued to scream, and to accuse her mother, Elwyn, Mary Ellis, every body, every thing, but herself, and was at length carried to a bed in strong hysterics.

Lady Lauretta had recollection sufficient to answer the inquiries of Fitzallan; she well remembered Lauretta's having been inoculated in infancy for the small-pox; but this information did not appease Mrs. Elwyn; she gave way to the most violent and dangerous emotions; lady Lauretta walked up and down the great hall, clasping her hands together, her long black tresses floating in wild disorder round her shoulders, and muttering from time to time—"False, perjured, treacherous *Halifax*."

Elwyn had retired to the library; and on Fitzallan's entreating admittance, his decisive negative forbade the further intrusion of anxious friendship.

It was the hour when Mary and Miss Letsom were retiring to their respective chambers, a gentle rap was heard at their door, and the voice of Fitzallan—"What is the matter?" eagerly inquired Mary.

"Alas! I can scarcely say," said he; "I believe Lauretta is dangerously ill, and the distracted state of Elwyn is beyond description; incessantly he reproaches himself with the murder of his wife, and his unborn offspring, as he believes that his precipitate discovery of lady Lauretta's imposition was the cause of his wife's illness; *she* will not be managed; lady Lauretta flies from her fearful screams; and I am come to ask——"

"I am ready," cried Mary, with eagerness; "I will instantly go with you; she is my *sister*, Fitzallan," said she, hastily wrapping a shawl about her, and tying on a hat, "my sister, you know; and Henry; poor Henry, he is, he *ever was*, my brother."

"Don't agitate yourself, my best love," said Fitzallan; "be careful of your precious health: put on another cloak," said he, taking one which Miss Letsom offered; "consider, you are not used to the night air."

"Oh, I shall not feel it," said Mary, as, hastily putting her arm within his, she lightly ran across the park.

On the steps before the door, without his hat, and in a state of agonizing emotion, Elwyn met her—"Angel of mercy," cried he, "lovely and ever beloved Mary Ellis, haste, haste to the apartment of my—of my Lauretta; save—save her life," said he; "oh, let me not think that my impetuous fury has destroyed her: hark, do you not hear? she screams again; oh, quickly haste and save her."

Mary broke from the retaining hold of Fitzallan, and, pointing to him to watch the motions of his friend, she made her way to the sick chamber, the cries of Lauretta enabling her to find it—"I tell you I am dying," said she; "I *know* I am dying," in a shrill tone of agony, as Mary entered the room.

“Pray, pray compose yourself, Mrs. Elwyn,” said Mr. Leonard, who stood near the bed; “I assure you you have every thing to hope, if you are quiet; but your agitation must exhaust you.”

“I can’t be quiet—I won’t be quiet,” cried she; “all the doctors in the world can’t persuade me to be quiet when I am in torture; oh! I shall die—I know, I know I shall die.”

Mary approached the bed—“Let *me* wipe your temples,” said she, gently taking the handkerchief from the servant engaged in that office.

“*You*, what *you* come to torment me?” cried Lauretta.

“No, my dear” (sister, Mary *would* have said) “no, my dear madam, I am come to try if I can be useful to you.”

“And *you* call your self my *sister*, I suppose?”

“I would willingly *prove* myself one by my conduct.”

“No *proofs* for *me*; I do not believe it; I *won’t* believe it—’tis all a base fabrication on purpose to murder me—I *know* I shall die—yes, yes, I know I am dying. Where is lady Lauretta?—where is the *beautiful mama* who has been my *ruin*?—why does not *she* come and see me too?—and why does not Elwyn come and see the murder he committed?”

“What *can* be done for her?” said Mary, in an under voice, and looking at Mr. Leonard with the most anxious earnestness.

“Indeed I cannot tell you,” said he; “this emotion, if persisted in, *must* be productive of fatal consequences.”

But nothing could still the agitation of Lauretta; with unceasing violence it continued during the whole of the night; towards morning, she was delivered of a female infant, who seemed likely to live; but life was then fast ebbing from the hapless parent; insensible and motionless, she lay exhausted by her sufferings.

Elwyn frantically burst into the room, to catch a last glance of her eye, but it had fixed in vacancy for ever.

Lady Lauretta appeared nearly as unconscious as the victim of her blind indulgence, and of her deceitful conduct; she looked on the inanimate corpse for a few moments in still and fixed horror, then, shuddering, she rushed down the stairs, and into the dining-room where Fitzallan was sitting, in melancholy ruminations; she hastily snatched up a knife from the table (which had been laid for supper overnight, and which still remained untouched), and saying—“Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?” would probably have inflicted summary punishment on herself if, quick as thought, Fitzallan had not wrested the instrument of vengeance from her; the loud and convulsive laugh, the daring expression of countenance which succeeded to this discomfiture, evinced to Fitzallan what he had suspected from the moment he saw her alight from the chaise, that her senses were entirely gone.

From such scenes of complicated horror, it is now time to transport our readers; they have seen the proud impetuosity of Henry Elwyn’s character; they have watched it as it “grew with his growth, and strengthened with his strength;” *they* will therefore imagine—but *we* cannot describe the complicated feelings which now oppressed his soul; he shut himself up from every body but Fitzallan, who *would* not be excluded; with unceasing patience and kindness, *he* exerted himself in endeavouring to sooth his anguished, his perturbed, and his accusing spirit; and the gratified lover found, that by this conduct he was securing himself a much nearer interest in the heart of Mary, than he *could* have done by the most sedulous attentions bestowed upon herself. Elwyn would not see Mary Ellis; he refused to admit Mr. Munden; and even Fitzallan was rather *suffered* than *permitted* to be near him.

Lady Laretta Montgomery's malady was fixed and irremediable; through the direction of Mr. Leonard, she was put under the care of a gentleman, whose humanity and attention to the unfortunate objects under his care, had long established his character.

The Halifaxes quitted Salcombe Lodge in a hurry, in hearing of the melancholy events at the Hall; and the Lodge shut up, and the Hall become the house of mourning, Miss Lawson began to vamp up, and recruit her disordered wardrobe, and to meditate another visit to *another* intimate friend; for as she had affronted Mrs. Orfield, by leaving her abruptly, while that lady was confined by illness, she could not *reasonably* expect a second invitation from her.

Fitzallan being obliged to quit the Hall for two days, Elwyn took advantage of this temporary absence, and left it also; the following letter he put on the library table, addressed to his friend:—

“My determination has long been made, dear Fitzallan; my mind must not be suffered to pray upon itself; in the ruin of all my domestic prospects, there is something to give a fresh impulse to my destiny, to nerve my hand with fresh vigour—our valiant troops in the Peninsula, and their noble leader; to *these* I bend my course, and, led by the victorious arm of Wellington, I go—to glory, or—to death!—In either case, to you, and to your virtuous Mary, I bequeath a precious trust—an infant *Clara* Elwyn; she will be bred up in the practice of those pure principles of which we have seen the benignant effect in Mary Ellis; and while she will escape the follies, the misfortunes of her *mother*, she will steer as clear from the headstrong impetuosity of her wretched and suffering father,

“HENRY ELWYN.

“Simpson has orders from me to yield an implicit obedience to your commands.”

And now, gentle reader, what remains to you?—Elwyn is still in Spain; our gentle heroine is not yet become lady Fitzallan; but the period is fast approaching, when she means to bear her infant treasure, her prized and cherished *niece*, the *daughter* of Henry Elwyn, to her husband's mansion; and the generous heart of Fitzallan is well prepared to love and welcome the interesting little guest.

Broken-hearted, and almost sinking to the grave, Mrs. Piff has been rescued, through the effectual interference of Mr. Munden, from the avaricious tyranny of her mean and brutal husband; and while he has agreed to receive fifty pounds per annum during his life, and to tease her no more, the park-cottage is to be the future residence of his foolish wife, where she is resolved to make *patchwork* from morn till night.

As no husband has yet been found for Miss Letsom, she will probably divide her time between lady Fitzallan and Mrs. Piff; enjoying the highly-prized society of the *former*, and amusing herself with *her* own kind of *patchwork* while resident with the latter.

We have not heard that Miss Lawson is likely to change *her* situation; her *change of character* is “a consummation devoutly to be *wished*.”

## THE CONCLUSION

The SUBSTANCE of this our book, we flatter ourselves, may be found in the words of a highly-revered divine of our church; *his* works were much prized by Clara Elwyn, and therefore we shall make no apology for concluding with a quotation from them:—

“And however insipid or insupportable a life may appear to some, which is to be humbly spent in regulating their desires, doing their duty, and expecting their reward, they will find upon trial that every other scheme produces miserable disappointments, and this, as much happiness as our present state is capable of. Length of days, easy circumstances, general esteem, domestic tranquillity, national good order and strength, are the smaller advantages that usually attend practising the rules of religion; but the constant ones, the calm peace, and joyful prospects, of all whose minds are duly affected by the genuine principles of it, these are blessings inexpressibly great.”—ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

FINIS.