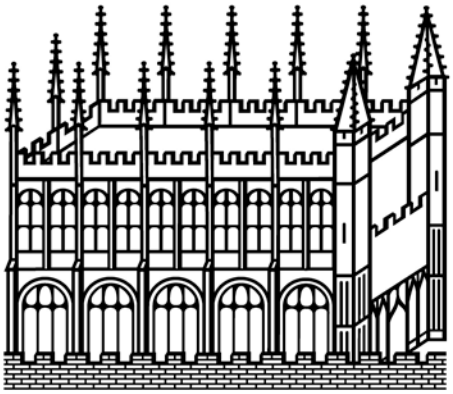


Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

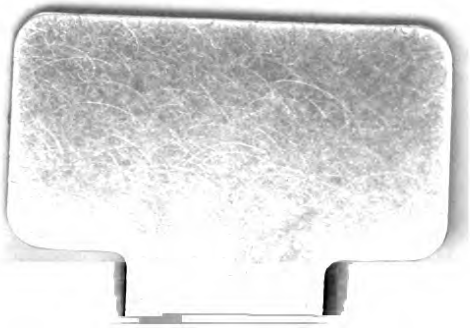
http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

ØRSTED
COLLECTION

E. H. W. MEYERSTEIN
BEQUEST TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book
was acquired for the
MEYERSTEIN
COLLECTION
OF THE
ENGLISH FACULTY
LIBRARY
with the help
of a grant made under
this bequest



31568

XM 71.71 [Gal]

300150995W

GALE MIDDLETON.

A STORY OF THE PRESENT DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BRAMBLETYE HOUSE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1833.

GALE MIDDLETON.

CHAPTER I.

"This this is holy; while I hear
These vespers of another year,
This hymn of thanks and praise,
My spirit seems to mount above
The anxieties of human love,
And earth's precarious days."

——— "A piteous lot it were,
To flee from man and not rejoice in nature."

WORDSWORTH.

So affectionate was the nature of our traveller, that, although he disliked London, and had ever been warmly attached to the country, more especially to his own sequestered retreat of Brookshaw Lodge, he could not quit the paternal roof without a deep dejection of spirits. There were few more fond or indulgent fathers than Sir Matthew, who, in the recent illness of his son, had evinced a deep and constant

tenderness, coupled with such an ungovernable rage against his assailants, that Gale's heart yearned towards him with a sense of gratitude which increased the pangs of separation. Cecilia, too, had tended him with an assiduous earnestness, the more winning because he had never before seen her exhibit so much warmth of feeling; his bosom thankfully acknowledged her good offices, and his depression was deepened when he reflected that her approaching nuptials would dissolve that family tie by which they had been attached to one another from the time of their birth. Caleb Ball, too, on the late occasion, had exhibited so much more feeling than he had ever imagined him to possess, that Gale could not leave him behind without a sensation of grateful sadness, and even ordered the postchaise to drive into the city, that he might call at the counting-house to renew the expression of his thanks, and to wish him good b'ye.

Never had he been able to pass through the crowded streets of this busy quarter, and to mark the sodden complexions, anxious care-

worn countenances, and eager hurrying of its countless throngs in the pursuit of the most grovelling objects, without giving way to those gloomy disparaging views of human nature and of the destiny of man, which occasionally darkened his mind, and imparted a morbid bitterness to his spirit. At the present moment his feelings of melancholy, assisted perhaps by the weak and exhausted state of his body, rendered him so peculiarly susceptible to these impressions, that, as he revolved in thought his own fate, and the probable doom of the crowds whom he was passing and meeting, he broke into one of those passionate soliloquies in which his desponding reveries would often find a vent.

This diatribe was interrupted by his arrival at the counting-house, whence his cousin was summoned to the door of the postchaise, to receive his thanks and his adieus. With his pen behind his ear, and a file of bills of lading in his hand, he came to the side of the carriage, his clay-coloured complexion, and the heavy immobility of his features, giving him the appearance of a leaden statue rather than of a

human being. The excitement by which he had been aroused had passed away, and he had relapsed into his usual frigidity and inanimation. Taking a pinch of snuff, as if to convince himself that he was alive, he coldly expressed his satisfaction that Gale had adopted his advice by going to Brookshaw Lodge, and counselled him to remain there permanently, adding, that he would immediately write should any clue be found to the thieves, of which, however, his hopes were much less sanguine than they had been. Pleading an engagement with an indigo-broker, he then extended towards his cousin a hand that was as cold and motionless as that of a corpse, and formally wishing him good morning, returned to the counting-house, taking another pinch of snuff, the only luxury, if such it may be termed, in which he was ever seen to indulge.

"This is the chilling influence of the city," thought Gale, as the carriage drove on. "Trade may sometimes quicken the faculties of the head, so far at least as self-interest is concerned, but it deadens the feelings of the

heart. When Caleb was in Portland Place the kindly impulses of our common nature, which were dormant, not extinct, started into momentary life. In Lawrence-Pountney Lane the benumbing touch of trade has frozen them into their pristine torpor. Surely there must be merchants of a nobler and more enlarged spirit, men who, in the consciousness that "true self-love and social are the same," endeavour to promote the interests of the community while they are seeking to advance their own, even as the industrious rower, by constantly pulling towards himself, helps forward all those who are in the same boat with him."

The crowds of people and of vehicles in the Borough, the noisome atmosphere, together with the incessant rumbling, clamour, and hurly-burly, almost bewildering the senses of our traveller, whose head was not yet able to endure such stunning uproar, plunged him again into a dark and desponding vein of thought. Over the sunless picture that his imagination shadowed forth his distorted religious views threw an additional gloom, pre-

senting the great mass of the beings who were passing him as not only doomed to toil and misery in this world but to inevitable and eternal anguish in the next — a species of nightmare, which always started up before him like a hideous apparition, when he was in this morbid mood, and which now oppressed his feelings with such a withering effect, that he could not shake the ghastly phantom from his mind. By keeping his eyes closed, his mental vision remained riveted to the spectre that it had conjured up; and he sate absorbed in this painful contemplation, as if the glare of the fabled basilisk, or the spell of some malignant genius, were upon his spirit, until his reverie was dissipated by the stopping of the carriage in order to change horses.

Little conscious of what he was about, he alighted and followed the waiter into the hall, or rather passage of the inn; but, instead of turning into the room intended for his reception, he proceeded into the garden at the back of the house, passed along a gravel-walk, and, opening the gate at its extremity, advanced

into a quiet meadow, belted with ash-trees and sapling oaks, whose foliage harmonized, even in its contrast, with the richer and brighter hues of the grass and the bright blue sky. To our bewildered traveller the transition seemed scarcely less sudden and marvellous than if he had been conveyed by some good angel from a dungeon to a paradise; for he had neither marked the lapse of time nor the gradual local change by which this seeming miracle had been accomplished. He had seen no object since he left the Borough; his last-remembered sensations were those of a noxious atmosphere, of smoke and dust, of stunning din, of narrow, dirty streets, crowded with wretches whose wan countenances wore the impress of sickness, misery, and turmoil. Well might the far different scene with which he was now surrounded assume the appearance of enchantment. All was softness, beauty, and tranquillity! From the unclouded sky the morning sun shed a mild radiance, that seemed to steal into the very heart of nature, like a smile from heaven! Wherever he planted his foot the flowery turf,

refreshed and brightened by an early shower, sent up a fragrant odour, that mingled with the balm of the breeze in which the vernal leaves fluttered their young wings, as if impatient to escape into the air and join the butterflies; tufts of primroses and other wild flowers, clustered beneath the shelter of the trees, and on the sunny banks, welcomed the spring with their laughing many-coloured eyes; a hidden rill that skirted the meadow, betrayed itself by its cheerful tinkling; the birds warbled and twittered in chorus, while, from his unseen organ-loft in the sky, the lark, intoxicate with sunbeams, poured down lighted lyrics that made the very air thrill, and could scarcely be heard without awakening the ecstasy they breathed! Upon no unsympathising ear did their melody now fall. In conjunction, with the heart-healing smiles that lighted up the face of nature, they diffused a benign serenity over the spirit of Middleton, soothing its disquietude as oil allays the troubled waters, and gradually raising him from the blackest despondency to an intense but quiet rap

ture, only to be expressed by the tear that glistened in his eye, and the religious gratitude that swelled his yearning heart! Naturally sanguine and cheerful, though warped by a succession of untoward circumstances from its proper bias, his mind, whenever it could throw off the incubus that oppressed it, resumed its original tendencies with a delight that seemed to seek compensation for all its sufferings by snatching for a brief space a condensed and exquisite enjoyment! The present was one of these beatific moments.

For some time he stood still, abandoning himself to the delicious sensations that thrilled through his frame, and listening in a mute rapture to the continued carols of the winged chorister and poet of the sky. Elated as he was, his feelings shortly received an additional excitement and exaltation by his catching, from afar, the two fluty notes of that rarely seen and self-echoing wanderer, the cuckoo. Even in later life, when the imagination is less susceptible, that magic sound, opening the long closed storehouse of memory, and drawing up

the curtain of the past, will often reveal to us a fleeting apocalypse of our youth, with all its lost impressions and half-forgotten pleasures. Upon the responsive heart of its present auditor it fell with an almost electrical effect. In well constituted minds, a sense of extraordinary happiness is generally accompanied by a fervent feeling of religious gratitude. Had this been one of Gale Middleton's ordinary fits of enthusiasm, it would have found its customary vent in some passionate apostrophe; but his impressions were too deep, too solemn, too ineffable, in their delight, to be thus expressed. He drew forth a miniature from his bosom, gazed intently upon it, pressed it with an air of profound adoration to his bosom, and then, with beaming eyes uplifted to the sky, tendered to heaven that mute homage which is, perhaps, more aceeptable than all the eloquence that ever was uttered by the tongue. Yes—reception and favour shall assuredly be extended to those pure offerings which we lay upon the altar of the heart, when grateful and happy feelings are the ministers of the bosom's

temple, and the soul, yearning towards its Creator, and unable in its speechless ecstacy to breathe a prayer, calls upon expressive silence to "muse his praise."

In this holy and beatific entrancement Gale Middleton remained wrapt, until his servant unwelcomely dispelled it by coming to announce that the carriage had been for some time waiting, when he slowly dragged himself from the heart-soothing meadow, casting many a lingering look behind, and without uttering a word stepped into the vehicle, which presently whirled him along the road at a rapid pace. Although his rapturous feelings gradually subsided, he continued during the remainder of the journey in a gracious and complacent mood, which was exalted into new delight, when he at length caught sight of the humble spire of Brookshaw church, and, presently afterwards, through the intervening trees, obtained occasional glimpses of the scalloped gables that surmounted his own residence. In the seclusion of this rural abode, in his chemical pursuits, his long rides and pedestrian

wanderings, and in ministering charitable offices to the poor, he had passed the least infelicitous days of his life, for he had few absolutely happy ones; and he returned to it with a keener relish, from a recollection of the manifold annoyances he had experienced in London.

In its principal features, the hamlet of Brookshaw was described by its name, for it presented a streamlet winding between two shelving slopes, which had been originally covered with a shaw or thicket. On one side, none but the older and larger trees had been left standing, the rest having been cleared away to make room for the cottages, dotted about in picturesque disorder, from the road that skirted the water to the summit of the slope, most of them having little gardens well stocked with flowers, while some of their fronts were covered with trailing roses, now in full blow. Just below the village, the streamlet spread out into a sheet of water, at the further extremity of which the current, being contracted by a dam, fed a mill. Its whirling wheel, for the rivulet was in this part deep

and rapid, diffused to some distance a gushing sound which was by no means unpleasant, especially in the summer, when it carried with it an idea of coolness.

On the other side of the stream stood the parish church, and Brookshaw Lodge, the smooth shaven grass and the well-trimmed edges of its grounds contrasting with the ragged and rushy banks opposite to them. The house, which was by no means large, and only derived its air of importance from the humility of all the adjacent buildings, was constructed in the old-fashioned conventual style, with projecting casemented windows, scalloped gables, terminated by a cross, massive chimneys of spiral brickwork, and an advancing porch with seats on either side. In front, a moderately-sized garden was squared into parallelograms by formal beds and walks, the central point of intersection being occupied by a sundial. But the pride and the ornament of the place, according to the opinion of Robin the gardener, and of the villagers in general, were two yew-trees clipped into the shape of enor-

mous peacocks, that flourished on either side of the great iron gate with which the surrounding wall was pierced, and which were probably coeval with the building, since a peacock formed the crest of the stone-wrought arms inserted over the porch. Though tradition had not rescued from oblivion the family to which this escutcheon belonged, it had preserved the names of these two evergreen peacocks, who had been known from time immemorial as Cæsar and Mark Antony. To Gale's predecessor they had been the principal inducement for purchasing the property; and the present owner, always consulting the feelings of others rather than his own, suffered them to remain in all their grotesque glory, as soon as he saw the value attached to them by the villagers, and more especially by Robin, who would probably have rather cut his own throat than have cut down either of these ancient friends and favourites.

The front portal in the garden-wall led to a rustic bridge of one arch, which formed the communication with the village; and there was

a side gate parallel with the porch, that opened into the church-yard. To the proprietor of a mansion thus circumstanced, there must be something affecting in this identification of himself and of his family with the adjoining church and burial-ground; in reflecting that his coffin and his corpse will be borne along that gravel-walk, and through that doorway, which he traverses upon every sabbath; and that the majority of the villagers with whom he is assembled in prayer will probably be one day collected to gaze upon his funeral. Any saddening feelings that such considerations may awake must be more than counterbalanced by the wholesome and monitory thoughts that accompany them.

Covering a gentle ascent behind the house, the ancient shaw, enlarged by the plantations of former proprietors, was pierced by shady walks and green alleys, which, from their diverging courses, seemed to describe a much larger space than they really occupied, for the pleasure-ground comprised only a few acres.

Gale's recent misadventure had for some time past formed the prevalent subject of conversation among the good folks at Brookshaw, which sequestered village, being out of the high road, and not often visited by travellers, supplied few topics of indigenous gossiping. Although the young squire, as he was generally called, sometimes received in their more confidential colloquies the title of the queer gentleman, or the college nickname of "Crazy Middleton," which had somehow transpired, as every thing does that is disparaging to its object, he was universally reverenced as a philosopher, whose chemical apparatus and experiments imparted to him something of a mysterious and wizard character, while his affability and benevolence had procured him the love of all his tenants and neighbours. The day of his expected arrival being known, the whole rural population had been on the tiptoe of expectation for some hours previous to his appearance; and no sooner was his carriage descried coming down the little descent that led to the village, than the wheel-

wright cast away his hatchet, the blacksmith threw down his hammer, widow Stubbs ran out of the chandler's shop, the fat and ruddy Master Penfold, the butcher, hurried to his door, which he completely filled up, and others of the villagers, with their children and barking dogs, hastening down the various footpaths that led from the slope to the water, stationed themselves by the roadside, bowing, curtseying, and bobbing, as the carriage passed, and welcoming the young squire back to Brookshaw with cordial greetings and blessings, mingled with commiserating remarks on the paleness of his looks, and execrations of the villains who had assaulted and wounded him. The black bandage across his temples excited a peculiar sympathy in the younger female villagers, who seemed to think that there was something more than usually atrocious in disfiguring such a nice-looking young gentleman, and compelling him thus to hide his beautiful head of hair.

Much gratified by the manifest cordiality of his reception, the traveller sate up, ex-

hausted as he was, lowered the window, spoke to several of the villagers by name, and in answer to their respectful inquiries, expressed his conviction that he should soon get well, now that he found himself once more among his good friends at Brookshaw.

So little personal attendance was required by Gale Middleton, whose habits were perfectly simple, and who liked, as far as possible, to wait upon himself, that an ancient couple, assisted by a damsel from the village, formed the whole of his domestic establishment. The former, both of whom had been servants to his godfather, had resided for many years in the lodge, the wife officiating as cook and housekeeper, and the husband, whose name was Robin, discharging the functions of gardener, footman, and factotum. Horticulture, however, which had been his original profession, was ever paramount in his mind, all sublunary things being considered vain and unimportant when compared with the kitchen and flower garden; but the great object of his existence seemed to be the punctual clip-

ping and snipping of Cæsar and Mark Antony, the huge vegetable peacocks of which we have made honourable mention, and which he watched and trimmed with as much tenderness as if they had been his own children. Robin was still hale and vigorous enough, in spite of his years, for the efficient discharge of all his various duties, though he would have been less tiresome if the notion that he was a little bit of an orator had not occasionally betrayed him into nonsense and garrulity. In figure he was tall and spare, but muscular; on either cheek-bone there was a patch of red that looked like the sunny side of a winter apple; his blue eye, though somewhat sunken, retained its gleaming light; while his grey eyebrows, and the few locks of silvery hue and silken texture that skirted his bald head, conferred upon him an air of respectability superior to his station.

Both Robin and his wife, who were sincerely attached to their master, felt hurt that he should have brought other servants with him, as they thought themselves competent

to the performance of all the services that his state might require, an opinion to which, even in the midst of their cordial welcomings, they could not refrain from giving utterance. Rather pleased than offended by a jealousy springing from affection, Gale took an opportunity of assuring them that he had brought down the strangers in compliance with Sir Matthew's wishes, not his own, and that he should seize an early opportunity of sending them back to London. Delighted by this intelligence, old Madge curtseyed and simpered, and bustled out of the room to prepare tea; while Robin, standing by the easy chair into which his wearied master had thrown himself, and peering affectionately in his face, exclaimed—"Dear heart! dear heart! you look terrible sickly and blighted like, and yet every thing hereabout do thrive so well, and look so healthy, and make such uncommon good shoots! Capital news, master! capital! the country will do now, and we shall get over all our troubles famously, that is to say if the final ends be adequate to the first results."

"What, Robin; from the effects of the Reform Bill, do you mean?"

"No, master, no; from the effects of these dry winds and cold nights what have radicated the slugs, and grubs, and snails, and such like vermin. I ha' emigrated the thistles, and rushes, and nettles, and such like, that had almost choked up the water-course, down by the old willow; and I ha' brandished away the brambles and underwood that were smothering the young saplings in the dairy copse."

"You could not have been more appropriately occupied, honest Robin. And what other news have you to tell me?"

"Oh, master! something that it will make your heart glad to hear. Cæsar has got as good a leg as ever, for the leaves have come on again where they were blighted last year; and Mark Antony's beak is three inches longer than it was, and the tuft atop of his head is now as round as a cannon ball, so that the whole figure's feasible and incongruous. Ah! if you feel rested enough, I 'm sure it would be a consolidation to your very soul just to

walk to the end of the garden to see them. You could lean upon my arm, and 'tis but a step."

"Not now, good Robin, not now. I dare say they will not fly away in the mean time, and to-morrow morning will suit me much better."

"Dear master! it wouldn't take you five minutes, and you 'll be glad when you get there that you lost no time. They 're perfect pictures, and Cæsar no longer shows the wound where that blundering booby, Tom Penfold, cut his throat with the shears."

"I 'm glad he has recovered, but as I am not, I cannot go and congratulate him. At present, I desire to see nothing but my bed."

"Which on 'em, master, the tulip-bed, or the anemones? Both is equally beautiful, quite a vision, and the yellow admirals will soon be coming into blow."

"No, no, you mistake me," said Gale, smiling.

"Dear heart! what you mean the kitchen-garden; why ay, there 's the onion-bed, and

the radishes, and the cucumbers; why, it's worth walking ten mile to see them."

"My good Robin, pray leave me till to-morrow; I am fit for nothing now but to go to bed, that I may sleep off the fatigues of my journey."

"Oh! I ax pardon; that's what you mean, master, be it? Well, to be sure! only to think that you should be able to close your eyes for the night without ever having seen Cæsar and Mark Antony. Dear heart! dear heart! you can't have a single atom of disregard for the beauties of nature."

The well-meaning, but garrulous and wearisome old man withdrew, and his master retired at an early hour to rest, fatigued in body, but in a complacent frame of mind, that contrasted signally with his deep dejection upon leaving London in the morning. Grateful for the serenity he enjoyed, although past experience would not allow him to calculate on its continuance, he offered up his thanks for the present tranquillity of his mind, as well as for his safe arrival at Brookshaw, and quickly sunk into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER II.

Heaven's favours here are trials, not rewards,
A call to duty, not discharge from care,
And should alarm us full as much as woes,
Lest while we clasp, we kill them ; nay, invert
To worse than simple misery their charms.

YOUNG.

BY a curious consistency, either of good luck or of bad taste, every thing, animate and inanimate, in the boudoir of the Duchess of Harrowgate, was in perfect keeping. All was equally sophisticated, perverted, and unnatural, and the owner herself accorded well with the bower which she had provided for her hours of London idleness, that is to say, for the whole period of her residence in the metropolis. When the month of May, arrayed in the full luxuriance of beauty, courted the inhabitants of cities to exchange their smoky prisons for

flowery meadows, and the cheering delights of groves and gardens ; when those delicious winds were blowing—

" That dance upon the leaves, and make them sing
Gentle love-lays to the spring—"

the Duchess was just commencing her fashionable season and that succession of parties which, compelling her to sleep through the greater part of the glorious, balmy, and sunny day, would condemn her, night after night, to the glare of offensive lamps, the suffocating atmosphere of crowded rooms, and the melancholy gaiety of balls, concerts, and routs, where all, equally tired of each other, and of the monotonous routine that brought them together, only increased the general ennui which all had met to dissipate. After art has reached its acmé of perfection, the insatiable demand for novelty can be gratified only by a gradual relapse into comparative barbarism ; a secret that explains why the declension of taste has generally been rapid in proportion to its previous elevation and fastidious refinement Satiated with all the combinations of beauty

and symmetry, it was her Grace's fancy to doat upon frights, to find pleasure in the unpleasant, elegance in the inelegant, and to surround herself with the representation of objects from which, had they been real, she would have turned away with terror and disgust. Her necklace was formed of scarabæi, or Egyptian beetles; at her breast she wore a crocodile-brooch; in her hair a gorgon; her bracelets were of twisted serpents; and other articles of jewellery were fashioned into the likeness of the most revolting reptiles. In the ornamental china of her chiffonière might be seen a whole zodiac of monsters, comprising dragons of every pattern, tunbellied bonzes and faquirs, squatted idols of hideous aspect, and other congenial evidences of the diabolical taste that pervades the celestial empire. With these the sprawling figures and nondescripts of a Japan screen were in frightful brotherhood; and even the few cabinet pictures that hung above this unattractive collection might in some respects be said to accord with it; for they were of the Dutch school, and, although they represented

human beings, the subjects chosen were always mean and ignoble, and sometimes disgusting, so that they were offensive, even in that which constituted their sole merit—their fidelity.

Art had equally triumphed over, or rather distorted, nature, in the flowers dispersed about the boudoir in vases supported upon brackets. All were rare exotics, and most of them, by grafting and other processes, had been made to assume uncongenial colours, or new combinations of form, that destroyed the consistency of their appearance; while their unhealthy aspect, combined with their faint and sickly odours, rather saddened than cheered the bower wherein they were imprisoned. This melancholy impression was increased by the plaintive note of a Java bird, which, instead of being exhilarated by the sight of one of its native flowers, beside which it was incarcerated in a little gilt cage, only seemed to bemoan its fate with a more doleful cooing.

On the zebra-wood table, amid a profusion of jewels, baubles, and trinkets, of all sorts, were lying various books, scattered about with

a careful negligence, and all betraying that second childhood of literature, where they are valued rather for their rich bindings and exquisite engravings than for the letter-press. They consisted chiefly of Annuals, a class more looked over for its plates, and more overlooked for its literary matter, than any that ever professed to address itself to the understanding as well as to the eye. Among them were two or three of the pseudo-fashionable novels, whose authors, substituting personality and scandal for plot, character, and incident, sought a transient popularity, which, even when it was obtained, was equally discreditable to its bestowers and its receivers.

At the foot of the table panted a corpulent pet pug, pronounced by many an enraptured peeress to be a perfect love of a fright, and abundantly justifying, by his ugliness, the latter appellation. Pampered into ill health and ill humour, the wretched little creature expressed, by constant wheezing, snapping, and snarling, a sense of the cruel kindness that had fondled it into its present unnatural state. It was by

no means out of keeping with its mistress, upon whom indolence, luxury, and inoccupation had produced nearly similar effects. From their being so rarely called into use, her bodily and mental faculties, as we have already intimated, had become sluggish and obtuse; indulgence of all sorts increased the evil, and sickness supervened, bringing its invariable concomitants, peevishness and ennui. As she reclined in an easy chair, receiving into her listless ear the liquid, fairy-like tinklings of a musical snuffbox, with which she occasionally sought to beguile the tedium of existence, surrounded with everything that could steep the senses in voluptuousness, dressed with an ornate splendour that scorned considerations of expense, the hues of her amber drapery softened by the mild light that blushed through the sweeping folds of the rose-coloured curtains, the air faint with the odour of tuberoses and other exotics, and her eye resting with a languid indifference upon jewels and rarities, for which all the elements and every quarter of the earth had been ransacked, the Duchess, toge-

ther with the accompaniments of her boudoir, presented a specimen of refinement and luxury, pushed to an excess that completely defeats its own object, and converts the enjoyment which it seeks to condense and sublimise into satiety, sickness, and dejection.

This most envied of the enviable, but in reality the most to be pitied of the pitiable, happened, at the moment of which we are writing, to be labouring under an attack of the vapours, which she was endeavouring to dissipate by turning over the pages of a new novel, the only books into which she ever looked; and even these were generally read to her by Miss Borradaile, till they answered their object by lulling her to sleep. Half dosing and half thinking of the engagements for the night, as she dawdled over the leaves, the Duchess yawned, and asked in a drawling voice, — "Pray, Miss Borradaile, what day is it?"

"Wednesday, madam," replied her companion, who sate in the adjoining drawing-room, with a profound metaphysical work in her

hand, ready to be produced, if any visitant should chance to enquire the subject of her studies.

"But you never told me the day of the month."

"I thought I had already mentioned to your Grace that it was the tenth."

"Very likely; but you know how I forget things. I'm sure you never informed me what month it was."

"Because I did not imagine your Grace could have been unaware that it is the merry month of May, as our poets call it, while Milton exclaims—

'Hail! bounteous May, that dost inspire
Mirth and youth——'"

"Nay, pray give us no more — I detest Milton; the Duke tells me he was a radical. What does the man mean by its inspiring mirth? I have seen nothing of the mirth of May but the bedizened chimney-sweepers, who announced its arrival, and I'm sure they were melancholy objects enough. The tenth of May, is it? Heigho! I wish the London

season were well over; it is dreadful work, and yet any thing is better than the country, and that odious Burwell Park, which I hate worse than any place in existence, always excepting our Warwickshire prison of Pillerton Hall. Do me the favour to look at my engagement book, and tell me what martyrdom I am to endure to-night."

"There is Lady Selina Silverthorpe's party; a ball at Lady Gauntley's; and the music at Lady Middleton's, which your Grace has undertaken to patronise."

"Heavens! how shall I ever get through it all? I must absolutely go to Lady Middleton's, and you must accompany me, for I am particularly anxious to introduce you to her son, a young man of prodigious attainments, with whom you cannot fail to be pleased, for he is a great scholar, and philsopher, and metaphysician, and all that sort of thing."

"Is this the gentleman who was lately buried alive?" inquired Miss Borradaile.

"The same — and this strange adventure renders him more interesting in my eyes than

all his attainments. It really qualifies him to become a hero of romance, which is a much better thing than a philosopher."

From this conversation it will be seen that her Grace had not been apprised of Gale Middleton's departure from London, a fact which had been purposely suppressed by Lady Barbara Rusport, lest it should defeat the arrangements made with Lady Middleton, and invalidate their mutual contract.

"Talking of romances," resumed the Duchess, "this satirical novel has made me smile in spite of my blue devils and my headach, for some of my most intimate friends are inimitably shown up — unmercifully ridiculed; and yet in common candour I feel bound to confess that their characters are not overdrawn—not in the least. Indeed, if they were, one would not recognise them so immediately. Whoever he may be, the author is certainly uncommonly clever; too much so in some respects, for he presumes his readers to be equally learned, and I found myself at fault upon several occasions. Pray, Miss

Borradaile, what is the exact meaning of 'the lower empire?' and what is a catachresis? and when was the edict of Nantz revoked? and who was Leo the Tenth?"

Too much accustomed to such abrupt interrogatories to be in the least disconcerted, Miss Borradaile adjusted her spectacles, and in a pompous oracular voice began to reply to them, veiling her ignorance as usual, whenever she was doubtful of her ground, by an additional confidence of tone and circumstantiality of detail. In the midst of a most elaborate definition of a catachresis, of which word she knew not the import, she was interrupted by the Duchess, who exclaimed, as she completed a long yawn—

"O—ay—yes—I understand it all now: I will not trouble you any further. I will beg you to read me a few pages out of this novel. It is really an amusing work, and one forgives the author his malicious pleasantry, because he does not draw caricatures. I dare say he has told all he knew, but if he had applied to me I could have given him hints

respecting some of my friends, which would have rendered his ridicule infinitely more caustic and piquant. After all, however, these publications are very mischievous and indefensible, and ought not to be encouraged. If there are any others lately published, mind that I have them. You may read on from page 218, *sotto voce*, if you please. It is all very well to have a masculine understanding, but a voice to match is too much for my poor head." These last words were spoken in a whisper.

Having fixed her spectacles in their proper position, and cleared her throat by a loud preparatory hem, Miss Borradaile read two or three pages, which possessed no particular interest, until she came to the following passage:—

"But the Juno of the fashionable Deities who had thus usurped the Olympus of the exclusive world, was the Duchess of Megrim, whose total want of attraction, either personal or mental, combined with her great wealth, had secured to her such an unblemished reputation, that it was equally impossible to deny

the purity of her conduct, or the grossness of her corpulent form; the fulness of her purse, or the emptiness of her head; the strength of her thick legs, or the weakness of her mind; the goodness of her conjugal character, or the total want of character in her flat unmeaning face. As the castle may well stand that has never been besieged, so the Duchess had never run away from the Duke, (although the whole world of his acquaintance seized every opportunity of setting her the example,) for want of a scapegrace to accompany her Grace in her escape. This was sufficient to constitute her a second Arria or Portia; and yet she had few domestic virtues except the virtues of her domestics, in the choice of whom she was laudably fastidious, taking none that were not good-looking, and six feet high. Prodigal of money where it could save her from the least trouble or annoyance,—with little disposition to discover real objects of charity, and no firmness to resist the importunity of impostors —she distributed her unavailing bounties rather to relieve her own feelings than those of others,

and was thus most selfish when she seemed to be most philanthropic.

"She loved her husband as he deserved—that is to say, not at all—and her friends as they expected, treating them with the politest courtesy before their faces, but amply indemnifying herself behind their backs. In fact, there was but one person in the world to whom she was sincerely attached, and that one was, perhaps, the least deserving of her preference, for it was herself. The attachment was attended with one advantage—she could never fear a rival. Unattractive as the painted Dutch frows hung up in her boudoir, and not less peevish and plethoric than the waddling pug that ——"

Here the reader, who had been for some time reddening, boggling, and hesitating, came to a full stop, uttered a huge hem! and exclaimed—"This seems very scurrilous, stupid, and unintelligible. Had I not better pass on to something else?"

"By no means," said her auditress, who entertained not the most distant suspicion that

the caricature was meant for a likeness of herself. "I cannot imagine who is intended by this character, but the author paints with such perfect fidelity to nature, that we shall be sure to discover. So pray go on."

Miss Borradaile, somewhat released of her embarrassment by the inapprehensiveness of her companion, thus proceeded:—"Not less peevish and plethoric than the waddling pug that wheezed at her feet, her ungraceful and ungracious Grace, whose want of ladylike qualifications would have excluded her, had she been left to find her proper sphere, from all but the lowest circles, was allowed to constitute herself the exclusive, *par inexcellence*, of the highest. Such in England is the omnipotence, the blindness, and the servility of fashion! That the Duchess of Megrim should pride herself upon her illustrious descent was natural, for, as she had no merits of her own, she might well stand excused for vaunting those of her ancestors; and it was equally *en règle* that she should pique herself upon her wealth, for even her nearest and dearest

friends were candid enough to admit, that, if she had not been worth money, she would have been worth nothing. Not the less implicitly was she reverenced as the goddess of the exclusives, the superlatives, the inaccessibles, the high and mighty fashionables: and we scarcely know upon which of the two parties we are passing the severest censure, when we declare that the idol and the worshippers were every way worthy of each other."

"Oh! the satirical creature!" cried the Duchess of Harrowgate, "whom can he possibly mean? Very extraordinary! I recognised all his other portraits at once: indeed, there was no mistaking them. Let me see—it cannot be the Duchess of Swansea, for *her* reputation is anything but unblemished; nor her Grace of Roscommon, for she, though ugly enough for the picture in every respect, is as poor as a rat; nor the Duchess of Maynooth, for though her thick legs, flat unmeaning face, and insipid character, answer the description well enough, she has no high descent to boast of, her grandfather having been a

thriving shopkeeper in the city. I could mention half a dozen to whom all the disparaging touches would be applicable enough, but I know not a single one who can claim unblemished reputation, illustrious descent, and great opulence. I suspect that our satirist can flatter when it suits him. Read on, however, read on, and I doubt not, that we shall presently solve the enigma, and find out whom he means."

Encouraged by this singular blindness on the part of her patroness, Miss Borradaile resumed the book, readjusted her spectacles, expectorated another loud "hem!" and continued her prelection as follows:—

"To assist her Grace in the laborious and irksome task of doing nothing, and to preserve her faculties in the full strength of their imbecility, she had engaged a toady, or humble companion, in the person of a Miss Blinkinsop, whose province it was to give information upon all subjects of which her patroness was ignorant, so that there was scarcely any limit to the duties of her office. For thus

enacting the Minerva she had no other qualification than that she resembled the owl of that goddess, not only in her screeching voice, and solemn air, but even in her countenance, especially when her round purblind eyes were cased in spectacles."—Here the reader again stopped in considerable embarrassment, for she began to recognise her own likeness, but, feeling that it would be better for both parties to dissemble her discovery, she read on with a nervous eagerness and increasing agitation, that hardly allowed her to complete the following extract. — "This petticoat quack afforded a notable instance of what may be accomplished by skilful humbug and confident pretension, in bamboozling weak-witted peeresses and hoodwinking such lords of the creation as are entitled to carry coronets upon, and nothing within, their heads. When we say that our smatterer was in reality as shallow as she imagined herself to be profound, we shall not have placed in too conspicuous a light her ignorance and her conceit. Unlike the ancient oracles, which generally gave ob-

scure and enigmatical answers when they felt themselves utterly unable to resolve questions propounded, our modern Pythoness was generally explicit and circumstantial in proportion to her want of knowledge—a species of intrepid assertion, which we could illustrate by innumerable specimens. Let the following suffice:—'What is the Pragmatic Sanction?' asked the Duchess, who had met with the phrase in a newspaper. 'It is the sanction,' replied Miss Blinkinsop, 'given by the Council of Prague in 1529 to the expulsion of the Jews as recommended by Pope Boniface the Second. The word was originally spelt Praguematic, but has become corrupted, like many other things, by the course of time.'—'Pray,' Miss Blinkinsop, inquired her Grace, 'what does this author mean by saying, that the bodies of the ancients were usually destroyed by cremation?'—'He means, madam, that they were reduced to an unctuous matter resembling cream, or rather to a species of tallowy substance which the French physiologists have denominated *adipocire*. A great quantity was

discovered in the cemetery of the Innocents at Paris, in the autumn of 1744.'"

Notwithstanding her inordinate self-conceit, Miss Borradaile recognised a sufficient degree of likeness in this caricature to be completely overcome by it, and there was therefore some truth in the averment of her indisposition, although she attributed it to a fictitious cause, when she exclaimed,—"I feel such a sickly faintness from the odour of those tuberoses, that I must beg permission to retire. Any other time, if your Grace wishes it, I can continue the reading of this book, though it really seems to me, a most scandalous, scurrilous, stupid, false, contemptible, spiteful—" As the indignant wrath of the speaker kept rising with every fresh epithet, she would probably have burst into tears had she ventured another, but she covered her retreat and her agitation by a seasonable "hem!" and hurried from the boudoir, carrying with her the obnoxious novel, lest her patroness should feel disposed to finish its perusal.

Though the torpid Duchess was always

craving for excitement, that which she now experienced was by no means of an agreeable nature. Not that she was displeased at the castigation bestowed upon Miss Borradaile, for she did not like her, and always bore the misfortunes of others with great philosophy ; but in recognising her companion's portrait, which she did immediately, she had unfortunately discovered that the *pendant* was meant for herself, and thus was she doubly mortified, not only in her own person, but in being represented as the dupe of a shallow and illiterate pretender. Extreme as it was, her vexation would have been still greater, had she not flattered herself that the caricature was too extravagant to be admitted as a likeness, even by her friends. " Thank Heaven !" she exclaimed, " *I* have none of Miss Borradaile's conceit; I am always ready to acknowledge my faults; I pique myself upon my candour; and I plead guilty therefore at once to the illustrious descent, the great wealth, and the unblemished reputation of which I am accused ; but as to all the rest, it is so notoriously and even ridiculously false

as to refute itself. Nor has poor Miss Borradaile any of the gross ignorance imputed to her by this clumsy slanderer; if she had, I must have discovered it long ago. However, the very suspicion is an additional motive for getting rid of her, and I must quickly give her a *congé*, either by marriage, or by pensioning her off." This soliloquy was interrupted by the announcement of Lady Barbara Rusport, to whom the Duchess, making not the least allusion to the satirical novel, communicated her increased anxiety to dispose satisfactorily of " the amiable and talented Miss Borradaile." Her Ladyship, aware that the husband whom they had selected for her had withdrawn from the scene of action, strenuously recommended a small pension as a sovereign remedy, and undertook to negociate the matter between the kind-hearted Duke, and the object of his intended bounty. " *Bien entendu*," said the Duchess, " that we cannot secure the young citizen as a husband, an arrangement which, in spite of all her protestations about independence, and freedom, and single blessedness,

I have no doubt poor Miss Borradaile would prefer; while I know it would be more acceptable to the Duke, who is absurdly fastidious in such matters."

Great had been the anxiety and incessant the occupations of Lady Middleton, since the Duchess of Harrowgate condescended to fix the night when she was to honour her with her presence in Portland Place. Paragraphs announcing this important event had duly gone the round of the fashionable journals, and the gossipers and scandalmongers had been busily occupied in assigning uncharitable motives to both parties for forming such an unprecedented and incongruous alliance. Some insinuated that her Grace, who had seen all the other sights, shows, and monsters, in London, betook herself to Portland Place for the sake of inspecting a real live citizen and citizeness in their own house, just as travellers are induced by curiosity to visit a kraal of Hottentots, or a horde of New Zealanders. Others suggested that she had been attracted to the *terra incognita* in question solely by a desire to behold

the young gentleman who had been so mysteriously buried alive, and for whom, as it was currently reported, a round sum had been offered by a travelling showman, if he would consent to be exhibited at Bartholomew Fair. Most of these paragraphs, which were bandied about with a malicious industry, contained some sneering allusion to the civic origin of Lady Middleton, and to her folly and presumption in thus thrusting herself into a fashionable coterie, whose only object in receiving her was the same that formerly admitted the low-born fool at court,—to make her the butt of their ridicule and contempt. Caustic and stinging as they sometimes were, Lady Middleton's predominant feeling, in the perusal of these attacks, was always of a pleasing nature, for they made no humiliating averment that she did not feel to be abundantly counterbalanced by the wide-spread announcement of the visit she was about to receive from the dictatress of the exclusives. There were others with much higher claims to the distinction than Lady Middleton, who would

gladly have borne the brunt of ten times as much sneering ridicule, could it have ensured them an admission into the Duchess of Harrowgate's circle; so cringing, so base, so degrading is the morbid mania for enrolment among the fashionable *élite*, on the part of many English females, who, in every other respect understand the dignity that is due to their sex and to themselves.

When this long-projected party was first announced to Sir Matthew, it encountered his decided opposition; for, as he cared not a doit for the whole peerage, and had a thorough contempt for people of fashion, whom he designated as a set of painted butterflies, or idle drones that brought no honey to the national hive, he had always ridiculed his wife's fantastical hankering for their society; while he felt in its full extent the indignity of the conditions upon which the proposed entertainment was to be given. "What, the dickons!" he exclaimed, "give up my own house! turn it into an hotel for a fat flounder-faced duchess and a parcel of scraggy-throated coun-

tesses, with as many feathers in their head as would rig out a funeral! Fine feathers don't always make fine birds, though, hey, hick! Find 'em in fiddle-scrapers and squalling Signoras, give 'em French kickshaws for supper, with as much Roman punch and Champagne as they can pour down their long throats, and all this for a set of high-bred cattle, that I never saw afore, and never want to see again, and none of whom will pay a farthing for making an inn of my house! Won't swear cause 'ee be always telling me to be genteel, but if I do, my name 's not Matt. Middleton."

"But, my dear," coaxed the wife in her softest purring voice, and with her blandest smile, "consider the great, the enviable, honour of our receiving the Duchess of Harrowgate in Portland Place. Her Grace——"

"Is a platter-faced squaw," interposed the husband. "Don't want any grace in my house, except before dinner and after, and that 's the only grace you don't seem to care about—had 'ee there! Lord love 'ee, Meg, do strike a light and look for your wits; what 's come to

'ee? Won't have more mice in my house than 'll catch cats. Tell 'ee what. If your lords and ladies want to fill their craws, and hear catgut-scraping in Portland Place, let 'em pay piper—let 'em cash up a guinea a head. Know better than that—more than their head 's worth: had 'em there! Hey, hick, ha, ha, ha!"

Lady Middleton had too much of the conventional politeness instilled by what is termed a genteel education ever to wrangle or to lose her temper; while her natural good sense, confirmed by experience, had taught her that nothing was to be gained by opposing her husband whenever he thought it incumbent upon him to assert his marital authority. Like other wives, therefore, she conquered by always yielding in the first instance, trusting to subsequent wheedling or importunity for obtaining all that she desired, a policy which seldom disappointed her. Firm and decisive as he was, and never to be overcome by a point-blank attack, Sir Matthew could not resist that teasing perseverance which, like the constant

dripping that wears a stone, at last grinds down the most obdurate opposition. By an exercise of domestic tact and good management, her ladyship contrived to secure by way of compromise every object at which she had been aiming, even to the exclusion of her husband, the baronet giving his consent to the party, provided he was not expected to be present.

"Won't play the waiter when I 'm the landlord," he exclaimed; "laugh at me if they like, behind my back, but not to my face: if they want a cat's-paw, let 'em take yours.—Well, well, every man 's a fool now and then: women always—ha, ha! had 'ee there, plump! Never mind, Meg: life 's too short for quarrelling: here to-morrow, gone to-day: all vanity and vexation; I got the vexation, you got the vanity: had 'ee there again, hey?—hick, ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Sir Matthew!" cried Lady Middleton, who, whenever by finesse and management she had carried her point, endeavoured to persuade her husband that she had yielded

to his superior authority, " My dear Sir Matthew, you are so inflexible when once you have formed a resolution that I have nothing to do but to submit. Be it therefore as you wish, though I am really vexed that I cannot induce you to do the honours of our party, as I fear it may seem disrespectful to the Duchess."

" Disrespectful to a fiddle-stick ! What respect did she ever show me? Never saw her full-moon fishy-looking face but once: thought she was a great halibut: had her there, hey ?— hick, what ?—"

Lady Middleton dropped the conversation, and hurried out of the room, declaring that she heard the knock of Sir Dennis Lifford, who had promised to accompany herself and Cecilia on a shopping expedition to Regent Street. Her ladyship's ear had not deceived her. On entering the drawing-room she found Sir Dennis reclining with his usual *nonchalance* on the sofa, and turning towards the pier-glass, that he might arrange his perfumed curls in the most becoming fashion, while he was languidly

conversing with Cecilia. Having completed his toilet, he moved deliberately round, raised his glass to his eye, and measuring Lady Middleton from head to foot, drawled out,—" Why, then, 'pon my honour it 's mighty ilegant ye 're dressed to-day, Lady Middleton, and the braids look nater than the *crêped* curls all to nothing, only they 're a trifle thicker on one side than the other. Ah, then, I 'm sorry to hear this morning from Mr. Burroughs that, in spite of the big reward, and the hue and cry that 's been raised, ye haven't discovered any of the fellows that played such havoc with your son. Och, the villains ! It 's uncommonly extr'or'nary they can't get hold of them."

" We still hope to do so," said Cecilia. " Though we may not succeed in the first instance, Providence will never suffer such a crime to go long undetected and unpunished. We fully calculate on some of the party turning king's evidence."

" And so they will, never doubt it. I bet a hundred to eighty that the matter's all cleared up in three months, and some of the rogues

crossing the water to Botany Bay. Talking of crossing the water, I must really once more intrate of ye, ladies, that ye'll fix an early day for making me a happy fellow. Mr. Burroughs will have all the papers and the marriage articles ready by Tuesday next, and I do hope the ceremony may take place on Wednesday. I have many reasons for wishing it. Is it Wednesday I said? Sure that 's the day I talked of going to Greenwich with Sir Terence Flanaghan to eat white bait; and I betted him fifty I'd row all the way back to London Bridge, barring the tide being against me. And why shouldn't I? Wednesday! what other engagement would I have? I've a notion of something; but such a head as mine! Pray, Lady Middleton, what was I talking of just now?"

"Only of such a trifling circumstance as marrying my daughter on the day you mentioned."

"Faith, and so I was! Ah now, pray let it be Wednesday, and no later, and get Sir

Matthew to give his consent. Oblige me in this, and ye'll be conferring a mighty favour upon me."

"You are very importunate, Sir Dennis, but I really cannot see the necessity for such extreme haste. Cecilia, I dare say, will not change her mind."

"That may be uncommonly true, Lady Middleton," said the Baronet, passing his fingers slowly through his hair; "but then you know, *I* may."

"If there is any chance of that," said Cecilia, reddening with anger at such an impertinent speech, "you had better not commit yourself by an irrevocable vow. I should be sorry to interfere with your party to Greenwich, and I beg therefore that you will hold yourself at perfect liberty to——"

"Nay, nay," cried Lady Middleton, equally alarmed at the lover's indifference and at her daughter's petulant reply, "you must not take Sir Dennis *au pied de la lettre;* this affected *nonchalance* is, after all, only a *façon de parler*,

adopted in compliance with the fashion. As a man of honour, he would never think of withdrawing from so solemn an engagement."

"Ah now, Lady Middleton, indeed and that 's mighty kind of you; and sure its every bit true. Is it I that would be for putting off the marriage, when all I want is to have it brought on as soon as possible, for reasons concerning Lord Ballycoreen at Paris, in which we are all equally interested, as I have already explained both to your Ladyship and Sir Matthew. Och then, Cecilia! don't look so hard-hearted and cross, but say you forgive me. Sure, when it 's such a mons'ous bore to remember things, a man may sometimes forget himself."

Cecilia, who had been completely piqued out of her usual placidity, made no reply, but stood pouting and twiddling a card-case round and round, as if uncertain what to say or do, when Sir Dennis, suddenly dismissing all his lounging listlessness, started from the sofa, sunk upon one knee, seized her hand, gazed tenderly upon her face, and, with a theatrical tone and gesture, ejaculated—

" O what a deal of scorn looks beautiful
In the contempt and anger of that lip!
Cecilia, by the roses of the Spring,
By manhood, honour, truth, and every thing,
I love thee so, that, maugre all my pride,
Nor wit, nor reason can my passion hide."

" There!" exclaimed Lady Middleton, " I am sure you cannot remain inexorable after such a declaration as this. I never saw Sir Dennis half so animated; but, when people are really in love, they are easily excited into these rapturous effusions. He reminds me of Gale, only that I never saw your poor brother half so well dressed."

Cecilia, who had not forgotten the similar scene at the Colosseum, and who thought it impossible that a man should spout poetry to her upon his knee unless he was furiously enamoured, was easily won, not only to pronounce his forgiveness, but to promise that she would assist her mother in endeavouring to persuade Sir Matthew to consent that the marriage should be solemnised in the following week.

CHAPTER III.

Where now, ye lying vanities of life,
Ye ever-tempting, ever cheating train!
Where are you now? and what is your amount?
Vexation, disappointment, and remorse.

THOMSON.

IT happened that, on the day fixed by the Duchess of Harrowgate for the musical party in Portland Place, Sir Matthew, having some official business to transact in his capacity of alderman with the common councilmen of his ward, had engaged a party of them to dine with him afterwards at the London Tavern, a circumstance very acceptable to Lady Middleton, who, knowing his boon companions of the city to be not less stanch topers than himself, had no apprehension of seeing him return home until long after the departure of her fashionable guests. How she had toiled

and tormented herself in all the preliminary arrangements; how keenly she had calculated the mode in which the greatest display could be reconciled with the smallest expense, so as to combine magnificence with meanness; how she had racked her imagination and exhausted her taste in arranging the decorations for the rooms, and the ornaments for the supper table; how long and deeply she had meditated upon the new dresses to be worn by herself and her daughter—these and a thousand other hows, whys, and wherefores, "the willing Muse shall tell." Suffice it to state, that all was at length completed to her entire satisfaction; the great, the important, the long expected, night had arrived; the drawing-rooms, hung with rich draperies, and brilliantly illuminated with wreath-entwined lamps, lustres, and candelabra, seemed to anticipate, by their joyous aspect, the gay and glittering pageant of which they were shortly to be the scene; every thing in short was ready, and every thing wore a look of cheerful expectation, unless we may except the bass-viols, violoncellos, and other musical instru-

ments deposited in a little orchestra, fitted up at the extremity of the suite. These vehicles of harmonious sound, which had so often enraptured a polite audience, and were about to do so again, appeared, by their grave aspect, to be wrapped up in the dignity of their own silence, and to be either feeding upon the recollection of their past exploits, or to be seriously perpending what they should next achieve. The leader's violin, supported by a music-book, was evidently consulting the bow twisted beneath its bridge; the subordinate instruments were not less obviously listening to the conference; and as to a portly bass reclining against the wall in a brown study, you might have sworn that he was weighing the respective merits of Rossini and Mozart. Perhaps we may have erred in thus interpreting the meditations of these inanimate occupants of the orchestra; but as to the significant and serious air of self-importance which they severally assumed, we speak without the smallest fear of contradiction.

Lady Middleton's good taste, of which we have already made honourable mention, shone

conspicuous in the embellishments of the apartments, which were at once chaste and rich ; sufficiently resplendent to stimulate and delight, but not so gorgeous as to dazzle and satiate the spectator, or to offend him by an air of ostentation. In her personal appearance the same nice tact was perceptible. Other wives, circumstanced like herself, might have thought themselves justified, considering the great reputed wealth of Sir Matthew, in bedizening themselves with diamonds, and challenging the admiration which the high and low vulgar willingly concede to such evidences of opulence. Aware of her origin, though she did as much as possible to forget it, and determined not to afford a plea for any sneering imputations upon civic finery, Lady Middleton left her jewels in their box, and, avoiding all attempts at magnificence, only sought to render her attire as elegant and as becoming as possible.

As a special favour, she had procured from Lady Barbara Rusport a list of the company to be invited, with an intimation, however,

that some addition might be subsequently made to the number. Over this catalogue, many names of which appertained to members of the high and mighty exclusives, superlatives, and inaccessibles, had she brooded with the exultation of a little mind, which feels that it is about to triumph over and to mortify all its competitors. Of these names she had extracted the most fashionably conspicuous to weave into a variety of newspaper paragraphs, writing them with her own hand, and seldom concluding her employment without ejaculating in a tone of triumphant delight. "So much for Mrs. Maltby! I will take care she shall have all the papers. Poor thing! she will be half killed with envy!" Many people are in the habit of imputing malignant feelings to those whom they dislike, as an excuse for their own; a species of self-vindication, in which it will be seen that Lady Middleton was not deficient, although, in point of fact, there was little or no ground for the charge against her sister, and consequently no valid pretext for her own jealous and uncharitable feelings. "There

will be no small uproar," she continued, "among my old acquaintance, when they find that not one of them is invited to my party; but as I shall be under the necessity of cutting them when I have the *entrée* among the exclusives, it may be as well to bring our separation to immediate issue, and give them their dismissal at once. It is only to be never at home to them when I am in the house, and never to see them when I am abroad, and the whole affair will be settled in three months."

This soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Cecilia, who, under her mother's directions, was attired with an elegant simplicity, though the effect of her well-turned and well-dressed figure was neutralised by her inexpressive features and general air of insipidity. "I am sorry that we are not to have Sir Dennis to night;" said the mother, "he assures me that he could easily have accomplished it, through some of his noble friends who are acquainted with the Duchess; but as he abhors a crowd, has no particular *penchant* for music, and abominates trouble of all sorts,

he declared that he would not be at the pains of applying for a ticket."

To this observation the daughter made some unimportant reply, and, as they walked up and down the room, both endeavouring to assume an air of self-possession, which was foreign to their hearts, they fell into conversation upon the approaching entertainment, each hoping that the Duchess and Lady Barbara would come early, as there would otherwise be so much awkwardness in their being totally unacquainted with their guests. It was not without a sudden start of the body, and some little trepidation of spirit, that they heard the first thundering knock, which seemed sufficiently consequential to announce the desiderated patroness of the entertainment; but to their great disappointment, it proved to be a party of titled strangers, whose names they could not catch, so miserably were they blundered by Dupin, who gallicized one half of what he heard, and perverted the other moiety into gibberish. Carriages now rolled in unintermitted succession into Portland Place;

loud and incessant became the appeals to the knocker; Dupin announced a whole Babel of unintelligible appellations; peers, peeresses, and commoners, poured through the open door; the drawing-rooms began to fill with turbaned chaperons, rouged staring dowagers, tittering young ladies in tulle dresses and wreaths, *roué*-looking elderly gentleman with bald heads and spindle shanks, and here and there a solitary juvenile beau. Tongues chattered in every variety of intonation, from the loud confidence of the oracular and infallible peeress, to the lisp of the simpering *debutante;* plumes waved, diamonds glittered, and silks rustled; but still the Duchess and Lady Barbara did not make their appearance, and the embarrassment of Lady Middleton and her daughter, who, amidst all this interchange of recognitions and tittle-tattle, were no more noticed in their own house than if they had been statues, increased with every passing minute. Evident as was the awkwardness of their situation, it excited not in their distinguished visitants the smallest attempt to remove it; they conducted

themselves exactly as if they were in a theatre, or other public place, into which they had paid for admission. Upon these occasions there is a negative rudeness which none but the polite world can assume, and which is almost as offensive as a positive incivility. They who had first arrived, and who could not therefore fail to recognise the mistress of the mansion and her daughter, measured them superciliously through their glasses, and passed on with a cold stately indifference to criticise the rooms. There were but two unnoticed outcasts, and their situation spoke for itself, although many of the promenaders seemed to be quite unconscious of their presence, as with a condescending and patronising air they ejaculated—"Really, now—all things considered, the rooms are by no means inelegant—I hadn't the least idea they could get up these things so decently in this part of the town—ar'n't you amazed, Lady Wriggleton?"

"Oh, never more so! quite an agreeable surprise. It must be confessed that the apartments are admirably fitted up, though I un-

derstand that Sir Matthew——really I quite forget the gentleman's name—is a citizen and alderman. How very odd!—exceedingly singular!—remarkable! People may well talk of the march of intellect!"

Pride, it is said, feels no pain; but even Lady Middleton, with all her pitiful ambition and grovelling aspirations, felt humiliated at being exposed to so much impertinence in her own house. Cecilia, abashed at the bold and almost contemptuous stare with which she was regarded, whenever she ventured to lift up her eyes, could have cried outright; and both the mother and daughter listened with increasing impatience for the announcement of the noble patroness, who was to introduce them to their visitants, and enable them to be at home in their own house.

At length they caught the welcome names of the Duchess of Harrowgate and Lady Barbara Rusport, when they were presented in form, first to her Grace, and subsequently to several of her friends, most of whom comported themselves with an air of stiff, cold, haughty

condescension, little better, even in its assumed courtesy, than a direct insult. At this juncture a name was announced which would have induced Lady Middleton to distrust the evidence of her ears, but that the individual to whom it appertained was presently ushered into the drawing-room. It was no other than Mrs. Howard Maltby, who, having by some inexplicable means procured an introduction to the Duchess, had contrived to get invited to the party. Magnificently dressed, and looking provokingly well, she tripped up to the Duchess, made her a profound obeisance, smiled graciously upon the mistress of the mansion, and then ran up to every individual with whom she was acquainted, in order to state that she came as the friend of the Duchess, not in virtue of her relationship to the lady of the house. Poor Lady Middleton was ready to sink into the earth with vexation. To mortify Mrs. Howard Maltby had been the main object of the party which she had collected together with so much management; and now to find that her sister

had anticipated her in making the acquaintance of the Duchess, and outsparkled her in her own house, was beyond all human endurance. The victim, thus justly punished by the disappointment of her machinations and the recoil of her own angry feelings, writhed under the infliction; but good-breeding and conventional politeness enabled her to conceal her emotions beneath a smile more than usually bland and complacent. After the Duchess had gone through the form of presentation, leaning all the while on the arm of Miss Borradaile, she enquired for Gale Middleton, and on learning that he had been compelled, on account of his health to visit the country, she expressed her disappointment in terms that showed her to be out of humour, while her *protegée* brought her spectacles nearer to her eyes, and uttered a doleful and dissonant hem! From this moment her Grace, evidently piqued, introduced no more of her friends, but sunk into an easy chair, gazing at the assemblage with a vacant unconcern, and venting her spleen upon her

unfortunate toady, for Lady Barbara, anticipating this burst of peevishness, had made her escape.

Lady Middleton, already distressed and disconcerted, saw that something had annoyed her illustrious patroness, though she knew not what, and, by way of supplying some new object of attention, wished to expedite the music, as the performers had by this time mostly taken their positions in the orchestra; but even this she hardly knew how to accomplish without contravening the instructions she had received from Lady Barbara, and appearing vulgar, which it was her special object to avoid. "*Laissez faire*," was to be her motto, and an absolute *nonchalance* was to mark her demeanour. Far from caring for her guests, she was not even to wear the semblance of caring for herself, so that she wandered disconsolately up and down her rooms, with an anxious and aching heart but smiling and gracious countenance, not knowing to whom to speak, and spoken to by none; wishing the concert to begin, and yet afraid to give any orders for ac-

celerating it, lest she should exhibit an unfashionable *empressement*. For want of proper arrangements beforehand a tedious delay ensued, but the leader at length gave his preparatory flourish, the company took their seats, the place of honour being appropriated to the Duchess, and the concert at length began.

It exhibited the usual features presented by such entertainments among a people who pay more and care less for music than any other upon the face of the earth. The timid young ladies, who had been afraid lest their voices should be overheard, now ventured to flirt and chatter, like parrots, under cover of some of the finest pieces of Beethoven and Rossini; while the dowagers and old women gossips of either sex seemed determined that their tongues should keep tune with the fiddlesticks, getting into a louder key with every *crescendo* movement, as if resolved to "ride on the whirlwind and direct the storm." Had Orpheus himself played to such a herd of human animals, he would have set nothing dancing but their tongues. Even the vocal performers failed to

command more than an occasional attention, most of the company being evidently of opinion that no voice was so sweet as their own; while all offered a most audible and irrefragable proof, that even the taciturn English may be stimulated into loquacity by really good music. Upon this occasion, however, the spectators, we cannot call them auditors, were not less enthusiastic than discriminating in their applause, invariably lavishing the most ecstatic "bravos!" upon those songs or pieces to which they had paid the least attention. To be sure, they reserved these marks of favour for the conclusion, so that they were perhaps merely expressing their natural delight at being brought so much nearer to the termination of the concert. By the help of incessant discourse and occasional plaudits, it did terminate at length, all parties, and especially those who who had been the most incessant talkers, agreeing that it had been a remarkably good concert, and had gone off uncommonly well. Let us not however be misunderstood as imputing to our countrymen a uniform indifference to

the charms of music. When a private concert is to be followed by a supper, the last two or three pieces are sure to collect a numerous and eager audience, a fact that was illustrated at Lady Middleton's, where a knot of officers, a bevy of beaux, and two or three *vieux garçons*, all of whom, if they had no stomach for music, had at least an excellent ear for champagne and Roman punch, simultaneously made their appearance full three minutes before the commencement of the finale.

The performers, doubtless very much flattered by the vehement applauses they had received for not being heard, now took their departure, and the company began to perambulate the rooms, waiting for the announcement of supper, when a disturbance sounded up the stairs from the hall, of which we must give a passing explanation. Foiled in all her attempts to procure a ticket for the party, and yet determined to make a bold push for admission, Mrs. Burroughs had arranged with her friend Dupin, whose service she procured by a bribe, that she should be smuggled into the

drawing-room during the *melée* that usually precedes the going to supper. For the music she cared not, but she coveted the *éclat* of being present; and she only desired to be in time for the supper, because her dear little darlings were so fond of *bonbons*. Attired accordingly in her new figured silk dress, and bedizened with all her jewels, baubles, and gold chains, she presented herself in Portland Place; but, unfortunately for the success of her scheme, the Duchess had ordered that none should be admitted who did not bring their cards of invitation, and, to guard against interlopers, had directed that one of her own servants should be stationed in the hall. Faithful to her orders, this man put a *veto* upon her introduction; and Mrs. Burroughs, in the fear of a detection that would not place her in a very enviable light, made a precipitate retreat, leaving her battle to be fought by Dupin, who lavished abuse in broken English upon the Duchess's menial, and would probably have received a broken head in return, had he not

taken to his heels and sought sanctuary in the drawing-room.

Here the company were still lounging about in different groups, beguiling the time with such elevated and edifying conversation as is usually heard in similar assemblages. After complimenting one another upon their mutual good looks, their divine *toques*, delicious turbans, and exquisite tiaras, the elderly ladies parted from their dear friends with a most affectionate smile, and then whispered to their companions,—"Never saw her look so ill in my life,—a frightful head-dress, but, poor thing! she never had an atom of taste." The young ladies flirted, and simpered, and talked nonsense almost as glibly as the dandy danglers by their side; while the elderly gentlemen, gathered together in solemn conclave, discoursed with a becoming gravity of the winners and losers at the Newmarket meeting, of the new female opera-dancer, and of a recently discovered intrigue in fashionable life, upon the subject of which they evinced a proper

sense of morality, unanimously condemning the parties for the irremissible crime of—suffering themselves to be found out.

Tom Rashleigh, for thus familiarly was he always termed, who affected, upon every occasion, to be the very latest of the late, and who had rather hear the liquid music of outpoured champagne than the finest strains of Paganini, now made his way into the drawing-room, where his progress was presently arrested by the Duchess of Harrowgate, to whose arm-chair he was summoned. Her Grace's motives for wishing to conciliate the man she most disliked, we have already stated; but though she feared him, she found a certain pleasure in his society, for he sometimes said droll things, sometimes abused her best friends, and in either case administered a momentary excitement to her stagnant faculties. "Dear Mr. Rashleigh!" she exclaimed, "I am glad you are come, but how shockingly late you are! This affair is awfully dull; I have not found the least pleasure in it hitherto, and now I have lost Miss Borradaile."

"Surely *that* must be a pleasure. I congratulate your Grace on the loss, and recommend you to offer a handsome reward to any one who shall find, and *not* bring her back."

"Nonsense! do tell me whether you have passed her in the *melée*."

"Oh, yes! I saw her just now — *quite plain*."

"I understand the meaning of your emphasis, but I will have no reflections on poor Miss Borradaile, who does not make any pretensions to beauty."

"I don't know why she should not, since she lays claim to talents."

"Why should you always be so censorious, Mr. Rashleigh?"

"Why should others wish to monopolise all the scandal to themselves?"

"You do not glance at me, I hope. No injurious rumours can be laid at my door: I am merely an echo."

"Echo never begins a story, and in babbling about what she has heard from others, makes it less at every repetition. Far be it

from me to doubt that your Grace acts up to this character."

"Nay, *our* dull jibes may be excused; they fall to the ground by their own weight."

"But mine, your Grace would infer, being pointed with wit, and sometimes barbed with epigrammatic verse, fly like an arrow, and seldom suffer their object to escape without a wound. Ay, there's the rub. Doubtless you think, as others have done, that I deserve to smart for my smartness. I might be as malignant as others, if I would only be as stupid. Many thanks for the implied flattery. I never knew a man who would refuse a compliment to his head at the expense of his heart. But I differ from your Grace; there is a species of slander, which, being adapted by its ponderous dullness to every capacity, has a wider range than any other: like a leaden bullet, its heaviness only enables it to go farther, and hit harder."

"Nay, I am not in the humour for arguing, nor, indeed, for any thing else. You know how anxious I have been to get a good lion for my next grand party. I had already exhi-

bited the man who performs upon his chin, and the child who plays the Battle of Prague upon a penny trumpet, and the Swiss milk-maid who yells the Ranz des Vaches; and for my coming *soirée*, I had made sure of securing the son of our civic host, about whose strange adventure in the church-yard all the world have been lately talking; but he has taken himself off into Sussex—was ever any thing so provoking! One cannot easily get another man who has been buried alive."

"Not in London, Duchess! in the country they are common enough."

"They say that the poor young man's intellects, not of the strongest order before, will never recover from the fright."

"Talking of frights, yonder is Miss Borradaile, walking arm in arm with old Lady Totteridge, who pretends to have a nervous affection in the head—the only thing she has in it, by the by—in order that she may display her diamond tiara to more glittering advantage. I wonder that your *protegée* should select for her companion a deaf, dull, peevish crone, who,

were it not for the Thames Tunnel, would be the greatest boré in existence."

"It must be confessed that Miss Borradaile is somewhat singular in her tastes: she always attaches herself to what everybody else dislikes."

"I never understood until now the secret of her inordinate self-love."

"You are prejudiced against her; in solid attainments, I can assure you that there are very few of either sex who come near her."

"They are quite right; *I* wouldn't, for one. Ah! I do her an injustice; I see she can admire something besides herself, for she is evidently eulogising the drapery of yonder curtains, and in common candour I feel free to confess that the apartments are fitted up with an inexplicable taste, considering that they belong to a PARVENU, a *roturier*, an actual *bonâ-fide* alderman, and a native of the *terra incognita*, eastward of Temple Bar. We shall soon hear of Hottentots building habitable hotels." It required no small impudence in a man of the most obscure origin to affect this fashionable arrogance, but Rashleigh had upon

all occasions so confidently sneered at upstarts and fellows of low birth that he had actually extorted credit for being a person of good family. "Pray, Duchess," he continued, "did you notice that beautiful cast of Minerva in the hall?"

"No!"

"Then I will speak about it to Lady Bridget O'Leary; she, you know, must have seen it, for she has always a cast in her eye."

"How can you be so illiberal? hers is by no means a squint, but an agreeable obliquity of vision. Her admirer, Jack Rutland, thinks it a beauty."

"Ay, her eye is like a bowl; its bias takes it out of the straight line, only that it may more certainly hit the Jack. *Apropos* of little deviations from the straight line, where is your friend, Lady Barbara Rusport?"

"Just now she was sitting at the window of the boudoir, gazing at the moon, of which she has always been fond."

"That I can understand, for there is a man in it."

"I cannot listen to such innuendoes. Would you insinuate that Lady Barbara —— ?"

"I only say that she is a philanthropist. A person so charitable as your Grace will hardly hold this to be a disparagement."

"Really, Mr. Rashleigh, I do not exactly comprehend you."

"Truly, Duchess, I can very easily believe it; but hark! there is the supper bell, which few will deny to be the best and pleasantest music they have heard to-night. Shall I have the honour of escorting your Grace down stairs?"

Lady Middleton had requested the most distinguished nobleman present to offer his arm to the Duchess, which he tendered accordingly, but so completely was this dictatress of the fashionable world enslaved by her fear of ridicule, that, in defiance of all established rules, and to the profound horror of many a "tenth transmitter of a foolish face," she pleaded a prior promise to Rashleigh, and suffered him to conduct her to the supper-room.

A considerable quantity of plate, with a

variety of handsome ornaments, having been hired for the decoration of the tables, they presented a very brilliant appearance; the banquet was elegant without any gewgaw tawdriness, and sufficient without superabundance; yet the comfort of the whole entertainment was spoiled by some of those paltry economies from which Lady Middleton could not refrain, even in the midst of a profuse expenditure. Rather than pay the full price to men accustomed to wait at table, she had engaged a cheaper and less expert set of assistants, who, not knowing where to find any thing that was wanted, and unable to comprehend the broken English of the sputtering Dupin, ran over each other, spilled the liquids and the viands upon the guests, and filled the whole apartment with most admired disorder. The champagne, being from Sir Matthew's cellars, was of excellent quality, but as her Ladyship would not incur the expense of ice, which she declared to be unnecessary, and had moreover ordered the wine to be deposited upon the tables beforehand lest it should be purloined by the ser-

vants, it had become so warm as to be scarcely drinkable. Nor had she been more fortunate in the Roman punch, which, having been furnished by an inferior confectioner, who supplied it at a lower price, was little better than a libel upon the exquisite and unrivalled beverage of which it bore the name.

As some of the young sprigs of fashion conducted themselves very much as if they had been at a tavern, their dissatisfaction at these epicurean delinquencies came to the cognisance of Lady Middleton, not only by their distasteful looks, but by very unequivocal exclamations of surprise and disappointment, which filled her with inexpressible mortification. Though she could not hear Tom Rashleigh, she gathered from his manner, and the sneering laugh of his immediate circle, that the wag who affected an ultra and superlative epicurism, was unmercifully quizzing the contents both of the long and the green glasses. It annoyed her also to perceive that the Duchess, evidently *ennuyée*, notwithstanding the sallies of the witling at her side, looked frequently and im-

patiently at her watch, as if anxious for the hour at which she had ordered her carriage.

In spite of these partial failures, the banquet seemed to be passing off with a tolerable cheerfulness, so far as might be judged by the commingled clatter of tongues, glasses, and plates. A supper-party is almost always pleasant and sociable, and the present offered no exception to the festive and hilarious character of such entertainments, so far as the guests were concerned; though the mistress of the mansion and her daughter were not participants in the general gaiety. With a serene and complacent smile mantling over her features, the former sate upon thorns; while Cecilia, abashed and unnoticed, and feeling herself completely out of her element, sighed more earnestly for the conclusion of the entertainment than she had ever desired its arrival. The general exhilaration, however, continued to increase; the madeira and frontiniac, which were pronounced admirable, and were willingly substituted for the delinquent champagne, seemed gradually to thaw the torpor of even the most

frozen fashionable;—the *bonbon* crackers exploded with a sharp report that justified an affected exclamation of alarm from some and a derisive simper from others; the significant mottoes elicited pleasant titterings; smiling countenances, white teeth, and sparkling eyes were to be seen in every direction; the solemn foppery of *haut ton* had been so far forgotten, that an unequivocal, we had almost said a hearty, laugh had more than once been heard; in short, the whole party was at its very acmé of enjoyment, when a sudden and obstreporous irruption of strange figures into the banquetting room filled some with terror and all with utter amazement, instantly silencing every sound, except the screams of the more timid young ladies.

We have recorded that Sir Matthew had engaged a party of commoncouncil-men to dine with him at the London Tavern, all of whom were as unflinching topers as himself. At a late hour of the night some of these revellers were still at table, and still calling for fresh bottles, or shouting bacchanalian songs,

when, upon a proposal being made that some devilled turkey should be ordered for supper, Sir Matthew ejaculated—" Hey, what ?—do you want some—hick !—supper I mean. Lots to be had at my house. Meg has got the platter-faced duchess, and a set of scarecrow countesses to listen to—hick !—tweedle dum twee, and squally-wally. More fool she :—never mind : can't make a silken sow of a purse's ear. Tell 'ee what, lads. 'Spose we tumble in upon 'em and help 'em to—hick ! finish the—hick !—capital fun ! frighten platter-face and the scrags of mutton out of their wits. Hick, hick, hick ! Ha, ha, ha !"

For an enterprise that was to begin with a wild frolic and end with a supper and champagne his auditors, who were still more intoxicated than himself, were exactly in cue, and they accordingly received it with a shout of assent. Sir Matthew, scarcely able to stand, less, however, from ebriety than from his chuckling laughter, as he thought of the astonishment which his unexpected appearance would excite, invested himself in his alderman's gown ;

his companions put on their robes; and the whole party reeled into a hackney-coach, shrieking a verse of one of their standard bacchanalian songs—

> What 's life but a frolic, a song, and a laugh,
> My toast shall be this, while I 've liquor to quaff,
> May mirth and good fellowship always abound,
> Boys, fill up a bumper, and let it go round.

On descending from their vehicle in Portland Place, they found lying on the hall table some of the instruments belonging to the performers, when each, "for madness ruled the hour," the motion of the coach having completed the intoxication of the whole party, imitated the example of Sir Matthew, by snatching up a fiddle, followed him to the door of the supper-room, and burst into the midst of the assemblage, all scraping their violins in a dissonant screech, and yelling in chorus—

> Boys, fill up a bumper, and let it go round.

In the belief of many of the guests that this uncouth and boisterous pageant constituted a portion of the night's entertainment, and that the performers were destined to enact some

species of masque, the first cries and faint screams of the females were rather indicative of surprise than dismay; while the rest preserved silence, in order to gather, if possible, the meaning of the scene. Meanwhile Sir Matthew, still plying his screeching fiddle and hiccoughing his bacchanalian chorus, advanced to the head of the table, and, fixing his fuddled grapy eye upon her Grace of Harrowgate, stammered out—"What, hey, are you the moon-faced Duchess?—hick! very glad to see —no—ar'n't glad at all—not my doing—all Meg's—hick! But now you're come I 'll give 'ee a buss, not — notwith — notwithstand — hick!"

The first person that seemed to comprehend Sir Matthew's real plight, was the Honourable Augustus Fortescue Sidney Clavering, a sprig of nobility and a cornet of dragoons, who, after peering at him through a jewelled eye-glass, ejaculated with a distasteful look, and in an effeminate lisping voice—"Ath I hope to be thaved! the nathty fellow 'th beathtly drunk!" This had already been discovered to be the

case with the Baronet's companions, who, in the fond, maudlin blindness of intoxication, had offered to salute some of the mummy-like dowagers, and rouged scraggy countesses, occasioning a shrieking, dismay, and confusion, which it would be difficult to describe. In the midst of this hubbub the reeling Alderman put his audacious arm round the fat throat of the Duchess, and attempted to salute her cheek, when her Grace, struggling to avoid the indignity, escaped from the embrace, leaving in his arm not only her *toque* and its splendid ornaments, but the entire wig that concealed the ravages of time upon her head.

Heavens and earth! was ever such a profanation known? The dictatress of the *haut ton;* the queen of fashion, the autocratrix of the exclusives and the inacessibles, to be thus exhibited to the *élite* of her subjects, sitting upon her throne with a bald pate!! Even the inebriated Sir Matthew seemed by his stolid and bewildered stare to be struck aghast at this unexpected apparition of a bare scalp; but, as he discovered the cause of the pheno-

menon, he exclaimed — "Hey, what? little scull, big body—like a turnip on a sack of— Hick, hick, hick! Ha, ha, ha!"

The age of chivalry hath not altogether passed away. An indignant cry of—"Knock him down!" burst from the knights and cavaliers who had witnessed this inexplicable outrage, and several of those who surrounded the offender prepared to obey the summons; but the object of their wrath, always as bold in spirit as he was powerful in body, and now inflamed by the vinous valour that delights in a scuffle, no sooner perceived their intention, than he brandished his violin as a weapon of defence, and whirled it round him with a sudden and vehement swing which brought its extremity in collision with the scull of the Honourable Augustus Fortescue Sidney Clavering. The hollow sound that ensued, might have proceeded either from the instrument, or from the cranium upon which it impinged; but the effects upon the respective vacua were very different. With a lugubrious groan, the smashed violin breathed its last upon the spot,

while the unwounded cornet merely measured his length upon the floor, beholding an incalculable number of additional lights, and ejaculating "Oh the thocking, thanguinary thavage! Thave me! thave me! I am quite thure he hath thplit my thcull!" He had nothing further, however, to apprehend from his assailant, for Sir Matthew having overreached himself in the blow, tumbled beside his prostrate victim, and was utterly unable to rise again from the floor.

In other quarters of the room two or three of the commoncouncil-men, not less pugnacious than their leader, struggled and fought with those who endeavoured to secure them; but they were forcibly expelled, and their companions fairly carried out of the apartment in the simultaneous rush which swept the whole assemblage rapidly into the hall, and dispersed them in search of their respective carriages, amid hysterical cries, and indignant execrations, and vociferous orders, and clamorous footmen, and swearing coachmen, and a general confusion, such as had never before been witnessed in the

respectable and well regulated purlieus of Portland Place. Either on foot or in carriages, for the withdrawing of the visitants rather resembled a disorderly flight than an ordinary dispersion, the whole of the fashionables had presently betaken themselves to more appropriate haunts, leaving the scene of recent uproar to a melancholy tranquillity. Although the Duchess, by the assistance of some of her friends, had almost instantly re-established herself in her *toque* and peruke, she was too much mortified by the exposure she had suffered, and her apprehension of the ridicule which would be entailed upon her by Tom Rashleigh's satirical muse, to proceed to any other party; and she accordingly returned home in a most splenetic mood, vexed beyond all measure that she should have subjected herself to so much humiliation and annoyance, and yet not have succeeded in procuring the desiderated husband for Miss Borradaile.

Sir Matthew, the unconscious Marplot of all his lady's schemes and devices, had fallen fast asleep upon the floor, whence he was raised,

and carried to bed in the arms of his servants. The weeping and trembling Cecilia—for she was both grieved and terrified out of her customary composure—had already obeyed the orders of her mother by retiring to her apartment. Lady Middleton shortly afterwards did the same; but sleep, in the agitated state of her mind, being entirely out of the question, she threw herself into an arm-chair, covered her crimsoned face with her hands, as if she felt that she should never be able to show it again, and, bursting into an agony of tears, remained for a long time overwhelmed with a painful and humbling conflict of shame, rage, and vexation.

Thus ended the grand *soirée musicale*, which had been planned and executed with so much care, cost, and contrivance, and which, from its first concoction to its final failure, had heaped upon the meanly ambitious Lady Middleton nothing but bitter disappointment and pitiable degradation.

CHAPTER IV.

There stands the messenger of truth; there stands
The legate of the skies! His theme divine,
His office sacred, his credentials clear,
——— by him in strains as sweet
As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.

COWPER.

GALE MIDDLETON, on the morning after his arrival at Brookshaw, was awakened at an early hour by the twittering of the sparrows, and the sharp whistle of the swallows, whose nests were clustered in the interstices of the scalloped gables, and who were darting backwards and forwards like feathered arrows. The lark too, that Orpheus of the sky, was piping aloft, while the blackbirds and thrushes, which were never suffered to be disturbed in their leafy sanctuaries, were sounding a reveille, and the chanticleer of the poultry-yard, who

had flown atop of the garden wall, sent his shrill clarion up to the windows, as if determined to arouse the newly-arrived master of the mansion. "You are right, my serenading friends," said Gale, as he quitted his bed; "he who resides in the country should conform to the dictates of nature and the habits of the animals by which he is surrounded. Never will he then complain of these melodious matins."

Unavailing would have been the attempt, even had he endeavoured to compose himself to sleep, for the village ringers, without waiting to enquire whether the clangour of their unmitigable bells would be acceptable to the invalid, had now betaken themselves to the belfry, whence they pealed forth a stunning welcome that shook the ancient gables of the lodge, and sent the feathered tenants twittering and screaming through the air, as if inquiring the cause of the uproar. Pleased with this rude greeting, he completed his dressing, and descended to the garden, where he found Robin already waiting for him at the porch. "Heart

alive, master!" cried the latter, "you be 'most too late; the dew will be all off, and there be a cloud coming over the sun. Only to think of your dawdling so! Come along, come along!" So saying, he hurried impatiently along the gravel-walk, his master following at a more tranquil pace, until they reached the peacocks, when the old man, taking the arm of his companion without the least ceremony, placed him in the best position for viewing the leafy sculpture, of which he pointed out the beauties, improvements, and alterations, with an enthusiastic grandiloquent prolixity that we cannot think of inflicting upon our readers.

After having paid his tribute of admiration to these specimens of perverse ingenuity, for he thought it better to do some gentle violence to his own taste and feelings than to hurt those of Robin, he suffered himself to be led round the garden, hearing rather than heeding the prattle of his garrulous companion, who enlarged upon every flower-bed and its prospects for the season, as if he were detailing the eventful history of an empire. While thus

perambulating his own little domain, the feelings of Gale were soothed into a sweetness and serenity to which many causes contributed. A return to one's own home, however lowly or lonely it may be, is always accompanied with gratifying sensations. The morning was bright, balmy, and exhilarating; the garden, now at the height of its vernal beauty, perfumed the air with the delicious odour of lilacs, wall-flowers, and other aromatic plants; the bells were ringing a merry peal; and, in the pauses of their sonorous symphony, the birds stretched their little throats with an increased energy, as if determined not to be outdone. Gale's complacent mood was exalted into a higher and nobler enjoyment, when, upon opening the garden-gate, and passing over the little bridge into the village, he noticed the fervour of unaffected attachment with which he was everywhere greeted. Utterly repudiating that alienation and arrogance of demeanour towards the lower orders, which are but too characteristic of our English gentry, Gale Middleton, naturally affable and benevolent, had always con-

ducted himself towards his rustic tenants with a friendly and earnest courtesy, which, being equally free from the pride that apes condescension and the familiarity that breeds contempt, had won universal regard, without forfeiting an atom of respect. Many there are who inveigh against our impoverished peasantry, as being sullen and disaffected towards their superiors. God knows they have little cause to be grateful! but few who have not tried the experiment would imagine how easily they may be conciliated by the smallest favours, or merely by an ingratiating demeanour.

Scarcely had the "Young Squire" crossed the bridge, when the villagers came flocking around him with bows, and scrapes, and curtseys, and cheerful smiles and welcomes; some congratulating him on his arrival, others inquiring after his health, and a third party, among which the good gossips were conspicuous, intreating to know how his recent accident had happened, and "all about it." Affection and indignation conspired with curiosity to make them so importunate upon the latter

point, that the object of this gratifying sympathy, who saw that widow Stubbs, and the rubicund Master Penfold, the butcher, and Jemmy Sanders, the beadle, and, indeed, the whole rustic conclave, thought themselves, in some degree, entitled to know the real rights of a matter which had been so variously represented, sate himself very good-naturedly down upon a block of wood, beneath an old sycamore-tree, and gave them a succinct account of his misadventure, which he terminated with repeating the assurance that he now felt but little inconvenience from his wound, and doubted not in a few days, since he was once more among his good friends at Brookshaw, to find himself perfectly re-established.

Followed by the blessings and prayers of the whole rustic population, he returned to the parlour of the lodge, venting a mental thanksgiving to Heaven that he was restored to the tranquil pleasures of the country, when he drew forth the miniature which he ever carried in his bosom, pressed it tenderly to his heart, and remained for some time gazing earnestly

upon it, completely lost in a profound but apparently a pleasant and soothing reverie.

The sound of the church-clock, dispelling his fit of abstraction, reminded him that he ought to send a gratuity to the ringers, although their musical clangour had given him a headache, which threatened to last all day. Summoning Robin from the garden, he accordingly despatched him with a sovereign for this purpose; but, after the lapse of about twenty minutes, the messenger returned with a simpering and significant air, and, depositing the money upon the table, exclaimed, as he let fall a smart slap upon the thigh,—"Never stir, but I 'm glad on't, that 's what I be! ay, as if my tall stocks had all turned out double, and the yellow-admiral tulips had all blowed without a streak."

"Why have you brought me back the sovereign?" enquired Gale.

"Why, master, the ringers—(they shall all on 'em have as many seeds and cuttings as ever they like,)—the ringers do hope no offence, but they be vexed to think that you should think

that they should think of ringing the bells for the lucre of gain, when they did it out of pure love like, respect being had to what 's adequate and emblematical. When they be ordered to ring for a wedding, and things be confederated accordingly, they be agreeable to take whatever folks may give them; but upon this here critical emergency they won't unanimously take nothing."

"Well, well, they shall not eventually conquer me in a contest of love. You may return to your occupations, good Robin; I well know that your garden labours are your greatest pleasure. And is this the class?" exclaimed Middleton, when he was once more alone; "which is reproached with an ungrateful, sordid, and selfish spirit? Glad should I be to learn what order of our finical and fastidious gentry could have exhibited more delicacy and disinterestedness. Verily, these peasants have the spirit of gentlemen; while the well-dressed arrogators of that title are too apt to content themselves with its outward form and semblance."

After having rested himself awhile in the parlour, Middleton was about to proceed to the laboratory, which was detached from the house, and fitted up with a complete apparatus for every sort of chemical experiment, when an unexpected visiter made his appearance, in the person of Jemmy Sanders, the parish-beadle. This functionary, scraping his hob-nailed shoe upon the carpet, and making correspondent salaams with his laced hat, advanced about a yard from the door, and then, smoothing down his shock of black hair with his left hand, and protruding a paper with his right, exclaimed with a gruff voice,—" Hope no offence, Squire, but I ha' got a letter for your honour, and if there be any faults of spelling, as I wrote it myself, I hope you 'll excuse it, Squire, seeing as how they do always have such uncommon bad pens at the Black Bull." So saying he deposited on a side-table an awkwardly folded square letter, the wafer of which was yet wet, and made his escape with a clownish precipitation. Having succeeded in obtaining a copy

of this document, we present it to out readers in the original form.

" TOO SQUIRE MIDDLETON.

" At meeting of the Ringers and others held at The Black Bull at Brookshaw, The 26 May, Resolv'd unanimousely—"

" That we Do congrattilate The Squire On his arrival at The lodge, A'ter The late unhuman and bloody-minded attack, wishing him Elth and appiness To enjoy The same.

" That we Do Trust The perpertators of The unheard of willany, of which we have just heard the peticklars, Will be brought To condine punishment, hoping That The guarden angle who preserved your life will often Do The same upon similar occasions.

" That we Trust The same guarden angle will cause your horn to be exalted, will entail you With blessings, and grant you length of ears accordingly, trusting you will Be korshus of your elth, since a'ter all, 1 must Take care of 1 self.

" Resolved That on toosday next, The

whether being shootable, we will mow, make, and carry The Squire's 12 aker field, beyond the dairy copse. Free gratis. For nothing.

"Resolved that on the anyversary of this day a peal of Triple-bob-majors shall be Rung annually, Once A year by—

"God Save The King!

"Singed on behalf of The Ringers and The hole village by me—

"JAMES SANDERS, Beetle."

Too sensibly touched by the affectionate kindness that breathed through this rude address even to be able to smile at its illiterate composition, Middleton could only exclaim, as he finished its perusal—"Here again are ignorance and rusticity, at which the scholar might flout, and the man of the world shrug his shoulders, while neither of them, perchance, might possess a tithe of the true politeness, the gratitude, and generosity, that have prompted this warm-hearted effusion. Even their labour, which is their only property, are these poor people willing to give up to me,

but I will not suffer them to waste for my benefit that which is so essential to their own. Oh much calumniated peasantry of England! impoverished and oppressed, and then libelled because destitution and ill usage have degraded you, how manifest is it that you want but a little kindness, and a fair remuneration for your labour, to draw forth all the natural goodness of your character, and triumphantly to refute all the aspersions of your slanderers! Often have I been reproached by some of the neighbouring landlords with underletting my farms and cottages, and overpaying my labourers; or in other words, with not sufficiently grinding the faces of the poor. For the miserable addition which these oppressors put into their pockets they pay a bitter price, in the certain hatred and malevolence, and the not improbable revenge, of dependents whom wretchedness has driven to desperation. In the trifling favours which I bestow—favours did I say? away with the proud word! for the natural rights that I concede to those whom I employ I am repaid a thousand-fold in the affection

and gratitude, which are dearer to me than are all his hoarded treasures to the miser; while they make me a gainer, even in a worldly sense, by imparting an additional security to my property. Strange! that in these perilous times the wealthy wronger of the poor should put his trust in guns, and traps, and sanguinary laws, instead of fencing himself round about with the cheaper and more secure rampart of justice, generosity, and love!"

Our visionary, for such will the maintainer of these strange notions be doubtless termed by many, proceeded to his laboratory, exulting in the thought that he should have leisure to pursue without interruption the chemical studies and experiments to which he was so much devoted. Welcoming his retorts and crucibles, he threw off his coat, invested himself in his fustian jacket and leathern cap, and was presently at work in the completion of some process, upon which he had been occupied before he left Brookshaw. He was rather premature, however, in imagining that he should be left long undisturbed; and yet a smile of

sincere pleasure greeted the intruder who presented himself at the door of the laboratory, and walked in with the freedom and cordiality of an old friend, although their mutual acquaintance was but of recent standing.

His visitant, the Reverend Mr. Hargrave, might still be termed a young man, although the somewhat antiquated fashion of his clothes, and the seriousness of his manner, which at times amounted to gravity, gave him an appearance of being older than he really was. Originally destined for the diplomatic line, he had been induced by some disgust inspired by the nature of his profession, combined with a disappointment in his affections, to quit the path of life that had been chosen for him and enter into holy orders. When, at his ordination, he solemnly declared that he believed himself to be called to the ministry by the promptings of the Holy Ghost, the words were not, as is too often the case, a sacrilegious mockery. Penetrated, even to his inmost soul, with the pure, beautiful, and peace-breathing morality of the Scriptures, he considered the

office of a Christian minister, when undertaken from conviction and conscientiously administered, to be the noblest and the most delightful upon earth. It was at Brookshaw that he first entered upon his labour of love, for such might the performance of his ministerial duties be strictly termed, his very first act affording a welcome proof to his parishioners that they were blessed with a clergyman of no ordinary stamp. Tithes, with all the undignified circumstances of their collection, had always appeared to Hargrave the most painful and derogatory concomitant of the sacred profession; and as to squabbling and wrangling for their increase, he thought that the holy hucksters who descended to such a sordid contest, however they might add to their income, were sure to forfeit the respect of their flocks, and consequently to lose the means of their ministerial utility, even where they did not entail discredit upon religion itself.

"My good friends!" said Hargrave to his parishioners, whom he had collected at the parsonage two or three days after his arrival,

"I am aware that, in the present state of the agricultural interests, the full exaction of tithe would be a most intolerable grievance. Even in flourishing times, I consider a tenth of the gross produce of a farm to be a most inordinate and oppressive tax upon capital and industry, while it operates as an almost insuperable bar to the investment of money in improvements. I am already so fortunate as to possess a trifling independence, and as I find that I can maintain, in this cheap village, a sufficiently respectable appearance with a very moderate expenditure, I purpose claiming from you only one half of the tithe that you paid to my predecessor; begging you most distinctly to understand, that although this arrangement shall be permanent so long as I remain among you, I do not, and indeed cannot, compromise the rights of my successor, who may not be in circumstances to continue the remission which I have so much gratification in now offering to you."

This alone would have been sufficient to establish his popularity, which was subsequently

confirmed and exalted by the whole tenour of his truly Christian life. Such a broad, I had almost said such an impassable, line of demarcation, often separates our fastidious, expensively educated clergy from their rustic flocks, that there can be little sympathy and no cordiality between them. Such was not the case with the benevolent and condescending Hargrave. Sufficiently elevated by his manners and attainments to command the unbounded reverence of his congregation, he conciliated their regard by a demeanour uniformly frank and friendly, and by participating occasionally in their occupations. Sometimes he might be seen, soon after sunrise, holding the stilts of the plough in his own field, a healthy occupation, which always exhilarated him with the thought, that, while thus subduing the earth, he was enjoying the noblest of triumphs, in contributing to the support and preservation of his fellow-creatures, whose destruction constituted the sole boast of the vulgar conqueror.

But that which most recommended him to the general love of the lower orders was his anxiety

to promote all their innocent amusements. So far from sharing the ascetical views of those Protestant monks who grudge a half hour's respite to the toiling and joyless poor, and would condemn them to additional austerity and mortification, he delighted to promote their pastimes of all sorts, and was even gratified when, after the performance of their religious duties, they devoted the Sabbath evening to harmless recreations. At their Saturday cricket-matches he generally sate upon the green and kept the score; and he was invariably requested to be the umpire in their friendly sports and contests. Without any such solicitation, he constituted himself the vindicator of their rights, whenever they were threatened or assailed, preventing by his representations the enclosure of the common, compelling the neighbouring magistrates to allow the continuance of the statute fair, which they had sought to abolish, and upholding, with strenuous unremitting zeal, the smallest of the few privileges to which the poor are entitled.

Even had he not been abundantly rewarded for such brave beneficence by a grateful consciousness of having discharged a duty and diffused happiness around him, he would have found an all-sufficing recompence in its effects upon his parishioners. Looking upon his predecessor, who was in every respect the reverse of Hargrave, as an oppressor, who cared for no interests but his own, many of them quitted their attendance upon church altogether, while not a few swelled the ranks of a dissenting chapel, which had been mainly run up on the strength of the clergyman's unpopularity. Convinced that those doctrines which could form so pure, so disinterested, so exemplary, a Christian as their present pastor, must be superior to all others, the inhabitants of Brookshaw gradually flocked back to their parish-church, and the dissenting chapel was speedily shut up. Few acts of immorality, none of violence or crime, were committed within the precincts of this happy village; and when the greater part of Sussex, almost in a state of civil warfare, was terrified by the daily outrages of the

starving and maddened peasantry, or by the midnight atrocities of the rick-burners, the squire and the clergyman of Brookshaw, in most other places the first objects of attack, having not the smallest apprehensions for their own persons and property, were enabled to leave their homes and assist in the pacification of the disturbed districts. During their absence the villagers, voluntarily associating for that purpose, took it by turns to guard during the night time the stacks and buildings of the Lodge and the parsonage, lest any itinerant incendiary, a stranger to the neighbourhood, should attempt their destruction. While havoc and terror reigned all around it, the village of Brookshaw enjoyed a profound tranquillity, and Middleton and Hargrave, on returning to their homes, relieved the parishioners from the nocturnal patrollings which they had undertaken, both of them declaring, with a justifiable pride, that they trusted to the love, the honour, and the justice, of their fellow-countrymen, which they believed to be a surer defence than all the bayonets of a banded army.

CHAPTER V.

Let there be no honour
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love,
Where there 's another man: the vows of women
Of no more bondage be, to where they are made,
Than they are to their virtues; which is nothing:
O, above measure false! *Cymbeline.*

"WHEN you entered," said Middleton, in answer to Hargrave's enquiries, "I was engaged in analysing the composition of different earths, to which, methinks, our chemical and experimental philosophers have not hitherto paid sufficient attention. Conquering all the other elements, man has converted them into slaves, who minister incessantly to his wants and pleasures. The invisible and impalpable air is made to grind his corn, to waft his vessels across the ocean, either for purposes of commerce or of war, and to answer a thou-

sand other purposes of utility and delight. Of the blessings which fire is made to dispense, let our manufacturers attest the importance and the extent. Water has been rendered not less widely subservient to our comforts. Over the pathless deep the mariner ploughs at pleasure an unerring road, which, marrying the remotest ends of the earth to one another, enriches them with the dower of commerce. From the action of fire upon water has been generated an omnipotent vapour, which, though it has yet scarcely escaped from the cradle of its infancy, already performs, in England alone, the labour of many millions of men; but, upon the element with which he is in more immediate contact, upon the qualities of the earth beneath his feet, man seems to have bestowed less analysis, and to have exercised less ingenuity, than upon any other."

"Because the mere process of tilling the ground is so simple as to be unsusceptible of improvement."

"That is precisely the point upon which I am at issue with our cultivators. If by ana-

lysing different earths we could discover the component elements in which reside the powers of fertilising, germinating, or enlarging, the various seeds or roots that are committed to the ground, we might be provided with the means of accelerating and perfecting all the vegetable operations of nature, so as to give an incalculable increase to her productiveness. We have found how to elicit the latent heat with which the atmosphere is charged; why may not the same subtile element, the secret germ perhaps of its fertility, reside in the superficial earth, awaiting the hour when it shall be discovered, and applied to the purpose of vivifying the soil into a more exuberant fecundity?"

"You may at least hope for success without being deemed a visionary; but for me, whose province it is to analyse the moral soil, there is little chance of my making any discovery that will very materially increase the crop of its virtues, or sensibly diminish the weeds of vice with which it is overrun."

"Alas, I fear not!" said Middleton with a sigh; "in that direction there is no prospect of

improvement. Providence has given us the wish but not the power to penetrate its inscrutable designs. In the destiny of man all is dark, all is calculated to inspire despondency, if not despair; there is but little happiness for him in this world, but little hope in the next."

Hargrave, who detested polemical arguments, and who knew the morbid sentiments of his friend upon these subjects, never attempted to discuss them, but always sought to turn the conversation when they had been casually introduced. With this view he suddenly exclaimed—"Nay, I recall my words, and I refuse assent to your positions. I *have* made a discovery, which, so far as I am individually concerned, has increased my stock of enjoyment, and confirmed my belief in the existence of human virtue, and consequently of human happiness. I have found out that there is an angel living in this neighbourhood."

"A female one, of course," said Middleton, with a faint smile.

"You are right, and that I may not keep

you longer in suspense, I will apprise you at once that she lives at Maple Hatch."

"How! what! at Maple Hatch!" stammered Middleton, in vain endeavouring to conceal his agitation. "I thought you did not admire Miss Norberry, that you considered her too masculine in the turn of her mind; that you disliked—why you told me so the very day before I left Brookshaw."

"And I said what I felt and believed."

"Have you then so soon and so totally changed your opinion, that, with a strange, I had almost said discreditable, inconsistency, you can now term the same individual an angel?"

"I think of Miss Norberry as I always did, and I have never termed her an angel."

"Of whom then were you speaking?"

"Of her sister Lucy, whom I had scarcely seen when you left Brookshaw."

"Lucy! I do not deny her beauty, but she is a mere mindless girl."

"Mindless!" exclaimed Hargrave, colouring, "methinks you can have seen as little of her before you went to London, as I had. She

may not possess the masculine understanding of her sister, and I am glad she does not, but I beg to assure you that she is by no means mindless."

"My dear friend!" said Middleton, taking the hand of his companion, who was evidently piqued, "I retract my assertion, and willingly ask pardon for my inadvertent phrase. I was so rejoiced to find that you did not intend —that you were not alluding to—Miss Norberry —to her sister I mean. Certainly Lucy is as handsome as an angel, and if you will do me the favour of partaking my bachelor dinner today, I doubt not you will convince me of her other claims to the character."

"And perhaps you may persuade me to abjure my errors with reference to her sister. I could not refrain from smiling incredulously when you declared that my presence was more welcome to you than any other, because I recollected with what a zealous delight you always welcomed Miss Norberry when she visited your laboratory, and how very highly you have ever estimated her virtues and talents."

"I was not aware that I had mentioned her," said Middleton, and he immediately changed the subject, for though he was really attached to Miss Norberry, as the reader has perhaps already suspected, his sensitive and delicate mind recoiled from any disclosure of a secret which as yet was hardly known, even to himself. There is a respect, a reserve, a fastidiousness, in true love, that prompts the bosom in which it is cherished to conceal it from every eye, and to brood over it with a delight enhanced by the consciousness that it is utterly unknown, even to its object. The passion that is divulged seems to lose some portion of its integrity; and the jealous lover finds a pleasure, though a solitary and a selfish one, in fostering the devotion of his heart, while the idol of his affections is as yet unaware of the silent worship she is receiving.

It was this feeling which perhaps led Middleton, while chatting with his friend after dinner, to discountenance all allusion to Maple Hatch and its inmates, an object which he sought to accomplish by enquiring more

pointedly than he had hitherto done into the history of his companion, especially into the circumstances which had induced him to abandon his diplomatic career and to enter into holy orders.

"It is a tale soon told," said Hargrave, "and I can have no objection to relate it; though I fear it will little raise me in your estimation, when you find that a disappointment in love was the primary cause, subsequently corroborated, as I trust, by higher and holier influences, that led me to become an humble and unworthy member of the church."

"Humble, but not unworthy," exclaimed Middleton. "Oh! if all its ministers resembled you, the church would be very unlike what it is."

Hargrave bowed and continued. "Though I am still in early life, and the event to which I have made allusion occurred some years ago, I was not even then young enough for love at first sight; my heart was not sufficiently inflammable to be immediately kindled by the burning-glass of even the brightest eye. In-

deed I am by nature rather phlegmatic than susceptible, but when once an impression is made upon me it is proportionably deep and durable, resembling in that respect the characters upon Egyptian granite—difficult to carve, but scarcely to be effaced without breaking in pieces the substance that has received them. Disliking despots and autocrats, whether male or female, I refused in the first instance to do homage to the idol which the polite world of Cheltenham, where I was then residing, had set up for flattery and admiration. Nothing is so intolerant as fashion. To dispute the pre-eminence of the season's goddess was equivalent to a denial of Diana at Ephesus. Assailed on all sides as a recreant and disloyal knight, I was assured that her personal charms were her least recommendation; that she was not less accomplished than beautiful, that her head was too good to be turned, that she possessed a warm and rightly feeling heart, and finally I was challenged to submit all these averments to the proof, by being introduced to her, by joining the parties of which she constituted

the ornament and the soul, and by forming a decision upon her merits when I had closer and fairer means of judging than any to which I could lay claim from merely seeing her at a distance.

"Not only was I bound in candour and gallantry to accept this challenge, but I felt piqued to vindicate my judgment, having a full conviction that a narrower inspection of the general idol would rather lower than exalt my preconceived estimate of her character. Our first interviews confirmed this anticipation. In nothing did I find her superior to any of the other young beauties whom I had seen intoxicated with the incense offered at their shrines. Animated but empty, her frivolous discourse was of dress, dances, and danglers, of plays and pic-nic parties, of fashionable novels, and mustachoed officers. I have no taste for frothy small beer, even were it poured from a golden and a graceful goblet; nor can I relish such vapid chit-chat as I have been describing, although it proceed from a mouth of pearls and rubies. 'No, no,' said I to

myself, not altogether displeased to find my judgment confirmed, 'she has nothing but her beauty to recommend her. Light, lively, and vacant, she may make an excellent partner in a quadrille, but alas! for the man who selects so pretty but so unintellectual a puppet for the companion of his life!'

"Nothing occurred to qualify this unfavourable impression, until I heard her sing. When I speak of a young lady's singing, I do not simply mean that she can warble sweetly like a bird or a flute, or prove the long and painful tuition she has undergone by executing difficult passages with a mechanical precision; but that she can adapt the tone and the expression to the sentiment; that she can touch the feelings as well as delight the ear, and exalt a sensual pleasure into an intellectual delight. To my infinite surprise all this was accomplished in the first song she poured forth. The poetry, the music, and the singing, were alike exquisite, and I ejaculated with some feeling of self-reproach—'This girl has a soul; I have done her an injustice, I have decided too

hastily, I must become better acquainted with her before I venture to pronounce a definitive verdict.'

"She herself seemed anxious to promote this object, for I could not but notice that she listened to me with pleasure, and imparted a higher and much more rational turn to the discourse when I was her colloquist, than when she was flirting and coquetting with the common herd of danglers. Never is a man's vanity and self-love so vulnerable as when he finds or fancies himself an object of preference in the eyes of an acknowledged belle, whose smiles are coveted by scores of rivals. The judgment and penetration which had selected me from the crowd, and had honoured me by the development of conversational powers withheld from others, were not to be impugned. Without wearing the least appearance of it, such a discrimination was the most delicate, the most insinuating of all flatteries; and the voluble nonsense which she still addressed to the flatterers in her train, and which had previously given me so mean an estimate of her mind, I

could now listen to with pleasure as a sort of oblique compliment to myself."

"Admiration soon ripened into a warmer feeling, and when I became her professed lover, I saw every thing, of course, through a rose-coloured medium, which imparted a charm even to her imperfections. Captivated as I was, could I then acknowledge that she *had* imperfections? Yes, I was candid enough to admit to myself, not to others, that, like all handsome and much-admired girls, she was *rather* coquettish, and decidedly too fond of rank and title; but this latter weakness was so general a failing with the English, both male and female, that it was hardly fair to expect her to be exempt from it. All my previous impressions in her favour were exalted into an enthusiasm of love by the frank, unaffected, and winning, way in which she accepted the offer of my hand. A bare competency was all that I possessed; but I was willing to throw up my diplomatic appointment at Lisbon, which was indeed rather honourable than lucrative, and to devote myself to the charms and duties of

domestic life in England. Nothing, she declared, could be more consonant to her own desires and feelings; an establishment such as I was enabled to offer, even although it would not include an equipage, was quite as much as she required; and she would much rather depend for her matrimonial happiness upon the affections and society of a sensible husband, than upon the splendour of his household appointments, or the pleasures to be derived from opulence. My proposals being not less acceptable to her friends than to herself, our engagement was soon made public; and as I considered myself to be the winner of a not inconsiderable prize in the matrimonial lottery, I stood with great good-humour the raillery of the wags who delighted to remind me of my former prejudice, and whose jokes and jeers I very complacently set down to the score of envy.

"Before our marriage could be solemnized, it was necessary that I should proceed to Lisbon, not only to obtain the consent of my uncle, from whom I had considerable expectations, but to dispose of some property which

I had purchased in that capital, when I expected to continue an *attaché* to the embassy. True love, they say, is always misgiving; and when I reflected upon the gaiety of Cheltenham, the coquettish disposition which I had observed in my mistress, and the crowd of flatterers and admirers whom not even her acknowledged betrothal could banish from her train, I implored her, in order to remove all anxiety from my mind during my compulsory absence, to ratify our mutual engagement by a solemn vow of constancy. Rallying me on my groundless mistrust, which, as she said, many girls, conscious of their good faith, would consider an indignity and scornfully refuse to indulge, she assented nevertheless to my wishes, and with every appearance of sincerity called Heaven to witness that she was affianced to me as my betrothed wife, and would never, never recede from the contract she had made.

"This ought to have satisfied me; but it did not. Perhaps I was unreasonable. Humility, perhaps, and an unaffected sense of my own inferior claims, rather than any serious doubts

of my mistress, had made me jealous; but I could not discard from my bosom certain suspicions as to a rich Irish baronet, Sir Mark Galway, who seemed to me more sedulous and earnest in his attentions to Helen than the rest of her attendant satellites, and towards whom, if I mistook not, she had evinced some little predilection before my declared attachment had induced him to withdraw from her coterie. Sir Mark was my friend, I should rather say my acquaintance, for he was too dissolute a character to be received into any degree of intimacy, and I therefore determined to seek him out, and to leave him no pretext for misunderstanding the nature of my engagement with Helen.

"'My dear boy!' cried the baronet, seizing and almost crushing my hand, 'give you joy with all my heart. And so you are to be married as soon as you return from Portugal. Charming girl, 'pon my soul! and if you hadn't come in the way, egad! I don't know whether I should not have popped the question myself.'

"'I suspected as much,' said I, with a secret

feeling of resentment; 'and as I have often heard you maintain that every thing is fair in love and war, I hope, my dear Sir Mark, you will pledge yourself not to practise in any way upon her affections during my visit to Portugal.'

"'What, my dear fellow! do you think I could take advantage of your absence? Do you mean to insinuate——'

"Forgive me, Sir Mark; but you have proved yourself to be a dangerous and gay Lothario; and as I believe you pique yourself upon your success in these affairs, you should view my present application as a compliment rather than a discourtesy.'

"'I have not sought, nor do I mean to seek any such success at the expense of marriage, and therefore, my dear boy, I will give you the pledge you require with all the pleasure in life. How shall I swear not to run away with your fair Helen, and fire another Troy? Shall I obtest Mars, Bacchus, and Apollo, or Vulcan and the bearded thunderer, or Venus, Cupid, and the doves and loves?'

"'Nonsense!' said I, 'this is no subject for trifling. Call upon Heaven to witness your truth, and promise me, as you are a gentleman and a Christian, that you will not seek to supplant me during my absence in the affections of my mistress.'

"With a greater air of solemnity than I had ever seen him assume he made the vow, for which I thanked him most cordially, and departed for Portugal with an assured and tranquil heart, in no corner of which did there now lurk one misgiving doubt.

"Circumstances which I need not state detained me for many weeks in Lisbon, during the early part of which period I received several letters from my betrothed, all testifying an undiminished affection and great impatience for my return; but latterly her communications had ceased—a circumstance which I attributed to her expectation of my arrival in England. Her silence was at length explained by the receipt of a letter, the perusal of which almost drove me to madness. For the sake of womankind I will not recite all its contents. Suffice

it to state that the perjured girl, justifying her faithlessness by the sophistical pleas of youth, inexperience, ignorance of her own heart, and so forth, concluded her cold and elaborate epistle by begging that I would consider myself released from our hasty and inconsiderate engagement, since she had agreed, with the sanction of all her friends, to give her hand to Sir Mark Galway. In a transport of rage, and without waiting to communicate my purpose to my uncle, I threw myself on board a merchant-vessel then on the point of sailing, resolved, upon my arrival in England, to expose to all the world the perfidy of my betrothed, and to challenge Sir Mark.

" How thankful am I that the delay of the voyage, calming this jealous paroxysm, allowed better and more Christian thoughts to intervene! 'No,' said I to myself, 'I will not plunge headlong into the folly and the wickedness of a duel. I will leave the forsworn couple to that punishment which they will inevitably entail upon each other, even if Heaven do not chastise them by some judicial

visitation. Our ship was bound to the Thames, but I desired to be put ashore at Eastbourn, meaning to proceed immediately to Falmouth, and return to Lisbon for the purpose of resuming my official station, which I had not yet formally resigned. Scarcely had I landed when I encountered an old and valued friend, the captain of a frigate, who, upon learning my plans, reminded me that the Lisbon packet would not sail for some days, and invited me to pass the intervening time at a marine villa which he possessed in the vicinity. Imagining that society and the necessity for exertion might rouse me from the melancholy into which I had sunk, I accepted his invitation, though I almost repented my doing so when I found, on my arrival at his residence, that the whole household were busied in preparations for a grand ball, which was to take place on the following night. 'I am in no spirits,' said I to my host, 'for talking or dancing, and I had rather therefore not appear at your gala.'

"'Psha!' said the captain, 'we shall have

pretty girls who will exorcise your blue devils into the Red Sea, and set you whirling in a waltz in spite of yourself. By the bye we expect a beauty from Cheltenham, who has lately jilted one lover, I hear, and is about to be married to another. She is on a visit to some relations at Hastings, who have promised to bring her with them.'

"I felt a thrill at my heart and the blood flushing to my cheeks, when I inquired who this fickle fair one might be, betraying such marked emotion, as my friend pronounced the name of my affianced mistress, that he asked the cause, and I was obliged to disclose to him the very delicate and painful circumstances under which we were mutually placed. 'I had much rather avoid an interview,' said I, 'which must be equally distressing to both of us, especially if there be any chance of my encountering Sir Mark, for I should assuredly insult him, and a duel, which I frankly confess I am most anxious to avoid, would be the inevitable consequence.'

"'As to Sir Mark,' said my friend, 'there

is no possibility of your meeting him, for he is now in Ireland, making arrangements with his lawyer respecting the marriage-settlements, and when he returns to England, he is to betake himself to Hastings, where the nuptials are to celebrated. And why should you fly from the presence of your faithless fair one, who must be as weak and silly a jilt as she is unprincipled? *You* are the aggrieved and offended party, and it is for her to quit the field if her conscience will not allow her to stand under the rebuke of your silent scorn, for I take it for granted you will not speak to her. Tut! man, never be fainthearted. Many a brave fellow has been jilted before now, and it is much better that you should have discovered the real character of this false-hearted damsel before marriage than after. Positively you shall not leave us.'

"Piqued by my friend's raillery, and not quite incurious as to the way in which she would be affected by my unexpected presence, I consented to remain, though I more than once repented my resolution when the ball-

night arrived. At every fresh announcement of visitants my heart throbbed violently; I was afraid my agitation would be perceived, and I was glad that the room was almost full before the object of all my anxiety made her appearance. At length I saw her advancing up the chamber, gaily dressed, looking, as I thought, more beautiful than ever, and followed, as usual, by a train of beaux and danglers. As she reached the spot where I was stationed, I bowed to her with a cold and reserved air; she gave a sudden start on recognising me, uttered a half-suppressed exclamation of surprise, coloured deeply, and then, making an effort to collect herself, returned my salutation with as haughty a look as she could assume, and passed on. That she was confused and oppressed with a deep sense of self-abasement, if not of compunction, I thought I could plainly discover; but her pride prompted her to conceal her emotions beneath a counterfeited gaiety, and she laughed, danced, talked, and rattled, as if determined to drown her own upbraiding thoughts

in a whirl of action and volubility. To me it was all evidently and even painfully forced, though I heard many exclaim, 'What an animated creature! what charming spirits she possesses!'

"'Well she may!" sighed a pretty girl; "think what a match she is about to make! a carriage and a title!'

"Alas! thought I, it is for these bawbles that she has made a sacrifice of my happiness, and, as I fear, of her own also. Her present noisy hilarity is nothing but an indelicate and unfeeling bravado. Let her enjoy her triumph while she may. I will do nothing to abash her — I will not dance, lest our hands should meet — she shall not even encounter my eyes, lest their reproaching or unhappy looks should send a pang to her heart.

"I was in the refreshment room, to which detached parties occasionally withdrew, while the dancing continued in an adjoining saloon, when I saw her approaching with some companions, and I passed on to a little unoccupied conservatory that terminated the suite of apart-

ments. As I entered I heard the loud plashing of the rain against the glass, the wailful whistling of the wind, and the roar of the breakers as they lashed the foot of the cliffs immediately beneath the lawn. 'This,' said I, 'is indeed the triumph of luxury and civilisation over nature and the elements. Without, all is midnight darkness, tempest, desolation, and misery; within, amid festoons of flowers and a meridian blaze of light, I see a sumptuous banquet, beautiful and happy faces, gaily dressed figures whirling in the giddy waltz, while I hear no sounds but those of merriment and music.'

"Scarcely had I uttered this soliloquy, when the report of a gun came booming sullenly over the wide waters; there was something sad and sinister in the sound, and I peered through the glass, to see whether I could discern any object at sea; but all was pitchy darkness. After a brief interval the report was repeated, and as it came in a momentary lull of the storm, methought it seemed much nearer than before. Concluding that it was a smuggling vessel chased by a revenue-cutter, no unusual

occurrence upon this coast, I was contrasting in my mind the situation of the crews, thus exposed to the united dangers of fire and tempest upon the dark deep, with that of the laughing and pampered revellers who surrounded me, when my friend the Captain hastily entered the conservatory, and enquired whether I had not heard two guns—a third sounded, loud and distinct, as he asked the question. I stated my conjecture as to their cause, but he shook his head, exclaiming,—'No revenue-cutter could get out in such a gale as this; these are signal-guns of distress, and I fear some vessel must have been driven ashore between us and the head. If the crew take to their boats they will be dashed to pieces against the cliffs. Their only chance of safety is to run for the Black Gap, and that they will never make on such a night as this, unless we lend them a helping hand.'

"Not less prompt and humane than brave, the Captain instantly summoned his gardeners, with two or three other servants, and, bidding them provide lighted torches, desired them to

follow him to the Gap. Joining this party, and leaving the company in the house quite unapprised of our proceedings, I hurried through the raging storm to the Black Gap, where we stood as near as we could to the foaming breakers, lifting up and waving our torches, but without being able to discern any other object than the whitened crests of the nearest surges. 'A boat! a boat!' cried the Captain, as a flash of lightning enabled his practised eye to take a wider range over the water. 'She seems to be making for the Gap. God grant she may not be swamped in the breakers!' All was again darkness and anxiety; but, after a brief interval, a second flash of lightning once more revealed the struggling boat tossed wildly towards us by the winds and waves. Presently we caught the voices of the people on board, and in another minute she came surging into the Gap, where she filled, but did not upset, so that the mariners leaped into the broken waters, and with the assistance of the Captain, myself, and the servants, were dragged with the ropes that we had provided safely up to

the beach. They stated themselves to be the crew of a vessel from Ireland, bound for Rye Harbour, adding that they had a gentleman on board, as passenger, who, in his hurry to jump into the boat, when the ship first struck, had fallen into the sea, where he had undoubtedly perished.

"'I don't know that,' cried the Captain, 'the distance is not so great but that a good swimmer might reach the breakers; and if he be swamped and washed ashore, there may be yet time, by prompt remedies, to bring him round again. The set of the sea is eastward, the tide must now be ebbing, and I will, at all events, crawl along under the cliffs in the hopes of finding him.'

"Taking the servants with him for this benevolent, though apparently hopeless, purpose, he requested me to conduct the rescued sailors to the house, to see them well fed, and to give orders that they should be bestowed for the remainder of the night in the offices and servants' apartments. This commission I cheerfully executed, busying myself in setting out

a supper for them in the kitchen, and in arranging where they were to sleep, an occupation that consumed more time than I had anticipated. Wet and weary, I ascended to the hall, in order to inquire whether my host had returned, when I saw some of the guests running to and fro with looks of consternation and dismay, and others clustering confusedly together around some object extended upon the boards. From the midst of this group there suddenly arose a piercing shriek that thrilled to my very heart, and I rushed impetuously to the spot, whence it proceeded. Heavens! what an awful, what an appalling spectacle did I behold! Stretched upon the floor, with its fixed glassy eyes staring upon vacancy, I saw the ghastly corpse of Sir Mark Galway, the passenger, as it proved, in the vessel that had been wrecked. Beside him, in her gala-dress, lay the fainting girl to whom he was engaged. As I gazed, horror-stricken, upon my rival, and remembered his broken vow, methought he had been struck dead, like another Ananias, for the crime of perjury: and, as the thunder

broke in tremendous peals above the house, and the lightning flashed fiercely through the hall, I imagined that the fair partner of his guilt was about to share the doom of a second Sapphira, and, in the madness of my yet unextinguished love, I threw myself upon her body, as if I would intercept the avenging bolt of Heaven.

" For a short time, utterly overcome by my feelings, I remained insensible; when my perceptions returned, I found that the body of Sir Mark had been removed, in order that it might be subjected to the customary processes for restoring animation, all which, however, proved utterly unavailing. The fair sufferer had been carried up stairs, whence her hysterical screams, mixed with a wild heart-rending laughter, sounded shrilly through the house, drawing tears from many an eye, and carrying anguish to every bosom. Half bewitched at the sound, I wandered perturbedly up and down the gay and garlanded rooms, seeking I know not what, hurrying I knew

not whither. Heavens, what a change! The sounds of music, merriment, and laughter had ceased, and nought was heard but hysterical sobs, and the voice of wailing, and cries of fear, and the whistling and howling of the storm, all occasionally drowned in the deafening roar of thunder. Around the decorated and deserted supper-table, and from the walls and ceilings of the ball-room, the gorgeous lustres and chandeliers still shed their light; but there seemed to be something sickly and ominous in their glare, and ever and anon they were quenched by the blaze of lightning, outdazzling their feeble flames. Oh, what a leveller is terror! In these moments I saw titled dames scared at the flickering coruscations of their own diamonds; many a plumed head was extended fainting on the sofas or the floor; pale was the cheek of beauty, her fear-fraught eye no longer watched by a crowd of admirers, and even her piteous appeals for succour and protection often unheard or unnoticed. Never, never will that terrible night be obli-

terated from my memory. Its effect, at the moment, increasing the previous dejection occasioned by the disappointment of my hopes, plunged me into an hypochondriacal state, from which I sought and found relief in the consolations of religion. In this frame of mind new views and new convictions were opened to me. My conscience could no longer reconcile itself to a diplomatic career, when, as I flattered myself, I could be more useful to my fellow-creatures in the ministry of the Gospel. I accordingly qualified myself for the church, and, shortly after my obtaining priest's orders, was so fortunate as to be preferred to the living of Brookshaw."

"And what became of your faithless fair one?" inquired Middleton, who, from some circumstances of resemblance in his friend's fate and his own, had taken a deep interest in his narrative.

"I know not, and I never inquired," replied Hargrave; "I can cherish no resentment towards one who has been so severely punished for her inconstancy. Motives of delicacy and

compassion have deterred me from mentioning her name even to you, and you will, I am sure, excuse a reserve of which you can so well appreciate the motives. Peace be with her, wherever she may be!"

CHAPTER VI.

Pleased by any random toy,
By a kitten's busy joy,
Or an infant's laughing eye,
Sharing in the ecstasy,
I would fain, like that or this,
Find my wisdom in my bliss,
Keep the sprightly soul awake,
And have faculties to take
Even from things by sorrow wrought
Matter for a jocund thought.

WORDSWORTH.

WHETHER or not some little misgiving still lurked in Middleton's mind, in consequence of what his friend had stated about his frequent visits to the Norberry family, we cannot determine; but certain it is that, on the following morning, he ordered horses to be put to the carriage in which he had travelled from London, and, under pretence of taking an airing,

drove over to Maple Hatch, which was not more than four miles distant from the Lodge. A less eager visitant, especially if he were a lover, although an undeclared and almost an unconscious one, would have waited till his health and good looks were more fully restored, or, at all events, until he had discarded the black bandage from his forehead, before he presented himself to the object of his secret attachment; but Middleton was not like other men. The real and the intrinsic, the qualities of the head and heart, were the sole objects of his regard; and, as he cared little for external forms and appearances in others, he presumed them to be equally indifferent to such trifles in himself.

Had he been accustomed to watch his own emotions, the accelerated pulsation of his heart as he approached Maple Hatch might have revealed to him the secret of his predilection. He could not, indeed, be altogether insensible to the pleasure that thrilled through his frame, but, with a strange caprice, he felt disposed to assign it to local influence rather than to the prospect of again beholding and conversing

with the fair inhabitant of the cottage. "Certainly," he ejaculated, "there is something bracing and exhilarating in the air that blows over this healthy common, while the Hatch, with its white front, graceful trees, and well-stocked flower-garden, always presents a cheerful aspect, that must animate the most phlegmatic passenger."

Though little better than a literal cottage, there *was* certainly an air of singular cheerfulness about Maple Hatch, probably from the profusion of flowers that bloomed in the green trellis-work of the windows, which were larger and more handsome than are usually seen in such small tenements. Two noble maple-trees threw their branches over the roof, and the small sloping flower-garden in front, was skirted by a natural thicket of sapling oaks, young elms, and ashes, perforated by a green alley that still retained the name of the Hatch, though no gate or bar now guarded its entrance.

The family by whom it was occupied consisted of four persons. Mr. Norberry, formerly

a drysalter in London, whom Sir Matthew has commemorated as " Surly Sam," was originally afflicted with an irritable disposition, which, being exacerbated by failure in business and the narrow pittance on which he was compelled to live, had settled into a morose querulousness, that continued to increase as every passing year added the infirmities of age to those of temper. Notwithstanding his commercial disappointments, he still possessed in his two daughters blessings that might have been envied by the highest and the wealthiest in the land; but so far from being sensible of the boon, he always spoke of himself as the victim of unparalleled and unmitigated misfortunes. It cannot be denied that he had one domestic calamity to deplore, in the unhappy plight of an only sister, nearly as old as himself, whose intellect, never very strong, had gradually sunk into a state of almost total fatuity. Aunt Patty, however, for by no other appellation was she ever known, was perfectly good-tempered, and still retained such partial possession of her faculties as to be able to take care of her-

self, and to perform some small portion of the household duties.

Christiana, the eldest daughter, whose name was always abbreviated into Chritty, had a well-proportioned figure and a clear healthy complexion, which constituted the sole personal recommendations that a sculptor or a painter would have discovered. In her face there was not one perfectly good feature; yet all admitted her to be pleasing in her appearance, and many thought her to be rather good-looking. In what then, consisted the power of producing, to a certain extent, the effects of beauty without the possession of its elements? In that which neither a sculptor nor painter can portray—in her expression of blended intelligence and amiability, in her animated countenance, which, being the expositor of an enlightened and benevolent mind, was ever assuming some new combination to charm the senses or awaken the sympathies of the spectator.

It will be recollected that Hargrave, who, in spite of his liberal and enlarged notions,

could not quite discard a professional dislike of those who presumed to think for themselves, especially if they happened to be females, had pronounced the mind of Miss Norberry to be masculine; a common, but foolish and indefinite phrase, which, if it have any meaning, should imply a compliment rather than the censure which it is often intended to convey. The sex to which we chiefly assign the education of childhood and consequently the formation of character; the sex intended to be the companion of man, and which in this age of universal reading must necessarily exercise a most important influence upon the literature and manners of society, ought not, according to the notions of Miss Norberry, to be restricted to the attainment of those superficial accomplishments which qualify them to be the playthings, rather than the fitting associates, of the self-styled lords of the creation. For beings to whom such high duties are committed, she did not consider any investigations or any range of study too elevated, though she did not wish them to move from their appropriate

sphere, or to forego any of the customary embellishments of the sex. Neither playing nor singing so well as many of those who had devoted their whole time to such pursuits, she had prosecuted studies and enquiries which might well be deemed a compensation for her musical inferiority. Whether or not they were of a nature to justify, in its invidious sense, the imputation of her possessing too masculine a mind, must be left to the decision of the reader, after her character shall have been more fully developed.

Many who could not appreciate the higher qualities of her mind were at a loss to discover why they invariably found such pleasure in her society, whatever might be the subject of her conversation. This charm, which to some appeared not less inexplicable than her good looks, consisted in her uniform cheerfulness. It was not high spirits, it was not a rattling vivacity, it was not an exuberant gaiety, whose flashes, as evanescent as they were sparkling, required the stimulus of company to elicit them; but a sustained and tranquil flow of complacent

good-humour, which was not less conspicuous in the bosom of her own family than in the midst of the pleasantest society. With a household such as we have been describing, and in circumstances, which, even in the estimation of the moderate, scarcely amounted to a competency, it might have been difficult to maintain such an enviable frame of mind, had not her cheerfulness been grounded upon a great religious principle. To be innocently happy ourselves, and to extend the same enjoyment of existence, as far as possible, to all within our sphere, she believed to be the main purposes of our being, and consequently the most acceptable homage that can be offered by his children to the Universal Father.

"You ask me," she would sometimes say, "why I am always exhilarated, and I answer because I am naturally devout."

Lucy, a brilliant brunette, with an arch expression of vivacity, and a sylphlike figure, was decidedly superior to her sister in personal beauty, though she could not be compared to her upon any other point; neither possessing

the vigorous, independent, and original turn of mind by which Chritty was distinguished, nor being enabled to compete with her in acquired accomplishments. None could be more ready than herself to acknowledge this inferiority. Unaffectedly humble in her own person, she was yet proud of her sister, whom she tenderly loved, and to whose praises she would at all times listen with much more pleasure than to her own.

With a playful girlishness she laughed at those who paid her compliments, not because she was altogether unconscious of her beauty, (what handsome girl is so?) but because she knew her talents to be of so common an order, that she doubted either the sincerity or the discernment of those who could offer her adulation in the presence of her sister. She resembled her, nevertheless, in one respect—she was almost always in a happy frame of mind; one would have thought that the very air she quaffed possessed the exhilarating power of champagne, or that her face, like the dial, had never reflected any but sunny hours. Her

sparkling gaiety and vivacity were, however, very different from the equable and philosophic cheerfulness of Chritty. Lucy's animal spirits, the result of a fortunate organization and high bodily health, would sometimes wear themselves out by their own playful vagaries, and leave her in the dejection that not unusually succeeds to such over-excitement. Chritty's cheerfulness, being founded on a high and holy principle, was not subject to such capricious changes.

No sooner had their visitant been recognised from the parlour-window, than both sisters, in the eagerness of their surprise and pleasure at his unexpected appearance, ran down the sloping garden to welcome him.

"Ay," thought Middleton, as he noticed their flushed countenances and their loose ringlets floating upon the wind, "this is what I like to see. According to the prescribed forms of etiquette, they should have waited till I had been announced by a servant, and then have received me with a frigid formality. How delightful is is to see the heart break

through these cold restraints, and run to meet me with such a friendly greeting!" His own heart sympathising with the cordiality he witnessed, he sprang from the carriage, unmindful of his debilitated state, and warmly pressed the hands that were extended towards him. Amid a thousand tender and eager inquiries, occasioned by his altered looks and the bandage over his forehead, the sisters escorted him to the parlour, which they had no sooner reached, than the father, who sat ensconced in an arm chair, with a newspaper in his hand, pushed his spectacles up to his forehead, cast a silent, scowling glance at the visitant, and then, bending another upon his daughters, growled, "What leave door open for? always whisking and whirling about—in and out like a dog in a fair."

"I am sorry I forgot to shut it," said Chritty, wishing to screen her sister, who had been the last to quit the room; "but I was in such a hurry to welcome Mr. Middleton—"

"That you left me to catch my death of cold. Ah! you girls are all alike—you think any

young man of more consequence than an old father. Well—sha'n't trouble you long, if I'm to be exposed to these chilling drafts of air: open door—open window—eugh!"

"You complained just now of being too warm," resumed Chritty, "which was the reason that I threw up the sash; but perhaps I had better close it again."

"Eugh! leave it alone; don't want to be stifled."

"You do not enquire after Mr. Middleton's health," said the daughter, anxious to change the conversation.

"There's no occasion—can see he looks ill—shocking! Those knocks on the head are ugly things—seldom recovered, let the scull be as thick as it will:—get better at first—take a turn—end fatally. Shouldn't wonder if this did the same—look as if you were going. However, hate all gloomy forebodings, so I'll say no more about it."

"If you wish to resume the perusal of your paper," said Chritty, who knew that her father did not like to be interrupted in that occupa-

tion, " I have no doubt Mr. Middleton will give you leave."

" Eugh ! don't care whether he does or not ; my own paper, my own house, I suppose." So saying, he readjusted his spectacles, settled himself in his arm-chair, and again began reading the Public Ledger, a journal which he preferred to all others, because it gave an account of all the sales effected by the brokers, with whom he had formerly been in the daily habit of meeting upon the Royal Exchange. While he was thus absorbed, and only delivering himself of a peevish " Eugh !" when he encountered any thing that displeased him, Chritty whispered to her visitant, " You must not mind what my dear father says ; he tells all the world they look dangerously ill, but, for my part, I am surprised that you have become so rapidly convalescent after such a frightful occurrence, of which I am most anxious to hear an account."

" Oh do, do tell us all about it !" cried Lucy, drawing a chair close to him.

Thus solicited, Middleton was obliged once

more to recite the particulars of his recent misadventure, a task which he did not regret, since the deep sympathy depicted on the eloquent countenance of the elder sister tended to give him the gratifying assurance that he was by no means indifferent to her, a conviction that filled him with a lively pleasure of which he scarcely understood the source.

Their interviews, before he left Brookshaw, had been tolerably frequent, but they had rarely met except to argue, and still more rarely argued except to differ; although, strange to say, they always separated with an increased respect for the character and a higher admiration of the talents of each other. "How cheerful and bright!" exclaimed Middleton as he completed his narrative; "this cottage appears to me after the dull and discoloured panels of the parlour at Brookshaw."

"I have endeavoured to make it so," said Chritty. "A light clean house conduces in no small degree to the enjoyment of existence, and I never neglect the most minute ingredient that can contribute to so desirable a result.

Thus I always keep the window sills furnished with flowers, which seem to be so expressly formed for our gratification that I never can behold them without feeling grateful and elated; and with the same intention did I select this as our sitting room, because it looks out upon the common."

"Which however," said Middleton, "is rather a dreary object, and, according to the political economists, a most unprofitable one."

"Dreary! unprofitable! I cannot think it so. I delight in a landscape of which nature holds a portion in her own hands, and where the eye can range at large, without the impediments of walls, palings, enclosures, and hedges. This common, with its blooming furze, its varicoloured heath, and its gay wild flowers, is a perpetual garden, and only the more picturesque for being a natural one. Unprofitable it may be to the rich, if they can only contemplate a landscape as a source of revenue; but surely it is most beneficial to the poor. I think a common the most cheerful of all objects, because it is at once the pleasure-

ground and the pasture-land of those who have but little other amusement, and no other property."

"Sometimes, however," objected Middleton, "it is the resort of the idle and disorderly, if I may judge by the little troop of gipsies whom I saw tramping across it."

"Nay, I scarcely know how to vindicate these European Arabs; and yet their little tent beside the brook or beneath the tree, the half-naked imps, the tethered, forlorn-looking ass, and the swart oriental faces burnished by the flickering fire around which they are grouped, certainly add to the picturesqueness of the scene."

"I was simple enough to have my fortune told by one of them yesterday," said Lucy. "Nay, Chritty, you need not smile, for I declared at the time that it was merely as an excuse for giving her sixpence."

"And what did the Sibyl prophesy?" inquired Middleton.

"Oh! I paid no attention to her nonsense," cried Lucy, blushing.

"It amounted," said Chritty, "to the usual promise of a husband, who, if I mistake not, was to wear a black coat, and to be several years older than herself."

"Nothing more likely to be realized!" exclaimed Middleton, significantly.

"La! how can you say so?" asked Lucy, colouring more deeply than before. "Surely you are not a believer in such trumpery. I do not know any gentleman several years older than myself, who wears a black coat, do I?"

"Why, yes," said Middleton, archly. "I can at all events remind you of one—Mr. Hargrave."

"Ridiculous! he never paid me a compliment in his life. but always speaks to me quite gravely and rationally."

"Is not that paying you a compliment?"

"Why, I must say I felt flattered by it; I hate people to talk nonsense to me—not that I care about Mr. ——, and indeed it would be absurd to suppose ——"

"Chritty!" said the father, without taking his eyes from the paper, "have you made the

gooseberry-pudding?" An answer was given in the affirmative.

"Have you ordered the cook not to boil it so much as the last?"

"No, indeed, for I was not aware that you wished me."

"Eugh! thought as much; nobody attends to *my* wishes."

"I will run and tell her," cried Lucy, and she bounded out of the room, not sorry to have an excuse for hiding her confusion.

"Door open again—thorough draft—might as well be killed outright — eugh!" growled Mr. Norberry, although Chritty had repaired the inadvertence of her giddy sister, even before her father had completed his sentence. His comfort was not destined to be of long continuance, for the door was again opened, a fresh puff of air passed through the chamber, and the irritable old gentleman was about to vent his anger in no measured terms, when he saw that the annoyance had been occasioned by the entrance of his imbecile sister, at sight of whom all his sour temper and surly demeanour

became invariably mollified. "Poor thing! poor thing! he ejaculated in a softened tone. "Chritty! make her chair comfortable for her." It was an unnecessary order, for his attentive and affectionate daughter had already busied herself in arranging the cushions, and placing the footstool, and opening the little work-table that contained her aunt's knitting materials. Meanwhile the object of her solicitude, a substantial looking person, about sixty years of age, dressed with all the neatness of a quaker, advanced to Middleton, dropped him a low curtsey, and offering him her snuff-box, stood gazing in his face with a vacant simpering smile. Middleton, who never indulged in the uncleanly habit of taking snuff, declined it with a bow; but she still pressed it upon his acceptance with such a benevolent smile, that, by way of humouring her, he took a modicum of the dirt between his finger and thumb, when she dropped him another low curtsey, and, fixing her mindless eye upon his bandage, exclaimed, "Ay, sure enough, I heard something of your being knocked on the head; but I had

no idea the bruise was so large, and so black. Well—nothing so good for it as a pinch of snuff." With these words she swam to her chair, where she was presently hard at work with her knitting.

"How is it?" inquired Middleton, when Miss Norberry was again seated, "that under circumstances, and in the presence of objects, which most people, even of firm nerves, would find depressing to the spirits, you contrive to be always cheerful, and, I might even say, happy?"

"Because I am too grateful to Heaven for the blessings I enjoy to sigh for those that are denied to me. Why should any virtuous person be habitually dejected? The beautiful and majestic earth is beneath our feet, the glorious firmament above our heads, God is for ever round about us while we live, and beyond the grave he has held out to us the promise of an eternal beatitude. Happiness is always to be found, if we will only condescend to pick it up seed by seed. As none of its ingredients should be thought too minute to be gathered and added to our own store, so none

should be deemed too insignificant for distribution to others. Occasions for conferring great benefits do not often occur, and when they do, it may not be in our power to bestow them; but the little services and gratifications which every current day places within the means of the humblest member of society will constitute, if we all throw our share into the common stock, a not inconsiderable aggregate of human enjoyment and mutual good-will."

"Ah!" sighed Middleton, "if all would contribute as much as you do to this public pool of beneficence!"

"I seek not to be a large so much as a frequent contributor. Never do I lose an opportunity of dropping in my modicum, if it be only a mite—a grain. The choice of a pleasant topic of conversation, the careful avoidance of every thing that can give pain, a look, a phrase, a single word, may sometimes put our friends in good humour with themselves and all the world for a whole day."

"It is not every one, Miss Norberry, who

possesses your sunlike talent of diffusing light and cheerfulness wherever you are seen. Few have sufficient discrimination or benevolence to say to every auditor that which it will be most agreeable for him to hear."

"But it is in the power of every one to avoid scandal, sarcasm, and ridicule. Oh! how would society be improved, if its members, when they cannot utter words of kindness and conciliation, would endeavour to acquire the neglected but inappreciable art of silence!"

"Most delighted should I be," exclaimed Middleton with a sigh, "to avail myself of your secret for acquiring a cheerfulness which has long been a stranger to my bosom; but alas! we differ widely in the religious views upon which your system is founded, and in our notions of the final destiny of man."

"Chritty!" growled her father, who had not uttered a syllable during this discussion, "have you dressed the salad? It must be near dinner-time."

"I will do it presently, it will not require a minute," replied the daughter.

"Thought you hadn't done it; you know I can't eat it if done by anybody else; but nobody thinks of me—eugh!"

At the broad hint thus conveyed, Middleton rose, and prepared to take his leave, when Aunt Patty, swimming up to him, dropping a low curtsey, presenting her snuff-box, and gazing at him with her usual unmeaning smile, exclaimed, "What a simpleton you must be to go away! we've got a gooseberry-pudding for dinner, and nobody makes them like Chritty."

"Poor thing! poor thing! exclaimed the brother; and then resuming his gruff voice, he continued, "Ask no one to dine here—poor as a rat—ruined man—nothing for *me* but misery and mortification."

Wishing the visitant a hasty good morning, Chritty ran to mix the salad, when Middleton made his bow and retreated through the garden, where he was joined by Lucy, who, after bounding before him like a young fawn, ran back to ask his opinion of her new gown. "Is it not a pretty pattern?" she cried; "and does it not fit me beautifully? It was chosen and

cut out by Chritty, who makes every thing for both of us, and for Aunt Patty too, whom she assists to dress every morning, which is the reason that she always looks so tidy. Oh! you don't know how clever she is. She is obliged to darn all papa's stockings, because he says I make such gobbling stitches."

"Indeed! your dear sister seems to be quite the factotum at Maple Hatch."

"Oh yes, and all round about it too. Our poor neighbours quite doat upon her: and so indeed does every body."

"I do not wonder at it!" exclaimed Middleton, who, having by this time reached his carriage, shook hands with Lucy, and drove off, thinking of nothing, on his way back to the Lodge, but the intelligence, the amiability, the forbearance, the cheerfulness, and the domestic virtues, of Chritty Norberry.

CHAPTER VII.

M. Jacques.—Monsieur, si vous voulez que je vous dise les choses, je crois que c'est Monsieur votre cher intendant qui a fait le coup.

Harpagon.—Lui, qui me paraît si fidèle ?

M. Jacques.—Lui-même, je crois que c'est lui qui vous a derobé. MOLIERE.

ON the morning after the grand party in Portland Place, which had been broken up and dispersed amid so much confusion and dismay, Lady Middleton, utterly unable to find repose, quitted her bed early, while Sir Matthew remained plunged in the heavy sleep that usually succeeds to intoxication. On awaking at a later hour than usual, and learning from the calm and polite but not the less sarcastic reproaches of Lady Middleton the disreputable uproar and outrage of which he had been the occasion, and the irrecoverable ruin he had

entailed upon all her lofty hopes, he burst into a horse-laugh, exclaiming—"So much the better! Glad on't with all my heart—every cobbler stick to his last. What 'ee want to become a woman of fashion for?—can't make a sow's purse of a silken ear. All stuff and flummery, all vanity and vexation; let birds of a feather flock together, and every goose stick to her own common:—had 'ee there, Meg."

"I could have borne every thing but your most offensive and unpardonable behaviour to the Duchess," said Lady Middleton, biting her lips to prevent the tears starting from her eyes.

"Hey! what! hick! did I really offer to kiss the flabby-faced flounder? Gadso! must have been drunk indeed: rather kiss a new Bath cheese—faugh!"

"I shall never be able to show my face again," said the lady, as she walked up and down the room in inconsolable perturbation of mind.

"Don't want 'ee, Meg:—rather you 'd show your back to these half-starved harridans,

and jail-bird dandies:—had 'em there, hey, hick!"

"After all the pains I have taken, and the expense I have incurred, I am confident the Duchess will cut me," said her Ladyship, talking rather to herself than her husband.

"Hope it won't be cut and come again, though; good riddance bad rubbush. Got to pay the piper, that's the worst on't."

"The whole affair will be unmercifully lampooned by that hateful Tom Rashleigh; the scandalous journals will ridicule us for a month to come; I shall never hear the end of it; if I only knew what to do under this intolerable disgrace—"

"Why, do what the Duchess can't—put a good face upon the matter: had her there, hey, hick! Ridicule! let them laugh that win: if the moon-faced Duchess cuts 'ee, as I hope she will, we shall save all she would have cost us. Zooks, Meg, how can 'ee take on so about such nonsense? Your fine friends must have seen a drunken man afore now; if not, time they should begin—better late than never.

What makes eyes so red? Haven't been such a simpleton as to cry about it, have 'ee Meg?"

"By your continuing to use that offensive contraction, I presume that you wish me to leave you," said Lady Middleton, with which words she forced her features into a smile, bowed courteously, proceeded to another apartment, and had no sooner closed the door, than she gave free vent to the tears which she had for some time found the greatest difficulty in restraining. Bitterly did she now regret that she had ever been tempted to give this unlucky party; and still more deeply did she lament that she knew not how to escape the disgrace of its failure. What apology should she make to the Duchess—how avoid the ignominy of being struck off from her visiting list, after having made such sacrifices to be enrolled upon it? To avert this calamity there was no humiliation to which her mean ambition would not have stooped; but she neither knew how to act, nor of whom to ask counsel and assistance. By her ridiculous affectation of moving in a higher sphere, she had alienated her

old friends, without conciliating new ones: she had estranged herself from her sister; and she could think of no one, on whose judgment she could rely in this emergency, except Lady Barbara Rusport, who, having been the first negotiator of the party, seemed to be the most fitting mediatrix for effecting a reconciliation with the Duchess. Besides, she had imposed pecuniary obligations on her Ladyship, which at least entitled her to her good offices.

While thus deliberating with her own sad thoughts, she was joined by her daughter, whose looks betrayed that she had passed an unquiet night. Cecilia had nothing to suggest, nothing to approve, nothing to condemn, nothing in fact to say, except to attempt a defence of her father, by pleading that he was unconscious of his actions at the time of his irruption into the supper-room, and that he always got tipsy when he dined with the "Boys of Bacchus," as he termed the choice spirits and stanch topers of his wardmote. This vindication appeared but little satisfactory to her mother, who, having penned a hasty note

to Lady Barbara, enquiring at what hour she might have permission to wait upon her, rang for Dupin, to whom alone she would entrust the billet, intending that he should wait at her Ladyship's house and bring back an answer. No notice being taken of her first summons, the bell was rung a second and a third time with increased violence, when one of the under-servants at length appeared, and, in answer to the enquiries of his mistress, declared that Dupin was not to be found.

"Not yet up!" she exclaimed, "go to his bed-room, apprise him of the hour, and tell him I want him immediately." The man left the room, and her Ladyship continued to Cecilia, "Poor Dupin! I cannot wonder at his oversleeping himself; I dare say he did not get to bed till sunrise, for, in the midst of all the vexation of last night's occurrence, I had sufficient presence of mind to desire that he would not retire to rest till he had counted over all the plate and deposited it in his own room. Never did I more strongly feel the comfort of having such a confidential person

about me. Heaven knows! I had need of some comfort under such distressing circumstances."

Cecilia, who had never troubled her head about Dupin's fidelity, observed that his superior cleverness was his great recommendation, and that no genteel family could do without a French servant of some sort, expressing a hope that they might soon have a Parisian maid. While they were thus chatting, the man who had been despatched to Dupin's room returned with the startling intelligence that the object of his search was no where to be found, and that his bed had evidently not been slept in.

"And the plate-chests?" eagerly demanded Lady Middleton, as a vague suspicion flashed across her mind.

"There are none in his bed-room, my Lady."

"And the loose plate that was hired?"

"There is none in his bed-room, my Lady."

"Nor in his pantry below?"

"No, my Lady, there's not a scrap no where; not so much as a flat candlestick."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Lady Middleton, "can Dupin have proved a traitor?—can he have robbed us, and decamped?"

"Oh, no; utterly impossible!" cried Cecilia; "those Frenchmen are always honest."

"Where is Sir Matthew?" resumed her Ladyship, "I must see him instantly."

As she was about to hurry up stairs for this purpose, another servant encountered her with information that one of the tradespeople, who was then in the hall, had seen a hackney-coach at the door as he was returning home in the middle of the night; and that, on recognising Dupin, who was assisting to load it, he had declared he was carrying away some of the hired things to a place of security, by order of Sir Matthew.

"Then the villain has indisputably robbed us!" cried Lady Middleton, who knew that her husband had issued no such orders. "He cannot have had many hours' start, and I trust we may yet apprehend and have him hung."

This hope rendering her in some degree insensible to the mortification she might other-

wise have experienced in communicating to Sir Matthew the treachery of her favourite Frenchman, she hastened to his room and blurted it out at once, conjuring him to pursue the offender without a moment's delay, in order that he might be punished with all the severity of the law.

"Hey! how! what?" cried the baronet, reddening with wrath, "all the plate gone, and all that was hired too? A pretty job! serve 'ee right, Meg!—Told 'ee how it would be!—Glad on't with all my heart and soul, 'cause I hope it will be the hanging of that damned French rascal. This is honest Dupin!—faithful Dupin!—trustworthy Dupin! Ar'n't 'ee ashamed of yourself, Meg?"

"I have more reason to be ashamed of you, Sir Matthew. Had you been sober last night, the party would not have been so riotously broken up, and you might have looked after the plate yourself."

"Had *you* been sober, Meg, the party would never have been given. Had'ee there—hey—hick!—what!—Well, well, too late to shut

stable when door's stolen; enough to lose plate, needn't lose temper:—no use to wrangle and jangle."

"I never do either, Sir Matthew," said his spouse, with a smile of provoking calmness.

"No, no, quiet enough; always smiling, but none the better pleased for that—only the more ill-humour at your heart; still sow sucks up all the draff—had'ee there!—hey!—what—hick!"

"This is not the way, nevertheless, to have Dupin."

"Gadso! very true. Where's my hat—off directly—shan't mind losing the plate if I can only see the French rascal hung. Throw myself into a hackney-coach, and go to Bow-street. Bad job, bad job! The devil take the Duchess and all her fashionable harridans! Needn't say same for all French butlers; go to old Nick fast enough without my sending 'em:—had 'em there:—hey!—what—hick!"

Scarcely had the baronet turned his back when the busy Mrs. Burroughs, who by some secret and inscrutable agency contrived to

know the occurrences in every house almost as soon as the inmates, intruded upon Lady Middleton, notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, exclaiming, " Oh, my dear friend, I am so grieved, so shocked, so surprised!—I don't mean at the unfortunate breaking-up of your party last night, though that was bad enough; —was ever such an unlucky *contretemps* as Sir Matthew's appearance in such a tipsy state! —but I am utterly astounded at Dupin's ingratitude and roguery. I do believe I shall never get over it:—such a character too as I had with him!"

" Yours was indeed a most unfortunate recommendation," said Lady Middleton, coldly.

" But I have done my best to repair the loss I have so unwillingly occasioned you. Dominick — ah! my dear friend, you may think yourself lucky, indeed, to have fallen into such good and active hands—Dominick is already out in pursuit of the delinquent, and vows that he will never rest until he has obtained some traces of him. As he considers himself now to

be your regular *homme d'affaires*, he did not wait for orders."

At another time Lady Middleton, who, from a conviction of her own superior good management, was jealous of all unsolicited interference in her affairs, would have been offended at this officiousness; but her spirit was now so much depressed by the annoyances assailing her in such rapid succession, that she had no heart to make objections; and, notwithstanding her dislike of her present visitant, she sought her advice as to the best means of propitiating the Duchess, apprising her that she had already written a note to Lady Barbara Rusport. This measure being pronounced the most judicious that could be adopted, the letter was despatched, and Mrs. Burroughs, declaring she would wait till an answer was returned, began to discourse with her usual volubility, "of every thing and other matters," though she made no allusion to her unsuccessful attempt at obtaining admission to the party.

While she was thus benevolently keeping up

her friend's spirits, or rather giving vent to her own, the servant returned with a freezing note from Lady Barbara Rusport, regretting her inability to name a day for receiving Lady Middleton, since she was in hourly expectation of being summoned to the country As this was ominous of the course likely to be adopted by the Duchess and her coterie, the heart of Lady Middleton sank within her, in spite of her companion's assurances that cards would infallibly be sent in the course of the morning by the Duchess and the major part of the exclusives who had honoured her with their presence.

"Talking of last night," exclaimed Mrs. Burroughs, "I am told the supper-tables were beautiful—*unique*, and I must positively have a peep at them as I go out. *Au revoir*, my dear Lady Middleton, make your mind easy about the little disaster occasioned by Sir Matthew's *étourderie*, and be assured that Dominick will give a good account of the fugitive Dupin and his stolen goods." With these words she took her leave, but, on reaching the

bottom of the stairs, turned into the rooms where the supper had been set out, exclaiming to the servant who followed her, "Dear me, James! it's very handsome, isn't it? Not half the nice things are eaten, I do declare; and your mistress might well desire me to take home some of them for my little darlings, since they will only get spoilt if they are left here." So saying, she loaded the deep double hold of her reticule with bonbons and sweetmeats, stuffed both her pockets with cakes, and left the house, whispering to herself, as she passed along Portland Place, "Poor dear Lady Middleton! it's really a vexatious, a humiliating affair for her; and I don't know when I had felt so keenly the misfortune of a friend. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody good:—the pursuit and prosecution of Dupin will be a good job for Dominick; and I have supplied myself with confectionary enough for my little rout next Tuesday."

Indescribable was the anxiety with which Lady Middleton and Cecilia sate at the drawing-room window, watching the arrival of any mes-

senger who might bring tidings of Dupin, but still more desirous to see the livery-servants who might have been ordered to leave cards by some of their fashionable visitants of the last night. None such made their appearance during the whole morning; never had their knocker preserved such a sinister and unwelcome silence; the bell seemed to be a dumb one; even Sir Matthew, who had promised to return, had forgotten to do so. At about five o'clock, however, Mrs. Burroughs once more hurried into the room with a smiling and significant face, exclaiming, "Was there ever such a man as my Dominick! Nothing escapes him. I told you he would never rest until he had obtained traces of Dupin, and I am happy to inform you that he has done so—he has found him out."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Lady Middleton, "then he will be punished as he deserves, and we shall recover the plate. Where is the nefarious fellow?"

"Why, Dominick, who, as I told you, ferrets out everything, discovered the hackney-

coachman, from whom he learnt that he had been ordered to drive to the river-side at Wapping, where Dupin, with all his chests and boxes, went on board a steam-boat bound for France."

"And the steam-boat?" enquired Lady Middleton, half breathless with impatience—

"Sailed, unfortunately, at an early hour this morning, so that I fear it must by this time have nearly reached its destination."

"What, then, is the plate irrecoverably lost, and has Dupin made his escape?"

"I apprehend, there can be little doubt of either fact."

"This is provoking indeed! From your looks, as well as words, I anticipated more satisfactory tidings."

"Surely it must be a satisfaction to you to have employed Dominick; no other man in London would have learnt so much in so short a time."

"Very likely, but when you said nothing escaped him, I made sure of his having arrested the fugitive."

"O dear, no! he has done wonders, I think, in ascertaining the fact that I have communicated. He never fails in what he undertakes."

"Pardon me: he has not obtained the smallest clue to the villains who assaulted Gale."

"That is the only affair in which I have known him to be completely baffled. The parties to that iniquity must not only possess consummate cunning, but be superior to the temptation of money, or some of them would have turned king's evidence to secure the reward. Dominick does not yet despair of discovering them; but I shall despair of reaching home by dinner-time, unless I hurry away, for I have yet seven or eight calls to make; so once more adieu!"

While the morning passed thus anxiously in Portland Place, a consultation had been held at the Duchess of Harrowgate's, attended by Lady Barbara Rusport, and some of her Grace's familiar associates, at which it was unanimously decided that no further notice whatever should

be taken of Lady Middleton, either in public or in private, and that, for the sake of disarming the laughers and quizzers, of whom they all stood in awe, the whole affair should be treated as a freak, to which her Grace had lent herself for the sake of deciding a bet. This fiat of the autocratrix was quickly communicated to all those who had witnessed the indignity she had suffered, and all were quite willing to yield implicit obedience to the mandate. Two or three sprigs of fashion, whose high birth was not less unquestionable than the lowness of their purses, and as many titled *roués* of loose manners and straitened finances, would willingly have called upon her, under the mistaken though not unusual notion that because Sir Matthew was a wealthy citizen he must of course be a money-lender; but they knew that it would henceforth be *mauvais ton* to be of Lady Middleton's acquaintance, and, as they considered it much more important to be *in* the fashion than *out* of debt, they determined to face their creditors and to turn their backs upon Portland Place.

On the following day there was to be a fancy fair in one of the fashionable streets for the benefit of a charity, which it was known that the Duchess and some of her friends intended to patronise. Deeming any certainty, however painful, better than so intolerable a state of suspense, Lady Middleton resolved to visit it, and to shape her future course by the reception she should experience. On learning her intention, Sir Dennis Lifford, who had called in the course of the morning, pressed for permission to accompany her, exclaiming, "Oh then, is it a fancy fair you 're going to? and isn't it the very thing I doat upon above all others? It 's the very triumph of ingenuity,—most extr'or'nary, 'pon my honour, that so many ladies should make so many things, and yet never stumble upon one, even by chance, that has the smallest value, or an atom of utility. What talents, what mons'ous invention they must possess! Hadn't a notion that rubbish could be made to assume such an amazing variety of forms."

Lady Middleton would have much rather

remained at home than have suffered Sir Dennis to escort her. Should he witness her discomfiture—should he notice any slights and rebuffs on the part of the fashionable visitants, it was impossible to foresee what injurious effects it might have upon one, who, being himself a member of these circles, might regret his approaching union with a family whom they discountenanced. "My dear Sir Dennis," she exclaimed, in the hope of dissuading him from his purpose, "I quite agree with you; the preposterous trash dressed up for sale upon these occasions forcibly reminds one of the well-known recipe for dressing a cucumber, and affords, it must be confessed, some support to the imputation of our being a nation of shopkeepers. If the charity deserve our support, it should be given in a straightforward way; but no—the mercantile spirit must enter into the transaction; we must have something, however worthless, in exchange for our money; we must make a bargain, however bad a one; and, thus tempted, many ladies will throw away pounds upon the trumpery of a charity

fair, who would hesitate at bestowing half-a-crown in fair charity."

"Och! never doubt 'em! its the ladies always that throw away the cash; but you 'll see how I 'll withstand the temptation, though I never was the boy to be caring about trifles in money matters."

"No, my dear Sir Dennis, I will not put you to the annoyance of accompanying us. Our friend Mrs. Burroughs holds a stall, within which we shall be seated during the whole time we remain; and besides, I have a commission for you to execute in another quarter of the town." So saying she gave him a bracelet to get repaired at a particular shop, and the baronet took his departure, stating that he had intended going into its immediate neighbourhood, that he might give some orders about his travelling carriage.

Lady Middleton and Cecilia, both arrayed in their most becoming and fashionable attire, now stepped into the carriage, and drove to the fancy fair, at which the former, as she had truly told Sir Dennis, intended to request a

seat within the stall appropriated to Mrs. Burroughs, calculating that in this conspicuous position it would be almost impossible to cut her, and that if any such indignity should be offered, it would be easier to make her escape by the passage behind the stalls than to pass through the crowd.

Mrs. Burroughs had made, begged, borrowed, or pilfered enough to deck out a table with toys, gimcracks, and kickshaws of the usual frippery description; and, having bedizened herself with all her feathers, all her gold chains, and all her rings, with an extra-allowance of rouge upon either cheek, she planted herself in her stall, every rustle of her flaunting silk gown seeming to say, "Only come and look how fine I am!"

Lady Middleton, feeling as if she were about to be brought up to the bar of fashionable opinion, and put upon her trial, though she knew not what offence she had committed, seated herself by her side, and awaited her sentence with a beating heart. Not long was she kept in suspense, for she presently saw the

Duchess approaching, accompanied by Lady Barbara, Tom Rashleigh, the Honourable Augustus Fortescue Sidney Clavering, and a large party of both sexes, all of whom had been at the *soirée* in Portland Place. Of course her Grace took the lead, for what degree of familiarity ever occasions precedency to be forgotten in England? Chatting and laughing, and occasionally stopping to admire or purchase, she at length reached the stall of Mrs. Burroughs, when Lady Middleton, flurried for once out of her usual self-possession, saluted her with a timid half-curtsey. It is for vulgarians to practise the cut dexter, sinister, oblique, short-sighted, hurried, downward, upward, and all the other varieties of non-recognition; none, however, but an Exclusive can claim the privilege of the cut point-blank, which consists in looking full in the face without seeing. In this art the Duchess was an adept. Neither altering her face, nor changing the expression of her countenance, she stared at Lady Middleton as if she had been a perfect stranger, dropped her eye upon the

toys, and exclaiming, "Very pretty! exceedingly ingenious!" passed on. None of her train were slow to catch the cue thus distinctly given. Lady Barbara brought her glass deliberately up to her eye, but it seemed to obstruct rather than assist her vision, for she, too, passed on, in apparent ignorance that she had been looking at the friend from whom she had so recently been borrowing money. Tom Rashleigh had a ready joke for the occasion, which he uttered loud enough to be overheard, while the Honourable Augustus Fortescue Sidney Clavering, gazing impudently at Cecilia, lisped to his companion, "Thurely I 've theen that girl thomewhere. How thamefathed the lookth! I don't like thothe bluthing girlth, they 're alwayth tho thly and thulky."

From the whole party, in short, Lady Middleton experienced a cut direct, too glaring and unequivocal to admit of a moment's doubt that it had been preconcerted. Stung to the quick with a sense of deep humiliation, colouring with resentment, and determined not to expose herself to a repetition of the insult, she seized the

arm of Cecilia, and made a rapid retreat from the fair, to the great relief of Mrs. Burroughs, who had not the smallest wish to participate in the slights shown to her friends, and still less to have her stall rendered unproductive by being placed under the ban and interdict of the Duchess and her fashionable coterie.

CHAPTER VIII.

This looks not like a nuptial.
Much Ado About Nothing.

LADY MIDDLETON'S misadventures, both at the supper-party, and at the fancy-fair, received all the mortifying aggravation that publicity could give them. Tom Rashleigh and the scandalous journals were not idle. Squibs and satires, lampoons and epigrams, followed one another in rapid succession; the wags, the wits, and the quizzers, were delighted to be supplied with so fertile a subject; and the caricaturists furnished additional food for ridicule and laughter. One of their ludicrous figurings represented Sir Matthew and his bacchanalian brethren as so many satyrs dispersing a bevy of nymphs, who were made to assume distorted and burlesque likenesses of

the fat Duchess, the scraggy Lady Barbara, and their terrified companions. Though both parties were included in these attacks, their principal annoyance fell upon Lady Middleton; she could not, like the others, laugh with the laughers, and treat the whole affair as a good joke; *they* were only ridiculed, but *she* was really ridiculous; she had been painfully, not to say ignominiously, foiled and frustrated in all her objects; and she felt humiliated in her own eyes, because she knew that she must appear lowered in the estimation of the world.

But, however her judgment might be perverted by the absurd affectation of fashion, she was not deficient in good sense; its suggestions were now confirmed by a natural feeling of resentment, and she resolved to abandon instantly and altogether an attempt which she felt to be utterly hopeless. Her first measure, under this altered state of mind, was to write to Lady Barbara, making no allusion to recent events, but soliciting repayment of the money lent her. She justly suspected that her alleged journey into the country was a mere

pretext, and she could not bear the idea of being out of pocket, now that there was no prospect of her receiving any equivalent. Incapable of deviating from the outward forms of politeness, even towards a person who had conducted herself with such signal ingratitude and rudeness, and against whom she felt keenly irritated, she worded her request in the most courteous language, assigning the great expense of the late entertainment as a reason for her present application.

In the course of the morning Lady Barbara's servant brought an answer, elegantly written on violet-coloured satin paper, enclosed in a pink envelope with a stamped border, and a coronetted seal, and couched in the following terms:—"Lady Barbara Rusport apprehends there must be some mistake in Lady Middleton's note, of which she does not understand the purport. Lady Barbara Rusport has no recollection of having received any money for which she has not given the stipulated equivalent. If she had contracted a loan, her note of hand would of course have been exacted

for it, and should any such exist it will be paid on presentation."

"Fool that I was!" exclaimed Lady Middleton. "Lady Barbara is a fashionable swindler, and I should have known her better than to suffer myself to be thus duped and defrauded. She performed her promise, it is true, by bringing me acquainted with the Duchess; and this, I presume, is the only repayment I shall ever receive. It is bitter indeed to be laughed at as well as cheated, but I must bear up with the more spirit against this double mortification, and at all events I will not allow the Duchess and her coterie to believe that I am annoyed by their insults."

Notwithstanding this show of courage, her mind was haunted with a perpetual apprehension that the occurrences of the last three or four days might exercise a sinister influence on Sir Dennis Lifford, who had confessed himself to be of a vacillating character, and whom she knew to be peculiarly sensitive to the opinions of the fashionable world. She was, moreover, anxious to expedite the nuptials

from her conviction that nothing was so likely to throw her late disappointments into oblivion as to furnish the tattlers with some fresh subject of conversation. By associating her name with that of Sir Dennis Lifford and his noble relatives, she would take her station in a distinguished class, of which all her civic connexions might well be envious, and which would afford some compensation for the slights she had experienced from the haughty exclusives. In these inferences her judgment did not err; but there were no grounds for her misgivings as to Sir Dennis. So far from his evincing any hesitation, he was importunate and even clamorous for the speedy celebration of the marriage, urging the imperative necessity of his keeping his promise with the Earl of Ballycoreen, and joining him in Paris at the stipulated time.

The necessary writings having been at length completed by Mr. Burroughs, the happy day was fixed, and all was once more joyful bustle and preparation in Portland Place. Lady Middleton, resolved to spare no expense that might

give *éclat* and notoriety to the nuptials, issued orders for a sumptuous dinner, engaging beforehand an eminent French cook to superintend the kitchen-arrangements. But the great object of her solicitude was to secure a handsome string of carriages for the procession to the church, and to include in the festive party as many titled and distinguished names as possible. To accomplish this, however, required some little address. Several of her old friends and acquaintance had taken offence at their exclusion from the late party, and she had to perform the unpleasant task of conciliating and making apologies to the very individuals whom she had intended to cut, in case she could have obtained any established notice from the Duchess and her coterie. Lady Middleton had great powers of persuasion, when she chose to exert them, as she did in the present instance; her colloquial eloquence was fluent and winning, her manner prepossessing, her smile the blandest and most gracious in the world. Besides, there are few females, old or young, who can resist the attraction of

participating in a wedding and sharing the festivities that succeed it. Her Ladyship had procured it to be rumoured that Sir Dennis, whose wealth and generosity were stated to be worthy of each other, intended to make handsome presents to the bridesmaids; and that in the evening there was to be a lottery of fashionable French *bijouterie*, to consist entirely of prizes. By these blandishments and attractions, all difficulties were finally overcome. The two tall raw-boned daughters of Lady Gauntley, and the two dimpled dumplings of Mrs. Curzon Chilvers, were to be bridesmaids; the marriage *cortège* was to comprise the travelling chariot of Sir Dennis Lifford, and the carriages of Sir Matthew Middleton, Lady Selina Silverthorpe, Lady Gauntley, Mrs. Curzon Chilvers, Mrs. O'Gorman French, and Lord Arthur Fintown, the last-mentioned nobleman joining the party as the friend of Sir Dennis. Here were the equipages of a Lord, two Baronets, two titled ladies, and two female commoners, both of whom, however, had genteel double names. It certainly sounded imposing;

Lady Middleton was delighted with her success; and, as she was too philanthropic to confine her satisfaction to her own bosom, she suffered it to transpire and be shared by the public through the means of sundry newspaper paragraphs, which gave punctual intimations of all the pending arrangements.

Sir Dennis, who now dined daily in Portland Place, made greater progress in Sir Matthew's favour during the week that preceded the nuptial day than he had ever done before. The alderman, to his equal amazement and delight, found his intended son-in-law a not less flinching toper than himself; while to the sympathy of fellowship in deep potations was added that of congeniality in political and religious sentiment—if those opinions can be termed political, which merely express a blind prejudice and grasping selfishness; or the name of religion can be desecrated by its application to a system of intolerance, bigotry, and hatred. Much of Sir Matthew's money having been made through the borough-system and the corruption of Tory politics, it was natural that

he should be a warm adherent of that party; and, as he had never been in the habit of measuring his phrases, he often spoke of his opponents in terms of great bitterness and abuse. But his bark was worse than his bite, and the kindness of his disposition was so well known, that none of those who differed the most widely from him in politics would have hesitated to apply to him for any favour which it might be in his power to bestow. There was an honesty even in his open advocacy of corruption and abuse; and as to his religious notions, he shared them with so large a class, that, however they might be deplored as uncharitable and even unchristian, their maintenance need not subject him to the imputation of being a whit more narrow-minded than many of his neighbours.

Not less affectionately attached to his son on account of his many amiable qualities than proud of his various attainments, though he often affected to undervalue them, he bitterly lamented to Sir Dennis that Gale should be a vehement Reformer, it might almost be said a

Radical, while he himself, an old staunch Tory, and consequently the real friend of our glorious constitution in church and state, was of course a Conservative and an Anti-reformer. "Why then indeed now, Sir Matthew," cried his toping companion, for this conversation commenced with the fourth bottle after dinner, "it does the heart of my soul good to hear you, and if possible increases my respect for you, for those sentiments are quite entirely, every bit of them, my own. Och! it's the ruin of us all this cursed reform will be, and the revolutionizing of the whole land, and the death of the constitution; and perhaps the murder of all the loyal Protestant inhabitants of our free and happy country, if the blessing of God don't send all the Whigs to the devil."

"Very true, very true! never heard more sensible remark. This cursed bill send every thing to rack and ruin: all go to dogs. Never mind—no use fretting—what says song?—Too much care make an old man grey—fill glass—bumper toast—confusion to the reforming Whigs—hey!—what—hick!"

"Ah! now my dear friend," said Sir Dennis, tossing off his bumper, and following the example of his companion by immediately refilling his glass, "if the creatures had only shown the smallest necessity for this murderous measure, devil a bit would I have objected to it. But who wanted it? Is it Ireland that wasn't flourishing under the old system? Ah! then, don't I know the contrary by the example of my own family, who got their title, and estates, and their money, by means of these very parliaments that they're now wanting to pull to pieces. Didn't my grandfather build forty-shilling cottages for freeholders, and buy up others by scores and hundreds, and become a mighty jobber at elections, until he got into parliament himself—it's the Irish parliament I speak of—and was made a baronet; and, being always a loyal Orangeman, ever ready to draw his sword against papists and rebels, and to drink protestant ascendancy toasts, and the g. [illegible]s memory, up to his knees in blood if necessary, didn't he obtain a large grant out of a forfeited estate in Galway, and rebuild

the old castle, where we have flourished ever since?"

"Clever fellow that—knowing hand—sly fox—warrant knew a trick or two. Chap that won't take care of himself take care of nothing—charity begins at home;—make money by your country, and you love your country, of course;—can't be a patriot unless you're rich;—poor fellows all rascals and radicals;—'spose we drink your grandfather's health;—none but a fool refuse to run for a halter when they offer him a cow—hey!—what!"

"The Liffords, my dear Sir Matthew, have always been of that opinion; and though they call Ireland the land of bulls, sure it has ever been a milch-cow to us, and the like of us. As loyal Orangemen we have very properly been promoted to posts and places of honour and trusts. Ah! now, would you have them trust a papist? and as no man, barring he's a fool and a natural, likes to work for nothing, we have picked up little sinecures and pensions by the way, and if we had any younger sons and idle fellows that were good for nothing

else, wasn't there always plenty of fat livings and nothing to do for them in the church? And yet they pretend that Ireland wasn't flourishing under the system!"

"Lying rascals—stick at nothing—don't scruple to say the same of England—and yet look at me, and many others of the same kidney. Haven't I, like your grandfather—monstrous clever fellow that!—made a fortune, and thereby benefitted country by the very borough-system which these revolutionary jacobins are overturning? Asses! — Shouldn't throw away clean water 'fore they've got dirty. Pull an old house on their own heads. All starve together. What'll a reformed parliament do for us? No wars—no loans—no contracts—no jobs—no snug commissions—no loaves and fishes—no pickings and lickings—all as poor as church-mice. The constitution gone, tell'ee, utterly gone—Parliament as it was for *my* money. I like corruption—something to be got by it—love me, love my dog—fill glass—hey!—what hick!"

"Indeed, and you may say the constitution's

gone, when raggamuffins and rapscallions are to have an interest in elections. Ah! I've a mighty contempt, and always had, for the lower orders and the democracy; but the biggest evil of reform, and that which goes to the very core of my heart, my dear Sir Matthew, is the injury that it threatens religion."

"Fegs, Sir Dennis! there we agree again. What's a man without a religion:—why, a beast—baboon—blackguard; wouldn't give a curse for him. Sorry to tell 'ee, haven't been so devout myself as ought. Busy life—hurry-skurry—must make money for my family; but then always went to morning church of a Sunday, as a gentleman should do. Always gave handsome Easter offerings—always hated dissenters and bloody-minded papists—Pope, Pretender, and the devil—hick!—fill glass—hey!"

"Faith then! there's a mighty likeness between us, Sir Matthew; for, like other people of condition, I always made a point of going to a fashionable chapel, where no shabbaroons or vulgarians were admitted; and as to hating all those that differ from the established church,

I flatter myself I'm as good a Christian in that respect as any in the world, not even barring yourself."

"My dear fellow," cried the alderman, in the maudlin fondness generated by incipient intoxication, "happy to have such a—hick!—tip us your fist—fill glass—happy to have such a real patriot and truly religious—hick!—for son-in-law—'spose we drink his health—hey!—what—hick!"

"And is it I, my darling, that wouldn't be proud and mighty glad to have such a disinterested friend of his country, and firm lover of piety for my father-in-law? Och! then, it's delighted I am!" Sir Dennis returned his companion's cordial shake of the hand, both parties refilled their glasses, a sixth bottle was produced: Sir Matthew growing warm in his abuse of jacobins, levellers, and reformers, drank bumper after bumper to cool himself, until the words came thick from his mouth, his ideas got confused, and the bottles and glasses began to dance a minuet before his eyes. His brother-conservative having confined himself to claret, was not so completely fuddled,

but, as his religious zeal gathered fire from every fresh bumper, he at last began to stammer forth and reiterate with more vehemence than distinctness the words, "Pope—radical—devil!"

"Capital fellows!" hiccoughed the alderman; "'spose we drink—'spose we drink their their healths—capital—hick!" The pious and patriotic alderman fell back in his chair, and was snoring in a minute, while his worthy compeer and competitor rung the bell, and, with the assistance of the footman's arm, made his way to a hackney-coach, and was driven to his lodgings.

When you have to deal with a wrong-headed man, there are no more effectual means for overcoming his prejudices of one sort, than by appealing to those of a different class. Sir Matthew, who hated Irishmen in general, because he had been a heavy loser by the failure of some of their merchants, and who cherished a more especial dislike of men of fashion and coxcombs, became cordially reconciled to Sir Dennis from the moment that he had proved

himself to be a potent drinker, a firm upholder of church and state, a strenuous advocate for things as they are, and a decided anti-reformer. Poor Ned Travers, for whom he had always entertained a strong partiality, soon vanished from his recollection; and the thought that Ciss had not only a great probability of being a countess, but a certainty of possessing a toper, a tory, and an anti-reformer for her husband, filled him with unusual spirits, and rendered him not less impatient than was Sir Dennis himself for the celebration of the nuptials.

Both Lady Middleton and Cecilia felt that as Mrs. Burroughs had been the means of introducing Sir Dennis to the family she ought to be invited to the wedding; but then it was also felt with equal poignancy, that, as she was only an attorney's wife and a person of no distinction, her name would rather vulgarise than give *éclat* to the party, while the idea of a glass coach in the procession was not to be endured for a moment. By way of compromise between proprieties and appearances, it

was settled that herself and her husband should be invited to the dinner, an arrangement which was by no means satisfactory to the lady in question, whose prying, busy, and meddling disposition would not allow her to brook this exclusion from the marriage-ceremony. Shrewdly divining its cause, she betook herself to a coachmaker in Long Acre, for whom she had procured two or three orders, and who, in return, for Mrs. Burroughs did nothing for nothing, supplied her gratuitously with second-hand carriages and post-horses for her occasional excursions into the country. From this person she procured a handsome coronet chariot, in which she drove to Portland Place, and, informing Lady Middleton that she had engaged it for that express purpose, requested to join the party to the church. Her other claims might have been withstood, but the handsome appearance of the equipage, as Lady Middleton glanced at it from the window, and above all, the sight of the coronet, were irresistible, and the petition was granted with a smile of more than usual graciousness.

Her Ladyship, however, did not consider the name of Mrs. Burroughs sufficiently *distingué* to be admitted into the newspaper paragraph announcing the nuptials, which, after due consideration, was drawn up in the following form. "Yesterday morning Sir Dennis Lifford, Bart. of Castle Moila, County Galway, led to the hymeneal altar the only daughter of Sir Matthew Middleton, Bart. of Portland Place. The Misses Gauntley and the Misses Curzon Chilvers were bridesmaids, besides whom there were present at the nuptials Lady Gauntley, Mrs. Curzon Chilvers, Lady Selina Silverthorpe, Mrs. O'Gorman French, and Lord Arthur Fintown. After the ceremony, the happy couple set off for Paris, intending to pass the honeymoon with Sir Dennis Lifford's uncle, the Earl of Ballycoreen, to whose title and large possessions he is expected to succeed. In the evening Sir Matthew and Lady Middleton gave a grand dinner to a large party of fashionable and distinguished friends."

It had been arranged that Gale should come up from Brookshaw to be present at the cere-

mony, which it was his full intention to have done, notwithstanding his dislike of Sir Dennis; but a relapse, occasioned by his having thrown himself into the water to save the drowning child of a peasant, brought on so many alarming symptoms, that his medical attendant peremptorily forbade his undertaking the journey. Sir Dennis could not listen to any deferment of the ceremony, and it was therefore determined that it should take place on the day originally fixed.

Being but little versed in the arcana of female paraphernalia, we can say little of those sported on the present occasion, further than to record that Lady Middleton was elegantly attired as usual; that Cecilia, in her bridal array, presented a very interesting appearance (such we believe is the established phrase); that Mrs. Burroughs, flaunting in her new figured silk dress, and bedizened with as much jewellery and finery as a morning attire would allow, cut a very showy figure; that the tall Miss Gauntleys, with their orange-flower wreaths, might have been taken for a couple

of garlanded maypoles, around which the two little plump Misses Curzon Chilvers were about to dance, while their respective mammas looked very smirking and significant; and that the rest of the ladies were all smart and smiling. Gorgeous were the massive gold chains, and glittering the rings of Sir Dennis, whose perfumed locks and umbrageous whiskers, always the tender objects of his especial solicitude, had been curled and arranged with a consummate care worthy of the occasion. Sir Matthew, with his chocolate coat, white waistcoat, rubicund good-humoured face, and powdered hair, presented a portly and pleasant appearance; while his gleeful cackling, "Hick, hick!" or loud hilarious triumphant laughter diffused cheerfulness through the whole party. Lord Fintown, looking as arch as his unmeaning face would allow, endeavoured to banter the bridesmaids, as they assisted to cut up and envelope slices of wedding-cake; Lady Selina Silverthorpe admired Sir Dennis's travelling carriage, which was waiting at the door; and Mrs. O'Gorman French, having expressed a vehe-

ment admiration of every thing else, followed the example of the bridegroom, by standing before a pier-glass, and admiring herself.

As the carriages made their way towards the church a trifling incident occurred which was unnoticed by any but Cecilia, on whom it produced a somewhat dispiriting effect. At the corner of one of the streets her eyes encountered for a moment those of Ned Travers, who had stationed himself against a wall to see the procession pass. On perceiving that he was recognised, he coloured deeply, and immediately disappeared; but not without awakening a regretful feeling in the heart of the bride, as she thought of the pang which her marriage might occasion in the bosom of her modest and meritorious admirer, of whose worth she became the more sensible now that she was about to lose him for ever. Nor was this impression diminished, when she observed that her mother wore the necklace given to her by Travers. It struck her that there was some indelicacy in her doing so on the present occasion, but she had not penetration enough to detect that Lady

Middleton's boasted refinement was that of manners not of feeling.

In his undisguised contempt for all vulgarians, Sir Dennis would gladly have disappointed the gaping populace by driving to the side-door of the church and alighting at the vestry; but as Lady Middleton, who was now in her glory, desired to give all possible publicity to an alliance which was to elevate her family in the opinion of the world, she insisted that the carriages should set down at the front gates. By this arrangement the gazers, who were rather numerous, had an opportunity of seeing and passing their comments on the party as they proceeded into the church, which they entered a few minutes before the appointed time. As the clergyman had not yet arrived, they were escorted by the clerk into the vestry, and requested to sit down till they should be summoned to the altar. Either the reverence inspired by the sacredness of the edifice, or the solemn nature of the ceremony about to be performed, seemed to have checked the tongues of the whole assemblage,

for, with the exception of a few inaudible whispers, there was a silence of two or three minutes, which was broken by Sir Dennis, exclaiming, "Ah now! Cecilia dear! don't you think you would look better if this curl was brought down a little lower upon the cheek? Excuse me—there!—sure it 's a million times more becoming. Not a looking-glass in the room—most uncawmonly extr'or'nary—pon my honour!" As he drawled out these words the door was hastily thrown open, but, instead of the expected clergyman, a tall, attenuated, sickly, and yet fierce-looking figure rushed into the vestry, and, fixing upon the bridegroom a look of blended wrath and exultation, shrieked out, "Ha, villain! have I caught thee?"

At sight of this apparition the terrified Sir Dennis fled instantly through an opposite door, followed with huge strides by the infuriated stranger, who overtook him in the church, and, undeterred by the respect due to the place, seized him with his left hand, and began to horsewhip him most unmercifully, branding him, at the same time, with all sorts of oppro-

brious epithets; while his victim, who offered no resistance, in vain struggled to escape from his sinewy grasp. Struck aghast by this inexplicable and appalling outrage, the bride sunk fainting into her mother's arms; screams of affright burst from some of the females, while the others, following Sir Matthew and Lord Arthur, rushed forwards to inquire the cause of this atrocious outrage. On reaching the spot, they found Sir Dennis in the hands of two Bow Street officers, who forced manacles upon his wrists, hurried him into a hackney-coach that was in waiting, and immediately drove away!

CHAPTER IX

For the man
Who in this spirit communes with the forms
Of Nature, who with understanding heart
Doth know and love such objects as excite
No morbid passions, no disquietude,
No vengeance, and no hatred, needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
But seek for objects of congenial love
In fellow-natures and a kindred joy.

WORDSWORTH.

OWING to the healthy and invigorating qualities of the air at Brookshaw Lodge, the tranquillity of his life, the delight of returning to his usual studies and pursuits in-doors, and the still keener enjoyment derived from his friendly visits to his tenants and humble neighbours; Gale Middleton so rapidly recovered strength, that in a very few days he dismissed

the servants who had accompanied him, and sent back the carriage in which he had travelled from London. His moderate income, after deducting his extensive charities, was not only inadequate to any permanent increase of his establishment, but he really felt his sense of manly independence lessened, both in his own person and in theirs, when obsequious menials were perpetually fidgeting about him to discharge those little offices which he held it more dignified as well as more decorous to perform himself.

Honest old Robin and Madge his wife were still more delighted than their master at the dismissal of the strangers. "Dear heart!" cried the former, rubbing his hands, "how glad I be that them Lonnoners be gone! They weren't like servants, were 'em, Madge? nothing adequate and identical about 'em; I hate such ignorant and idiomatical creatures."

"Ay, and a pretty joke for them to talk of taste," cried Madge, "when they had the imperence to tell me I didn't know to dress hash mutton, and asked me to make it into a curry,

and then laughed at me, because I said I never heard of people currying any thing except a horse."

"Zooks! Madge, but I wouldn't let 'em domicile over me in that way, the jesuitical, succulent animals! Never stir if either on 'em knew a bulb root from a young potato, nor the names of the commonest plants and flowers in the garden. One on 'em called sparrow-grass, ass-sparrowgrass—like an ass as he was; and cowcumbers the t'other called coo-cumbers, as if they were pigeons or doves. What can ye expect from vulgar ignoramuses that can't expostulate the names of things by their proper dominations?"

"Well, they be gone now, Robin, thank Heaven! and it don't become us, for the best on us is but poor mistakable beings, to be proud of our superior knowledges."

"I warn't proud, Madge, but a man, if never so humble, has a right to be identical and adequate, that is, supposing he don't push it to a superficial degree."

Had it depended upon Mr. Norberry, who

cared for nobody but himself, and hated going from home, though he was never happy in his own house, the family would not soon have returned Middleton's visit; but Chritty, whose benevolent disposition made her scrupulous in observing all the forms of neighbourly politeness, and who felt, moreover, a deep interest in the health of the invalid, pressed so urgently the necessity of going over to the Lodge without delay that her father assented with his usual ungracious—"Eugh! always worrying me to be gadding somewhere or other, though you know I hate tramping about; but nobody cares for *my* comfort."

"Nay, my dear sir, I was particularly requested by Mr. Hoskins to get you out of the house as much as possible, since he thought you would be benefited by a more frequent change of air and scene."

"Eugh! all alike, those apothecaries; finds his boluses won't cure me, so sends me out to gulp the wind. Ar'n't a cameleon. Same air, I suppose, on one side the common as t'other. Ar'n't a fool—humbug!"

"But if you derive no benefit from it yourself, I am sure that a little drive will do good to dear Aunt Patty."

"Will it? Poor thing! poor thing! let 's go by all means. I 've no objection; wouldn't signify if I had; nobody cares for me. Go directly if you like—I hate to be worried: why make such a fuss about things?"

Notwithstanding her protestations to the contrary, Lucy cherished a lurking confidence in the gipsy's prophecy, and, thinking it not unlikely that if she went over to Brookshaw Lodge she might encounter a certain gentleman in black, some years older than herself, she learned the tidings of the projected visit with great glee, and ran skipping to her room to put on her bonnet; while Chritty, who had previously procured a conveyance for the occasion, went to assist her aunt in preparing herself, and to see that she was provided with a warm shawl. Having stated that Chritty procured the conveyance, our strict regard for veracity obliges us to confess its nature. Gentle reader!—no, we need not propitiate the gentle:

—genteel and fastidious reader, if by any such we are perused, we beseech thee to discard for once thy worship of appearances, and not to be immeasurably horrified when we whisper in thine ear that the carriage in question was a taxed cart, freshly painted of a dark green, and drawn by a respectable little horse; but nevertheless a bona fide taxed cart, belonging to Master Saxby, the miller, a near and very friendly neighbour, who was always delighted to accommodate the "charming young ladies," as he called Chritty and Lucy, with the loan of his vehicle.

"Eugh!" grunted Mr. Norberry, as he took his seat and the reins, with his sister beside him, and his two daughters on the bench behind; "going to be a wet day I see—soaked to the skin—catch our deaths of cold—always the case when *I* go out."

"Indeed, papa, it is only a passing cloud," cried Chritty; "see, it is gone already, and here is the bright and pleasant sun again! It will be a beautiful morning."

"Oh, very! we shall be half-roasted, I see,

and smothered with dust. Never any fine weather in this country."

Lucy was in high and happy excitement during the drive to Brookshaw; but, though her exhilaration partly proceeded from the hope of meeting Mr. Hargrave, it might rather be termed a sensation than a sentiment. She rattled and laughed from the spontaneous irrepressible exuberance of animal spirits; her heart, like a bird in its summer nest, sang for very glee; nor did this ebullient joyousness receive a check until, on perceiving some horsewomen at a little distance, she exclaimed, with a look of chagrin, "Good gracious, Chritty! here are the Miss Talfords on horseback, with a livery-servant behind them, and they will see us riding in this vulgar taxed cart! Was ever any thing so provoking!"

"For shame, Lucy!" was the reply; "how can you be so silly? They know that we are poor, and if they are proud enough to think worse of us for riding in a vehicle adapted to our circumstances, we had better drop their acquaintance, and pass them as we would any

other strangers. If they do not cherish any such feeling, and you are still hurt at meeting them, the pride must yours, not theirs."

"But a taxed cart is so shockingly vulgar."

"Ridiculous! may it not be still more vulgar, dear Lucy, to imagine that there can be no gentility without riches, equipage, and fashionable appearance? I know not a greater vulgarity in the character of the English than their contemptible fear of being thought vulgar."

"Well, Chritty, you may be very right in point of argument, but it is not every body who possesses your good sense, and one does not like to be thought ungenteel, however erroneously."

In accordance with this feeling, Lucy dropped her glove as their friends passed, and by stooping to recover it, contrived not to be seen by them. Chritty nodded and spoke to them familiarly, and received, in return, a smiling recognition.

"Eugh!" exclaimed Mr. Norberry, "I think those girls might have stopped to ask

us how we were; but I 'm down in the world now: nobody shows any respect to *me*."

"They checked their horses, sir; but, as you did not draw up, they rode on."

"Draw up! ar'n't going to humble myself before *them;* knew their father when he was only a clerk in the city: stupid fellow, but—born with a silver spoon in his mouth: nobody so unlucky as I am:—eugh!"

On their arrival at the Lodge, Middleton recognised the visitants from the window, ran out to meet them, and, greeting them with a cordial welcome and a radiant countenance, ushered them into the parlour, whispering to Lucy, as they advanced, that she would find a gentleman in it whom she might not be altogether displeased to meet, though he was some years older than herself, and attired in black. She blushed beforehand at this announcement, and still more deeply, when, with a mock ceremoniousness, he presented her to Mr. Hargrave; but her confusion was only momentary, and, as she fell into conversation with "the gentleman in black,"

her sparkling eyes, vivacious gaiety, and the frequent laugh that disclosed her brilliant teeth, seemed to intimate that the gipsy's prophecy might be fulfilled without putting any very painful restraint upon her inclinations. While the party were engaged in pleasant chat, Madge, who had complete management of all the household affairs, and who piqued herself upon keeping up old country customs, entered the room with cake and wine on a waiter, which she handed to each of the guests with a profound curtsey. Mr. Norberry, who liked these old-fashioned tokens of hospitality, helped himself to a bumper and a liberal slice of cake, exclaiming, as he tasted the former, "Ha! good Madeira—some of old Jemmy Gale's London-particular that he sent twice out to India—swear to it any where—found it here when you took possession, didn't ye? Eugh! bad cake—too many seeds—not half so good as what Chritty makes."

"Nobody does anything so well as Miss Norberry," cried Middleton.

"You refute yourself," said Chritty, "for

you completely eclipse me in paying compliments. I rather pique myself upon my cakes and puddings, but I am a very bad hand at flattery."

After the conversation had continued some time, the master of the mansion, who, like all country gentlemen was fond of showing his improvements, proposed a stroll round his grounds, a suggestion that met a glad assent from all but Mr. Norberry, whose indolent habits had given him a special abhorrence of being dragged over grounds and gravel walks. "Eugh!" he once exclaimed, in answer to an invitation of this nature, "give your arm to a rolling stone, if you want a companion. That will do good to your walks, I shan't; that won't get tired, I shall."

Urging that the promenade, moderate as was its extent, would be too much for his sister, he said he would accompany her into the village, and wait by the water-side, till the others rejoined them; in conformity with which arrangement Middleton offered his arm to Chritty, Lucy took that of Hargrave, and they proceeded through the back garden into

the shrubbery and plantation that clothed the slope behind the house.

Among the winding umbrageous walks made through these groves, rustic alcoves had been erected here and there for the accommodation or shelter of all who might seek these pleasant shades, to which the public were admitted without discrimination during three days in the week. "The remaining four," said Middleton to his companion, "are sufficient for my purpose, when, in those gloomier moods to which I am unfortunately subject, I can betake myself to solitude, and enjoy a total sequestration from my fellow-creatures."

"Enjoy!—away with that misanthropical sentiment, and remember that you are condemning yourself not others, when you confess that you are better fitted for solitude than society."

"I acknowledge it—I do condemn myself; but, when I am infected with spleenful thoughts and hypochondriacal dejection, is it not better to retire from the world, lest I should spread the contagion to others?"

"No; this is to confirm by indulging the selfishness of sorrow. Instead of infecting others with your melancholy, they would enliven you with their cheerfulness. Every one who loves his species should reflect that to live *for* them he must live *with* them. Social intercourse is the great civiliser and improver."

"I do but occasionally enact the hermit, and only when I am under the influence of sombre and distressing convictions, which you, I know, do not share, but which I have in vain endeavoured to shake off. Though you may condemn the purpose to which I sometimes appropriate these congenial shades, I venture to anticipate that you will praise my picture-gallery, upon which we are now about to emerge."

"Your picture-gallery! I knew not that you possessed one."

"You will recognise it as we pass through these fields, to every one of which I have endeavoured to impart a pictorial character, and, by diversifying them, to give to the whole

the semblance of a glorious gallery. Some you will perceive are light, open, and airy; others sylvan and umbrageous; but all cheerful and gay, for I have suffered too much myself from gloomy feelings to wish to awaken them in others."

"So philanthropic and yet unhappy!" exclaimed Chritty.

"Where there were beautiful trees," continued Middleton, "I have cut down the underwood, that they might be seen to more advantage, and sometimes made the footpath meander, that they might be presented in more than one point of view. It is the winding of our roads that renders our English scenery so superior to that of the Continent, where an object, however beautiful, is like a picture which when once seen, is seen for all: whereas the same object in England would rather resemble a statue, which you may walk round, and make it assume a variety of beautiful attitudes and combinations. Pray admire the contrast, or the harmony, of colouring that I

have endeavoured to introduce into my hedges, by presuming to guide the great artist-hand of Nature."

"I begin to catch the idea as well as the beauties of your picture-gallery, and admire not less the taste that has governed, than the benevolence that dictated, its formation. These are imperial arts, and worthy kings!"

"It has cost me very little; for all simple, natural pleasures, which are ever the purest and the best, are at the same time the cheapest. Having the green for sports and pastimes, and this range of fields for their evening's promenade, I find that the villagers have nearly deserted the alehouse where they formerly used to congregate."

"I wonder not that you have rendered them more moral and temperate, for you have awakened a sense of beauty in natural objects, and the good and the noble are naturally elicited by the beautiful. The exhibitions, the collections, the libraries, calculated to diffuse this salutary impression, are mostly confined to the rich. You are the first who have opened a

gratuitous picture-gallery for the poor; and if others would follow your example, they would do much towards elevating the taste and polishing the manners of the lower orders."

"I can assure you that some of my Brookshaw peasants have already become amateurs of the picturesque, and will discourse earnestly, if not learnedly, upon the merits of these different fields and views."

"And without knowing your rustic connoisseurs, I venture to pronounce that they are better as well as wiser men than they were. It is a favourite theory of mine, that when the moral and physical systems are more completely harmonised, towards which consummation I believe all things to be indisputably advancing, the beautiful and the good will always be found in accordance. Even now the good qualities of the head and heart are generally united, for virtue is only practical wisdom; and the time will perhaps come, when mental and personal loveliness will be equally inseparable."

"Do you not think that, to a certain

extent, this period is already arrived? An amiable and intelligent expression, which is the visible beauty of the mind, is at the same time the greatest ornament of the face. Who that gazes, only for a moment, upon Miss Norberry's, can fail to perceive in that highest species of exterior comeliness the bright and faithful reflection of interior virtue?"

"Nay, nay, this is unkind," said Chritty, slightly blushing, "by condescending to reason with me, you were rendering such grateful and welcome homage to my mind, that I did not expect you could think so poorly of it as to pay a compliment to my person."

"I meant no compliment to either. I never flatter, neither do I ever conceal the truth. I intended to express what I sincerely feel—that I know not which most to admire—your mind or person."

"It is gratifying to hear you say so, for I value the good opinion of the good; but your courtesy must not change the topic of conversation from the picture-gallery through which we are strolling to one of its most insignificant

spectators. It has been urged by some, that the English are so uncivilised—so barbarous, that, far from appreciating any favours of this sort, they will mutilate and deface the beauties of nature or specimens of art to which they are allowed free access. Seldom, however, has the experiment been tried, and its very rarity ensures its partial failure, for the vulgar must be familiarised with objects of taste before they can understand or respect them. I have been given to understand that the mutilation of the monuments in Westminster Abbey, which is often adduced as a proof of the barbarism of the lower orders, and a reason for excluding them from all our public buildings, is entirely attributable to the young *gentlemen* of Westminster School, the sons of the rich and the aristocratical."

"What public buildings," said Middleton, "are appropriated to the uses of the modern poor? Amid the stately edifices that surround them, our lower orders behold none that have been constructed for their own accommodation but the prison and the penitentiary; or the

poor-house and the hospital, in which so many of them are destined to end their days."

"And from all private mansions and parks they are generally shut out with an offensive jealousy. Wherever our gentry find an open boundary they set up fences and palings, or dig ditches and trenches; where there were walls already, they raise them higher; they love to fortify themselves behind iron spikes and broken bottles: while some, I am sorry to say, will not be contented with any barrier less effectual and destructive than steel-traps and spring-guns. Estranged, defied, treated as enemies, the humbler classes naturally become rude, uncivilised, sullen; and this want of refinement is absurdly urged by their superiors as an excuse for the continuance of that very alienation which has produced it."

"In proof of the justice of your remarks," said Middleton," "I would beg you to observe, that not one of the pictures in my gallery is defaced or injured. There is not a bough broken. No—the common people are to be conciliated by kindness and refined by culture,

not less certainly than they are to be provoked by annoyance and vulgarised by exclusion from all intercourse with the politer classes. More sociability between the two would mitigate the contemptuous haughtiness of the one, smooth the ruggedness of the other, exalt and harmonise the whole community."

CHAPTER X.

Since benevolence is inseparable from all morality, it must be clear that there is a benevolence in little things as well as in great; and that he who strives to make his fellow-creatures happy, though only for an instant, is a much better man than he who is indifferent to, or, (what is worse) despises it. PELHAM.

THEIR admiration of each other being thus exalted by their common participation in the charms of the surrounding scenery, who can wonder that both Middleton and Chritty forgot the companions with whom they had started? Hargrave and Lucy had unconsciously dropped some distance behind, and found nothing to regret in this momentary separation. They were even happier than their friends, if their gratification was to be inferred from the animated countenance of the usually grave-looking clergyman, and the vivacious laughter of the playful Lucy,

whose exhilaration seemed to seek a vent in rapid locomotion. Walking was too sedate for her; flitting and gamboling around Hargrave like a spirit of light and joy, she ran hither and thither to pluck flowers from the hedge, or to catch some new view; and then, returning to her companion's side, and condemning her own girlish frolicks, she would protest, with a starched look, that she meant to be serious for at least five minutes, and would forthwith begin discoursing with a mock gravity, generally bounding off before the conclusion of the prescribed term to follow some new vagary. "Heavens!" exclaimed the delighted Hargrave, "how could Middleton apply the term 'mindless' to this gifted girl? Because she possesses the innocence and gaiety of a child, he has presumed that her mind must be puerile. Never was he more mistaken. Hers is indeed the perpetual sunshine of the breast; who can compete with her in the highest, noblest, most enviable, of all faculties, that of enjoying existence? Nay, it seems as if, like the loadstone, she could impart her power to all with which

she comes in contact, for never have I myself felt so joyous as to-day, and never have these fields appeared half so attractive to me."

Chritty and her companion were returning by another path towards the village, when they heard cries and screams, and Middleton, rushing down the slope towards the river, beheld a boy who had fallen into the mill-dam, and whom the current, rendered unusually strong by recent rains, was hurrying towards the wheel, where he must inevitably be submerged and probably killed. Aunt Patty, having strolled to the dam, simpered and curtsied to the struggling boy as he was borne along, and held out her snuff-box, in apparent wonder that he would not stop to take a pinch. Mr. Norberry, who was at some distance behind, had not witnessed the accident.

Middleton saw that there was not a moment to be lost. At Cambridge he had acquired one accomplishment—that of swimming—sometimes the only one that students bring from the university, and he instantly threw himself into the water, so as to intercept the boy, which he found no

difficulty in effecting; but to resist the current and reach the bank with his prize proved by no means of such easy achievement. Debilitated by his late illness, and impeded in the use of his arms by the clinging of the terrified boy, his utmost efforts could not master the stream, which drew him backwards towards the mill, as often as his vehement exertions had enabled him to resist its perilous suction, and to gain a momentary advance. By shaking off and sacrificing the boy he might have saved himself, but he seemed determined to rescue him, or to share with him the desperate chance of being dragged under the wheel.

This catastrophe neither of them could long have escaped, had not Chritty reached the bank in the very crisis of their fate. Clasping her hands together, and uttering an agonised scream of terror as she saw the imminency of the danger, she lost for a moment her self-possession. It was only for a moment. In another instant she rushed into the water till it reached her shoulders, and then, throwing forward one end of her long shawl, while she firmly grasped

its other extremity, she called out to Middleton to seize it. This he fortunately effected, and, as Chritty had secured a firm foot-hold, she succeeded, without much difficulty, in drawing him out of the deep water and seizing his hand, when all three scrambled to the bank together. Unconsciously she still retained the hand she had clasped, and, pressing it fervently in the agitation of the moment, energetically exclaimed, "O my dear Mr. Middleton! you are safe—you are safe—thank God! thank God!"

The tender return of the pressure recalling her to her recollection, she suddenly withdrew her hand, blushed deeply, and in hesitating accents attempted to explain that the action was involuntary, as she knew not what she was about. But all her faculties seemed to have passed away with the danger that had braced them up to sudden vigour and exertion; her voice faltered, the colour again fled from her cheeks, she gasped for breath, uttered a deep sob, and, as her knees trembled and failed, would have sunk to the ground, had she not

been supported by Middleton. Involuntarily pressing her to his bosom, he bade the rescued boy run for assistance; but the little urchin, stupified by his terrors, instead of moving from the spot, continued crying and bewailing himself; while Aunt Patty, who had now come up, curtsied to the whole party by turns, and with her never-failing simper presented her ever-ready snuff-box.

Unable to quit the spot himself, or to derive any succour from his companions, the bewildered Middleton, whose agonised feelings now fully revealed to him the secret of his attachment, could do nothing but ejaculate, "Brave, generous girl! my dear preserver! what courage, what presence of mind! my dear, my *beloved* Miss Norberry!"

The boy's outcries proved so far serviceable that they reached the ears of Hargrave and Lucy, who now ran to the spot, the latter, whom it was not easy to outstrip, reaching it first. A few words of explanation apprising them of what had occurred, Hargrave hurried towards the village for assistance, while Lucy

lavished the most affectionate attentions upon her sister, who, though she had been overcome by sudden faintness, had never completely lost her consciousness, and now began to revive. As soon as she opened her eyes and discovered her situation, her face was again deeply suffused with blushes; she withdrew herself from the arms that had been supporting her, and leaned upon Lucy, murmuring with an anxious look, but in a faint voice, "Pray, pray Mr. Middleton, take care of yourself—you are an invalid—this accident may occasion a relapse—pray hasten home instantly. As for me, it is nothing; I was overcome by the surprise and agitation of the moment, but I am strong—very strong—and shall be as well as ever in a few minutes."

Touched by this tender solicitude, Middleton, at all times utterly regardless of himself, expressed the deepest anxiety on account of Chritty, and implored her to hasten to the Lodge, that she might be provided with a change of dress, at the same time tendering his arm to support her. She accepted his

proffered aid, but did not lift up her eyes, and leaned rather upon Lucy than her lover, for such may Middleton be henceforth called; and thus they returned slowly towards the village, followed by Aunt Patty, who, having taken the hand of the still crying urchin, was endeavouring to console him by offering him a pinch of rappee, when a woman with disordered hair and dress rushed wildly towards them, and, throwing herself upon the boy, shook him violently, and overwhelmed him with menaces and reproaches for having disobeyed her repeated injunctions never to approach the mill-dam. This passionate mood was of short endurance, for in another minute she burst into tears, reproached herself for her violence, clasped the child in her arms, and almost stifled it with kisses and caresses, after which she fell suddenly upon her knees before Middleton. Some distant eye-witness of the fact had apprised her that the Squire had rescued the boy, and the poor woman's impassioned gratitude seemed to know no bounds. "The blessings—the blessings of God be upon

you!" she exclaimed, uplifting her clasped hands to Heaven. "O Sir! you have saved my life as well as Harry's: his father doats upon him, he loves him a thousand times better than himself:—he is a very violent man, and has often sworn that he would kill me if I suffered any harm to come to his darling boy. God bless you, sir, again and again!"

"My good friend!" said Middleton, "I have done no more than I should have performed for any other child, and you should thank this lady, not me, for she it is who has preserved us both; but this is no time for parley. Come to me by and by at the Lodge, after you have changed your son's clothes."

"Alas, sir! he is no son of mine—he is only my nephew."

The party again advancing, had not proceeded many yards, when they encountered Hargrave and a posse of the villagers; the former provided with such restoratives as he could hastily collect, while all eagerly proffered their services, and would have placed Chritty in a chair, which they had brought with them

for the purpose of carrying her to the Lodge. As she had been affected more by her terror on account of Middleton's danger than by her exertions or the plunge in the water, she was now sufficiently recovered to decline both the restoratives and the conveyance; and, being superior to all affectation of tremors and weakness, she walked forward with a firm step and a cheerful look, declaring that she felt already invigorated by the cold bath she had so unexpectedly taken, though she still expressed anxiety on account of Middleton. Before they reached the village they met Mr. Norberry, who, concluding from his daughter's plight that she had met with some trifling accident, exclaimed, with a reproachful look, "Eugh! soused into the water I see. Awkward girl! always star-gazing, or staring at the clouds. Wonder, for my part, you don't flounder into every ditch. Spoilt your clothes. Who 's to pay for new ones? Ruined man, now: poor as a rat—eugh!"

When apprised, however, that she had voluntarily endangered her own life to save that

of another, the thought of the danger she had incurred, as well as of the generous courage she had displayed, brought a tear to the father's eye; he tenderly embraced her, muttering in a softened tone, "Ask your pardon, my dear child:—brave girl—good girl! wouldn't have lost you for the whole village;" and, putting Lucy aside, he took Chritty's arm, and besought her to hurry on as fast as she could, for fear she should catch cold. Nearly the whole population of Brookshaw had now gathered round them, pouring all sorts of praises, congratulations, and blessings, upon both parties, and testifying especially such a deep interest in the health and safety of the Squire, that Chritty's previous admiration of his benevolent character was exalted by seeing how generally and ardently he was beloved.

Middleton refused to retire to his own room, until he had provided for the comfort of his fair preserver. Fanny Penfold, the sister of the luckless young gardener who cut Cæsar's throat, offered her Sunday habiliments for this

purpose, and as she was about the same size as Chritty, the latter withdrew with her to Madge's room, and, being presently equipped in a neat peasant's garb, again descended to the parlour, where Middleton was already seated. Her metamorphosed appearance excited no little amusement; her father, now in an unusually gracious mood, declared that he had never seen her look so well as in her present dress, though the girl was certainly not pretty. Hargrave politely assented to the first part of the proposition, but stoutly denied the second; so did Middleton, still more vehemently, protesting that, although Miss Norberry, from her fine figure and fascinating countenance, must always be entitled to admiration, she had never appeared so interesting in his eyes as when she first recovered her senses after her immersion in the water. As Chritty recollected that she had then been supported in his arms, and had heard him passionately term her "his beloved," this declaration called up a thousand blushing apparitions to her face, and filled her with such confusion, that Middleton,

in order to relieve the embarrassment he had occasioned, invited Mr. Norberry and his daughter, as well as Aunt Patty and Hargrave, to convert the occurrence of the morning into an excuse for a pleasant social day, by staying to partake of such an extempore dinner as Madge could provide.

It would be difficult to decide which of his guests was the most delighted by this proposition, which being accepted as cordially as it was given, the master of the mansion forthwith proceeded to hold a council with his cook and factotum as to the best means of meeting this unexpected demand upon her larder. Madge was not sorry to have her talents at a culinary impromptu put in requisition. Middleton, whose object was hospitality not ostentation, and who had always condemned the prevalent fashion of costly dinners as an absurd sacrifice to pride and epicurism at the expense of all proper social feeling, made no apologies for setting before his friends a very humble meal, recommended by a hearty welcome. Nothing could exceed the pleasantness of this unpretend-

ing dinner, although it could not boast either French wines or made dishes; and, instead of a liveried lackey behind each chair, the whole duty of attendance was discharged by a cleanly, fresh-coloured, Saxon-faced country damsel, being the identical Fanny Penfold, of whom we have already made honourable mention.

Shortly after the conclusion of this simple meal, Middleton received an intimation that the woman whose nephew had been saved was in attendance with the child. When they were ushered into the room, all were astonished at the improved appearance of the boy, who at the time of the accident had been so bedraggled with muddy water, and so disguised with tears and terror, that his singular beauty, both of form and feature, had escaped notice. In his present garb and altered looks he seemed to be a perfect model of youthful symmetry and comeliness, while his manners and language, as he returned thanks to his preservers, evinced a gracefulness and propriety superior to his station. His aunt, renewing her acknowledg-

ments in a strain of the most ardent gratitude, stated, in answer to Middleton's inquiries, that the boy's name was Harry Clements, and that his father was in service in London as a coachman. Upon being interrogated as to the name of the family with whom he lived, and their place of residence, she betrayed some little confusion, and then declared that she was utterly unacquainted with either; but renewed her previous statement that though a passionate and violent man, he was the fondest and best of parents, that he doated upon this his only child, suffered him to want for nothing, and came to see him as often as he could. Middleton giving the child a handsome keepsake as a pledge of his protection, dismissed him with his aunt to participate in some of Madge's cakes and home-brewed ale, and invited them both to call at the Lodge as often as it suited them.

"I know not," said Middleton as they left the room, "which calls forth the pleasantest feelings, the conferring or the receiving of an important favour. There is a sort of reciprocity in gratitude; we owe it, in some degree,

to those from whom me may justly claim it, because they have enabled us to perform a kind action, which, like every other virtue, rewards itself. I love this charming boy, for instance, because I have been instrumental in saving his life; and I—" he hesitated, for the word "love" was at the tip of his lips, and though he felt the impropriety of using it, no fitting substitute immediately suggested itself; "and I naturally esteem, and reverence, and admire Miss Norberry, even more than I did previously, because she has rescued me from a desperate danger. If I have said little upon this subject, it is really because I have been unable to find expression for my feelings."

"I am glad of it," said Chritty; "and, as you have just declared that every good deed as its own reward, I wish you would leave mine, if it deserves the name, to thank itself."

"Nay," resumed Middleton, "I was not quite disinterested in my logic, for it goes to prove that you ought to stand well affected towards me for having enabled you to render me a signal service."

"Cry your mercy!" exclaimed Chritty, smiling; "this is either fishing for a compliment, or it is mere sophistry, and I have no turn for either; but being a plain spoken body, as the good housewives say, I will freely confess that, without assuming the smallest merit for obeying a mere impulse, I am delighted that I happened to be on the spot, and that I acted as I did. Come, Lucy, we must be going homewards, as I neither wish to hear any more compliments for not being afraid of a cold bath, nor to face the night-air after taking one."

Both Middleton and her father indicated that she should return in a postchaise, instead of a taxed cart, but she laughed at their apprehensions, exclaiming, "You forget that I am accustomed to face the weather at all seasons, and consequently never take cold. I am under much more apprehensions for our host, who is not yet recovered from a severe illness, than I am for myself. Besides, Fanny Penfold's clothes are warmer than my own. Dearest Lucy! what *will* become of us should we

again meet the Miss Talfords, when the horror of the taxed cart will be aggravated by my wearing this peasant's garb? Forefend us, all fays and fairies, against any such calamity!"

"If they will defend you from catching cold," said the affectionate Lucy, "I will ask no other favour of them."

Middleton, who had disappeared for a moment, now returned with Madge's scarlet cloak, which he wrapped round Chritty, in spite of her protestations that it was unnecessary, and then helped her into the vehicle. Hargrave performed the same office for Lucy; the father and Aunt Patty were already seated, when, after cordial shaking of hands, and mutually expressed hopes that they should all meet again in a day or two, the party drove off on their return to Maple Hatch.

"What a charming, unaffected, and every way superior girl is Miss Norberry!" exclaimed Middleton, on regaining the parlour with his friend. "Though her father was much less morose than usual this morning, I have sometimes seen him treat her so harshly, notwith-

standing her filial attentions, which are truly exemplary, that I have been tempted to regret her absolute dependence upon a parent who can be so unconscious of the prize he possesses."

"What! are you not then aware that he and all the family are dependent upon Miss Norberry, whose income of three or four hundred a year, which is their sole support, was left to her by a maiden aunt? This fact, which she herself keeps a secret, I gathered from Lucy, who was betrayed into divulging it by her affectionate gratitude towards her sister. She is always singing the praises of her dear schoolmistress, as she terms Chritty, from whom she received her education. I know not a more generous-hearted and grateful girl than Lucy."

"But how immeasurably is the character of Christiana exalted," said Middleton, "by the circumstance you have just revealed to me! The maintainer of the whole family, and yet its most industrious servant; entitled to everything, and yet almost denying herself

comforts, that she may provide little luxuries for them; exposed to such incessant annoyance from her harsh and splenetic father, and yet so meek, so humble, so enduring, so magnanimous! Her income a bare competency, and yet enabled not only to maintain a respectable appearance at home, but to administer charitable assistance to her neighbours! Imbued, even to her heart's core, with the very spirit of religion, and yet cheerful as the sunrise in May, and free from the smallest taint of bigotry and intolerance! O thou unparagoned and all-accomplished girl! happy was the augury, and faithful the prophetic promptings, that led thy parents to bestow upon thee the hallowed name of Christiana!"

While he admitted the merits of the elder sister, Hargrave maintained with all a lover's zeal the claims of the sparkling Lucy, observing that the pupil was every way worthy of her instructress. "There you have pronounced her highest eulogy!" exclaimed his friend, and in this strain the conversation proceeded, until Middleton complained of a shivering sensation

in his limbs, and expressed a fear that he had indeed caught cold, when Hargrave, reminding him of his debilitated state and the danger of a relapse, prevailed upon him to retire immediately to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

Distempered nerves
Infect the thoughts; the languor of the frame
Depresses the soul's vigour. Quit your couch,
Cleave not so fondly to your moody cell;
Nor let the hallowed powers, that shed from heaven
Stillness and rest, with disapproving eye
Look down upon your taper through a watch
Of midnight hours.

WORDSWORTH.

NOTWITHSTANDING all Chritty's admiration of Middleton's character, he entertained certain notions, which she considered so inimical to his own happiness, and consequently to the mental peace of those who should be intimately connected with him, that she could not reconcile herself to the thought of receiving him as a suitor. It was, therefore, with a double pain, both on her own account and his, that she reflected on the betrayal of regard into

which she had been inadvertently hurried. Frank and straightforward in all her actions, she determined to conduct herself towards him as if nothing had occurred, but at the same time to hold a strict guard over her feelings in future; and, above all, to efface if she could, any impression that she might have made, by discountenancing rather than encouraging his attentions.

Hargrave and Lucy, visited by no such misgivings, nourished the passion which had sprung up in their bosoms without restraint or apprehension. The former, though his temperament had become grave and almost saturnine at times, from the diappointment in his affections of which we have given a brief outline, delighted to behold in others the vivacity which he himself had lost; and, imagining that he should possess in Lucy an ever-flowing fountain of gaiety equally innocent and fascinating, he felt a daily increase of his attachment. Strange as it may sound, Lucy liked her admirer all the better for being of a sedate character and some years older than herself.

The sprightliness in which a giddy girl might indulge even to exuberance, would not, she thought, have assorted either with the sex or the sacred calling of Hargrave; as to his age, the difference between them was not so disproportionate as to amount to an objection; and she only felt the more flattered that a man of mature years should select her from the crowd, and, instead of paying the sugary compliments with which she had sometimes been surfeited by dangling youngsters, should converse with her rationally and even confidentially, as if he sought her society from motives that rendered his preference a real honour. Conscious of her inferiority to her sister in point of intellect, she had been accustomed to believe that all other girls possessed equal advantages over her, and had thus formed a disparaging and unjust opinion of herself. With all her humility, however, she had sufficient pride and self-love to feel flattered by the attentions of Hargrave, and perhaps the more so because she thought so humbly of her own merits.

Chritty proved right in her predictions as to

the consequences of the accident at the mill-dam. Braced into vigorous health by constant exercise in the open air, in almost every state of the atmosphere, she herself experienced no injurious effects from her immersion; while in Middleton it brought on a relapse, attended with inflammatory symptoms, which at first assumed a very menacing aspect. It was this illness which prevented his going to London, as he had purposed, to attend the marriage of his sister with Sir Dennis Lifford, a mark of affection and respect which he would gladly have testified towards Cecilia, though he could not conceal his dislike of her intended husband, and had indeed entered a sort of protest against the match.

No sooner was he convalescent, and again able to quit his bed-room, than Hargrave, who inferred from his own feelings with regard to Lucy that no medicine could be more restorative, no specific more magical in its influence on the invalid, than the sight of his mistress, hired an open carriage, and brought over Mr. Norberry and his family from Maple

Hatch. It is much easier to control the head than the heart; when Chritty's judgment had dictated a resolution, she seldom swerved from it, unless when an appeal was made to the kindlier and more tender sympathies of her nature. All her determinations as to the coldness and reserve with which she should treat Middleton were instantly put to flight on her observing his languid, pale, and altered looks. Alike surprised at the suddenness of the change, and overcome by her feelings, the generous, warm-hearted girl, expressed her sorrow for his sufferings and her anxiety for his recovery, with an ardent tenderness, so gratifying to its object that it seemed, to judge by his delighted countenance, as if she possessed the power of instantly realizing her benevolent aspirations.

Partly with the interested motive of having more frequent interviews with Lucy, and partly in the hope of contributing to the recovery of his friend, by affording him as often as possible the cheering solace of Chritty's society, Hargrave conveyed the family from Maple Hatch

two or three times a week, thus affording ample opportunities to the lovers of cementing their passion by the frequent sight of their mistresses. It appeared to Chritty that, by absenting herself upon these occasions, without assigning any valid excuse, she should betray a consciousness of the passion she had inspired, and perhaps be suspected of coquetting. An air of self-possession and indifference, coupled with a guarded discountenance of any very pointed attentions that might be shown her, seemed the best mode of repressing a predilection which, with all her regard and esteem for Middleton, she could not fully reciprocate. But her coldness could not chill so rapidly, as her presence, her virtues, and her accomplishments kindled and increased the passion she had excited. Her lover's flame gathered strength and extended itself, until it resembled a conflagration, which is rather fed than checked by the puny streams of cold water thrown upon it. Middleton noticed indeed an occasional distance in her manner, but as he could not doubt the testimonies of regard that had escaped from

her at the time of the accident, and attributed her present altered demeanour to a maidenly coyness and timidity, it only enhanced the admiration it was intended to repress.

In a few days he was sufficiently recovered to quit the house, and stroll as far as the plantation, or even to the first field of what he termed his picture-gallery, where the balsamic air, and the beauties of the scenery, in which he had ever found a particular delight, invigorated his body and produced a soothing effect upon his mind. Ever since his return to Brookshaw, he had been blessed with a complacent, we had almost said a happy, mood. The frightful and mysterious occurrence which had hastened his departure from London, still haunted him at intervals, like an occasional nightmare; but his constant association with such redeeming specimens of human nature as Hargrave and the two sisters of Maple Hatch had banished from his thoughts those disparaging notions of his fellow-creatures, which had so often darkened his mind till it sunk into a despondency approaching to despair.

Sitting one morning in an alcove of the plantation, indulging a grateful sense of the long respite he had enjoyed from these tormenting thoughts, he drew forth the miniature which was ever worn next his heart, pressed it respectfully to his lips and to his bosom, and continued gazing so intently upon it, while he ejaculated a few words of impassioned homage, that he did not immediately notice the entrance of a second person. It was Chritty, who, in wandering with her father through the grounds, had left him at a little distance behind. No sooner did Middleton recognise her than he huddled the miniature into his bosom in evident confusion, and was about to speak, when he was anticipated by his visitant, who said formally, and with a slight reddening of the face, " I beg your pardon, Mr. Middleton, for this intrusion. My father, fatigued with walking, desired me to step forward to see whether you were in the alcove; but had I been aware—" She paused, for she scarcely knew how to proceed, when Middleton took advantage of her embarrassment to exclaim, " My

dear Miss Norberry, your presence can never be an intrusion, nor can you have observed anything with which I would not wish you to be made fully acquainted, if you desire it. Will you allow me to explain that—"

"O dear! by no means," interposed Chritty, "I desire nothing—I have no right, no wish, not the least in the world—to look for an explanation. You are in your own domain, giving vent to the effusions of your own heart. It was only for me to explain how I came to intrude, most unintentionally I can assure you, upon your privacy."

"Suffer me to repeat that I have no seclusion which will not ever be most welcomely, most delightfully, dispelled by your appearance; and as to the feelings and effusions of my heart—O Miss Norberry! if you will allow me to lay bare that heart before you—if you will listen for a moment to an effusion that shall breathe its most cherished hopes and aspirations —if you will forgive the presumption—"

"Nay, sir, you had an object for your effusions before my presence interrupted them.

It does not become me to hear, and still less to share them, but there is nothing to forgive on either side—here comes my father."

"Eugh!" growled Mr. Norberry, as he reached the alcove, "found you at last, have we? This comes of having grounds; playing at hide and seek with one another all day long, —tired as a dog. Why did you run away from me, Chritty? Ar'n't a penny-postman, to trudge all day afoot; but nobody cares for *me*."

"You forget, sir, that you desired me to step forward and see whether Mr. Middleton were in the alcove."

"Didn't desire you to stay chatting with him, though! Come, let's get back to the house: hate walking through fields and woods —only meant for cattle. Ar'n't a horse, or an ass—eugh!"

Taking his daughter's arm, Mr. Norberry returned towards the Lodge, Middleton walking beside them, and endeavouring by the most courteous attentions to dispel the reserve that still chilled the countenance of his fair companion. If no man is a hero to his *valet de*

chambre, still less can any female be a perfect heroine to the author who is conversant with her most secret thoughts. Candour obliges us to confess that, upon this occasion, Chritty Norberry did not display so perfect a magnanimity as we could have wished. Having made up her mind to reject Middleton as a husband, she ought not to have felt hurt that any other woman should possess his affections, even supposing the miniature he had pressed so tenderly to his heart and to his lips to have been that of a beloved mistress; a presumption only justified by appearances, since she had not sought to obtain any glimpse of the painting. In the first moment of calm reflection that succeeded to this surprise of her feelings, she accused herself of having harboured an unworthy sentiment, and sought her vindication by a species of sophistry in which we are all subtle, when we are special pleaders for ourselves. "Jealousy!" she mentally ejaculated, "there *can* be none where there is no love, and I cannot be said to love a man whose sentiments I do not altogether approve, and

whose hand, were it instantly proffered to me, I should feel it my duty to reject. No—it is the duplicity that would delude me by the tokens of a preference and regard which he evidently lavishes upon another; it is his double-dealing which has offended me. From the generous, the kind-hearted Middleton, whom I deemed the very soul of truth and honour, I could never have expected deceit, and it is natural that I should resent an unworthiness which I had so little reason to anticipate." Alas! had Middleton been indifferent to her, Chritty would not have conceived so keen a displeasure against his supposed duplicity; it was her attachment that made her suspicious; and the indignation which she attributed to an injured sense of rectitude was but the pique of disappointed love. Her reserve was maintained during the remainder of the visit, and when she took her departure from the Lodge, it was with a secret determination never to return to it.

The surprise to which Middleton had been exposed in the alcove, and the misconstructions

it might occasion, induced him to form a resolution diametrically the reverse, and to decide that Chritty *should* return to the Lodge in the quality of its mistress. As his passion had been receiving a daily accession of strength, and he had previously made up his mind to offer his hand, he saw in the awkward affair of the miniature a reason for hastening his declaration, as the most effectual method of dispelling erroneous impressions. He had been on the point of removing all doubt upon the subject by satisfactory explanations, when the inopportune appearance of Mr. Norberry prevented him. Nothing now remained but to seize an opportunity of formally doing so, and, as he could not bear to remain longer than was absolutely necessary under an unmerited suspicion, he resolved to put his purpose in execution on the following day.

Diffident, sensitive, timid, and penetrated with an intimate conviction that the happiness or misery of his life would depend on the result of his offer, Middleton, after taking long and anxious counsel of his thoughts, resolved

to make his proposal in writing, instead of seeking a personal interview. It was much easier, however, to decide upon writing, than to please himself in the composition of his letter. Five or six were destroyed before he was sufficiently satisfied to sign, seal, and deliver, his amended epistle into the hands of Robin, with strict orders for its instant and careful conveyance to Maple Hatch. Of its contents, precious as every sentence might perchance be deemed by some of our fair readers, we can only furnish a brief outline. After pledging himself to a full and satisfactory explanation on the subject of the miniature, the writer solemnly protested that his whole undivided heart and affections were irrevocably devoted to Miss Norberry, whose virtues and talents formed the subject of an ardent but not intemperate eulogy. He then entered into a frank detail of his circumstances, made a formal offer of his hand, stated that her acceptance of it, should he be deemed worthy of an honour and happiness so inappreciable, would scarcely separate her from her own

family, since it was his determination to reside permanently at the Lodge; and concluded with a passionate entreaty that she would not plunge him into despair by the rejection of his suit.

Of the intense anxiety with which he awaited the return of his messenger they only can judge who have been placed in a similar state of suspense. It was little likely that an answer requiring such mature deliberation on her own part, and a probable appeal to the sanction of her father, would be immediately despatched; but it was just possible that Robin might be kept waiting till a reply could be framed, and this idea, improbable as it was, fixed him immoveably at the window commanding the road by which his servant would return. While thus straining his eyes, and converting every animate and not a few inanimate objects into a likeness of the desiderated harbinger of pleasant tidings, he saw advancing towards the house, from the side entrance of the garden, a group, consisting of the boy whose life he had been instrumental in saving, his aunt, and a third person, whom, from his coachman's

appearance, he concluded to be the father of the child. He was a short, florid, and rather corpulent man, attired in a very handsome livery; his shining flaxen side-curls trimly arranged under his large cocked hat; his countenance open and smiling; and his whole substantial comfortable appearance conveying the impression that he served a family where there was plenty of good cheer and no very severe duties to perform. On the door being opened by Madge, for Middleton had given general orders that all visitants, however humble their station, should be ushered into the parlour, the woman entered first, holding the child by the hand, and, after dropping a deep curtsey, turned to the man behind, and said, "Come forward, Henry, and fall upon your knees, and call for the blessing of God on the gentleman who saved your dear boy's life."

The man advanced accordingly, smoothing down his shining hair with his right hand, but he had no sooner caught sight of Middleton than, suddenly starting back with every demonstration of utter amazement and dismay, while his

staring eyes remained riveted upon the object before him, he ejaculated in a hoarse whisper, "You! you! is it you who saved my boy's life at the risk of your own? O God! this is too much! Villain—villain that I am!" He smote his hand violently upon his reddened forehead, which was suddenly covered with perspiration, and then looking wildly around him, and gasping for breath, exclaimed pantingly, "Air! air! I shall be suffocated!" and rushed out of the room like a maniac.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Middleton, not a little astonished at the unaccountable burst of passion he had just witnessed. "Is your brother subject to fits of madness?"

"No, sir, no," replied the woman, dropping a tear from her eye as she shook her head, "he is both sane and sober, but he is a strange violent man, as I told you before, though why he should break out into such an agony before the preserver of his child Heaven above only knows. I hope you will forgive him, sir, and allow me to follow, and see what is the matter

with him. Nothing could exceed his gratitude as we came along; he declared himself ready to lay down his life for you; and I am the more surprised at his conduct, because the sight of his dear boy generally quiets him, let his rage be ever so towering. Come along, Harry, let us go and look after your poor father."

"Do so," said Middleton, "and let me see you again to-day, and your brother too, if possible, for I shall be anxious to know the cause of his strange behaviour."

This occurrence appeared so singular to Middleton, that it even superseded for a moment his previous solicitude for the return of Robin. After taxing his recollection to the utmost, he could not remember ever to have seen the man before; his figure, countenance, and voice, all seemed equally strange; and he could only therefore conclude, that he must have been labouring under a momentary hallucination, which transformed the preserver of his child into the likeness of some other person. Such vehement agitation in a man evidently

too robust to be affected by trifles indicated a most powerful cause of excitement. Middleton's curiosity was piqued to learn its development, although, as he sate at his parlour-window watching for the return of the woman, he did not forget to peer along the road by which Robin was expected with tidings from Maple Hatch.

While thus occupied a letter was brought in by Madge, which had just been left at the gate. Her master gazed at the superscription; he knew not the writing; it bore the post-mark of a country-town at some distance, in which he had not a single acquaintance. He opened it with a vague feeling of indifference, but it soon became evident, from the flashing of his eyes and the sudden reddening of his cheeks as he perused it, that the contents were of a startling and painful nature. They were as follow: —

"SIR,

"This letter comes from a friend who knows and regards you, though he has reasons for

concealing his name. Its object is to caution you against Miss Norberry, who is not what she appears, but an artful, designing girl, who seeks to inveigle your affections for purposes which I shall feel it my duty to divulge, should you not immediately withdraw your misplaced attachment. Once already have you been deceived by a girl who appeared not less innocent and fair than Miss Norberry. Beware of being a second time betrayed!

"YOUR FRIEND."

"Slanderer and liar!" cried Middleton, crumpling up the paper, hurling it to the ground, and stamping on it indignantly with his foot. "Miss Norberry artful and designing! Miss Norberry an inveigler of affections for unworthy purposes! Loathsome, calumnious villain! she is a paragon of purity and perfection —a pattern of every virtue—a model for her whole sex. O Heaven! can there exist a miscreant so devilish as to traduce the transcendent excellence and immaculate integrity of Miss Norberry?—Fool that I am! why should I

thus chafe at the malignity of an anonymous slanderer, who deserves nothing but silent and supreme contempt? My friend, indeed! insolent, false, detestable wretch! Yet must he know something of me, since he makes allusion to that hateful affair which I have ever wished to lock up as a secret in my own bosom. This is strange!"

He picked up the paper, unfolded, and again read it over, word by word; but could not recognise the hand-writing, which bore no semblance of being feigned. "That I, myself, have enemies," continued Middleton, as he gazed upon the revolting scroll, "enemies who would destroy me, though I am unconscious of offence towards a single human being, was unfortunately known to me already; but that Miss Norberry should have foes so implacable as to seek the destruction of her fair fame, which I believe to be still dearer to her than her life, is a thought almost too horrible to contemplate. And this infamous traducer says that he knows me; nay, he does, he must know me, or he could never have alluded to

——. Evil betide him! for dragging back that hideous affair to my recollection. What are we to think of human nature when such gratuitous wickedness can exist; what can reconcile us to a world, wherein we must mix with fellow-creatures like these?"——Immersed in such reflections, and gazing upon the paper before him, instead of watching the road by which Robin was to return, he allowed that trusty emissary to reach the Lodge, and even to present himself in the parlour, before he was aware of his approach. "Well, Robin!" cried his master, starting from his seat with an animated yet anxious look, "have you brought any answer — where is it? Did you see Miss Norberry — did she say anything — how did she appear?"

"Dear heart!" cried Robin, "what a power of questions! Why, no man could answer them all at once, unless he was ambidexter, and had got two tongues in his head. I can't tell how Miss Norberry looked, 'acause I didn't see her; and I ha'n't brought an answer 'acause she didn't write one; but she sent Miss Lucy

to enquire particularly after your health, and to give her compliments and to say, that she would write an answer to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Not before? Well, I had no right to expect it sooner."

Relieved from his immediate suspense upon this subject, Middleton's thoughts reverted to the singular behaviour of the man who had visited him, and to the contents of the infamous letter which he still held in his hand. As the woman whom he had desired to return did not re-appear, he determined to communicate to Hargrave all that had occurred, to show him the libellous attack upon Miss Norberry, and to ask his advice as to the best means of discovering and punishing the writer. His friend, not less indignant than himself at so flagitious an aspersion, suspected that the two facts with which he had been made acquainted might possibly be connected, that Middleton's visitant having been employed to write the letter without knowing the parties, might have been struck with sudden remorse on finding he had been aiming a stab at the peace of his bene-

factor, and he recommended accordingly that they should proceed instantly to interrogate him. On reaching the residence of his sister, she declared that her brother, without explaining the cause of his being so violently affected, had quitted Brookshaw immediately after leaving the Lodge, stating that he meant to strike across the country in order to catch the London stage. Of his address in the metropolis, or the names of his employers, she repeated her entire ignorance, betraying much confusion at these interrogatories and a great indisposition to answer them. Nothing further could be done at present, and, with regard to ulterior proceedings, Hargrave recommended that no notice whatever should be taken of the letter, and that it should be left to the oblivion and contempt it merited.

On the following morning Middleton's suspense became most acute and painful; his breakfast was sent away untouched, to the great discomfort of Robin and Madge; and he continued walking up and down his parlour, or eagerly looking out for the expected messenger

during two or three hours. It was still early when, the desiderated letter being placed in his hands, he tore it eagerly open, and, with a beating heart, read as follows:—

"DEAR MR. MIDDLETON,

"From the first moment of our acquaintance I have ever cherished the highest admiration of your talents—the sincerest reverence for your many virtues; and as these feelings have been constantly acquiring strength with the increase of our intimacy, it is difficult to express my pride and satisfaction at finding that I have won your regard, that I have been even deemed worthy the exalted honour of receiving a tender of your hand.

"But, alas! the pride, the pleasure, the delight, with which I might otherwise have been filled, are converted into painful regret at the thought that circumstances and considerations of the most cogent nature imperatively compel me to decline your offer. As my reservation upon this subject, delicate as it is, would be equally unjust to you and unworthy of my-

self, I will state my reasons with the utmost frankness.

"While my family remain in their present situation, it is not my intention to marry. What would become of my dear father, whose infirmities require such constant solace and attention, were I to desert him in his old age? Who would watch and nurse my poor Aunt Patty? Lucy, dear girl! good and affectionate as she is beautiful, would supply my place to the best of her ability; but she is too young to have so grave a duty exclusively deputed to her; too young, and too little acquainted with the world, to be left alone. I am vain enough to believe that my society and my assistance are essential to the comfort of my whole family, and while I retain this impression, no selfish considerations shall ever induce me to quit them.

"But there is another and much stronger impediment to our union; one, indeed, which I believe to be insuperable. Your gloomy, your terrific, notions of the Creator, and of the doom to which he has condemned the majority

of his creatures, I believe to be mistakes equally derogatory to the Deity and to man. That they have been occasionally destructive of your own peace of mind I know from painful observation; that they will continue to be so I have but too much reason to fear. You are well aware that I attach not the smallest importance to merely theoretical differences in religion, where there is sincerity and virtue on both sides; but my happiness is too important, too sacred, a deposit to be endangered by a marriage where there is an incompatibility so marked and essential as that to which I have adverted.

"You say that my refusal will reduce you to despair. With the high hopes and glorious privileges of a Christian, no man, and least of all so virtuous a one as yourself, should ever abandon himself to despondency. Surely you have too much manliness and good sense to suffer your peace of mind to be even temporarily invaded, because you cannot place it in permanent peril by an incongruous union.

"Insurmountable as are the objections to any closer alliance between us, I shall be proud

to retain the friendship from which I have derived so much pleasure and instruction. Whether you concede this privilege or not, I entreat you to confide in the perfect truth with which, on my part, I subscribe myself,

"Dear Mr. Middleton,

"Your sincere, your grateful friend,

"CHRISTIANA NORBERRY."

"Maple Hatch,
"Thursday Night."

"Then there is no hope for me!" exclaimed Middleton, throwing himself back in his chair, and dropping the letter upon the table. It is decreed that every attachment of my heart shall be cruelly blighted,—that every plan which I form for my happiness,—happiness! idle mockery!—for the diminution of my misery, shall be relentlessly foiled and frustrated! It is not enough that my life shall be sought by some remorseless assassin, but it would seem that the curse, the hatred, and the malice, with which I myself am pursued must be extended to all those on whom I bestow my love. Thus only can I account for the wither-

ing canker that tainted the first object of my affections; thus only can I explain the base and slanderous attack levelled against the immaculate Miss Norberry. What have I done to entail this persecution, this wretchedness upon myself and others? to be as a second Jonah, carrying with me storm and danger whithersoever I go? But why should I be exempted from the common lot of man? Guilt and sorrow in this world, perdition and torment in the next, such is his dark doom. O miserable race of mortals! O world of bitterness and woe! O revolting present! O still more frightful future!"

In this strain did he continue for some time to ejaculate and to bewail himself. The hope that had latterly given sweetness to his life, was suddenly changed to gloominess and gall; a dark and disfiguring cloud seemed to have spread itself, like a pall over the whole face of creation; he retired to his room, and, refusing for several days to admit the even visits of Hargrave, abandoned himself to the blackest melancholy.

CHAPTER XII.

Put not yourself into amazement how these things should be: all difficulties are but easy when they are known.

Measure for Measure.

PANTING for breath, trembling with agitation, and rendered still more pale from the transport of rage into which he had thrown himself, the gaunt cadaverous-looking stranger, whose sudden outrage upon Sir Dennis Lifford, in the very body of the church, had struck aghast the whole nuptial assemblage, advanced towards them, after having committed the bridegroom to the custody of the Bow Street officers, and, with a courteous demeanour, singularly at variance with the violence he had just been perpetrating, began to apologise for the alarm and disturbance he had inevitably occasioned. "What the devil!—hey!—hick!—

apology!" interposed Sir Matthew, almost crimson with wrath, "knock me down, and ask pardon—pull my nose, and make me a bow—humbug! Fine words butter no parsnips. Tell 'ee what, sirrah! if 'ee baint mad and just broke out o' Bedlam, I shall trouble 'ee for that horsewhip, and when we get out o' church, if I dont give 'ee a proper taste on't, my name 's not Matt. Middleton."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized the right hand of the stranger, and was about to wrench the whip from his grasp, when Lord Arthur Fintown exclaimed, "Nay, Sir Matthew, you are an alderman and a man of peace, and had better leave the settlement of this affair to me. If this person is a gentleman, as his appearance really betokens, he will either give such an explanation of his conduct as may justify it, though that seems hardly possible, or he will do me the honour of affording me satisfaction in the usual way for the gross insult offered to our whole party."

"Most willingly do I accept the alternative," said the stranger, politely bowing, "but surely

this is no place for an *éclaircissement*, nor need the public be parties to it."

He glanced at the crowd that was pouring into the church, making all sorts of absurd enquiries; and as Sir Matthew and Lord Arthur immediately saw the force of this objection, they proposed an adjournment to the vestry-room, the former ejaculating, "Ay, we must look to dear Ciss: poor girl! frightened out of her wits, I dare say. Enough to make her: great scarecrow of a fellow; looks like the ghost of Magog: hey!—what!—come along."

On their reaching the vestry, the inquisitive strangers who had intruded were ejected, the door was fastened: Cecilia, sitting beside an open window, and smelling to salts, had recovered from her faintness, though she was still much agitated, and the rest of the marriage-party were gathered together in the narrow apartment, every eye bent eagerly upon the stranger, and every countenance expressing either surprise and curiosity, or indignation and alarm. "Ladies and gentlemen!" said the unknown, who had by this time recovered

his breath and some portion of his self-possession, while his wild and haggard looks were now tempered by much suavity of manner, "I ought to begin by apologising for the confusion and terror of which I have been the occasion, but really I feel so delighted, so overjoyed at the thought of my having reached the church in time to prevent the completion of this fellow's infamous design, that I can only congratulate you, as I do from the very bottom of my heart, on your escape from a calamity which would have plunged you all into the deepest distress. You, sir, I presume, are Sir Matthew Middleton. I give you joy that your daughter has been snatched from a treacherous and cruel snare, and I flatter myself that when you know who and what I am, you will be spared the trouble of attempting to apply my horsewhip in the way you meditated." A slight tinge of his pallid cheek and an air of dignified pride accompanied these words.

"Fegs! I don't know that," cried the baronet, "that 's hereafter as may be—like to pay as I go—shan't let you slip in a hurry—

don't throw away clean water till I get dirty—fair speak and nose tweak won't do for me—tell'ee that plump—hey!—what!—hick!"

"Come, sir," said Lord Arthur, with the air of a man who would not be denied, "we require neither preamble nor congratulation, but insist upon knowing, before we proceed to further measures, who and what you are."

"You shall be satisfied," was the reply; "I am Sir Dennis Lifford, Baronet, of Castle Moila, in the County of Galway."

"You Sir Dennis Lifford!" exclaimed every voice, in various tones of surprise and incredulity.

"Humbug!" cried Sir Matthew, again reddening with choler. "Old birds not caught with chaff.—This cock-and-a-bull story is too ridiculous to be believed."

"You will find it a truth nevertheless, which I have abundant means of establishing, as well as the further and more startling fact, that the scoundrel who has lately been presuming to figure in my character, and whose audacity, aggravated by the basest ingratitude, I could

not, in the passion of the moment, refrain from chastising with my own hand, though I ought to have left so vile a culprit to the vengeance of the law, was lately my valet!"

A scream of horror from several of the ladies thrilled through the narrow apartment; the word "Impossible!" was ejaculated by others, with an indignant shake of the head; while poor Cecilia, leaning upon her mother for support, and bursting into tears, seemed utterly overcome by her feelings.

"Let me explain," resumed the real Sir Dennis, "the unfortunate combination of circumstances that enabled this fellow to personate me for such a length of time without contradiction or discovery, and your doubts—for some of you, I perceive, are not yet satisfied as to my identity—will be immediately dispelled. His nefarious project was not so wild and desperate as it might seem, for as his name is really Dennis Lifford, no uncommon one in the County of Galway, his marriage, had it been completed, might have been held valid, and he would, at all events, have possessed the

means of obtaining his wife's portion, which was doubtless the rascal's object, or of extorting money for consenting to a divorce or separation. In point of fact, he is the son of an obscure pork-butcher at Tuam."

Lady Middleton, blushing with mingled anger and confusion, and unable to lift up her eyes from the ground, reiterated the hideous word with a shudder of ineffable disgust; Cecilia groaned audibly; the elder Miss Gauntley covertly withdrew her bouquet of orange-flower blossoms, but not so adroitly as to be unobserved by her sister, who immediately followed her example; Mrs. Burroughs slipped out of the room unobserved, and hurried home to consult Dominick; the rest of the females, most of them smelling to their vinaigrettes, gazed at one another with a very sheepish and lackadaisical expression of nausea; while Sir Matthew exclaimed, "Curse the fellow's impudence! was it the son, then, of an obscure pork-butcher who always affected such a contempt for the rabble, and the mob, and all vulgarians of the lower orders, and gave himself the airs of a

dandy, and an exquisite, and a man of birth? —Ay, ay, set a beggar on horseback ride to the devil. Why, Meg, you always said he had the manners of a complete man of fashion—no judge myself—thought him always a fool and a fop—not the less fashionable for that; had 'em there.—If this all true, we shall look like a precious set of asses! But don't understand yet. How could the fellow make such an appearance, and carry off his imposture so cunningly? Strange affair—hey!—what!—hick!"

"I believe I can render it more intelligible to you," resumed the genuine Sir Dennis. "Having received a decent education at Tuam, and being immeasurably vain of his supposed talents and good looks, he determined on seeking his fortune in Dublin, where, however, he would have starved, but that a distant relative took compassion on him, received him into his shop, and taught him his own business of a hairdresser, which he practised for several years."

Lady Middleton, biting her lip till the blood was ready to start, but without raising her abashed eyes, echoed the hateful word, "Hair-

dresser!" Cecilia gave a second groan; Miss Curzon Chilvers plucked off her white favour with a most distasteful look, and threw it scornfully upon the ground; the other bridesmaids did the same; Lady Selina Silverthorpe, decamping without beat of drum, slipped out of the room and into her carriage, anxious to obtain some compensation for her offended feelings by being the first to spread the strange tidings through the town; while Sir Matthew cried, "Damn the fellow! I might have suspected as much. That was the reason, then, why the rascal was always flourishing his little comb, and twiddling his locks and whiskers in the glass, and noticing everybody's head-dress. Ah! what 's bred in bone never out o' the flesh. Sheep in wolf's clothing after all. Ha! thrown off mask, and shown cloven foot — scoundrel!"

"How intolerably provoking!" said Lord Arthur, "that the creature should be absolutely too contemptible either to fight, kick, or horsewhip. Never was so gulled and bamboozled in my whole life. The fellow cer-

tainly had the manners and language of a gentleman. How is this to be accounted for?"

"If he really possessed those qualifications," continued Sir Dennis, "he must have gained them on the stage, to which he subsequently betook himself, when his debts and dissipated habits compelled him to give up his shop and run away from Dublin. Joining a paltry strolling company, he sometimes made himself useful as hair-dresser, and sometimes was promoted to act the parts of fops and coxcombs, in which capacity he must have picked up whatever knowledge he may display of fashionable manners and phraseology."

"But where," asked Sir Matthew, "where did he pick up his letters of introduction, and his title-deeds, and his money, and his equipage? Zooks! we are not a bit nearer the real state of the case than we were at first; all in the dark still—hey!—what!—hick!"

"Because you have not heard me out. Strolling with his company to Galway, he was arrested for debt, when his mother, who had formerly been a servant in my family, after

telling me his whole history, prevailed upon me to liberate him, and implored me to take him abroad with me, pledging herself for his future good conduct, and assuring me that he bitterly lamented his past irregularities. Pleased with the fellow's appearance and address, as well as with his seeming aptitude for my employment, I yielded, in an evil hour, to the importunities of his mother, a very worthy woman, whom I was anxious to oblige, and consented to take him as my valet, and to carry him with me to Paris, whither I was going to visit my uncle, the Earl of Ballycoreen."

"The Earl, then, *is* your uncle in real truth," said Lady Gauntley, inquiringly.

"He is, madam."

"And you expect to succeed to his title and estates?"

"I know of no other candidate for them at present."

"If you should prolong your stay in London, Sir Dennis, we shall be most happy to see you in Gloucester Place, and to make amends

for our involuntary mistake:—we have a few friends on Thursday night, if you will do us the honour." Here her ladyship slipped a card into his hand. "Allow me to present Miss Gauntley. This is my second daughter, Augusta; my dear,—Sir Dennis Lifford—the real Sir Dennis." The young giantesses, reducing themselves to the height of six feet by curtseying, "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," staring at the expected successor to the earldom of Ballycoreen as if they could have swallowed him up with their saucer-eyes; while the object of their grim smirking courteously regretted his inability to accept her ladyship's invitation, as he was under the necessity of departing almost immediately for Paris.

"What the dickins has all this flummery got to do with the explanation," demanded Sir Sir Matthew impatiently. "You engaged the fellow as your valet, what then?"

"Taking with me the title-deeds of my estate, in order that I might consult an eminent barrister in Dublin, as to the possibility of cutting off a portion of the entail, I started for

that city in the identical travelling carriage which I saw waiting at the door of this church as I entered. On the journey I was seized with a sudden and violent illness, which compelled me to stop at an obscure town in the county of Westmeath, where my malady became so much aggravated by an ignorant practitioner that a brain fever ensued, and I was for some time delirious. Here was an opportunity too tempting to be resisted by my rogue of a valet, who, in all probability, thought I should die. Leaving with the people of the inn a sufficient sum of money to satisfy them as to my immediate expenses, and stating that he must proceed to Dublin to inform my family of my illness and procure fresh supplies, he left me to my fate, and set off in my travelling carriage, carrying with him my title-deeds, my watch, and other valuable trinkets, a letter of introduction to a gentleman in London, and two or three hundred pounds in Bank notes. With this sum, as I have since discovered, he proceeded to a gaming-house in Dublin, and having been fortunate enough to treble its amount, he seems

to have conceived the design of assuming my name, and, under that disguise, of making some daring and brilliant hit in London, which should render him independent for life. Of the enterprise upon which he decided, and hazardous as it was, had so nearly accomplished, I need not inform the present company; though I hope they will now accept, in the sincere and candid spirit with which they are proffered, my congratulations on their deliverance from a calamity which would have been not less painful than degrading to all parties."

"Curse the fellow once more!" cried Sir Matthew; "I can now understand why he was always in such a confounded hurry, and would not have the wedding postponed for a single day. Fudge!—humbug!—swindling rascal! But 'ee hav'n't told us how 'ee found him out, and followed him up, so as to be here in the nick o' time. Narrow escape, egad! Never mind—a mile 's as good as a miss—hey!—what!—hick!"

"When I recovered my faculties," continued Sir Dennis, "I had the mortification of finding

myself a prisoner for debt to my landlord, without the means either of proving who and what I was, or of defraying the bill which had been run up against me during my confinement. A fresh delay was incurred by the necessity of sending a messenger to Castle Moila, and it was only on the very day of his return, that a paragraph in a London paper announced to me the impending and early marriage of Sir Dennis Lifford with the only daughter of Sir Matthew Middleton."

"How fortunate!" cried Lady Middleton, who, in the humiliating sense of her precipitation and ambitious folly, eagerly claimed merit for the accident which had prevented the full entailment of their evil consequence, "how fortunate that I caused those paragraphs to be inserted!"

"Ay, Meg; your pride and vanity did 'ee some good there: no thanks to you, though; shot at a pigeon and hit a crow; out o' the frying-pan into the fire; hey!—what! Well, sir?"

"Finding that there was now not a moment

to be lost," resumed Sir Dennis, "I started instantly; travelled night and day, though my impaired health was little adapted to such an exertion, and paused not till I reached London a few hours ago, when I consulted an attorney, procured the assistance of Bow Street officers, and burst upon your bridal party with a sudden, perhaps a rude, violence, for which the state of my feelings, and the circumstances of the case, must plead my excuse. If any doubt still exists as to my identity, I would refer you to my attorney, who is in waiting without; or to my late valet, who is by this time in prison, and will not, I presume, deny himself, now that he is detected and foiled, to be a base, infamous, and ungrateful, impostor."

"Tell 'ee what," said Sir Matthew, "asked 'ee just now for the loan of that horsewhip, intending to use it pretty briskly if 'ee hadn't made out a case; and now I give 'ee free leave to lay it across my shoulders for being such a gull, gudgeon, buzzard, and dupe, as to be bamboozled by an acting, hair-dressing lackey, because he had fine whiskers, fine clothes, and

fine words. Ah! now we can find out that fine birds don't always make fine feathers. None so blind as them that can't see—had 'ee there, Meg—hey!—what!"

"Miss Middleton," said Sir Dennis, taking the hand of Cecilia, whose tears continued falling into her lap beneath her lowered veil; "allow me to renew my congratulations on your escape from this atrocious design upon your happiness. Believe me that you have, on every account, reason for felicitation, since, even if you had honoured the real instead of the fictitious Sir Dennis Lifford with your regards, you would have entailed upon yourself a sickly and not very sightly companion, whose age and whose infirmities little qualify him for such a distinction."

Cecilia made no reply to this polite speech; but the elder and the junior Miss Curzon Chilvers, standing on tiptoe, in order to come within eyeshot of the speaker, threw as many dimples as possible into their dumpling faces, as if to intimate that there were others who might not think upon this subject in the same

way as Cecilia: while Lady Middleton, conceiving the pleasant possibility of a transfer from the false to the genuine Simon Pure, arrayed her face in its most winning smiles, and expressed a hope, that although their first introduction had been so painful and inauspicious, they might still be honoured by the acquaintance and friendship of a gentleman to whom they owed so deep and impayable a debt of gratitude. Sir Dennis again lamented that his early departure for the Continent, where he meant to reside for several years for the benefit of his health, would prevent his availing himself of this polite offer; and then presenting his own card, as well as that of his attorney, to Sir Matthew and Lord Arthur, he bowed courteously, quitted the vestry-room, and drove to his hotel in the reclaimed travelling chariot which was to have conveyed the bride and bridegroom to Dover.

Lady Gauntley, finding that there was no more intelligence to be gleaned, and no chance of making Sir Dennis supply a bridal garland for either of her maypole daughters, gave them

a signal and retired, without saying a syllable to the rest of the party. Mrs. Curzon Chilvers would have done the same, but that Lord Arthur was deeply engaged in a whispering conversation with one of her girls, a proceeding which Lady Middleton interrupted by asking, "Pray, Lord Arthur, who introduced you to this infamous impostor? I saw him first in your society, which to me was a sufficient guarantee of his respectability."

"Egad! Lady Middleton, you do both me and my friends too much honour. I cannot always answer for my own respectability, still less for theirs. Mrs. Burroughs first made me acquainted with the fellow, stating that he was a distant relative of her own."

"And by the same lady was he introduced to me also," cried Mrs. O'Gorman French.

"And to Mrs. Burroughs am *I* also indebted for that honour," exclaimed Lady Middleton, delighted to have found a scapegoat upon whom she might throw some portion of the ridicule and blame with which she herself expected to be overwhelmed. "And pray,"

continued her Ladyship, peering with a sharp and vengeful eye round the room, " where *is* Mrs. Burroughs ?"

" She has *levanted*, stolen a march upon us ;" said Lord Arthur, " I saw her sneak off with a crest-fallen look as soon as Sir Dennis commenced his explanation."

" This has an exceedingly suspicious appearance !" exclaimed Lady Middleton.

" Come, come, Meg," cried Sir Matthew, " don't 'ee be too hard upon your friend—fair play 's a jewel—remember she introduced us to that honest trustworthy Frenchman, Mounseer Dupin—had 'ee there—hey !—what ! —hick !"

Mrs. Curzon Chilvers and her daughters now took their departure, accompanied by Lord Arthur Fintown, whose attentions to the elder of the young ladies seemed completely to console her for the morning's disappointment ; but Lady Middleton still lingered in the room, anxious that the loungers and gazers who had collected round the church should disperse, before herself and her daughter underwent the

ordeal of their eyes and their observations. The stout and bluff Sir Matthew, however, who had no notion of truckling to a mob, exclaimed, "Well, what are we waiting for? sha'n't get a husband to-day—ar'n't as thick as blackberries. Never mind, Ciss dear! Better single than married to a valet de sham. Living lion better than a dead dog. Give us your arm, dear: come along—hey!—hick!"

Lady Middleton, finding the side-door now quite public enough for her purposes, retired through its narrow portal; Cecilia, who had not spoken a word since the *denouement*, leaned upon her father's arm, and concealing herself as well as she could by means of her veil and her bonnet, passed with a feeling of deep humiliation through such gazers as still hung around the spot, sprang into the carriage, drew up the opposite blind, huddled herself into a corner, and burst into a fresh flood of tears. As the vehicle drove rapidly off Sir Matthew used the most affectionate endeavours to console her, urging that she ought to rejoice and give thanks to Heaven for her escape, instead of

abandoning herself to useless lamentation. Lady Middleton, too much in need of consolation to be able to administer it, silently revolved sad and bitter thoughts in her mind, conscious of the unmitigated ridicule, and still more insulting commiseration that awaited her, and yet utterly unable to devise any scheme for warding them off. Her previous boasts, not very sparingly promulgated, that the caption of so valuable a prize as Sir Dennis was entirely attributable to her own contrivance and superior good management, now rushed upon her memory, with the sickening conviction that others would recollect them still more accurately than herself. One only consolation suggested itself to her. She would endeavour to make the meddling Mrs. Burroughs responsible for the whole disgrace; or at all events, compel her to share the ignominy of which she had been the occasion—a charitable resolve which, however, brought but little relief to the misery of her mind. She still felt herself in the situation of an awkward fowler, who, having missed the object at which he aimed, is wounded by the

recoil of his own ill-directed gun, and, instead of obtaining pity, excites contemptuous laughter by his bungling failure.

Such was the plight in which the bridal party returned to Portland Place, where Cecilia immediately hurried to her own apartment, anxious to withdraw herself from every eye, and feeling as if she should never again be able to venture into society and face the sneers and laughter of a taunting world. For Lady Middleton, who fidgeted from one room to another as if she could escape from herself and from the nervous excitement that tormented her, new vexations were reserved whithersoever her footsteps led her. In the dining-room was set out in decorated array the *déjeuner à la fourchette*, prepared for the bridal party. On a side-table in the drawing-room were displayed the little packages of bride-cake, with a special portion for Mrs. Howard Maltby, which the fair brides-maids had so lately enveloped under her own immediate direction. In another chamber were the trinkets and trifles collected for the lottery. On all sides the evidences of her

anticipated triumph were now converted into so many aggravations of her humiliating discomfiture and defeat. Measuring others by her own little mind, she believed that the whole world of her acquaintance would exult in her misfortune; while she did not give them credit for the politeness she herself possessed, and which would have prompted her, had the circumstances been reversed, to gloss over any such feelings of petty malevolence with smiles and courteous grimace. How she might best meet this swelling tide of annoyance, and notify to these hostile friends the cruel mischance of the morning, was a matter too important to be hastily decided. All she could do at present, was to order that not a single visitant should be admitted, until Sir Matthew and herself could determine what line of conduct they should adopt.

Sir Matthew, who could never reconcile himself to the deferment, still less to the forfeiture, of a feast, recommended that the grand dinner should take place by all means, urging with a characteristic manliness that it would be the

best possible opportunity of breaking the tidings to their acquaintance, and of disarming their taunts or ridicule by showing that they themselves viewed the critical detection of the impostor as a subject for festive rejoicing and for receiving the congratulations of their friends. With all her plausible politeness and bland self-possession, Lady Middleton did not feel herself equal to this task. She had no spirits, she said, for a party; Cecilia's appearance was entirely out of the question; there would be an air of indelicate bravado in giving the entertainment, when the family was placed in a predicament so awkward and embarrassing: and Sir Matthew reluctantly consented that messengers should be despatched to all the intended guests, apprising them that the dinner and the evening-party were unavoidably postponed.

This abeyance of the banquet, with the probable spoiling and certain vain cost of its materials, being one of those rare trials that the constitutional good-temper of the baronet could not well endure, he indulged in taunts and sar-

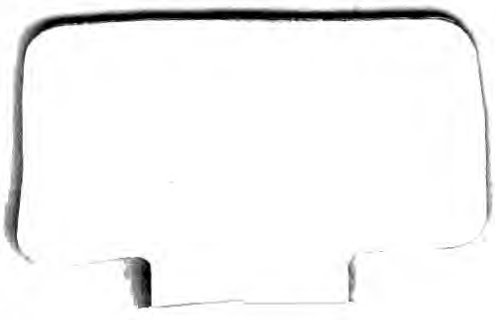
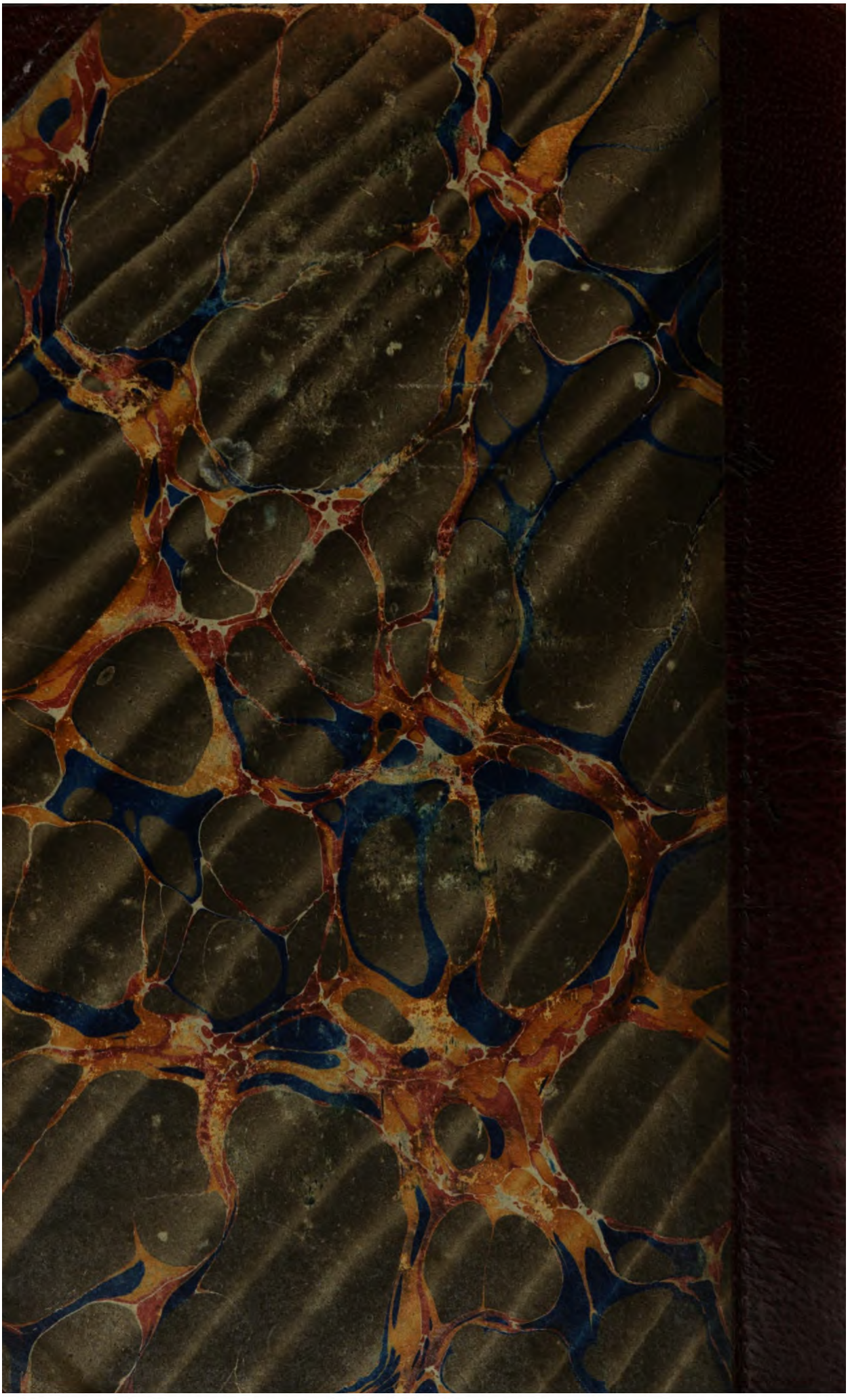
casms against his wife on the subject of Sir Dennis, which provoked recriminations of no very conciliatory nature. With the usual sapience of people who can discover the probability of a thing after it has happened, however blind to it before, Lady Middleton now recognised the habits of the valet and the hairdresser in many of those little traits of the sham Sir Dennis's demeanour which she had received at the time as indisputable evidences of gentility; while, in his fustian language, theatrical airs, and stage-struck heroics, she could as evidently discern the manners of the strolling player. Nor was Sir Matthew deficient in that postliminious species of second sight to which we have alluded, though neither of them suspected that the impostor, who was by no means wanting in shrewd tact, had addressed himself in an especial manner to their respective foibles. Seeing her Ladyship's mania for every thing that appertained to fashion and the *beau monde*, he had assumed such airs of the dandy and the exquisite as he had been enabled to glean from plays and observation,

pushing them perhaps to a little degree of extravagance in consideration of her Ladyship's civic origin, and presumed ignorance of the *juste milieu* in such matters. With Cecilia the same affectation, seasoned by an occasional dash of scenic genuflexion and rant, passed current for genuine specimens of *ton;* while, in his interviews with Sir Matthew, the knave, discarding much of his drawling and conceited foppery, had only sought to ingratiate himself by affecting a participation in the political and religious prejudices of his intended father-in-law. As we usually deal out our hatred to those who have made fools of us according to the measure of our own gullibility, it would be difficult to say whether the baronet or his lady were most inveterate against the impostor, upon whose head they trusted that the real Sir Dennis would speedily bring down all the vengeance of the law.

Occupied in such discussions and altercations, which consumed the remainder of this unhappy day, neither of them adverted to the

paragraphs transmitted to the newspapers, with such a pompous account of the wedding. They appeared of course in all the journals, and the house was accordingly besieged on the following day with visitants and congratulatory notes, which entailed a whole series of explanations and replies, equally painful and humiliating. The contradictions immediately inserted in the papers, with the jibes and jeers, the taunts and ridicule to which they gave rise, subjected the unfortunate Lady Middleton to a new torrent of impertinence, in the form of elegantly written three-cornered billets, commiserating her ill-usage, or expressive of indignation at the licentious and scurrilous personality of the press; every one of which polite notes, such was the morbid exacerbation of her feelings, she considered as an intentional insult. Several days afterwards, when she ventured abroad, which Cecilia had not yet summoned courage enough to attempt, her Ladyship was rudely pointed out by the passengers as the object of all this unwelcome publicity. To fashionable notoriety

she would not have objected; but an exposure of this sort she found so annoying, that she determined to withdraw from London until the affair should blow over or be superseded by some new nine-days wonder.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.