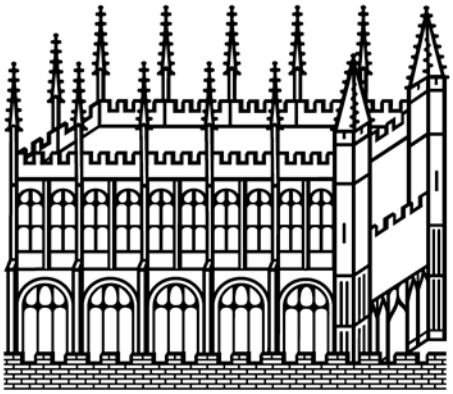

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GALE MIDDLETON.

A STORY OF THE PRESENT DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BRAMBLETYE HOUSE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1833.

GALE MIDDLETON.

CHAPTER I.

Mais, au moins, dites moi, madame, par quelle sort
Votre Clitandre a l'heur de vous plaire si fort.
Sur quel fonds de mérite et de vertu sublime
Appuyez vous en lui l'honneur de votre estime ?
Vous êtes-vous rendue avec tout le beau monde,
Au merite éclatant de sa perruque blonde ?
Ou sa façon de rire et son ton de fausset
Ont-ils de vous toucher su trouver le secret ?

MOLIERE.

ON the day that her Ladyship formed this resolution, she received the following letter from her step-son at Brookshaw Lodge:—

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"If our joys, in the state of darkness to which we are all doomed, be but too often and too rapidly converted into sorrows, it cannot be denied that our seeming vexations will some-

times prove sources of comfort and consolation. Much as I regretted the severe illness that prevented my being present at Cecilia's intended marriage, I now rejoice that I was spared the pain of participating in a scene of disappointment and distress which I could have done nothing to alleviate. I have already written to congratulate my sister, as well as yourself and Sir Matthew, on the detection and defeat of the base contrivance for the destruction of her happiness; and I now take the liberty of addressing you, in the hope that I may contribute to prevent her peace of mind, and the welfare of our family, from being again placed in jeopardy. That a second adventurer and impostor should make her the object of his nefarious designs I do not anticipate; but as her pliant and easy disposition will probably induce her to defer to your judgment and choice, should other claimants solicit her hand, I venture to make a few references to the past, not in the way of reproach — far from it—but from a deep anxiety to obviate any future mistakes on a subject so momentous.

" My insurmountable objections to the pretended Sir Dennis I took the liberty of stating to you fully and freely, as soon as I understood that he had become a suitor to Cecilia. Antiquated as such notions may sound, I had conceived that a real gentleman, in addition to that restraining fear of God which constitutes the best bravery of a Christian, should be a patriot and a philanthropist; that he should be gentle, generous, and high-principled; courteous to the weaker sex, benevolent and gracious to his inferiors, polished and urbane to all. Not only did the sham Sir Dennis appear to me deficient in these good qualities, but I found him infected with many of their opposite vices. Forgetful of his Creator, and indifferent to his country, dissipation, frivolity, and the indulgence of an intense selfishness seemed to be the sole objects of his existence. Towards females his manners evinced an impertinent boorishness that would have disgraced a peasant; among friends and equals his conversation, utterly unintellectual, consisted of the most vapid common-places of the day, delivered

in an affected, drawling accent. Of the vulgarians and the lower orders, as he presumptuously termed the great mass of his fellow-countrymen, he never spoke except with an unmeasured insolence and contempt, while he would cringe to any leader of the Exclusives, especially if titled or high-born, with the most abject servility. To have been engaged in a duel; to have taken in a friend, either by a gambling-bet or in the sale of a horse; to have defrauded an honest tradesman by the non-payment of his bill; or to have figured in an intrigue, seemed, in the estimation of this profligate pretender, to be distinctions rather than disgraces.

"In answer to these accusations, which I repeatedly urged against him, I was told that they amounted at most to peccadilloes, from which no modern young man of rank and fortune was expected to be free; and that he was in every respect a perfect gentleman and a man of fashion; in proof of which asseverations I was referred to his dress, his manners, and his language!

"That the manners and the character which are conceived to constitute a gentleman, will vary at different æras, I am well aware. In the grave, stately, and magnificent courtiers of the Elizabethan period, vying with each other for the honourable notice of their learned queen by excellence in arts as well as arms, I can recognise the chivalry of the drawing-room. The dissipated companions of the royal Charles, heartless and unprincipled as they were, distinguished themselves by wit, vivacity, and the possession of literary taste or talents. They who, at a later period, affected the formal and ceremonious politeness of the French court, were dignified by a graceful decorum and a punctilious sense of honour. But the modern dandy, at once exclusive and vulgar, ignorant and vain, servile and arrogant, clownish and conceited; not less selfish, sensual, and immoral, than his predecessors, and unredeemed by any of their better qualities, what claims can *he* advance to the proud appellation of a gentleman? His clothes are cut upon a fashionable model; he is conversant with a certain

conventional slang; he can assume in his manners that lounging insolent nonchalance which fops and fools have determined to be the mode! For proof how soon and how successfully these externals of vulgar gentility may be aped by the vulgar, I refer to the valet of the real Sir Dennis Lifford.

"I have gone into this analysis of a man of fashion, at much greater length than I intended, in the hope that you will not suffer any of that worthless tribe to entail misery upon our dear Cecilia, by becoming successful candidates for her hand. Bestow her, I beseech you, on a *real* gentleman, estimating his claims not by his exterior but his intrinsic merits; weighing the essentials and disregarding the accessories; valuing him for himself and not for the fashionable or unfashionable *coterie* to which he may belong; preferring, in short, the humblest man whom God has stamped noble, to the proudest peer, if his rank and title be his only nobility.

"Once more I entreat you to pardon the freedom of this appeal, in consideration of my

fraternal love for Cecilia, and of the sincerity with which I subscribe myself,

My dear Madam,

Your affectionate Son,

JAMES GALE MIDDLETON."

All reproaches are painful in proportion to their truth. During the perusal of this letter Lady Middleton's cheeks had more than once reddened with resentment, from a conviction that the censure of her conduct, implied though not expressed, was abundantly justified by the facts of the case. Although Gale had been too delicate to make any allusion to that subject, she remembered how often she had tauntingly desired him to take the sham Sir Dennis as his model. Always disliking her step-son, from his avowed contempt of fashionable frivolity, she was now embittered against him, because she felt conscious that she must appear ridiculous in his eyes, and she cast his letter aside, exclaiming, "A most impertinent epistle, in spite of its affected respect; and the morbid mind of the writer is visible in every line.

What! he would have me marry the girl, I suppose, to some such half-witted creature as himself? What should *he* know of fashion and gentility? Let him skulk in his laboratory, and send his wits wool-gathering after the philosopher's stone. Let him dive into the obscure haunts of the London poor, and be knocked on the head for his pains. Let him jump into a mill-dam to rescue a beggar's brat, and be rewarded with a dangerous illness. Poor semi-lunatic! poor crazy Middleton! after all, I should compassionate rather than condemn him."

Sir Matthew, who really felt grateful to the true Sir Dennis for the exertions which had preserved Cecilia from his roguish representative, proposed that they should call at his hotel to return their thanks in a more formal way than they had hitherto done, a suggestion which met with a ready concurrence from her ladyship, in the secret hope that it might lead to some beneficial result. Not having yet ventured out of the house Cecilia would willingly have been left at home; but her scruples were

overcome by reminding her that she would go and return in the carriage: she was arrayed in her most becoming bonnet with the pink lining, in order that her pale cheek might benefit by its reflection; and the party set off for the Clarendon hotel. In spite of her ladyship's objurations, there were still ambitious and fashionable hankerings in her bosom, though she was too prudent to give them utterance. In her imagination, however, they might find a safe scope; and Alnaschar himself never indulged in fonder reveries than those with which she amused herself during the drive to Bond Street. "It is still possible," she thought, "that the real Sir Dennis may take a fancy to Cecilia, who really looks remarkably well in that bonnet. How glorious would be my triumph should she, after all, become Countess of Ballycoreen! The public and these pestilent journals would then be as obsequious to me as they are now scandalously insulting. Riding in my daughter's coronetted carriage, I could return with proper dignity and disdain the cut direct that I received from the impertinent and dis-

honest Lady Barbara Rusport; nay, the Duchess herself, and her haughty friends should see that I despise them; I would defy the malice and the lampoons of the formidable Tom Rashleigh;—perhaps—I am certainly much better qualified for the post—perhaps I might succeed to the office of fashionable dictatress, which her grace cannot much longer sustain—and then—then—." Her ladyship was spared the trouble of stating what signal revenge she would wreak upon her opponents, what indignities she would heap upon those who had slighted her, for the carriage stopped at the Clarendon hotel; she learnt, in answer to her inquiries, that Sir Dennis had departed on the previous morning for Paris, and her vision of glory, fading rapidly from her mind, left its place to be supplied during the return home by disappointment and dejection.

Nothing now remained to delay the projected retreat from London, where she had become so painfully conspicuous, except her determination to call Mrs. Burroughs to account for introducing the sham Sir Dennis, and vouching him

to be a relation. That busy, bustling, and calculating personage, whose vulture-like instinct seldom failed to scent from afar, and to pounce upon the fragments of a feast with her capacious reticule, had never presented herself in Portland Place since she had slipped away from the vestry-room, although she must have been aware that the materials of the marriage banquet were "absolutely spoiling," to use her own phrase, for want of claimants and consumers. On quitting the church she had hastily sought her husband, urging him to offer his services to the genuine Sir Dennis in the prosecution of his valet, against whom she felt keenly incensed from an apprehension that she might be compromised by his imposture. Nor was she wrong in this conjecture. According to the established custom of making the weakest go to the wall, it was pretty generally resolved that Mrs. Burroughs, who, in point of fact had been mainly instrumental in pushing the counterfeit baronet into society, should be made the scape-goat for all those whom her representations had induced to notice him. Some instinctive foreknowledge

of this conspiracy confined its object for several days to her house, although, when Lady Middleton sought her out in this retreat, she ran, forward to meet her with an air of easy assurance, exclaiming—"Ah, my dear friend! I am so vexed that a violent cold has prevented my calling in Portland Place!"

"Stay, Madam," interposed her visitant—"let me intreat that you will not call me your friend, for it is an honour that I am little anxious to share with the valet of Sir Dennis Lifford, even though you should be able to offer me the additional distinction of being your relative."

"Ah now, my dear Lady Middleton, I can forgive you for feeling hurt at that unfortunate affair. How cruelly were we all deceived!"

"Forgive me! I am not aware that I have done anything to require it: I am only at a loss to know how you can forgive yourself. Will you allow me to enquire by whom you were introduced to your relation, the strolling player, hair-dresser, and valet?"

"This is unkind and unjust: you must be

aware that when I spoke of him as being very distantly related to some part of my family, I alluded to the authentic Sir Dennis."

"You forget that you presented him to me as a near connexion of your own, vouching for his wealth and his respectability. May I again enquire who authorised you to guarantee his identity, for to this point every other is subordinate."

"Of the real Sir Dennis I have asserted nothing that cannot be well sustained: he is rich, his character unimpeachable, and his succession to the Earldom ——"

"Nay, nay, we are not speaking of the real, but the sham Sir Dennis. Once more I beg to know by whom you were introduced to that impostor."

"Impostor you may well call him, and villain to boot! Dominick tells me that he will certainly be transported, though in my opinion that is letting him off a great deal too cheap. Such miscreants ought to be hung. Never have I been so imposed upon in my life, but I feel the mortification more on account of my

friends than on my own. What a beautiful bonnet! but you have such unrivalled taste. Positively I never saw you looking better in my life."

"Mrs. Burroughs, will you excuse my saying that as I called upon you with the firm determination of following up this enquiry to some positive issue, I cannot be deterred from my purpose by such studied evasion. You must either disclose the name of the party by whom the impostor was introduced to you, or you will find it difficult to escape from a suspicion which I trust you do not merit, and to which therefore I will not make a more distinct allusion."

"Suspicion! I do not understand you; but such is the gratitude of the world! When I presented him to you as not unlikely to prove a most eligible husband for your daughter, you confessed your obligation; and now, because I have been most cruelly deceived, as well as yourself, you give vent to insinuations equally ungenerous and unjust."

"I know by whom *I* was first deceived, or,

at all events, misinformed; I came hither to ascertain by whom *you* were first placed in that predicament; but since you refuse to satisfy me upon this point——"

"Do not misrepresent me, Lady Middleton; I refuse nothing. Being unconscious of offence, unless a venial indiscretion may deserve that name, I cannot have any wish for concealment. Not entertaining a moment's doubt, when this most plausible pretender gave himself out as such, that he was the real Sir Dennis, I introduced myself to him, and conceived that I was doing a favour to my friends, by presenting him to them."

"I suspected as much. Your friends are infinitely obliged to you; but as I have suffered so severely for being of the number, I hope you will excuse my withdrawing myself henceforth from the list." With a smile of the most ineffable blandness and amenity, and feelings of the bitterest exacerbation, Lady Middleton curtsied and withdrew, deaf to all the entreaties and asseverations of Mrs. Burroughs, who loudly protested her innocence of any interested mo-

tive, or of the smallest wish to deceive, in the part she had so unfortunately acted. In this she did but speak the truth. The pitiful vanity, often indulged at the expense of veracity, which prompted her to claim consanguinity with every Irish family that was rich or titled, together with the sordid desire of turning the acquaintance to some account, had led her to introduce herself to the fictitious Sir Dennis, and to assist in making up a match with the daughter of Sir Matthew Middleton, whose house presented a most attractive foraging ground for herself, while his wealth and civic connexions might prove not less profitable to her scheming husband. But, like the generality of crafty and calculating persons, she had at last been cunning enough to overreach herself. Lady Middleton, convoking the female friends who had been present at the intended wedding, laid before them the result of her recent interview, and demanded their judgment upon the culprit, whose confession she had recorded. All were delighted to have found some one upon whom they could throw the

whole blame of their own delusion, to which, however, some of the mammas had lent themselves from motives quite as selfish as those of Mrs. Burroughs. It was unanimously decided that her conduct had been most unguarded and unjustifiable, even if it could be cleared from suspicions of a fouler nature; and the whole party determined upon dropping her acquaintance.

Now that she was no longer in a situation to defend herself, every one had a charge to bring against her. The pickings and pilferings, the calculating contrivances and sordid manœuvres, the furtive beggings and borrowings, to say nothing of the more open rapine of this domestic Arab, who laid under contribution all that crossed her path, and never visited the drawing-room without an eye to the housekeeper's apartment and the replenishment of her omnivorous reticule, were exposed and condemned without mercy. Poor Mrs. Burroughs! she was not only cut by her friends, but cut up by her enemies. Tom Rashleigh, in one of his Sunday lampoons, entitled " a Dominical

letter to Mrs. Dominick," after making allusion to her reticule, and declaring that all was fish that came to her net, gave her the nickname of the cormorant, a sobriquet which proved equally adhesive and unfortunate. Its very applicability soon rendered it inapplicable, for it occasioned her character to be so thoroughly known, that the cormorant, had she devoured nothing but such prey as she could collect by her own foraging, might rather have been termed the chameleon.

On the day after the holding of this conclave, Lady Middleton received an unexpected visit from Sir Matthew's nephew and clerk, the demure, cold, formal, and priggish-looking Caleb Ball, whose thatchy mud-coloured hair, finical neckcloth, and leaden puritanical countenance, seemed to have remained immoveable and immutable since she had last seen him. "I have taken the liberty of calling upon your ladyship," said the visitant bowing humbly, and not presuming to take a chair, "because I have tidings which I think your ladyship will be glad to hear."

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Ball, but I cannot hear anything till you are seated," replied Lady Middleton, whose habitual politeness overcame even her dislike of this city grub, as she sometimes contemptuously termed him.

Keeping at a respectful distance, and placing himself upon the edge of the chair where he sat stiffly upright, Caleb continued, "I am just come from Bow Street, and I thought your ladyship would be gratified at learning that there is a fellow now in Newgate, whom we believe to be one of the ruffians that attacked my cousin Gale. Ever since that dreadful affair, I have been indefatigable in endeavouring to discover the villains and bring them to justice; but, in spite of the reward offered, I have never, till now, had the smallest hope of succeeding."

"The name of our family has been so much before the public of late," said Lady Middleton, slightly colouring, "that the fresh notoriety of a trial would be particularly disagreeable at the present moment."

"Truly so, Madam; your ladyship's remark

is exceedingly just; but the Old Bailey Sessions will not be held till the twenty-fourth proximo. I am going immediately to Newgate to interrogate our informant, who is one of the felons in the prison, and if we find reason to believe his statement correct, I shall write to my cousin to come up from Brookshaw, that he may see whether he can recognise the party accused."

"Your diligence, Mr. Ball, is praiseworthy, and I trust you will succeed in your object," said Lady Middleton, coldly; "but if you have nothing else to communicate, I shall be obliged to wish you good morning, as I have a particular engagement."

"Truly so; I would not presume to detain your Ladyship for the world, but if I might venture to take such a great liberty, now that I am here, I would humbly prefer a petition on my own account. I would respectfully beg your ladyship's interest with Sir Matthew to get me taken into partnership, without waiting for the expiration of the present articles. Mr. Hobson has no objection, and if Sir Matthew

could be brought over, I am sure Mr. Thwaytes would follow."

"These are matters, Mr. Ball, in which I never interfere. Sir Matthew, I know, entertains the highest opinion of your integrity and commercial abilities, and you had better therefore apply to him."

"I have received so many favours at Sir Matthew's hands, that I feared I might be thought pushing and importunate. Business is my only pleasure; a partnership in the house of Middleton, Thwaytes, and Hobson, my only ambition; and your Ladyship's influence is so great with Sir Matthew, that if I could prevail upon your ladyship ——."

"Well, well," said Lady Middleton, rising, "I will take an opportunity of mentioning the subject to him."

After a profusion of thanks, each accompanied by a cringing bow, the visitant replaced his chair against the wall, and took his departure, making another profound bow at the door before he quitted the room.

"Low, servile, vulgar fellow!" exclaimed

Lady Middleton, as he withdrew. "What have I to do with advancing his interests, which I dare say, was the sole object of his visit? I have no desire to see such a thorough grub in partnership with Sir Matthew."

In compliance with the earnest solicitations of Cecilia, her mother now agreed to withdraw from London; but, submitting to the absurd regulations of fashion, even while she professed to have thrown off its yoke, she would not betake herself to the sea-side, though it was recommended as best adapted to restore her daughter's depressed spirits, because it was not yet the modish season. A retired cottage was accordingly hired at a few miles distance from London, so that Sir Matthew could occasionally run down to them. Here they passed three months in tranquil seclusion, Lady Middleton, who carefully eschewed the perusal of the scandalous Journals, wherein she was still condemned to figure, doing her best to forget the mortifying failure of the *soirée musicale*, the insult she had received from the Duchess and her friends, the still more annoying slights

of the overreaching Lady Barbara, and the manifold and humiliating vexations heaped upon her by the sham Sir Dennis. Cecilia, little sensitive as she was, could not so easily recover from the shock she had experienced. Her late distressing and degrading disappointment seemed not unlikely to entail consequences that might cling to her for the remainder of her life; few suitors, she suspected, would face the ridicule or the contempt of the town by claiming a hand which had so nearly been bestowed upon a valet; and, as she referred mournfully to the past, she regretted that, under the direction of her ambitious mother, she had given so positive a dismissal to her worthy and unassuming admirer Ned Travers.

CHAPTER II.

Man must either believe in the perfectibility of his species, or virtue and the love of others are but a heated and objectless enthusiasm.

E. L. Bulwer.

We return to Brookshaw and to Maple Hatch, where, in the interval since we left them, considerable changes had occurred. Hargrave making frequent visits to the Norberries, and thus maturing a passion which had continued to increase since his first interview, at last made a formal offer of his hand to Lucy, as they were strolling one morning over the common in front of the house. Too sedate a suitor to affect raptures and ecstacies, or despondency and despair, as the alternatives of his reception or rejection, he avowed his attachment with a frank fervour; pointed out the domestic advantages that would attend such a union

by its enabling her still to remain in the immediate vicinity of her father and sister, from whom she would scarcely be separated; regretted the narrowness of his income, which merely amounted to a competency; but expressed a confident persuasion that, if she would become his wife and share his humble abode, they might be blessed with a mutual happiness that would leave them nothing to desire.

"Dear! dear!" cried the blushing Lucy, clasping her hands together as he concluded, "Are you really in earnest, Mr. Hargrave?"

"Can I be otherwise? Why should you for an instant doubt me?"

"Because it seems scarcely credible that so clever, so learned, so superior a person as you are, should condescend to think seriously of such a wild, giddy, inexperienced, uninformed girl as I am."

"Your humility makes you unjust. Say not wild and giddy, but delightfully sportive and vivacious; attractions which, in combination with your innocence and simplicity, constitute the great charm of your character. Uninformed

I *know* you are not; this, indeed, would be impossible in the pupil of Miss Norberry; and, as to your inexperience and unacquaintance with the ways of the world, believe me, dear Lucy, they only make me love you ten thousand times better."

"Oh, Mr. Hargrave! how very kind and good you are! I *must* run and tell Chritty; she will be so delighted! You cannot imagine how highly she thinks of you."

"Stay, stay!" cried the lover, clasping the hand of his lively mistress, who was about to fly towards the house. "I would rather hear that you were delighted, that *you* thought favourably of me. Tell me, I beseech you, that I am not indifferent to you, that you accept my offer, that you will allow me to consecrate my future life to your happiness."

"What am I to say, Mr. Hargrave? Chritty has taught me never to utter a falsehood, which I am sure I should be doing, were I to deny that I feel most highly honoured and sincerely gratified by your offer."

"May I then infer that you do not reject it?" asked the suitor, eagerly.

"I don't know what I ought to reply on such an occasion, and you will pardon me, I hope, if I should confess ——. No, there cannot be any impropriety in speaking the truth; I shall accept your offer with joy, if papa and sister think that I ought to do so."

"Ten thousand thanks, dear Lucy!" cried Hargrave, pressing to his heart the hand which he still held captive. "Of their consent and approbation I have little doubt, now that you allow me to cherish the delightful hope that I have succeeded in winning your affections. I hardly expected at first that I should ever be so fortunate."

"Why not? I am sure you did me injustice, I have always had more regard for you than for anybody — except papa and dear sister. I love Chritty better than anything in the world, and if my acceptance of your offer would have carried me far away from her, I must positively have rejected your suit."

"I feel too grateful, dear Lucy, for the first part of your avowal to be offended at the second; nor shall you make me jealous of your excellent sister. May you always remain as frank towards me, and as affectionately attached to her, as you are at the present moment!"

There was, indeed, something singularly touching in the mutual attachment of these most amiable girls, the difference of whose years, though not sufficient to impair the sympathy of feeling, or congeniality of pursuit, which usually prevail between unmarried sisters, had blended with the fond familiarity of Lucy an admiration, gratitude, and respect, that partook of filial reverence; while Chritty, in guiding and instructing her pupil, and supplying the place of the mother whom they had lost, became imbued with a maternal tenderness, free from any restraint or assumption that could encroach upon the perfect equality of a sister's love. Hargrave, struck with this picture of pure, innocent, and disinterested affection, had often exclaimed, when first he bent his regards upon Lucy—"Oh! if this beautiful

and sportive girl, volatile as she seems, can instantly become meek, obedient, and sedate when checked, even by a look, from the sister whom she loves; if, while she shares her pastimes with an almost exuberant vivacity, she can assiduously participate in her graver duties; if at one time she can cheer her moody father by her gaiety or her gambols, and at another soothe his sickness by the tenderest solicitude and the most watchful forethought, surely she possesses all the requisites of a maturer age for discharging the duties of a wife and ensuring the happiness of a husband."

Agile as the mountain chamois, Lucy, on reaching the gate of the cottage scudded up the garden, and, panting with agitation, while she buried her glowing face in her sister's bosom, pressed her fondly to her heart, murmuring,—"We shall not be separated, dearest Chritty! I shall still see you almost every day, or I never would have given my consent."

"What has happened? what has happened?" demanded the sister, tenderly returning her embrace. Lucy stole her eyes upwards,

and was so much amused with the expression of alarm in the countenance before her, that her own blushing features became suddenly mantled over with arch smiles, and she burst into laughter, exclaiming: — "Oh! nothing very terrible; only Mr. Hargrave has made me an offer of his hand. Are you not surprised?"

"Not in the least; on the contrary, I fully expected it, and I am delighted beyond measure at finding I was not mistaken; of all men in existence Mr. Hargrave is the one to make you happy. My dear, dear Lucy! my heart is too full for utterance,—I give you joy with all—" The tears trembled in her eyes, and an affectionate kiss supplied what her faltering words had failed to express. After a brief interchange of the fondest endearments and congratulations, Lucy ran to communicate the happy tidings to her father, who received them with a rare avowal of satisfaction, though he could not refrain from ungraciously adding,— "Eugh! wonder what he could see in *you* to make you his wife."

"That is the very thing that puzzles me," replied Lucy, "only he is so very good and kind."

"Ay, you may well say that. What are you crying about?"

"Am I crying? I was not aware of it; only dear Chritty broke into tears when I told her of it, and so I suppose I cried for company."

"Then you are a couple of geese for your pains. You know I hate blubbering, it always makes me low; but nobody cares for *me*." An affectionate embrace reproached this unkind assertion. Chritty and Hargrave soon after made their appearance, and as the old gentleman, in spite of his grumbling propensities, was highly gratified by the projected match, he gave it a glad sanction, and was mollified, for the remainder of the day, into a mood of almost unprecedented complacency.

The fit of gloom and despondency into which Middleton had been thrown by the unexpected rejection of his suit, was not only of a more sombre hue, but of longer endurance than any he had previously experienced. Enshrouding

himself in a moral and physical darkness, which involved this world and the next, the past, the present, and the future, he would admit only partial glimpses of light into his study and his laboratory; he abandoned his pleasant walks, and the cheering face of nature, that might have dispersed his black melancholy; sitting at home, day after day, he fed the hypochondria that oppressed him by seclusion and inoccupation, and remained unsusceptible of even a momentary solace, except when he drew the inseparable miniature from his bosom, and pressed it reverentially to his heart and to his lips. Hargrave having at length succeeded in gaining admittance, enticed him from his benighted room, and prevailed upon him, though not without difficulty, to stroll through the plantation, as far as his favourite rural picture-gallery. The day being remarkably serene and splendid, the beauties of the landscape shone forth with such an overcoming effect upon the dejected gazer, who had been latterly moped up in the obscurity of a dim chamber, that he stood for some moments in a silent ecstasy,

drinking in the scene with his tear-filling eyes, and then ejaculated with a pious fervour,—"Oh! the beauty, the loveliness of the world! Oh! the greatness, the glory, the goodness of God!"

"Enough!" said his companion, "be sensible of these—feel them as you ought,—come hither daily to impress them upon your heart, and you cannot relapse into a prostration of spirits equally unworthy of you as a christian and a man."

From this moment Middleton began in some degree to recover his self-possession, though he found it impossible to shake off altogether the incubus that darkened and oppressed his spirit. During the blackness of his fit he had repeatedly conned over the defamatory letter respecting Chritty Norberry, without perceiving, until his mind had recovered its lucidity, that the slanderous scroll which accused her of inveigling his affections for some unworthy purpose, was refuted by the fact of her having peremptorily rejected his suit; and he would indignantly have torn the letter to pieces, had

he not reflected that its preservation might possibly lead to a detection of the infamous writer. In proportion as this epistle lost its power of annoyance, Chritty's acquired that of consoling him, even while it so firmly declined the tender of his hand. It avowed no objection that was morally insuperable; it contained the most flattering expressions of regard, nay, it even made him an offer of her continued friendship, and he accused himself of the rudest ingratitude in having omitted to acknowledge this kindness, as well as of a culpable inattention to his own interests in not having eagerly accepted a privilege which might eventually lead to the realisation of all his hopes. To an interview he was not yet equal, even could he summon courage enough to solicit one; he had delayed writing till he knew not how to begin; and his natural timidity, combined with the shattered state of his bodily and mental health, diminished daily the capacity for opening a communication with Maple Hatch.

From this difficulty he was relieved by

Chritty herself. In following the dictates of her judgment, she had overrated the strength of her heart. It was not until after she had discarded Middleton that she felt how much she loved him—a discovery attended by many painful, and even humiliating, feelings, without tempting her however, even for a moment, to wish for a reversal of her decree. His many virtues and endearing qualities, as well as the eligibility of the match upon every other account, only made her the more regret that so many recommendations should be nullified by one objection, which she thought insuperable, since she believed it to be constitutional. In this she was mistaken, but she had not then seen enough of her lover to detect her error. At times she adverted to the circumstance of the miniature, but it was with a vague feeling of curiosity, rather than with any remains of the jealous displeasure that it had awakened at the moment.

Such was her frame of mind when Hargrave communicated to her the forlorn state of Middleton, from whom he had learned its cause;

and while he presumed not to question the propriety of her decision, he urged her by every consideration of humanity to lend her aid in rescuing their common friend, of whom they might so justly be proud as an ornament to human nature, from the lamentable despondency into which he was plunged. Deeply affected by this appeal, which awakened all the dormant tenderness of her bosom, Chritty eagerly professed her readiness to adopt any suggestion likely to forward the proposed object. Her visitant hinted that a letter, reasoning with the discarded suitor, kindly, but firmly and argumentatively, on the inutility of giving way to such vain and injurious regrets, could hardly fail, when coming from her, to be attended with soothing and beneficial effects. Delicate as was the task, especially after what she had already written, Chritty had too strong as well as too humane a mind to shrink from its performance; and she accordingly despatched a letter, reminding him, among many other exhortations to fortitude under disappointment, that he did not belong to himself, but

was the property of the neighbourhood which he had done so much to improve and to bless; and that consequently he could hardly stand excused for shutting himself up, and indulging a selfish sorrow, to the neglect of those numerous dependents and claimants, who, though they might not experience any discontinuance of his charities, looked to the cheering presence and kind inquiries of their benefactor, in the almost daily rounds that he had been accustomed to take, as still more gratifying than even the receipt of his bounty. With Middleton, who made it the study of his life to live for others rather than himself, this argument was too cogent to be resisted, and he immediately resumed his visits and his wanderings, deriving from the personal exercise of benevolence, from communion with the healing and hallowing influences of nature, and above all, from the commencement of a correspondence with Chritty, which scarcely suffered a day's intermission, a new and gratifying interest in existence, which, though it could not altogether dispel the painful recollections by which he

was occasionally haunted, restored him to a state of comparative equanimity.

Thus did affairs remain for some time, during which no interview had taken place between Middleton and Chritty, the latter seeking to avoid a meeting, lest in the sympathy of the moment, she might be betrayed into a manifestation of feelings that might awaken unfounded hopes; the former, willing to forego the delight of an occasional conference, which would only aggravate the pangs of subsequent separation: both parties sensible of the awkwardness that must attend their first meeting. It soon took place, nevertheless, under circumstances calculated to aggravate this feeling of mutual embarrassment, for Middleton could not refuse, when invited by his friend, to participate in his nuptials; and Chritty's attendance, as the bridemaid of her sister, was of course indispensable. The ceremony was performed in Brookshaw Church, a friend of Hargrave's officiating as minister. Whether their individual feelings became absorbed by the more potent interest of the solemnity, in which

they had both so much reason to sympathize, or that they had anticipated such perplexity from their meeting as not to be sensible of any when it actually occurred, we cannot determine, but certain it is, that neither Middleton nor Chritty were so much embarrassed as some of their friends. Aunt Patty, for the simple-witted woman insisted on being present, and her brother would not allow her to be thwarted, remained indeed as imperturbed as usual, simpering, curtsying, and offering her rappee to the bride, bridegroom, or the minister, with an inopportune politeness that on any other occasion would have provoked a smile. Mr. Norberry, though he had seldom testified much regard for his younger daughter, was so much affected when he had to give her away, and considered how much he should miss her at Maple Hatch, that he burst into tears, and then became angry with himself for not having been able to suppress his emotion.

Perhaps no bride had ever approached the altar more willingly, or with better-founded anticipations of happiness than Lucy—and yet

all her sprightliness, all her vivacity, were gone: she was utterly overcome, and wept like a child. The thought of leaving her home, and of parting from her dear Chritty, although she would still be living in her immediate neighbourhood, coupled with an oppressive sense of the new duties she was about to undertake, proved too much for her young and tender mind. Sympathising with his bride, even the manly Hargrave could hardly restrain the tear that glistened in his eye. In short, it was one of those weeping weddings that generally turn out the happiest in the sequel, since the emotion betrayed attests the sensibility and affection of the parties, as well as their deep sense of the solemn obligations imposed by the "holy state of wedlock."

It had been settled that the newly-married couple should proceed to Brighton, where they intended to pass some time, a friend of Hargrave's having undertaken to perform his clerical duties during his absence. A cold collation had been provided at the Parsonage, which being recommended by some of old Jemmy

Gale's " London particular" Madeira, the gift of Middleton, proved so acceptable to Mr. Norberry, as well as the minister who had officiated, that they remained discussing its merits until the carriage that was to convey away the bride and bridegroom came to the door. They drove off amid the tears and benedictions of their friends, when Chritty, after watching the vehicle till it was out of sight, turned from the door into the adjoining churchyard, not knowing that Middleton had strolled in the same direction. In a few minutes she saw him returning towards her, and as it was now too late to recede, she continued her course till they met, and then, with as unembarrassed an air as possible, she began to talk upon the fineness of the weather, the beauty of the prospect, and the solemn, penetrating, and intense sense of our own existence as well as mortality, elicited by walking in a churchyard, amid the mouldering relics of bygone generations.

" What hopes and fears — what happiness and misery," sighed Middleton, " once quickened the pulses and thrilled the hearts that

are now mouldering beneath our feet! And yet these poor peasants were perhaps less wretched than those whose keener sensibilities only expose them to a more poignant wretchedness."

"In all classes I believe the human mind to be so plastic," replied Chritty," that it soon shapes and accommodates itself to the circumstances surrounding it, so that there is less actual misery in the world than grumblers and gloomy moralisers are willing to allow. Life is a system of equivalents and compensations, which is perpetually approximating the enjoyments and sufferings between those two extremes of human condition, the highest of which has every thing to fear and little to hope, the lowest nothing to dread and every thing to gain. During a third, I might almost say during half, their existence, all mankind without distinction are in a state of absolute mental equality, and one, moreover, that is free from all anxiety."

"At what period?" demanded Middleton, not immediately catching her meaning.

" When they are asleep," resumed Chritty ; " ay, and I suspect that in their waking feelings there is a much nearer approach to this exact equilibrium than is generally apprehended."

" Alas ! and what is this medium state ?" asked Middleton. " My late reading has not induced me to form a higher estimate of it than I should deduce from personal experience and observation. History, which has been not unaptly termed the Newgate Calendar of kings and rulers, presents to us an almost unvaried picture of wars, guilt, and wretchedness, leaving upon the mind a most disparaging impression of human nature."

" You cannot fairly judge of man from the records of history," said Chritty, who had purposely sought, and now prolonged the conversation, in the hope of disabusing Middleton of some of his desponding views. " Finding in vice a more striking and available theme than in goodness, and delighting in action rather than repose, historians, while they dilate with complacency upon sanguinary convulsions or

revolting crimes, leave unnoticed all that might redeem and soften the atrocities they record: the virtues and tranquillity of private life, and, indeed, all the finer portions of our common nature, evaporate in the process of historical analysis, so that it can be no wonder if we are presented with a gross residuum of blood-steeped and offensive fact."

"Which unfortunately is truth, nevertheless."

"Perhaps so, but not the whole truth. And even in this partial view, a fair retrospect of the past is so far from justifying despondency, that it will warrant the most cheering conclusions as to human destiny. In the constantly meliorating progress of our species, accompanied, or rather occasioned, by the diffusion of knowledge and the improvement of institutions, I find a manifest proof that Providence is working out, slowly indeed, but certainly, a grand scheme for the advancement of mankind. The ignorant and ferocious savage constitutes, it must be confessed, but a sorry lord of the creation; but may not the proud title be

vindicated by civilized man, that noble and rational being, formed in the express image of the Deity, who hath been enabled to carry his audacious thoughts into the highest heaven, to develop the mysterious laws that regulate the movements of the celestial bodies, and thus, as it were, to penetrate into the secrets of the Creator ?"

" But mankind have sometimes fallen back, and lost what they had gained, as witness the dark ages."

" Such a moral eclipse can never recur. Since printing has given permanency and diffusion to the light of reason, it is impossible for a century to expire without bequeathing to its successor the inappreciable legacy of all its improvements, physical and moral. We are all and each of us the heirs of six thousand years, and living, even the very poorest, in the enjoyment of their accumulated wealth. Besides, there has always been an eventual progression, however it may have fluctuated. Compare the first savage with the last philosopher, consider what has been already accomplished,

remember that improvement accelerates its own progress, multiplies for ever its own progeny; and if we are to calculate our future advancement by the past, as why should we not?—what limits shall we fix to our aspiring hopes? Without lending ourselves to the reveries of a millennium, or believing in the perfectibility of a finite being, we may well feel persuaded that man has capacities for improvement which will eventually exalt his earthly destiny in a degree of which our barbarian ancestors could not even have formed a conception."

"How sanguine must you be, if you can review the past, contemplate the present condition of man, and yet indulge the dream of a future golden age, destined, I fear, to prove not less fabulous than that which the poets have already assigned to some past and unknown æra."

"It is the past, as well as the present, that gives me such confident hope of the future. No race of animals are more sagacious now than they were in the remotest ages; they remain unaltered, and we may therefore con-

clude them to be inalterable. Man is the only improveable creature, the faculty must have been given to him for the purpose of its gradual development; from which fact alone I should infer his constant melioration in this world, as well as his ultimate destination to a higher and holier state of existence."

"So far I may agree with you, but when you adduce a philosopher as a specimen of man in the nineteenth century, you are surely arguing from the exception rather than the rule."

"Not comparatively. The most ignorant peasant is a philosopher compared to his remote ancestors. Savages have driven back or exterminated the wild beasts; civilized man is everywhere doing the same by the savage, who may be termed the human wild beast. Over the whole earth, once the property of barbarians and animals equally ferocious, civilization is extending itself, and as this advances and improves, the world will gradually be peopled with a higher and more intelligent order of beings. The comforts, luxuries, and intellectual enjoyments which no king could

command a few centuries ago, are now brought within the reach of the lowest labourer, and I would infer what civilization may accomplish hereafter by what it has done already. If the present be as a millennium to the past, I would ask you once more, why may not the future be as a millennium to the present ?"

" You have furnished me with such food for reflection," said Middleton, " and have so shaken some of my preconceived notions, that you will perhaps allow me to defer my reply till I have the pleasure of seeing you again."

" Nay," said Chritty smiling, " do not suppose that I wish to entrap you into any admissions. You shall make your rejoinder whenever you think it worth while to claim the right of being heard. Here we are at the gate, and it is well that we have concluded our walk, as well as our argument, for the present at least, for yonder is my father beckoning me into the house."

CHAPTER III.

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
——————Oh, woe is me!
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

SHAKSPEARE.

INDEPENDENTLY of the pleasure Sir Matthew Middleton anticipated from meeting his son, and contributing to the renovation of Cecilia's health, though she laboured under no other ailment than a slight depression of spirits, he was not sorry on his own account to obtain a short respite from the labours and anxieties of business. Arrangements were soon made, and the family arrived at Brighton, where a house had been engaged next door, as it chanced, to that in which Hargrave and his bride were

lodging. This bathing-place had been selected because it was nearer than any other to Brookshaw Lodge, and no sooner was the baronet installed in his new abode, than he wrote to his son, summoning him to join them without delay. Not having received any previous intimation of their intention to leave London, Gale was surprised by this unexpected notice, but as he was solicitous to see his father, as well as to embrace and congratulate Cecilia, he gladly prepared to obey the mandate.

Hargrave having been induced to prolong his stay beyond the expiration of the honeymoon, was still at Brighton; and his society, of which Middleton severely felt the loss, presented an additional inducement, had any been wanting, for betaking himself to the sea. But there was one deterring consideration which more than counterbalanced all these motives to compliance. He was now in frequent epistolary communication with Chritty Norberry, ever striking out some new subject of controversy, rather with the view of lengthening the discussion, than of arriving at any definite

result. His fair communicant strove hard to eradicate certain notions which she considered erroneous and hostile to his happiness; and although upon some points she had succeeded in converting him, he hesitated to acknowledge his conviction lest she should find in that admission an excuse for dropping the correspondence. Since the renewal of their personal communication at Hargrave's wedding, he had, moreover, ventured to resume his occasional visits to Maple Hatch, not reflecting that by thus feeding his hopeless passion he was only incurring the risk of fresh struggles for his already lacerated heart. A friendship between young persons of different sexes may be easily warmed into love; but to refrigerate love into friendship is a process of very rare and difficult accomplishment.

Notwithstanding the pain of tearing himself away from his mistress, whose gentle manners and ingratiating cheerfulness had unintentionally given fresh encouragement to his hopes, Middleton would not delay his departure, but proceeded forthwith to Brighton.

"Ha! my dear boy!" cried Sir Matthew on his arrival, grasping and almost crushing his hand in the cordiality of his embrace, "glad to take 'ee by the fist again, with all my heart and soul! Ah, lad! know 'ee again now the black bandage is gone. Thought the pitcher that went so often to the well would get broken at last. How's head? not cracked is it? I mean not worse than it was; had 'ee there—hey, what?—hick! hick! hick! Ha! ha! ha!" The delighted father, who had not laughed so heartily for some time past, seemed to enjoy his own crowing cachinnation, for he victoriously re-echoed it, continuing all the time to shake the imprisoned hand.

"Thank you, dear Sir," replied the son, returning the embrace, "my head is sound, even if it be not sane, and I have now pretty well recovered the effects of my unfortunate cold bath."

"Ah, what, in the mill-dam, hey? brave boy, brave boy! born to be drowned never be hung, hey? had 'ee again there—hick, hick, hick!" Sir Matthew buried his knuckle in his

son's side in token of his triumph, and then continued :—" Well, dear boy, sad doings since 'ee left us, out of the frying-pan into the fire —bad ending, worse begin — misfortunes ever come single—nothing but bad luck. First you get knocked o' the head—there 's not much in that—ha ! ha ! good !—then I get too much in my head, half seas over, scattered the grand supper-party right and left, capsized the tables, offered to buss the platter-faced duchess—must have been drunk to do that—rather kiss a halibut, or a batter-pudding, wouldn't you, hey ? Then Mounseer stole off with all the plate ; rascal ! wish I had him here—give him something to run for, but what can 'ee expect from a Frenchman ? Then came that affair of the Brummagem Sir Dennis—caught a Tartar there—ought to have had my eyes open—sleeping poultry catch no fox—such a conceited jackadandy, and talked so much nonsense, thought he must ha' been a man of fashion—had 'em there ! Scoundrel ! go to Botany Bay—but hush ! here comes Meg and Ciss."

Cecilia embraced her brother cordially, and yet with a feeling of awkwardness, for the humiliating events since their last interview recurred to her mind, and brought a blush to her cheeks. Lady Middleton received him with undiminished courtesy, her smile being even more bland and benignant than usual, because she had not yet forgiven him for the letter he had written on the subject of the counterfeit Sir Dennis. Gale, however, who had been latterly in a mood of rare quietude, owing to the state of affairs at Maple Hatch, and who was now exhilarated at meeting his family after a separation of some time, suspected not the hollowness of her ladyship's inquiries, and seeing nothing around him but smiles of welcome, gave such cheerful vent to the gratification he felt, that Sir Matthew exclaimed. "Fegs, Gale! think that polt o' the head and souse in the water ha' done 'ee good; used to be as down in the mouth as the root o' my tongue, and now you can cheer up a bit. Give 'ee joy, dear lad! long lane got no turning; laugh and grow fat; lost your long face, and I 'spose I

found it; quite in the suds lately, nothing but mischief and bad debts. Never mind—turn and turn about—heads I win, tails you lose, fair play 's a jewel—hey! what! hick!"

"I am sorry to hear of your losses, sir, but we are come to Brighton, I hope, to forget all our troubles, and to enjoy ourselves; for the purpose of assisting you in which good object, I have ordered over some of my godfather's 'London particular' Madeira, your favourite wine."

"Have 'ee, boy? — didn't think got so much gumption in 'ee; but none know how the shoe wears, but them that pinch it. A blot 's no blot till it 's hit. And I 've sent down two hampers of prime old port — only wants drinking. Ah! we've lost Sir Dennis: what a pity such a rare three-bottle fellow should turn out a rap, a raff, a Brummagem! Anybody dine with us to-day—hey—what?"

After an animated and cheerful conversation, during which Middleton carefully abstained from any unpleasant allusion or inquiry, he mentioned that his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Har-

grave, were next-door neighbours, and asked permission to introduce them. This being readily granted, he withdrew and called at the next house. What was his amazement and delight, on entering the drawing-room, to see Chritty, whom Hargrave had brought over a few hours before from Maple Hatch, intending to retain her as their visitant until they returned home. In a moment of surprise it is difficult to conceal the feelings. "Miss Norberry here!" cried Gale running towards her, his face glowing with joyful animation, "Oh! what an unexpected pleasure!"

"Indeed, Mr. Middleton, it is mutual," said Chritty, advancing to shake hands with him, while the blush that stole over her features, and the sweet graciousness of her countenance, created beauty where there was none. "Meeting any of our acquaintance, whom we imagined to be at a distance, is always so gratifying!" she continued with a more reserved air, for she feared she had betrayed too marked and fervent a cordiality, and gently withdrew the hand which Gale had retained.

"Gratification is far too tame a word to express *my* feelings," said Gale, gazing tenderly at her as he spoke. "Mine is a sensation of delight, heightened into ecstasy by surprise."

"Superinducing a temporary absence of mind," said Chritty smiling, "for you seem to have forgotten that Mr. Hargrave and Lucy are in the room."

"Pardon me, my good friends," said Middleton, shaking them most heartily by the hand, as if anxious to atone for his momentary oblivion.

The conversation now became general, and was pursued for some time with so much earnestness, that, until accidentally reminded of it, Gale never recollected the object of his visit which was to introduce his companions to their neighbours. Accompanied by Chritty, they proceeded next door, where he presented Hargrave to his family, who were already acquainted, though but slightly, with the Norberries Lady Middleton disliked them all. The father was poor and a vulgarian; Chritty she pronounced to be odd and unfashionable; and as she suspected her son's attachment, and could

not bear the idea of his degrading himself by so humble an alliance, she seized every opportunity of decrying the whole family. True, however, to her superficial politeness, she received them with great courtesy, and, having resolved in her own mind to cut them as much as possible, expressed the warmest satisfaction at finding that they were such near neighbours. Sir Matthew pounced upon Chritty, whom he assailed with a hundred questions concerning his old friend, "surly Sam Norberry," and Gale was thus enabled to observe what a seeming change had come over the spirit of Hargrave's bride. We say *seeming*, for there was not the smallest real alteration in her. From affectation of all sorts, she was perfectly free; what was it then? Simplicity, inexperience, *nâïveté*—any thing you will, provided you admit that it was delightful, in spite of its capricious and inconsistent air. Lucy, in fact, was in a state of transition, and hardly knew how to adapt herself to her new predicament. "I am a married woman now, and the wife of a clergyman," would she sometimes ejaculate,

assuming, with a mock gravity, the most demure look imaginable, making a parade of her keys, and acting for a few minutes the part of the sedate, plodding housewife. Anon would she forget herself, and relapse into girlish playfulness, presently, however, discovering her heedless levity, and apologising for it, half in jest, half in earnest, with such a mixture of arch vivacity, humble deprecation, and blushing, beautiful confusion, that it was difficult to say whether she appeared the most fascinating and bewitching as the discreet spouse, the sportive vivacious girl, or as the embarrassed bride, imploring pardon for having inadvertently jumbled all three characters together. In the eyes of Middleton, she had never seemed half so lovely, half so inconsistent, or half so entertaining; his thoughts as well as eyes reverted to Chritty, and he was more than once tempted to envy his friend the felicity of being married.

At this season there was not much gaiety at Brighton, but shortly after their arrival they were invited to an evening party and a little

amateur music, by a Lady Bishopstown, who, finding some difficulty in filling her rooms, wrote a polite letter to Lady Middleton, requesting she would bring with her any of her friends who were fond of singing, as she expected a Miss Horton, whose vocal powers were of the very first order. "Even in our ashes live their wonted fires:" Lady Middleton had forsworn all fashionable gaiety, and had professed an intention, on dear Cecilia's account, to live quietly and recruit their strength while they were at the sea-side; but there was no resisting an invitation from Lady Bishopstown, third or fourth cousin to the Marchioness of Pentweezle, with whom, by the by, it was little honour for any one to be connected. A gracious answer in the affirmative was accordingly despatched; Sir Matthew, in bantering allusion to his own misconduct at the concert in Portland Place, declared that he would have nothing more to do with caterwauling parties, for fear of accidents and fat duchesses; but his son offered to supply his place, provided that he might add to their number Hargrave, his

bride, and her sister, the former of whom was passionately fond of vocal music. To this proposition his mother smilingly objected that the carriage would not conveniently hold five, and that although people might wink at the want of style in Mrs. Hargrave, who was a clergyman's wife, there was a deficiency of fashionable dress and appearance about Miss Norberry, which—"

"Excuse my interrupting you," cried Gale; "with regard to the first difficulty, it will easily be removed, as I should prefer walking; and as to the second, if Miss Norberry be not arrayed in the last new fashion, still less am I, and I will therefore stay at home, and not give you any occasion to blush for the cut of my clothes."

"What strange notions you entertain, my dear Gale! In a man there is always an excuse; he is an eccentric or a humourist, and affects unfashionableness; but for a girl there is no such redeeming plea."

"Humbug!" cried Sir Matthew, "ha'nt 'ee got rid of all that nonsense yet? what's the matter with the girl? handsome is as handsome

does—dress'd well enough, though she han't got saddle-bags at each shoulder, so big as yours and Ciss's. So much the better: not so great a donkey: had 'ee both there. Poor surly Sam! down in the world now—like to be civil to his daughter—one good turn deserves another—life's uncertain—gone to-day, here to-morrow.—I say she *shall* go—hey, what hick!"

As Sir Matthew spoke as if he meant to be obeyed, the lady bowed graciously, saying—"Nay, if you make a point of it, I shall of course submit, although for more reasons than one, I am surprised at your blindness in urging the request. The strange rural-looking daughter of a bankrupt drysalter must of course be a proper person to present to Lady Bishopstown."

"Why not? doesn't bite nor kick, do she? good as her ladyship, I'll warrant: a king may look at a cat, I s'pose: never mind—how can'ee have the heart to turn up your nose at her, when her poor father's not worth a penny?—hey, hick!"

On the night of the party, Gale walked to

the residence of Lady Bishopstown, the rest following in the carriage. They were late, for Lady Middleton had a perfect horror of being in good time, so that the principal drawing-room was already full when they arrived. After their presentation to the lady of the mansion, who stood near the door to receive her guests, Hargrave pushed forward through the throng, in order to secure a seat for Lucy, which he had accomplished, and was returning to escort Chritty to join her, when he started in evident amazement, reddened, and turning to Middleton, whispered in his ear—"What an extraordinary coincidence! I have again encountered her at the sea-side. How strange! Heaven defend us against any such tragical catastrophe as attended our last meeting!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" demanded his friend.

"Of the fair but fickle girl who once possessed my heart; of her whose name I would not mention to you; of her whom I last beheld at Eastbourne, attired in a gala dress, and stretched insensible upon the dead body of her

affianced husband, while the thunder rocked the house, and the lightning flared through the deserted ball-room. Let her not see me; I would not hurt her feelings if I can help it, nor prevent her singing, for she is a most accomplished vocalist."

"Point her out to me," said Middleton, curious to behold the inconstant beauty whose violated vow had entailed upon her so severe a punishment.

"I wish not to look at her again, lest she should recognise me, which, if I may judge by my own sensations, would distress her for the whole evening. To prevent this I would rather retire altogether; but how can I get Lucy across the room without being seen by her from whom I would fain conceal myself?"

"That feat I will accomplish for you, but only on condition that you enable me to distinguish your fickle fair one."

"She is still handsome, though her beauty is much faded; she stands near the piano, and has a wreath of red roses round her auburn hair. I observed no more."

"You have told me enough; remain here in the door-way, and I will presently bring your wife to join you." With this intention Middleton made his way, not without difficulty, towards the piano; but no sooner had he beheld the fair and handsome wearer of the red roses than he stood as if transfixed, gazing intently upon her, while his face became agitated with deep emotion. Its expression, however, was an unimpassioned calmness compared to the sudden agony that convulsed the features of the fair girl when she caught a glimpse of him. Her very lips, half opened with the starting exclamation that had burst from them, became deadly white, she trembled violently, and, sinking into a chair where she was partially concealed by a large music stand, would apparently have fainted, had she not inhaled the pungent odours of a vinaigrette. In a few minutes, appearing to have recovered her self-possession, she rose up, and passed slowly through the crowded visitants into the back drawing-room, addressed by several as she moved, but making no reply, and seeming not to notice their salutations.

Middleton, not yet recovered from the first bewilderment of his surprise, and almost unconscious of his movements, followed in the same direction, but, on casting his eyes around the apartment, he could not perceive the object of which they were in search. While thus gazing with a thrilling heart, half disposed to believe that he had been deceived by some fleeting vision, the coinage of his fancy, a servant approached, and told him in a low voice that if his name were Middleton, a lady desired to speak to him immediately. Filled with a thousand vague conjectures at this strange communication, he followed the man in silence, and was conducted to a room on the ground-floor, which he entered, and beheld before him, supporting her arm upon a chair, which trembled with the vehemence of her agitation, the fair girl whose apparition in the drawing-room had so powerfully excited him. No sooner was the door shut by the retiring servant, than she threw herself upon her knees before him, and clasping together her uplifted hands, exclaimed in an impassioned and broken voice—"Spare

me, Mr. Middleton! for God's sake do not betray me; I shall go mad at once if you divulge the fatal secret. I believe I am mad already from the very fear of it, for at times I know not what I say or do. You once respected, you once loved me, you were once about to make me your wife—Remember, oh remember this, and have pity upon me!"

"Unhappy girl!" exclaimed Middleton—"rise from this unbecoming posture. Why have you given way to so perilous a burst of passion; why do you thus appeal to me? Have you not my solemn vow of secrecy? Remember you! Alas! can I ever forget the name of Clara Manning?"

"I hate, I abhor that contaminated appellation. How much reason I had for wishing to change it, you know too well. I am now Miss Horton, which name I have taken after a deceased relation, who left me a portion of his fortune."

"I am glad that you are enriched, I shall be still more so to find that you are reformed and respectable."

"Judge of the unexceptionable circle in which I am moving by your meeting me here. I am not without expectations of being honourbly settled for life. A word, a whisper from you would blast my prospects for ever. Oh, Heaven! if you were to utter it! My brain is burning at the thought. It is to ensure your silence that I have thus sent for you, that I make this appeal to your mercy, nor will I rise from my knees till you swear not to betray me. Swear, I conjure you, swear!"

"Unfortunate Clara! you may be betraying yourself by this most indiscreet step. You have my vow already."

"I know it, I know it, but *I* have once broken a solemn oath. Heaven knows how bitterly I have been punished for it? and I am haunted with a perpetual dread that you may become as perjured as myself. Swear then, still more sacredly than before, or I will never release you," and as she spoke she threw her arms passionately around his knees."

"By everything that is great and good! I swear once more never to reveal your secret,"

said Middleton, solemnly; "and now, Miss Manning—"

"Utter not that hated name."

"As Miss Horton, then, I implore you to rise from this unseemly attitude, to compose yourself, and to return to the drawing-room, whence your absence will be observed. You are expected to sing."

"Sing! am I in a state now to warble love songs. Oh! if you knew what it is to mingle with the pure and innocent, and to feel that I have no right to their society; to dread every minute the discovery that would drive me from it with ignominy; oh! if you knew what it is to sing moral or cheerful songs with a guilty and an aching heart, you would pity, you would forgive the wretched, wretched——"

"Nay, nay, no more of this," said Middleton, raising her from the ground; "I have forgiven you long since, and Heaven knows how sincerely I pity you."

"Do you, do you indeed? it is more than I deserve. I could have submitted to your reproaches, your anger, your contempt even;

but your unmerited kindness I cannot, cannot bear."

Overcome by her feelings, the miserable girl burst into tears, and sunk sobbing into his arms at the very moment when the door was opened by Chritty Norberry, who came to assist Lucy in searching for her shawl, which she had been unable to find, and to which she attached a particular value, because it was a wedding present from her husband. Struck with sudden astonishment, both coloured deeply, and, starting back, were about to withdraw hastily from the room, when Middleton called out, "Stay, I entreat you, and assist me. Miss Horton has been attacked with sudden illness—aid me in attending her to a carriage."

All other feelings, varied and vehement as they were, being overpowered by this appeal to her humanity, Chritty ran forward to tender her services, and Lucy followed her example, but the object of their solicitude had already recovered self-possession, and disengaging herself from Middleton, politely thanked them for their intended kindness, and requested to be

immediately assisted to a carriage that she might be taken home. While the sisters were expressing the sincerest regret at her indisposition, and arranging her shawl so as to protect her from the night air, she begged them to explain to Lady Bishopstown that sudden indisposition was the cause of her abrupt departure, and then, leaning on the proffered arm of Middleton, ascended a carriage that was in attendance, and drove off, without perceiving Hargrave, who was waiting on the stairs.

It was not until relieved from the embarrassment of her presence, that Middleton felt the full awkwardness of the situation in which he had been surprised, calculated as it was to awaken misconstructions which, in the present state of his relations with Chritty, he would have given the world to prevent, and which were nevertheless totally unsusceptible of explanation on account of his solemn vow of secrecy. Not knowing what to say in this dilemma, he remained silent; while the sisters, scarcely less perplexed than their companion, busied themselves with a nervous earnestness

in searching for the shawl. It was found at last, and they were about to retire from the apartment, when Middleton, unable to bear the thought of their departing under erroneous impressions, though he could not fully remove them, said, hesitatingly, Miss Norberry—Mrs. Hargrave, you will much oblige me by not mentioning what you have seen, a request which I do not urge on my own account, but out of consideration for ——." The delicacy of his situation, his pledge, and the fear of throwing any suspicion on Miss Horton, checked his tongue, and after a pause he continued. "My lips are unfortunately sealed by an engagement, an inviolable oath that prevents my explaining what has occurred. This interview was not of my seeking. I entreat you once more not to mention it, and to believe me, when I assure you upon my honour, that I have never seen Miss Manning since I left Cambridge."

"Miss Manning!" cried Lucy. "It is Miss Horton, the lady who was to have sung to us."

"Yes, Miss Horton, Miss Horton, a very

fine singer: I hope you are perfectly satisfied," said Middleton, too much agitated to weigh his expressions. He looked appealingly at Chritty, who perceived his distress, and, believing that any further colloquy would increase it, bowed her head as if in acquiescence, took her sister's arm, and exclaiming, with an assumed air of indifference, "Come, Lucy; Mr. Hargrave will think *we* are lost as well as the shawl," led her out of the room.

Immersed in various thoughts, but all of the most painful kind, Middleton remained for some time fixed to the spot where he stood, until the entrance of a servant roused him from his abstraction, when he seized his hat, and hurried out of the house, utterly forgetting the party upstairs. Without knowing whither he bent his steps, he wandered to the esplanade on the West Cliff, and hurried rapidly onwards, revolving in his mind the occurrences at Cambridge in which Clara Manning was concerned, and to which he could never revert without the keenest pain; or wondering what conclusions Chritty Norberry would draw from the scene

she had witnessed, and his inability to explain it.

It was a cool, serene, and balmy summer night; the gentle moon-lit waves, breaking into semicircles of spangled froth, laid themselves hushingly upon the shore, as if sinking to sleep; a refreshing sea-breeze fanned his glowing face; while the peaceful heavens and the placid moon, imparting to him at length a portion of their own holy tranquillity, diffused a healing sanctity through his bosom, and soothed the disquietude of his soul. Grateful for this returning complacency of spirit, he gazed around him, and, finding that he was unobserved, drew the miniature from his bosom, pressed it to his heart and lips, ejaculated a few inaudible words, and then turned homewards, sufficiently calmed to admire the blended loveliness of the heavens and ocean, as with soft sighs and mutual smiles they seemed to be wooing each other.

Though tranquillized, however, his thoughts were still so absent, that, instead of stopping at the house occupied by Sir Matthew, he

knocked at the adjoining door, without discovering his error until he was ushered into the presence of Hargrave. "This is kind of you," exclaimed the latter, "I was in hopes you would look in before you went to bed, that you might explain your strange interview with Clara Manning, my once affianced mistress, whose name I took so much pains to conceal from you, while it appears that you have long been acquainted with her. How singular that you should never have heard of her adventure at Eastbourne."

"When I knew her at Cambridge, I had learned nothing of her previous history. Concealments of all sorts were practised upon me: I can explain nothing. Let the misfortunes or misconduct of Clara Manning be forgotten with her name, which she has changed to Horton, though she is still unmarried. Unhappy girl! let us both seal our lips as to her past life. Be ever grateful to Heaven, dear Hargrave! you have had a most providential escape."

"Of that I am aware, and I trust not

unthankful, either for the evils that I have escaped, or for the blessings that are vouchsafed to me. Perhaps you are similarly circumstanced, for I suspect that this fair warbler won your youthful heart, as she had previously conquered mine. Were you, too, jilted?"

"Ask me no questions I implore you. I am bound to silence by a solemn vow. Since I left Cambridge, I have never seen her till this night: I trust I shall never behold her again, and to secure this object, as well as to spare the poor girl the pang of again meeting me, it is my intention to return to Brookshaw tomorrow morning."

"I shall remember and respect your vow, mysterious as it appears, but you had better defer your return for two or three days, when we, also, shall be journeying homewards.

Upon this subject Middleton declared his resolution to be immoveable, wished his friend good night, withdrew to the next house, and immediately retired to bed, though the recent adventure had been too stimulant of unplea-

sant recollections and anxious forebodings to allow him for some time to forget them in sleep.

Nor could Chritty, any more than her lover, bury the singular occurrence of the evening in oblivious slumber. As she lay in bed, it furnished continued food for fresh conjectures and painful misgivings. She remembered to have heard a vague rumour of some love affair in which Middleton had been engaged at Cambridge: it could now be hardly doubted that Miss Horton was the object of his attachment; and though he declared that he had never seen her since he left college, he did not affirm that he had never corresponded with her; he did not deny that he carried her miniature in his bosom, and occasionally pressed it to his lips and his heart, for of whom but her could it possibly be a portrait? How could all this be honourably reconciled with his avowed love to herself and the offer of his hand? It appeared that Miss Horton had changed her name; he had called her Miss Manning; he had desired herself and Lucy

not to mention the tender interview of which they had become accidental spectators; he had declared his own lips to be sealed by an inviolable vow. Here were change of name, mystery, and concealment, ratified by a solemn oath, and all savouring strongly of criminality, or at least of some grave misconduct, in which her judgment told her that Middleton must be deeply implicated, for she knew him to be naturally as frank and open as the day. Had he not moreover secret enemies who had assailed his life? All these suspicious circumstances, joined to his gloomy views, and the hypochondriacism to which he was subject, made her congratulate herself upon having rejected his suit; but this verdict of her judgment was scarcely confirmed by her heart. Mortification and regret, not perhaps altogether free from a tinge of resentful jealousy, were her predominant feelings; and she accused herself of ingratitude to Heaven, because an unbidden tear had stolen down her cheek.

CHAPTER IV.

"Her divine skill taught me this;—
Thus from every thing I saw,
I could some instruction draw,
And raise pleasure to the height,
From the meanest object's sight.—
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustelling,
By a daisy, whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed,
Or a shady bank or tree,
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's bounties can
In some other wiser man."

GEORGE WITHER.

THE first interview of Middleton and Chritty, after their return to their respective homes, occurred at the Parsonage House, whither Hargrave and Lucy had invited them. Middleton was embarrassed, from a recollection of what had occurred at Lady Bishopstown's, and his

inability to explain it; but the cheerful and easy self-possession of Chritty, and the cordiality of her reception, quickly reassured him; while the sprightly Lucy, rallying him on his grave looks, exclaimed, "The Turks pray to their prophet against sorrowful faces, which they consider sinful—so do I; and as a penance for your presuming to enact the Knight of the Rueful Countenance, and in my presence, I order you to escort Chritty to the north seat of the church-yard, that she may see what an improvement we have made in the view, by pulling down the old barn. Hargrave is visiting one of his sick parishioners, and I cannot go myself, having some household duties to discharge. Dear, dear! what a torment is married life! One has always some worrying, pleasant, troublesome, dear, delightful, little occupation to fill up one's time. Heigho! it 's quite miserable to be so happy all day long." The playful housewife jingled her bunch of keys, and assumed such a lackadaisical yet beautiful expression of mock distress, that Chritty laughed outright, while a languid smile passed over

the features of Middleton, as he offered his arm to the sister, and declared that he should be most delighted to perform the enjoined penance of showing her the improvement in the churchyard, which he termed throwing open a new picture for public and gratuitous exhibition. For the purpose of enabling it to be the better seen and enjoyed, Hargrave had caused a bench to be fixed, upon which Chritty placed herself, and, after admiring the view, turned to her companion, who had now seated himself beside her, and said smilingly, "Well, Mr. Middleton, do you remember our last colloquy upon this spot, and are you prepared to answer me, why the future should not be as a golden age to the present, seeing that the present may be termed a golden age to the past?"

"I need not provide myself with an answer, since I fully admit your position; we may go on improving, however, *ad infinitum*, without any correspondent increase of happiness. If we could measure our enjoyments and advantages with those of our ancestors, instead of our wealthier contemporaries, we should all of

us be more contented; but it is the unfortunate property of rank, riches, and superiorities of all sorts, that, while they do not make their possessors happy, they render others miserable by exciting their envy."

"But will you not admit that there is a levelling principle at work, which is constantly tending to equalize the enjoyments of all ranks? In intellectual pleasures, the most exalted of any, already are the educated poor almost upon a par with the rich, and so far they may be said to have attained a comparative golden age."

"Brought, as I have been, into personal contact with some of the least favourable specimens of my fellow-creatures, both male and female, how can I imagine them to constitute any portion of even a comparative golden age?"

"By judging from mankind in the mass, and not from individual instances. Eminently wise and useful was the counsel given by a lately deceased philosopher * to a friend, whose views were not altogether dissimilar from your own.

* Sir James Mackintosh.

'Allow yourself,' said the sage, 'to see the great loveliness of human virtue amidst all its imperfections, and employ your moral imagination, not so much by bringing it into contrast with the model of ideal perfection, as in gently blending some of the fairer colours of the latter with the brighter hues of real experienced excellence, thus heightening the beauty, instead of broadening the shade which must surround us, until we waken from this dream in other spheres of existence.'"

"I want not quotations but realities."

"Rather say you have a morbid craving for the gloomy in preference to the gladsome. The first step towards either goodness or happiness, is to believe in their existence. Are there then no pleasant realities? And is this august, this majestic, this beautiful, this delightful world to be termed a doleful dungeon, or a vale of tears? What monstrous ingratitude! Enjoyment is the natural state of existence; our senses, instead of being limited, as they might have been, to purposes of mere existence, are made to minister unto us a thou-

sand superfluous gratifications, if any thing can be deemed superfluous that creates an innocent pleasure. What incalculable, what ineffable delights, apart from all objects of utility, are let in upon us by the eye, by the ear, by the palate, by the sense of smelling! Why is the jocund earth, our magnificent banqueting-hall, garlanded with flowers, odorous with perfumes, and melodious with all varieties of grand and dulcet music, but that the abundant and delicious festival which is incessantly renewed for all animated beings, making their existence a perpetual jubilee, may be rendered as variously delightful as possible, and fill the mind of the reasoning guest with pious gratitude to the Creator, for the blessings and delights that he hath so profusely scattered throughout the whole creation? Strange that this universal love which our common Father extends to all, without discrimination of country or of creed, should not have imbued his sons with stronger feelings of fellowship, brotherhood, and toleration!"

"You have enumerated delights for which it

behoves us to be thankful; but, after all, these are but sensual pleasures, which we share with the animals that perish."

"Nay, not the greatest of all. Consider the illimitable range of our intellectual delights, in art, science, and literature; reflect upon the charms of love and friendship, and of all those sweet charities, affections, and sensibilities which, when they flow in the channel intended by nature, are perpetually bathing our hearts in joy."

"One might apply to your fancy, Christiana, what was said of the Venus painted by Zeuxis, that it seemed to be fed upon roses, for you certainly see every thing *en couleur de rose*, and I envy you that happy faculty of enjoying existence which I, alas! am utterly unable to attain. Even could you persuade me to change my desponding views as to the miserable destiny of man in this world, which I confess you have in some degree shaken, it would not allay the fears that beleaguer me as to his future fate."

"It ought to do so, if analogy and fair de-

duction have any influence over your mind. What we see is chiefly valuable to us, as an imperfect shadowing forth of what we are incapable of seeing. If, in this our fleeting existence, God has provided for our habitation so magnificent a palace, and has been careful to lavish upon us such varieties of enjoyment, think you not that, in the future state which is to endure for ever, the tender love and mercy of the Creator, more necessary to us by all the difference between life and eternity, will be immeasurably more considered than the claims or demerits of the creature? That the beneficent, the indulgent Father of his children in their perishable state, can become inexorable towards them when they are immortal, it is difficult to imagine; still less that, without reference to the good or evil they may have committed, he can capriciously elect some to glory and doom others to perdition."

"Your are alluding to the doctrine of predestination, which I hold to be supported by positive texts of Scripture."

"And which I presume to think refuted by

the general scope and spirit of the holy writings. It is a trite illustration, but you must allow me to repeat, that texts are like the hairs of a horse's tail, which in their connected form conduce to purposes of beauty, protection, and utility, but which, when extracted singly, are only fit for springes and snares. From any such passages that appear to be inconsistent with the divine goodness I would appeal to the bible of the universe, on whose three leaves of earth, sea, sky, God's own hand hath stamped in characters that all may read, while none can alter or interpolate them, justice, mercy, and all-embracing love."

"You admit, then, that the doctrine of predestination is not to be refuted from the Scriptures themselves."

"It is presumptuous, I am aware, in an unqualified girl like me to converse, and still more so to write upon such subjects; but I trust you will excuse the attempt in consideration of the motive, when I inform you that, with the hope of removing impressions injurious to your peace of mind, I have drawn up a

little paper on this subject, deriving my arguments solely from the Scriptures. Read it with indulgence, and if you remain unconvinced by my reasonings, at least pardon the freedom with which they are urged."

"Read it! pardon you, my dearest Miss Norberry!" cried Middleton, taking the paper and pressing it respectfully to his lips. "Every word of it shall be precious to me, as a flattering, a delightful proof of the interest you condescend to take in my happiness, and, whatever may be the result of its perusal, I tender you my heart-felt thanks for the kindness that dictated its composition. I have pleasure in confessing that our last colloquy has to a certain extent made a convert of me, and that I do not think quite so unfavourably of human destiny in this world as I once did."

"It delights me to hear you say so. Be assured that the conviction of the great and constant improvement of our species is a lofty, virtuous, and ennobling theory, which it is beneficial to adopt, even with an enthusiastic confidence; since to believe assists to realise it.

This cheering faith reconciles us to the lot of humanity, even when we behold it under the darkest occultation, by the persuasion of its final and effulgent emergence. Prompting to all that is great, and good, and glorious, it incites us not to pass through life like a vessel through the waves, or an arrow through the air, leaving no trace behind; but to make some deposit, however humble, upon the altar of human improvement, which may show that we have not lived for nothing; that we have at least contributed a mite towards the advancement of our species."

As she pronounced these words Chritty rose and returned towards the house, accompanied by Middleton, whose thoughts were so intent upon what he had just heard, that he uttered not a syllable until the liquid voice of Lucy, playfully rallying him upon his abstraction, dispersed his reverie. During the remainder of the visit, however, he continued silent and absorbed, musing deeply upon the colloquy in the churchyard, which had awakened in his mind a train of anxious and engrossing reflec-

tions. Sensible of his unfitness for society, and impatient to peruse the manuscript placed in his hands, he made an excuse for retiring early to his own house, and, throwing himself into a chair by the parlour window, drew forth Chritty's paper, and eagerly commenced its perusal. It was not his custom to give any orders respecting his meals, which were regularly prepared and sent up by his servants, without awaiting any particular instructions. Concluding from the early hour of his return that he had not yet taken tea, Robin brought it up, and left the room, without being noticed by his preoccupied master. After a short interval he re-appeared, and observing that no progress had been made during his absence, began to pour out a cup, when Middleton, withdrawing his eyes for the first time from the paper, apologised for the trouble he had given, and desired him to take away the apparatus, as he was too busy to attend to any thing at that moment.

"Well, sure enough, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said the old man.

"Madge and I can have a second tea instead of supper, and that will make the matter all square and idiomatical."

The good dame, who, like most of her sex and station, was always ready for a cup of souchong, sate down with her husband, but had no sooner tasted the beverage, than she declared the water to be so badly smoked, an accident for which she could not account, that it was impossible to drink it. She accordingly left the table to pursue her customary occupations, while Robin, who was either more thirsty or less squeamish than his wife, completed the meal by swallowing her portion as well as his own. Tired with the labours of the day he withdrew shortly afterwards to bed, where he had not long remained, when he was attacked by a burning heat and violent pain, accompanied with great nausea and an almost intolerable thirst. Madge ran down stairs to procure him some milk, which he drank with avidity, but his tongue and throat still remained parched and sore, notwithstanding his copious draughts, and the pains soon became

so acute, that the terrified wife hastened to her master, who was still reading in his study, and implored him see and give his aid to the sufferer.

Throwing aside the paper he had been studying, Middleton hurried to the garret, when he found the poor man's pangs so grievous, and his state so alarming, that, after prescribing such immediate remedies as he thought likely to alleviate his anguish, he descended to the stable, saddled his horse, and rode off for the apothecary, who resided at some distance, and with whom he returned in as short a time as possible to the lodge. On their arrival they found the patient still worse, labouring under much agony of body, and sinking when these attacks left him into a depressing conviction that his last hour was come, during which his speech was occasionally rambling and incoherent, though it generally bore reference to his gardening pursuits. By proper applications he soon obtained considerable relief, but his persuasion that death was approaching remained unaltered. "O dear doctor!" he ex-

claimed, "it's too late; my stomach be like a hotbed sowed with mustard and capsicums, and my kidney-beans be all burnt up as black as a coal."

"You are terrifying yourself without a cause," said the apothecary, "there is no immediate danger; the powder of ipecacuanha has produced good effects already, which the emetic tartar will complete, and I shall order you an emollient decoction of marsh-mallows, to lubricate the excoriated coat of the stomach."

"O doctor! I don't care about the coat of my stomach, it be hot enough to do without. It be no use, doctor, no use. Man be a poor bulbous creature, adequate to all sorts of contiguous disorders, and born to be mowed down like the grass. My hay-time be come, and it do seem to me, at this very moment, as if I heard Death whetting his scythe to have a cut at me, and saw his vision right afore me."

He fixed his eyes upon the apothecary, who drew back, apparently not liking to be mistaken for the principal, where he was only the agent.

"The Lord be good unto us all!" resumed the patient, "we be all of us a sort of quadruped flowers with two foot-stalks, only we be planted and put into the ground in this here world, in order to rise up in that 'ere, just as if I were to put a bulb-root into the lower garden and it were to shoot up atop o' the lawn border. After I be earthed round, I do hope I shall rise up all the fairer and whiter, like celery, and be finally transplanted into heaven, there to become a Jerusalem artichoke, and a star of Bethlehem."

"My good Robin!" said his master, "compose yourself, you have been assured that you are in no danger; but, even were it otherwise, you can have nothing to apprehend, for few, I believe, have passed through life so innocently as yourself."

"Ah master, master! the best of us be but poor idiomatical creatures, but I trust nobody won't meddle nor make with me in the other world in the way of doing me any harm. If I could just get into the gardens of Paradise,

with my spade, rake, and dibble, I might be of use in helping the other angels to dress the borders, and brush away the worm-casts, and plant edgings of box and thrift, and dung the melon-beds, and such like. Dear heart! dear heart! I fear there wont be no Cæsar nor Mark Antony to clip, and that's an infectious thought that keeps a worrying o' my heart like a maggot in a nut."

"I trust, Robin, that you will find favour and acceptance whenever your hour is come, but I repeat once more that your life is in no present danger."

"Well, sir, well; it be kind of you to say so, and to talk balm of Gilead to me; but I have a sort of angular, exotic feeling about my heart that tells me otherwise. If it were the will o' Heaven I should like to have stopped a little longer in this here garden, that I might have been audibly employed in saving the winter vegetables, and planting out lettuces, and cleaning the fruit borders, and shifting the auriculas, and potting the carnation-layers, and

planting out my pipings, and looking a'ter my bulbs, and such like. And there's the privet-hedge wants clipping: but it can't be helped, we that is annuals can't expect to be evergreens that never dies. I have only one request to make of you, dear master, afore ever I drop to the ground, and as you were always kind and good to me, I do hope you 'll grant it."

"That I will Robin, if it be in my power."

"Then promise me that you won't never let that thick-headed, succulent fellow, Tom Penfold come anigh Cæsar and Mark Antony to clip 'em. They be quite visions of glory now, and it be a great comfort to me to think that I do leave 'em in greater beauty and more incongruous order than ever I found 'em in."

"This promise I willingly make you, and here is my hand upon it," said Middleton.

"Thank you, dear master, thank you," cried Robin, returning the pressure.

"I shall now die all adequate and identical."

Having thus satisfactorily made up his worldly affairs, the patient, who had obtained a temporary respite from his pangs, turned to his

pillow, as if anxious to compose himself, when the apothecary made a signal to Middleton, and both retired quietly from the room, sending up Madge to sit by her husband, with orders that she should give them immediate notice if his sufferings returned.

CHAPTER V.

The drink! the drink! I am poisoned.
Hamlet.

"I WOULD not alarm our patient," said the apothecary on entering the parlour, "especially as I believe the remedies applied will prevent any serious consequences; but, from certain symptoms that I have observed, I strongly suspect him to have swallowed corrosive poison."

"Poison!" ejaculated Middleton, "impossible! How can you imagine that so simple and inoffensive a creature, guileless and happy as a child, would ever dream of committing suicide, or that if he had made the attempt, he could prepare himself for death with the calmness

and complacency we have just been witnessing? He believes himself to be on the brink of the next world, yet his dying thoughts are of the flowers he leaves behind him, and of those which he hopes to cultivate in another state of existence. Is this lamentable or enviable? Surely it comes within the latter category, if there be any truth in the averment that 'where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

"He may have taken poison inadvertently, without any suicidal intention; or it may have been administered with an evil intent against his life by some enemy."

"He cannot have an enemy in the world, for I am confident that he never wronged a fellow-creature."

"Is it impossible, then, for an innocent man to be the object of secret and malignant villainy? Can he always secure himself against the attacks of assassins?"

"Alas! my own sad experience compels me to answer—no! But honest Robin, equally obscure and blameless in his life, hath borne his faculties so meekly, that verily angels trum-

pet-tongued might plead against 'the deep damnation of his taking off.'"

The apothecary, who piqued himself upon his insight into human nature, though this imagined penetration only amounted to the vulgar error of assigning the worst possible motives to every action, and presuming the whole world to be fools or scoundrels, drew back his lips with a sardonic grin, and said, "Our lives would not be worth much if we had no better police than these angels with their trumpets; and as to its being impossible that honest Robin should have an enemy in the world, it is 'a bold averment to make of any man that is married.'"

"I do not understand you, Sir," said Middleton, gravely.

"As to this case, supposing the man to have been maliciously poisoned, which is at present uncertain, I affirm nothing: but in the course of my practice I have been more than once called in to a husband, whose wife has administered to him a composing draught, from

which it was not intended he should ever awake."

"If you are in earnest, Sir, you must allow me to tell you that your insinuations are most cruel and unwarrantable. If your remark be intended as a pleasantry, I can only say that it is grievously misplaced."

"Nay, Mr. Middleton, I have as yet advanced no charge and attempted no pleasantry. I have declared nothing, indeed, but my suspicion that the poor fellow has somehow been poisoned, a fact which I should like to ascertain, before I leave the house, by personal investigation and enquiry. If I mistake not I hear the wife on the stairs. Have I your permission to call her in and question her."

Immediate assent being given to this proposition, Madge was summoned to the parlour, when, in answer to the interrogatories of the apothecary, who cross-questioned her with the suspicious subtlety of an Old Bailey counsel, she stated that her husband, having made a hearty meal of the tea and cake intended for

her master, had retired to bed shortly afterwards.

"And how long had you made this cake?" asked the questioner, assuming the fact of its having been manufactured by Madge.

"I made it and baked it yesterday."

"And where have you put what was left?"

"There was none left: it was but a small one, and Robin ate it all."

"No doubt; had there been any left it might have told tales. But did you not taste any of it yourself?"

"No, I am not fond of they cakes."

"You are quite right, no more should I be. Do you mark, Mr. Middleton, do you mark? pray attend to her replies. But as you told us your husband drank so copiously of the tea, you joined him of course in that part of the meal?"

"No, I didn't: I found the water smoky, so I didn't drink more than a drop."

"Ha! ha! right again, very right. Do you mark, Sir, do you mark? And so your husband never found out that the water was

smoky: very extraordinary! And pray what became of the tea-things? I should like to see them."

"I washed them up, as soon as he had done, and put them away."

"No doubt, no doubt. On such occasions, if upon no other, the tea-things are sure to be instantly washed up and put away. Do you mark, Sir. And the tea-kettle in which the water was boiled: what became of that? did you wash that out, also?

"No, I left it on the hob, just as it was."

"Ah! then there's nothing in *that*, I dare be sworn. And you have had no visitors to the kitchen this afternoon, you say, not a soul has been in it but yourself and your husband?"

"Nobody, Sir."

"So I supposed: you may go upstairs again to Robin, and we will speak further with you by and by." Madge curtsied and withdrew, when her interrogator, turning to Middleton, demanded with a look of triumph, "Well, Sir, what say you now? If we can establish the presence of poison, of which I have little doubt,

will you not admit that we have already discovered strong grounds of suspicion against the wife?"

"It is for you to decide whether poor Robin has or has not swallowed any deleterious substance; but as to Madge, I will stake my existence, were appearances ten times more strongly against her, that she is innocent. It is quite monstrous to imagine her capable of such an enormity. She never quarrelled with him — she had no motives for such an atrocious attempt."

"Into motives we cannot penetrate; but we can judge of facts. If you have no objection, I should like to look about me a little in the kitchen."

"I will accompany you," said Middleton; "for on the poor woman's account, not less than my own, I am anxious that the affair should be thoroughly sifted."

"Ay, ay," cried the apothecary, as he ferreted into every hole and corner of the kitchen, with the alacrity and suspicious instinct of a thief-taker, for which office nature seemed to

have intended him. "Ay, ay—here are the tea-things all washed and put away sure enough, and not a scrap of the cake left in the larder or the cupboard; a cunning jade! a cunning jade! but we shall have her yet, and bring the fact home to her, by discovering where she bought the poison."

"You will first, I hope, ascertain whether any has been administered, which I confess myself strongly inclined to doubt."

"Well, Sir, we shall see, we shall see," cried the apothecary, who, as he continued his perquisitions, had now taken off the lid of the kettle, and was examining the inside with the aid of a candle, when he exclaimed triumphantly, "Eureka! it is found! it is found! I thought I could not be mistaken in the symptoms. The wife was quite right to find the water smoky. Look here, Sir, look here! See you this white sediment at the bottom of the kettle, and these concretions at the side?"

"I do, but I am not aware that they are of a deleterious nature."

"That we will determine presently;" so

saying, he took up a minute portion with a spoon, applied it to his tongue, and instantly spitting it out again, exclaimed, "Arsenic! arsenic! I suspected as much from certain appearances upstairs, and now stake my professional reputation upon the fact. I can swear to it by the taste, but we have plenty of other tests. Have you a crucible ready? You are aware, Sir, of course, that the chrystalline arsenic gives a whiteness to metals in fusion, and that a single grain will turn a pound of copper into a seeming silver that is not malleable. It combines with oxygen in two proportions, and the compounds are denominated oxides, because ——."

"You are forgetting to notice one thing," interposed Middleton, "which is much more germane to the matter than the qualities of arsenic; that Madge stands acquitted, for the tea-kettle is the only thing she has not cleaned out, which she would naturally have done, had she inserted any poisonous contents."

"There may be a motive for assuming this appearance of innocence."

"You said just now that we could not penetrate into motives, though we could judge of facts."

"I say so still—and how stand the facts? Here is a man poisoned, for whose life I will not even now be answerable, though the sudden and violent sickness produced by the tea, and the alexipharmic remedies I have since applied, may perhaps save him: here is a kettle encrusted in several places with arsenic; and here is a wife who declines tasting any of this fatal beverage, under pretext that the water is smoky, while she confesses that no person has entered the kitchen during the whole afternoon, but herself and her husband, *alias*, her intended victim: For her own sake, if she is innocent—for yours whether she be so or not, she ought to be taken into immediate custody; but we have no magistrate's warrant, and at this time of night it will not be easy to procure one. Ah! what a pity that your friend and neighbour, Mr. Hargrave, should have declined the honour, when he was lately requested to become a magistrate."

"I do not agree with you, for in my opinion nothing can be more incompatible than the clerical and the magisterial functions, the bible and the sword. If the divine be fitted for his holy duty, he must be eminently disqualified for that of executing the laws and inflicting punishments. What can be more unseemly and inconsistent than to hear a minister of the religion of love, preaching on the Sabbath the forgiveness of injuries, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven, and to behold him on the following morning, with stern looks, perchance, and angry words, condemning some petty delinquent to the mitigated penalty of six months' imprisonment and two public whippings, because it is his *first* offence?"

"Well, Sir, well, you have strange notions, very strange; but this is not the question. *Quid agendum?* What is to be done? We must lock up this kettle, of course, to prevent all access to it; and we must next consider how to secure the woman, the culprit, the criminal."

"I cannot allow these terms to be applied

to my servant upon such inconclusive evidence. You shall see me lock up this kettle; when I retire to bed I will take with me the key of the porch-door, so that no inmate can escape; in the morning we will examine Robin, who is not now in a state to be interrogated, and we will then decide what further measures should be adopted."

"I will be with you early for that purpose."

"Do so, and in the mean time, as I shall sit up with Robin, I shall be glad to have instructions as to his treatment, should his sufferings return, which you say is not unlikely."

Upon this point the practitioner gave full directions, and then took his leave, declaring, according to professional rule, that he had several other patients to visit, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour.

Not less surprised than distressed at this mysterious occurrence, although he fully exculpated Madge, and felt convinced that it must have originated in some unaccountable accident, Middleton returned to the attic, where he found Robin again complaining of pain and

an insatiable thirst, although his pangs were much less severe than they had been, and the sickness had nearly left him. Exhausted by his sufferings, the patient at length sunk into a feverish and perturbed sleep, when his master, desiring Madge to call him, should her husband require assistance, descended the stairs, locked and secured the key of the hall-door, and then, retiring to his room, threw himself on the bed without undressing, and, after some time given to a variety of anxious conjectures, sunk to repose.

Awaking with the first dawn of light, he ascended the stairs, when he had the satisfaction of learning from Madge that Robin had enjoyed a deep and quiet sleep for the last two or three hours, and seemed to be perfectly easy. He desired her not to leave him for a moment, and as he had promised not to make any further inquiries, or take any steps until the arrival of the apothecary, he determined to await his appearance. As true to the scent of crime as the vulture to that of carrion, the man of medicine appeared at an early hour, much more

eager to draw from his patient some support to his own uncharitable suspicions of the wife, than to ascertain how he had sped during the night, and what had been the effect of the remedies he had taken. For form's sake, however, he made the proper inquiries as to his health, and having pronounced that he was going on as well as possible, and was decidedly out of danger, he commenced his interrogatories after the following fashion. "And so, my friend, you were alone the whole afternoon of yesterday; nobody in the house but yourself and your wife, for your master dined out, I find."

"Yes, master dined with Mr. Hargrave, but I wasn't alone for all that."

"So we understand; you had your wife with you."

"No I hadn't, for she was busy a long time in the closet up-stairs, sorting out the pots for the preserves, and while she were there, an old, fibrous, idiomatical-looking Jew, with a long black beard, comes to the kitchen-door, and asks if there was any china to mend. Now the milk-jug was broken—I done it the night 'afore,

and I didn't want Madge to know on't, 'cause she be so flustrous and rumbustical about the old green china, so I says to the Jew—yes, says I, but you must be quick about it, Moses. To be sure he did look uncommon superficial when I called him Moses. So says he, I must have some boiling water, says he, what 's this in the kettle? It 's spring water for master's tea, says I, that I be going to take up to him presently. You 're sure it 's for your master's tea, says he; and he asked me that 'ere question two or three times over. So then he said he must have a drop of cold soft water besides, and I went to the scullery to fetch it, and when I came back, I found he had taken the lid off the kettle, and put it on again the wrong way, so that it wouldn't shut close, and he done it, he told me, to see that the water was boiling. So then I filled up the tea-pot for master, and I paid the Jew for the job, which was done, all adequate and identical, in two or three minutes; he bundled off, and Madge remained quite clandestine of the whole affair from first to last."

"Good heavens!" cried Middleton, striking

his forehead with his hand, "a horrible suspicion flashes across my mind. My thoughts have been so completely engrossed by apprehensions for poor Robin, that I never once adverted to myself; yet, from the statement just heard, there can be no doubt that this diabolical attempt was levelled at me and not at him. Once already, as you are well aware, has my life been attempted by some unknown assassin; and it is manifest that this Jew is another miscreant who has been employed by the same party to effect my destruction."

"It is most fortunate," said the apothecary, "that Robin filled the teapot so immediately, and before the water was fully impregnated with the poison, or the consequences must have been fatal."

"Heart alive! have I been drinking pison that was meant for master? Well, I 'm glad on't, that I be, for I must soon ha' withered and gone off any how, while he be just blooming and coming into blow like. O those auspicious Jews! I fear the best on 'em be but deciduous characters. But, doctor, if I have

got pison in my stomach, like an insect in the bud, it won't prevent my rising up and flowering in the next world, will it?"

"No, nor in this either; in three or four days, I hope, you will be as well as ever."

"Lord love ye, doctor, do get me up and about 'afore three or four days, or Cæsar and Mark Antony will have grown out of all knowledge, and become as rough and ragged as young colts on a common."

"I have one consolation," said Middleton, arousing himself from a painful reverie into which he had sunk, "no suspicions can now attach to any part of my own household. Indeed I never harboured them for an instant. This villainous Jew has been the sole contriver, or at least the sole agent of the mischief."

"Ay, and we must have him instantly pursued," cried the apothecary, who presently quitted the house, not less eager to spread the strange tale among the gossips of the neighbourhood, than to raise a hue and cry after the felonious Israelite.

Hargrave, having gathered some vague ru-

mours of the overnight's occurrence, now hurried into the parlour to inquire the particulars, and to offer such assistance as might be in his power. It was his strenuous advice, after having been apprised of Robin's statement, that Middleton should immediately request the attendance of a magistrate, not only that he might receive a description of the offender, and take measures for his apprehension, but that he might attest the deposition of the patient. Should a relapse, or any unfavourable change occur, it would be impossible for him, perhaps, to repeat what he had stated, to furnish any further particulars, and above all to identify the culprit, in the event of his being arrested. Nobody else had seen him, for he had stolen into the house in the dusk of the evening, probably through the plantations, and must have escaped in the same way, since none of the villagers had noticed him.

The whole place was now in an uproar; the atrocious attempt upon the life of their benefactor having transpired, men, women, and children, neglecting all their respective labours,

huddled together in groups, eagerly canvassing the affair, vowing vengeance against the miscreant, and discussing the best methods of pursuing him with a chance of success.

As the females, and even the children of Brookshaw, insisted upon joining in the pursuit, Hargrave divided the whole into four parties, gave to each a particular description of the delinquent, and assigning to them four different routes, bade them scour the country as far and as fully as they could, he himself taking the command of one of the bands. Meanwhile Middleton, having mounted his horse, was riding at a rapid pace towards the residence of the nearest magistrate, filled with painful and gloomy thoughts, but animated with an eager desire to have the caitiff arrested, that so he might obtain a chance of solving the inexplicable riddle as to the secret enemy who was thus practising against his life with a perseverance only to be equalled by his remorselessness. "It is terrible," he mentally ejaculated, "to have the sword of Damocles thus hanging over my head; to be for ever

exposed to a violent and cruel death; but it is still worse to know that, without conscious offence to a breathing being, I have a foe, unknown, invisible, merciless, who is perhaps dogging my footsteps, like an armed shadow, whithersoever I go, and at this very moment may be levelling his blunderbuss from behind yonder hedge. Who is he? what is he? where is he? Could I see my danger, I feel that I could confront it manfully; but this blindness, this suspense, this misgiving of every fellow-creature who approaches me, weighs down my spirit with a sadness that will not be shaken off. O Christiana! eloquent, argumentative, but alas! too sanguine Christiana! how can I reconcile your lofty and ennobling notions of human nature with my own heart-withering experience of its deceitfulness, its groundless animosity, its abandonment to utter and hopeless reprobation?"

Mr. Philpotts, the magistrate, a man of low birth, and the founder of his own ample fortune, had considered himself as one of the people, and had cherished liberal opinions, until

his marriage with the third cousin of a noble man, from which period, affecting to participate in the aristocratical sentiments of his wife, he associated, as exclusively as he could, with the upper classes; professed a violent hostility to reform, and talked very pompously and very foolishly of standing by the illustrious order with which he had the honour of being connected. Having adopted an unholy faith in the folly and depravity of the poor, while he considered their betters, as he termed all who were rich, or high-born, to be nearly impeccable, he exercised his magisterial functions with sternness and severity. Poachers in particular he never pardoned; he was a sportsman; he had a preserve of pheasants; all offences against the game-laws he held therefore to be utterly irremissible. When Middleton reached the residence of this burly and consequential person, he was hearing a case of assault and battery; but, as the parties were plebeians, and the new visitant wore the appearance of being in easy circumstances, he stopped the examination in order to enquire

the object of his attendance, promising, when he had learnt it, to drive over to Brookshaw, as soon as he had dismissed "the low fellows who were then pestering him." Meanwhile he referred to his clerk for any official measures that might be necessary touching the warrant and the orders to the constables and headboroughs.

Most persons are jealous of the observances due to their station, in proportion to their want of real dignity. This was eminently the case with Mr. Philpotts, who imagined himself to be doubly maintaining his authority when he exacted homage from others, and displayed arrogance in his own conduct. Several hours elapsed before his ponderous showy coach and flaunting liveries astounded the old women of Brookshaw, as he drove up to the Lodge, where he assumed as fussy and pompous a manner as if he were a despotic prince condescending to visit one of his vassals. He took Robin's deposition, however, upon oath, not without some expressions of impatience at his grandiloquence and circumlocution; and then

adjourning to the parlour, vouchsafed to partake of a little collation provided for him; and even to pronounce that the Madeira was some of the very best, except his own, that he had ever tasted. "A shocking affair! a shocking affair indeed!" exclaimed the magistrate, refilling his glass; "when persons of property and condition are to be poisoned in their own houses! but the fact is, Mr. Middleton, that the lower orders of this country are the most profligate, unprincipled, and abandoned set of miscreants upon the face of the earth."

"God forbid!" ejaculated his companion; "there is no country, I believe, where enormous wealth and the most abject poverty are so often found in juxta-position as in England, and where, consequently, the temptation to the commission of offences against property is so urgent and incessant. It would seem, too, as if the laws, which are made by the rich for their own protection, increased in severity with the wealth of their enactors, for our's are probably the most rigorous in the world. Hence our prisons may be always full, without jus-

tifying the inference that the great mass of our fellow-countrymen are worse than their continental neighbours."

"A great deal, sir, a great deal: I happen to know it in my magisterial capacity. The whole of the rapscallions and tatterdemalions that constitute the swinish multitude, as somebody has very properly called them, are thieves, rogues, and vagabonds; nay, sir, worse, worse —they are poachers.

"Even were they as depraved as you represent them, which I never can admit, the fault would not attach to them so much as to their rulers and teachers, their temporal and spiritual pastors and masters. Government and institutions are to a people what education and parental treatment are to an individual. In the best regulated household there may be a single scapegrace; but if in a numerous family all the children turn out incurable profligates, it *must* be the fault of their parents and instructors."

"A very extraordinary mode of arguing, sir, very! So, then, we of the upper orders are

answerable for the rascality of the lower classes; and I myself, I suppose, am to blame because my hares and pheasants are snared almost every night by a set of scoundrelly poachers."

"You are to blame, I think, in attempting to preserve, for the exclusive amusement of a privileged class, particular fowls of the air or beasts of the field, which never can be individualised as the property of that class. Whatever is wild belongs, by a natural right, to those who, without trespassing, can catch it."

"What, Sir, have we not the law on our side?"

"There is no wrong, nor oppression, nor manifest absurdity, which has not, at one period or other, had the law on its side; but the Game Laws, the worst and most insulting relic of the worst ages, are so monstrous in their nature, and so diametrically opposed to the spirit of the present times, that they must be swept away, root and branch, by the very first breath of a reformed Parliament."

"Oh, ay! you are a Reformer, I remember to have heard—a Radical, if I mistake not.

Well, Sir, well; much good may it do you! But when you have got together, under your ten-pound franchise, a Parliament of cobblers and tinkers, to say nothing of rogues and vagabonds, I should be glad to know who is to fill your offices of trust, and honour, and dignity, for even *you*, Mr. Middleton, must allow that all our honest, upright, and respectable characters, all our men of high principle and unblemished reputation, are exclusively to be found in the rich and genteel classes, and among that illustrious order with which I have the honour to be connected."

"They ought to be so because they are the farthest removed from temptation, and might well be impeccable, from the mere luxury of virtue. Nevertheless I differ from you *toto cælo*, not only as to the general depravity of the humbler classes, but as to the immaculate character of those whom you are pleased to term their betters."

"Sir, I do not understand what you are aiming at."

"As a set-off to your low-born vulgar cri-

minals, I am looking around me for high-born, titled, wealthy, and mighty culprits, for whose arrest I will not ask your warrant, since I will presume myself to hold one signed by the great Magistrate of Heaven; and, that I may show my respect for rank, and orders of precedency, I will begin with our hereditary legislators, who are sometimes the first to break the laws themselves have enacted; though I am ready to admit, for I will not imitate you so far as to condemn a whole class, that many, very many of our nobility, are an honour to their titles. My Lord Duke! excuse my want of reverence for your court-dress, and your star and garter, as well as my laying my hand upon your shoulder—I arrest you as a murderer! Nay, put up your sword; if you took my life, it would only confirm my charge. Can you deny that you bubbled your friend in a gaming transaction, and then shot him in a duel?—Psha, fellow! he demanded satisfaction and I gave it him as a man of honour. Cry your grace mercy! this may be gaming-house law,

but I thought that the laws of God and man denounced you as a murderer."

"Excuse me, Mr. Middleton; I cannot hear any more of such common-place radical rubbish. Call you this a case of murder?"

"Nay, Sir, I listened to your sweeping impeachment of all the lower orders, and do you wince when I retaliate upon a single individual of rank? Not a murder? Why, then, the decorated, 'Most Honourable,' who sits by his side shall supply me with one. My Lord Marquess! hold up your hand. Are you not the seducer of an unsuspecting girl who pined herself to death? Did you not win his last guinea of a brother collegian, who rushed from the hazard-table to blow his brains out? Are you, or are you not a murderer—ay, or no?"

"Ridiculous! inflammatory! libellous! contemptible! really, Mr. Middleton, this is worse than Cobbett's twopenny trash."

"Bear with me a little longer. I see yonder an Earl, a Viscount, and a Baron, with whom I would fain exchange a word. Right Honour-

able Sirs! I accuse you each and all of perjury, in having violated the marriage vow which you solemnly swore at God's altar to maintain. You laugh scornfully. What! shall the vulgar perjurer be infamous, while you, who have added to his crime, cowardice, cruelty, and ingratitude, are still Right Honourables? It may be so *here*, *but* will it be thus *hereafter*?"

"Sir! this is language only worthy of a ranting and revolutionary tub-preacher or mob-orator. Are you aware that you are speaking of persons of rank?"

"I will descend then to the class beneath them. Gentlemen of the House of Commons! there are some among you whom I denounce as swindlers and shoplifters, in obtaining goods on credit for which you knew you had not the means of paying, and then pleading your privilege from arrest; others there are, whom I accuse of dishonesty in horse-dealing, on the turf, at the gaming-table; and a more numerous class, whom I arraign of petty larceny in books, prints, coins, hats, umbrellas, and all such

trifles as do not expose their purloiners to a criminal process, or civil action."

"And what would you infer, Sir, from this Jacobinical philippic?"

"That if the upper classes, whom you deem so impeccable, do not often appear in our courts as violators of the written law, they are not seldom infringers of the moral and religious law; and that their exemption from the pains, penalties, and disgraces, that fall so heavily upon their inferiors, is less attributable to the presence of high principle than to the absence of temptation. Alas! Mr. Philpotts, which of us can answer for our good conduct, had we been distressed, and had we 'exposed ourselves to feel what wretches feel?' not I, for one. Let no man undervalue riches, which, though they may sometimes tempt us to excess, are often our sole preservatives from crime. Many of us, when we pique ourselves upon our honour and honesty, little think that we are paying a compliment to our three per cent. consols, or our landed estates, rather than to our sense of religious restraint or moral principle. Were

the destitute sinner and the rich saint to change fortunes, they would sometimes, I suspect, change characters."

"Why, Sir, this beats anything that has ever been spouted at those hotbeds of sedition, the Political Unions. It must be vastly improving to our lower orders!"

"Oh! that I had it in my power to meliorate their lot! But this can only be effected by a general change in our mode of treating them. We punish the crimes, and in some cases even the misfortunes of the poor, with severity; but we offer them not a single incentive to virtue and good conduct; our criminal system creates a hell for them, but does not offer to their hopes anything that approximates towards a heaven. Might we not bestow orders, distinctions, and privileges, upon such of the humbler classes as had merited them. He, for instance, of whatever occupation, who had brought up a family without burthening the parish, or offending any law, might be perpetually exempted from impressment, from serving in the militia, or in some instances from

the payment of taxes. He might carry a decoration, which it should be imperative upon our military sentinels to salute; while our gentry might honour themselves as well as him by invariably taking off their hats to him as he passed."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Philpotts contemptuously, "a pretty scheme truly! why, the very lowest of the rabble would scorn to wear any such badge, and if they did, it would not have the smallest influence upon their conduct."

"I am convinced of the contrary from what I witnessed at your own house this morning. You were expressing your surprise that one of the witnesses in the charge of assault and battery had conducted himself with so much forbearance. 'Why, your Worship,' said the man, 'I am an old soldier, you see; it was a holiday, and I wore my Waterloo medal, and, that being the case, I couldn't demean myself to behave like a common boxer or a blackguard.' From this single trait I should draw conclusions favourable to the scheme I have been recommending; and I believe it will be found that

very few of the common soldiers who received Waterloo medals have ever misconducted themselves."

"Stuff, Sir; and perilous stuff too! I see through your plot. You have been attempting to degrade our aristocracy, and that illustrious order with which I have the honour to be connected, only that you might raise up a tag-rag and bobtail nobility out of hobnailed clowns and unwashed artificers. You must allow me to tell you, Sir, that these are very dangerous and unwarrantable sentiments. Yes, Sir, I look upon you as a fire-flinging innovator, one of those who set about the work of revolution as unconcernedly as the wind, when it goes whistling forth to raise a storm that shall engulf a whole navy. You 'll pardon my freedom, but I always speak what I think."

"Nay, Sir," said Middleton smiling, "I am too much a friend to freedom to think that it requires a pardon."

Without farther remark, or any parting salutation, Mr. Philpotts hurried into his carriage, exclaiming as it drove off, "*Crazy* Mid-

dleton ! it is too mild a term. The fellow is as mad as a March hare, and ten times more mischievous. No wonder some one has attempted to poison him, and little harm if he had succeeded !"

CHAPTER VI.

Rise to my soule, bright Sunne of Grace, O rise!
Make mee the vigour of thy beams to proue;
Dissolue the chilling frost which on mee lies,
That makes mee lesse than looke-warm in thy loue.
I have gone wrong and erred; but ah, alas!
What can I else doe in this dungeon dark?
My foes strong are, and I a fragill glasse,—
Howres charged with cares consume my life's small sparke;
Yet, of thy goodnesse if I grace obtaine,
My life shall be no losse, my death great gaine.

Drummond of Hawthornden.

In the course of the afternoon the different parties of peasants returned from their search, all equally weary and unsuccessful. Not the smallest trace had been obtained of the fugitive. His figure, as minutely described by Robin, was so remarkable that he could not well have escaped notice and observation, and yet they

could gather no tidings of him, either in the highways or byways, at turnpikes, public-houses, or lonely farms; a circumstance whence Hargrave drew the conclusion that he could not have wandered far, and must still be lurking in the immediate vicinity of Brookshaw. All were invited to take some refreshment at the Lodge, the modest larder of which being presently exhausted, as well as that of the contiguous parsonage, the guests betook themselves, nothing loth, to bread and cheese, lubricated by a copious supply of home-brewed ale. Middleton and Hargrave were not unassisted in doing the honours of this homely but hearty repast, for as there was a want of ministrants, owing to the absence of Robin and Madge, Lucy, whose beautiful and blooming looks might indeed have qualified her to enact the part of Hebe to the Gods, insisted on being cup-bearer to the rural guests. Her performance of this menial office would have somewhat abashed them, had she not discharged its duties with a laughing good-humour, or jocose gravity, that soon dispelled every feeling of restraint. Be-

sides, she had already become a general favourite with the parishioners, whom she cheered by her affability and sprightliness, while she benefited them more essentially by her charitable disposition, and her attention to their minutest wants and wishes. So far from lending herself to the cant, parade, and patronising airs of certain fashionable philanthropists, whose capricious benevolence is but a flimsy cover for vanity, her good offices were rendered as unobtrusive as possible; while, if they transpired, she disclaimed, with a real feeling of humility and an assumed air of self-ridicule, any attempt at acting the Lady Bountiful of the village. Middleton, who thought much more highly of her since her marriage than he had done before, complimented her upon the ability and success with which she discharged her new duties as a cup-bearer, when she blushed and laughed, exclaiming, "Nay, now, it is not fair to banter me, for I know that I am but an awkward girl still, for which I have the less excuse, having always had such a good opportunity of improving myself by observing dear

Chritty. Oh! you have no idea how clever she is in these matters, and indeed in every thing else. She can even mix up medicines for the poor, and I have heard many of them say that she has done them much more good than the apothecary."

"I doubt it not; so charming a practitioner might drive away, methinks, every malady that flesh is heir to. Christiana Norberry is an angel!"

"Lud! I am glad to hear it. What, then, must I be, who am her sister?"

"You are another angel," said Middleton smiling.

"You have had too much ale," cried Lucy, "you begin to see double. Begone, toper! not a drop more shall you quaff to-day."

Before the peasants retired they would have made arrangements for renewing the pursuit on the following morning, but their hospitable host, apprising them that the constables were still out with orders for the apprehension of the offender, positively forbad their intended

purpose, for which, however, he renewed his thanks, and then wished them good night in a parting cup. Lucy, declaring with an assumed air of ludicrous pomposity that she could not any longer neglect her household duties, returned home, while Middleton and Hargrave, after talking over the occurrences of the day for some time, went forth to enjoy the refreshing coolness of the night-air in the grounds at the back of the house. A few scattered lights from the opposite bank, visible at intervals through the openings of the trees, intimated that the villagers, fatigued with their exertions, were retiring to their beds; the moon, rising above the crest of the ridge, and silvering the tufted tops of the plantation, left the walks beneath in a dim obscurity, except where the thinner foliage allowed a checkered light, broken as the leaves were gently fanned by the night-breeze, to glimmer and dance upon the ground. Here and there a partial aperture allowed a ray to dart for some distance into the grove, glistening on the dewy grass, and gleaming against the polished trunks or fea-

thery branches of the birch and ash trees, until it became absorbed by the rougher surface and denser foliage of the oaks and elms. It was one of those soft, genial, gentle nights, that impress the mind with a sense of involuntary devotion, and even seem to impart the same feeling to inanimate nature. The rustling of the leaves, and the low indistinct murmurs ascending from the ground, sounded as if the earth, before it sunk to sleep, were whispering a prayer to heaven; while it might have been thought, that the hushed impending heavens were listening graciously to the thanksgiving.

For some time the friends strolled forwards without speaking, for it seemed to both as if they were in one of Nature's sanctuaries, of which it would be almost profane to dispel the silence by the tones of a human voice. At length they reached a wilder and darker part of the grove, where the babbling of a runnel, hurrying from a pond above to the village rivulet, broke the illusion; and, as they felt their way into an alcove, for in this spot the shades of night deepened into dark-

ness, Middleton began to discourse of the event which had engrossed his thoughts during the day.

"Hist—hark!" interposed Hargrave, after a brief interval, "I hear a noise; some one is moving among the bushes, as if stealing upon our retreat."

"Who can be lurking in the plantations at so late an hour? you must be mistaken: I hear nothing but this importunate runnel urging its way amid the stones."

"Listen! listen! there it is again!" whispered Hargrave, and his companion could now distinctly hear a rustling of the underwood, and a stealthy footfall among the crisp dry leaves upon the ground. Night-prowlers of any sort were so little known in the vicinity of Brookshaw, and especially in the plantations of the Lodge, that he was rather disposed to think some sheep or heifer had strayed towards them; but his friend drew a far different augury, and, putting his mouth to Middleton's ear, said in a low voice, "How singular if this should prove to be the Jewish villain who so

lately attempted your life! I have already expressed my opinion, that, while we were seeking him at a distance, he was probably lying *perdu* in some of the contiguous woods: whoever this fellow may be, he cannot be lurking hereabouts with any good motive."

"Ha!—say you so?" cried Middleton, "then we will quickly put him to the test—anything is better than suspense." So saying, he sprang from the alcove, and precipitated himself among the bushes whence the sound had proceeded, scaring from his covert a man of middling stature, who rushed down one of the dark walks, with an evident terror that urged him to his utmost speed. Middleton, whose suspicions were fortified by this manifestation of guilty panic, followed instantly, and as the fugitive dashed across a moon-lit opening, was enabled to perceive that he was attired in black clothes, and wore the semblance, while he displayed the activity, of a young and vigorous man. His superior swiftness, and the increasing obscurity of the walk, soon carried him out of sight; but his pursuer

tracked him for some distance by the sound of his feet, until he plunged into an umbrageous alley of turf, when this too failed him, and he followed with a blind impetuosity, utterly unguided by the ear or eye. Still animated with all the ardour of pursuit, and hurrying forward in unavailing chace from one alley to another, for he was familiar with them all, he again caught the sound of rapid footsteps, and, redoubling his speed, suddenly encountered a figure just at the point where two walks intersected each other. So violent was the shock with which he threw himself upon the presumed object of his search, that both came to the ground together, Middleton exclaiming, as he firmly grappled him, "Ha, fellow! have I caught thee?"

"You have indeed," replied the well-known voice of Hargrave, "but I will thank you not to throttle me nevertheless."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated his friend, "is it you? what a bitter disappointment. How has it happened?"

"Knowing that you were unarmed, and fear-

ing that you might be rushing into danger, I left the alcove and ran after you as fast as I could; but you presently outstripped me, and I never caught sight of you again till we met with so little ceremony at this crossing, and you were good enough to knock out of my body the modicum of breath that the rapidity of my race had left me."

"Forgive me, my dear friend," said Middleton, helping him to rise, "I hope you are not hurt; but was ever anything so provoking? Have you seen the fugitive? Let us renew our pursuit. The rascal cannot be far off. Do you think he has quitted the plantation?"

"I have not yet recovered breath enough to answer all your questions at once; but to take them in order. I am not hurt, though somewhat shaken; it *is* very provoking; I have not seen the runaway; I do not think he can be far from us, and I have no objection to continue our pursuit. But as the rogue's cautious advance, and rapid flight show him to have had some evil purpose in view; as he may be armed and we are unprotected, I propose that we

should renew our search without separating. If it be the Jew, as I suspect, it would not be prudent to place yourself, singly, in his power."

"No, no, this is not our Israelite," said Middleton. "According to Robin's description that arch-felon was old and decrepit, and attired in a long drab great-coat; whereas the fellow of whom I caught a glimpse wore a short black coat, while his uncommon swiftness proved him to be young and active."

Nay then, if that be the case, I know not why we should trouble ourselves to pursue the knave. And yet his actions betray a guilty purpose; though not a principal in the late attempt he may be a confederate, and I confess that I should be glad to secure him. Shall we arouse some of the villagers, and get them to surround the plantation, while we beat the bushes on the inside?"

"Not for the world. The poor fellows have already been employed all day in a fruitless search, and I will not have them again disturbed. You yourself must be fatigued, nor am I in cue for a night-chase after a fellow who

runs like an antelope, and whom I am less anxious to catch, now that I am satisfied he is not the poisoner of whom we are in quest."

"But he may be his colleague, or some second assassin, nevertheless; nor am I so weary but that I can hunt for him a little longer. Come, let us try this dark walk to the left, for he will not take cover in the moonlight."

Without separating from each other, the friends renewed their search, but as it offered no prospect of success, and Middleton was apprehensive of exhausting his companion, who had been afoot for many hours, they shortly returned to their respective homes and retired to bed, both parties mortified at their failure, but neither of them sorry to forget in sleep the occurrences of an anxious and harassing day.

Early on the following morning, Middleton, having seen Robin, and ascertained that he was proceeding satisfactorily, retired to his parlour with a bible and the little treatise given to him by Chritty, in order that he might study and reflect upon it more deliberately than he had hitherto been enabled to do. So far as he

had advanced in its perusal, its effects upon his mind had been of a gratifying nature, exalting his opinion of the writer's talents, and awakening a deep sense of gratitude for the kindness of her intention, although her arguments and references had not yet converted him from his preconceived notions. After having finished the lecture of the paper, and certified the correctness of the several passages quoted from the Scriptures, he sate for nearly two hours in deep meditation, and found, for the first time, that the perilous doctrine which had so often agitated and distressed his mind, filling him occasionally with despairing terrors of final and inevitable reprobation, did not by any means appear so clear and irrefragable as he had been accustomed to deem it. Profoundly interested in following up the reflections thus suggested to his mind, he was hardly satisfied to have his meditations interrupted by visitants, even when he found that one of them was the fair writer of the essay, and the other his neighbour Hargrave. "We intrude upon you at an early hour," said the latter, "but you must blame

our friend Chritty if we disturb you unseasonably."

"Miss Norberry's visits cannot, I should think, be unseasonable to any one, and least of all to me," replied Middleton, looking at her with an affectionate smile.

"The fact is," said Chritty, "that I came over from Maple Hatch before breakfast, because I had tidings to communicate which would not brook delay. Soon after daylight this morning, for I was up unusually early, I saw at our garden-gate the poor woman whose nephew you saved from drowning in the mill-dam."

"Whom *you* saved, when you saved me," cried Middleton. "And now, before you proceed with your statement, you must allow me to declare that you have a second time preserved my life; for had I not been too much absorbed by your admirable essay to attend to anything else, I should doubtless have swallowed the poisoned tea. Oh, Miss Norberry—twice my preserver! I would fain express my gratitude, but—"

"Tush! you owe me none. If I have done

you service in either case it has been from momentary impulse or from mere accident, for neither of which can I claim the smallest merit, though I will not deny the profound gratification I feel at having been the means of preserving so valuable a life. Pry'thee let me continue my deposition, for you are closely concerned in it. The poor woman to whom I referred, was the first to apprise me of the Jew's infamous attempt, of which she furnished such particulars as she had gleaned, adding, that she had wandered all night in the hopes of gathering some tidings of the miscreant, and having at length strolled into the copse that terminates the Hatch-lane, had discovered a bundle lying in a lonely ditch, and covered with rushes. On opening it, she found an old drab great-coat, and a long black beard, exactly answering Robin's description of those worn by the Jew; when, in the belief that she had at length obtained a clue to the malefactor, she brought her prize to Maple Hatch, in order to show it to me, and to ask my advice as to how she should act."

"This is singular indeed!" exclaimed Middleton; "after all, then, it is fair to surmise that the miscreant only assumed the semblance of a Jew. May I inquire, my fair preserver, what counsel you gave?"

"In the supposition that the felon might return for the trappings thus concealed, I advised her to replace the bundle where she had found it. My father and some of his neighbours, who have eagerly volunteered their services for this purpose, are now lying hidden in the copse, and if they are fortunate enough to seize the real or supposed offender, I have recommended that they should secure and bring him over here, together with the bundle, in order that the man or the clothes might be identified by Robin. If he can speak confidently to that point, we shall be provided with sufficient evidence, I suppose, to convict the criminal, and probably to discover the monster who so diabolically instigated him to seek your destruction."

"Oh, Christiana! allow me the privilege of using that beautiful and appropriate name—

you lay me under so many obligations at once, that I am utterly unable to express their amount, still less to repay it, even in thanks. Were it otherwise, I might attempt some sort of acknowledgment for that admirable paper, which has already shaken——"

"Hush!" interposed Chritty, "never let authors hear their own praises from your mouth. If my poor composition have wrought profitably upon your spirit, let its eulogy be seen in your amended and more healthy cheer of mind, which to me will be ten times more precious than all acknowledgments or rewards."

"What are these clandestine proceedings to which you are alluding?" asked Hargrave with a smile—"Chritty Norberry! Chritty Norberry! if I find you tampering with one of my parishioners in spiritual matters!"—He held up his finger menacingly, as he added—"I have a great mind to punish you by not telling you how nearly we had arrested the poisoner, or at least some lurking criminal in the plantations behind the house; but as I know the intenseness of female curiosity, I will

not be so hard-hearted as to disappoint you." He then narrated the overnight's occurrence, taking credit to himself and his friend for the singular dexterity with which they had missed the object of their joint pursuit, and succeeded in catching each other.

"It is a melancholy reflection," said Middleton to Chritty, "that, as often as I endeavour to adopt the more gladsome and inspiriting views of human nature which you are for ever urging, some untoward or sinister event is sure to blight the fair prospect opening upon me, involving it in gloom, and restoring my previous despondency."

"You are alluding to this fresh attempt upon your life," said Chritty, "which, considered by itself, is doubtless a revolting circumstance, and one that does little credit to our nature. But it is you who are now arguing from the exception instead of the rule, in taking a single misguided wretch as a fair sample of that noble creature, whom God has formed in his own image, and endowed with virtuous propensities and an immortal soul

Your life has been basely attempted; this is a great crime, but it is a solitary one, and look how many virtues it has called forth! see how it causes the fairer parts of our nature to shine out with all the brightness of contrast! Is not the whole country up in arms to secure the assassin? Contemplate the disinterested affection shown by the entire population of Brookshaw, many of whom, in spite of your prohibition, I met at an early hour, this morning, again wandering forth to renew their search. Consider the grateful, indefatigable perseverance of the poor woman who discovered the bundle, and who would willingly lay down her life for you. Forget not, though I only mention it in the way of further illustration, that my father and his neighbours are at this moment lying concealed among hedges and ditches, in the hope of detecting and securing your enemy; and bear also in mind——"

"No more, no more!" passionately exclaimed Middleton; "oh Christiana, I cannot bear these reproaches. I own it all—I see—I feel, I acknowledge the holiness and beauty

of human nature in its comprehensive view—I am an ungrateful creature, unworthy of the kindness and the blessings lavished upon me. Selfish and dissatisfied, I have sometimes exclaimed, what have I done to be pursued with the hatred of this unknown enemy? Alas! might I not much more reasonably ejaculate—what have I done to merit the regard and attachment, the generous, disinterested, the zealous, the devoted fidelity and friendship of this whole neighbourhood? Requital for so much sympathy and love, I can never, never, make; but my heart must perish ere it can forget to feel, and my lips must be cold ere they can cease to acknowledge, the kindness I have experienced. Dearest Christiana!—pardon me for calling you so—how have I deserved that you should twice have saved my life? that you should evince such an active interest in my welfare? that you should condescend to honour a moody hypochondriac like myself with your favourable notice? Hargrave, my pure-hearted, and noble-minded friend, how have I deserved of you, that you should so long have borne with

my gloom and my infirmities. Blessings have been showered upon me by God and man, and most ungrateful have I been to both. May Heaven have mercy on my errors! Christiana! Hargrave! will you be sponsors on behalf of your fellow-creatures, and forgive me for them and for yourselves? I throw myself on your mercy—oh, do not, do not reject a penitent brother!"

In the agitation of his feelings he seized a hand of each of his companions, and shook them with a tremulous nervousness, while the tears trickled down his cheeks. Chritty deeply affected, and animated with the pure delight of seeing a fellow-creature, whom she sincerely respected, awakening from the delusion that had so long preyed upon him, unconsciously returned the pressure of his hand, exclaiming—

"Most sincerely do I congratulate you on this incipient emancipation from the gloom that has so long oppressed and enthralled your noble mind, trusting that all its delusions will now be rapidly shaken off, never, never to resume their ascendancy. Think honourably of

your fellow-creatures, confide in the dignity of their nature and of your own, yield yourself to the holy and exalting belief, that man is destined to happiness and constant improvement in this world, and you will not be haunted with any of those horrific phantasms as to the next, which, even when entertained by the pious and the good, are but profane libels upon the justice and mercy of the Creator.

Christiana has spoken in a manner worthy of herself and of her name," said Hargrave; "most cordially do I add my congratulations to her's, in the hope, as well as firm trust, that the light which has now begun to break in upon you is but the dawning of a spiritual and intellectual day, whose cheerful sun shall shine upon you without a cloud, so long as you remain among us. God bless you, my dear friend, and make you henceforward as happy as you deserve to be!"

"Thanks! thanks!" ejaculated Middleton, pressing the imprisoned hand to his lips and to his heart—"this is indeed a happy moment. I feel as if my mental regeneration had com-

menced: Heaven grant that it may continue and extend, and that I may never experience the horrors of a relapse!"

Some time was spent in mutual felicitations of the most cordial and endearing nature, when Chritty, who wished that the seeds of change which had been sown in the mind of Middleton, might ripen into mature conviction, under the influence of solitary meditation, made a signal to Hargrave, and drew him away. Enraptured with the soul-cheering prospects opened to him by her little essay, Middleton again betook himself to its perusal, studying and reflecting upon its contents, until, the film of error and delusion eventually falling from his eyes, he became a convinced and enthusiastic convert to her consolatory doctrine. So delicious were the sensations which penetrated his bosom, in the firm belief that the divine justice would be attempered by love and mercy, while the destiny of his fellow-creatures, hitherto so withering to his heart, now revealed itself to his mental vision in a glorious apocalypse of almost illimitable improvement, that for several days

he yielded himself up to an ecstatic reverie. If he wandered forth, the fields with which he had so long been conversant, seemed to have been suddenly sublimized into a paradisaical beauty, and the mortals that traversed them to be endued with an angelic purity.

> "Clothing the palpable and the familiar,
> With golden exhalations from the dawn,"

he invested every object with a celestial loveliness, and imagined himself to be wandering among Elysian bowers, enjoying a seraphic beatitude, and listening to the choral symphonies of saints and cherubim. We have elsewhere recorded that his naturally sanguine and happy temperament, blighted by the superstitious terrors instilled into him in early life, was apt to fluctuate from one extreme to another, though it was more frequently under the influence of despondency. It is needless to state that his present overwrought excitement was of too exalted a character to be enduring; but, instead of swinging back, as had formerly been the case, into a proportionate dejection,

he subsided gradually into a cheerful and complacent mood, the best sign of returning moral health, because it promised to be equable and permanent.

During this period, Hargrave and Lucy, convinced from his looks and manner of the beneficial regeneration he was undergoing, intruded upon him as little as possible, nor did Chritty, for the same reason, make her appearance at the Lodge. His friends, however, had not omitted to take all proper measures for discovering the pretended Jew, though hitherto their exertions had been unattended with success. By day and night had vigilant scouts been stationed in the copse, where the bundle was concealed, in the hope that its owner would come to reclaim it. Disappointed in this expectation, they at length took it up and conveyed it to Robin, now perfectly recovered from the effects of the poison, who immediately recognised the great-coat as that worn by the sham Israelite, a fact to which he could depose with perfect certainty, as he had noticed it to be patched in the arm with a different colour. Nor

did he entertain a doubt, that the long black beard was the identical appendage he had seen wagging over the broken milk-jug, though he would not undertake to swear to it.—"Never stir!" cried the honest gardener, "but I do fancy I see the succulent multifarious fellow right afore me, as he was when he turned round the jug, and looked so uncommon emblematical afore ever he began to mend it. Well, well, all his evil doings will perspire one of these days, and he will be brought to everlasting shame in this world and superficial punishment in the next. Heart alive! I certainly did think that all my entrails was turned into pepper and mustard, and that I was agoing to ride to the other world upon a horse-radish, like; but I forgive the vagabond for his deciduous attempt, so far as I be concarned, though I never will pardon him for seeking to pison such a good, kind-hearted, adequate, and identical gentleman as master."

As the spiritual calenture that had accompanied the regenerating change in the mind of Middleton began to subside into a soberer de-

light, his first anxiety was to pour fourth his fervent gratitude to Chritty for a conversion which her essay, her conversations, and her example, had been the chief instruments in effecting. Reproaching himself for not having sooner discharged this duty, he mounted his horse, and hastened over to Maple Hatch, where, on entering the garden, he saw Mr. Norberry and his daughter seated in an alcove on the summit of the slope, shaded by the two noble maple-trees, whence the cottage took its name. The taste of its present fair occupant was visible in the flowering plants that clustered over the roof, and the roses that enwreathed the wooden columns of this picturesque retreat, which she had set up and decorated for her father; though truth compels us to add, that she had done so for the very unromantic purpose of providing a fragrant and shady summer-house, in which he might enjoy the luxury of his evening pipe. The old gentleman, who really felt as much regard for Middleton as was consistent with his churlish nature, had willingly turned out to watch the

concealed bundle in the copse, in the hope of apprehending its felonious owner, but having caught nothing but a cold, and being one of those habitual grumblers, who delight to make the most of every little ailment, he had ever since enacted the invalid, reproaching himself with his folly, and testifying an additional moroseness towards his daughter, although she tended him with her usual affectionate sedulity. —"Eugh!" he grunted, in answer to Middleton's inquiries—"how am I? very bad, as such an old fool deserves to be; arn't a slug, nor a frog, nor a tadpole, to go groping into damp ditches, and squat upon muddy banks, without catching the rheumatism. Sneezing too, like a cat in a gutter. Serves me right—little matter, I suppose, if I catch my death of cold—nobody cares for *me*."

"Nay, my dear Sir," said his daughter,—"I entreated you not to go out, and when you insisted upon accompanying your neighbours, I not only cautioned you about your health, but requested them to prevent your remaining abroad after sunset."

"Requested *them!* what do they care for me; what does anybody care for me?—hoarse as a raven; scarcely see out of my eyes; rheumatic all over—Eugh!"

Expressing the deepest regret that he should have been the unintentional cause of his indisposition, Middleton tendered the warmest thanks for his good offices, although they had not been attended with success.

"Ay, much good your thanks will do me," was the reply—"won't take away my pains, nor take my medicine, will they? Time to take my draught now—nasty stuff! suppose I must go—eugh!"

"Allow me to accompany you," said his daughter rising.

"Shan't do any such thing—stay where you are—hate to have you always running after me like a dog." So saying, he buttoned up his coat, held a pocket-handkerchief to his mouth, and left the alcove, to the great delight of Middleton, who seized the first moment of his departure to announce to his companion the full conversion effected by the perusal of

her essay, and to pour forth the most impassioned thanks for the ineffable delight he had experienced since he had shaken off the nightmare by which his mind had been so long oppressed. With an angelic smile, Chritty declared her heart-felt joy at his deliverance from the thraldom of a soul-withering superstition, which was but an impious attempt to enshrine the capricious and revengeful passions of man in the person of a just, consistent, and benevolent Deity.—"But, beware," she added, with a look of friendly admonition, "lest the cold fit should succeed to the hot one. Of such sudden conversions I am prone to doubt the permanency, especially where they act upon a susceptible mind, and agitate it with vehement oscillations, instead of fixing it in a stedfast, self-poised equilibrium. It would grieve me more than I can express, were I to see the progress of my pilgrim arrested, and to behold you sliding back into the slough of despond."

"Of that I have no fear. My present convictions seem to be based upon an adamantine

rock, and I have enjoyed too exquisite a happiness in the last few days willingly to surrender it. When I recollect how often I have heard you urge the most exalted and inspiriting sentiments as to the destiny of man in this world, it seems strange to me, my fair instructress, that I should ever have yielded myself to the appalling doctrine as to his future doom, which you have so recently and so happily eradicated from my mind. But in my youth I was sickly and timid, and my tutor, a stern, iron-hearted man, whom I should now pronounce to be a bigot, after instilling into me his own terrible doctrine, forbade me by the fiercest denunciations, ever to presume to question or examine it."

"Ay, that is the way with all fanatics. To proscribe the use of reason, in the most important and most exalted of all purposes to which it can be applied, is high-treason against the majesty of God and man: it is to offer up to the Creator the ignoble worship of a brute instinct or blind obedience to prescription, instead of the convictions of an inquiring and

enlightened intellect. The realm of thought, that boundless and blessed region where the prisoner may expatiate without restraint, and the pauper revel in a golden Eldorado; where the sick may find health, and the slave liberty; is the entailed indefeasible patrimony of the whole human race. Freedom of thought, speech, and writing, within the limits of a proper decorum, is the birthright of all, without distinction; and the Cain who first put a muzzle upon our mouths, and a padlock upon the press, should be held up to perpetual detestation, as the first murderer of the intellect, the first enslaver of the soul."

"And yet there are points upon which we submit very quietly to this mental vassalage."

"Yes—because we are apt to treat our opinions as mothers do their children—the weakest and the worst we love best. Attached as they are to political liberty, and personally the bravest people in the world, the English are such moral cowards, that, upon several subjects of inquiry, they will patiently suffer the weak intellects to intimidate and silence the strong

ones. One of our English divines has said, that in following and investigating truth, we should imitate a man hawking, who goes straightforward, looking only upwards towards heaven, and regardless of what difficulties he may encounter upon earth. Away with this virtual inquisition, which throws a dishonouring doubt and distrust upon that which it professes to defend and establish. I would have an unlimited freedom of inquiry, from a firm and solemn conviction, that the deeper we penetrate, the more fully shall we develop and acknowledge the greatness, goodness, and glory of our heavenly Father."

Oh! that I had possessed a tutor like you!" exclaimed Middleton, "who, instead of enslaving my young mind to his own dark superstition, had emancipated and exalted it by such lofty doctrines as these!"

"Nay, no more of this, or you will deprive me of the christian's best attribute—humility. See! my father beckons me, I must join him instantly."

"I will accompany you, but I cannot say

with pleasure; for, had an angel been discoursing to me in this flowery arbour, I could scarcely have quitted it with more regret." So saying, he gave his arm to Christiana, and returned with her towards the house.

CHAPTER VII.

What lets, but one may enter at her window.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders generally discover every body's face but their own, which is the chief reason for that reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended with it.

SWIFT.

IT became Middleton's first care to extend to others, as far as possible, the enjoyment of existence that now pervaded his own bosom.

"Happiness," he exclaimed, "is like riches: we are but the stewards of what is entrusted to us, and in both cases we are amply repaid for that which we distribute. Most true is the Latin adage, which tells us that the wealth we give away is the only property we are

always sure of possessing;* and not less unquestionable is it that we double our own felicity by sharing it with others. Benevolence towards our fellow-creatures is the most acceptable gratitude we can evince towards God; and the prayer most sure of finding its way to heaven is, perhaps, that which is offered up for us by the lips of others."

In accordance with this feeling, he enlarged the sphere and increased the activity of his charities. On his first arrival at Brookshaw, he had founded a school, which, it is hardly necessary to add, was open to all without distinction of creed; for he held it not less unchristian to exclude a child from the benefits of education because its parents were Dissenters, than it would be to shut the doors of a public hospital against every patient who did not profess a particular doctrine. Considering it of more importance to cure ignorance, the disease of the mind, than any bodily ailment, and deeming the claim for education on the part of the poor the most

* "Solas, quas dederis, semper habebis opes."

sacred that they could urge, he was at a loss to reconcile uncharitable distinctions and exclusions either with the parable of the good Samaritan, the special injunction to do good to all men, or the all-embracing love that constitutes the very spirit and essence of Christianity. In connection with the school, he had established a village library, not stocked with books only calculated to foster illiberal prejudices or instil some peculiar tenet, but with such works as combine rational entertainment with sound morality and enlarged religious views.

"This is not enough," he observed to his friend and active coadjutor, Hargrave: "we have taught every one of our parishioners to read, and we have provided them with books and newspapers, so far as our narrow means and the impolitic taxes upon knowledge allow us, in order that we may counteract the mischievous publications of the day; but the good folks of Brookshaw, like others, are fond of society; they like to discuss what they have read, and to talk over the contents

of the newspaper, for which purpose they have no place of rendezvous but the tap-room, where example, sympathy, and the necessity of moistening their arguments, should they happen to be dry, sometimes lead to excesses which they themselves are the first to deplore when they discover the shrunk state of their finances on the following morning. To prevent this evil, I would have a reading or club-room appended to our little library, where the subscribers might meet two or three nights in the week, and settle the affairs of the village, or of the nation, if they think proper, over such moderate and inflexibly restricted potations as might be agreed upon among themselves. By these means, in conjunction with the Temperance Society, to which many have already subscribed their names, we might wean them from the use of ardent spirits and the habitual haunting of the alehouse, without infringing upon that sociable conviviality and relaxation which they have quite as much right to enjoy as ourselves, and of which I should be the

very last man to deprive them. Our humbler fellow-countrymen will now be generally educated; many of them, under the Reform Bill, will be entitled to the elective franchise; all will take a deeper interest in the institutions of their country; and, while we are thus politically elevating a whole class, we should endeavour to raise them also in the moral scale, by alluring them as much as possible from coarse and degrading propensities, and giving them a taste for more refined and intellectual recreations than they have hitherto been accustomed to seek."

Both friends being fully agreed upon these points, they set to work with a zeal and judgment that soon produced effects apparently incommensurate with the limited means employed; so true is it that good-will and good discretion will often create funds for themselves, and ensure success where much ampler finances, without such auxiliaries, would be almost sure to fail. Deeply, however, as Middleton's heart was engaged in these philanthropic operations, its scene of

paramount attraction was Maple Hatch, whither he now betook himself almost daily, seizing every opportunity to draw Chritty into conversations similar to that which we detailed in our last chapter, and never leaving her without a more exalted impression of her talents as well as of her virtues. On his return he rarely failed to pay a visit to the parsonage-house, where the manifest felicity which his friend enjoyed in the society of the sprightly Lucy strengthened his own unsuccessful but ineradicable love for Chritty, and made him sigh with a daily increasing ardour for the conjugal delights so congenial to his affectionate temperament and domestic habits.

Upon this subject a new and sweet hope, welcomed with an avidity proportioned to the transport it excited, began to steal into his heart. By that occult free-masonry which enables lovers to discover their mutual attachment, either through the silent eloquence of the eyes, or by some other equally inscrutable medium, he flattered himself that he was by

no means indifferent to her who had continued to possess his whole affections. These nascent hopes rapidly expanded as he referred to the letter in which she had rejected his suit, for he could not but feel that circumstances were now materially altered, and that some of the impediments to their union, which were then deemed insuperable, had been removed altogether, while others were considerably modified. Lucy was married, and her residence at Brookshaw now pleaded in his favour; the difficulties that bore reference to the father and aunt Patty were certainly not invincible, since he was most ready to receive them as inmates at the Lodge; and as to his gloomy superstitious views on the subject of man's destiny, both here and hereafter, they were happily eradicated from his mind, which was henceforward open to a participation in her own enviable cheerfulness. Urged by these considerations, and by a daily and hourly increasing love, which told him that Chritty Norberry had now become absolutely indispensable to the permanent establishment of his happiness, he resolved upon again

making her a tender of his hand, grounding his importunity on the changes to which we have referred. Natural diffidence, the awkwardness of presenting himself a second time as a suitor, and the fear of disturbing an intercourse in which he found so keen a delight, and which he might be assured of retaining if he would consent to sink the lover in the friend, withheld him from again formally declaring himself, until an occurrence took place which completely satisfied him as to the state of Chritty's affections, and brought affairs to an issue much more rapidly than he had anticipated.

As he was about to leave the house one morning he received the following letter by the post :—

" Infatuated man, once more beware ! Though you know it not, I have been watching your footsteps with the friendly intention of saving you from ruin. I find you have renewed your attentions to Miss Norberry, notwithstanding my former caution. Again do

I warn you against her delusions. She is deceiving you, even as you were deceived at Cambridge; she is attached to another, with whom she has lately had several clandestine interviews. If you will not trust my assertions, believe at least the evidence of your own senses. Station yourself this night at the back of Maple Hatch, towards ten o'clock, and you will see her lover escape from the window of the little china-closet, which is their place of assignation. Seek not to discover the writer of this letter; he is your friend, but he is, and ever will be,

"AN UNKNOWN."

On the perusal of the former calumnious attack upon Christiana, Middleton had burst into an indignant and ungovernable rage; but this second scrawl, though it advanced still graver and more circumstantial criminations against her, was read over with such a thorough conviction of its atrocious falsehood, that it only inspired him with a contemptuous loathing for the wretch who had penned it.

His faith in Chritty's truth and purity was too deeply rooted in his soul to be shaken even for an instant, and, however he might regret the confirmation that some secret villain was still conspiring both against her happiness and his own, he was not sorry that his charges had at length assumed a tangible shape, and that he had named the hour and the spot where, if he attempted to substantiate them, either by himself or his confederates, he might be detected, seized, and forced to confess the motives of his malignity. For this crisis and consummation Middleton had been longing with an intense curiosity, sharpened by a feeling of self-preservation; for, as he knew that some deadly enemy was plotting against his life, he was naturally anxious to free himself from a predicament which oppressed though it could not intimidate his heart. Hargrave had recommended him to go always armed, but this counsel he had rejected, observing that he had rather meet death at once, than die every day by living in the constant dread of it.

On comparing this letter with the previous

one, it was found to be in a different hand-writing, though he had no doubt it had been dictated by the same party, as was indeed sufficiently intimated by its contents, and the reference to the love-affair at Cambridge. From the writer's confession that he had been watching his footsteps, he concluded him to be the person whom Hargrave and himself had chased in the plantations, circumstances which only whetted his anxiety to dispel the mystery that surrounded him, and terminate a state of suspense so painful to himself and his friends. Should he, or should he not, communicate to Hargrave the letter he had received? This was a question which kept him for some time irresolute, though he finally decided in the negative, from a lurking suspicion that the whole story might possibly have been trumped up for no other purpose than to decoy him into some ambush, to which he was too generous to expose a friend whose life was so precious, and whose profession exonerated him from sharing a night enterprise of this questionable character. With the jealousy of a

lover he was, moreover, determined to have the sole merit of unmasking the villain who had dared to asperse his mistress, and of compelling him to retract his foul scandals, and confess the motives that had instigated him to their invention. He even rejoiced to think that the moment was at hand which, bringing his long concealed enemy to light, could scarcely pass over without leading to an *eclaircissement* equally necessary to the security and happiness of himself and Chritty.

With an impatience that only retarded the hours he wished to expedite, he awaited the arrival of night, when he set off for Maple Hatch. At the back of the cottage there was a small kitchen-garden, divided by a thick hedge from the Hatch-lane copse, in which had been discovered the bundle containing the disguise of the pretended Jew. Stealing as covertly as possible to the back of this hedge, he made his way through it, and stationed himself on the garden side, in such a way that, while he was effectually concealed, he could keep his eye upon the china-closet window, now faintly

gleaming in the starlight, and reach it in a minute, should any one attempt to escape from it. Of his feelings while thus ensconced, and eagerly expecting the moment in which his fate seemed to be involved, we will not attempt a description. A light, glancing for an instant from one of the windows, made his heart throb so vehemently that he was on the point of bursting from his place of concealment; but he restrained his impetuosity, determined not to defeat his purpose by any premature disclosure. Quickened to an incredible activity of mind, and recalling all the cruel machinations of which he had been the object, he became impressed with the sudden conviction, that the wretch for whose appearance he was then lying in wait had been the sole author of all his wrongs and sufferings; the same who had contrived the attack upon him in London; who had sought to poison him at Brookshaw; who had subsequently been seen lurking by night about the premises, meditating, doubtless, some fresh atrocity, and who had caused to be written the vile slanders upon Chritty Norberry,

which he was now seeking to substantiate, by assuming the character of her lover, and pretending to escape clandestinely from the house. To his own wrongs Middleton could have submitted with comparative patience; but the indignities heaped upon Chritty irritated him into a mood of such ungovernable passion, that, in the impatience of a delay which now became intolerable, he was again about to start from his hiding-place in order to seek his adversary in the house, should he have stolen into it, when the china-closet window was cautiously raised, a man appeared at it, and rapidly, though without noise, let himself down to the ground. Scarcely had he touched it, when, uttering an exclamation of indignant rage, Middleton burst from the hedge to seize him; but before he could effect his purpose, the fellow rushed across the garden, leaped over the hedge into the Hatch-lane, and ran swiftly along it. Maddened at the very thought of being again baffled, his pursuer followed with such energy that, after a race of about fifty yards, he overtook and threw himself upon

him, crying out, as he grappled him with a convulsive grasp, and even struck him in the agitation of the moment—"Ha, villain, have I caught thee? Surrender, confess!"

Without uttering a word, the miscreant disengaged his right arm, raised it in the air, and with a short dagger affixed to the end of a pistol, aimed a deadly blow at the heart of his assailant, whose life was not less singularly than fortunately preserved by the miniature he always carried in his bosom, which occasioned the point of the weapon to slide off, and only to inflict a trifling wound upon his shoulder. "Blood-thirsty ruffian!" cried Middleton, "will nothing but my life satisfy thy malignant hatred? Nay, then I must disarm and secure thee." As he spoke, he suddenly clutched the weapon, endeavouring to wrench it from his opponent's grasp; and a short but desperate struggle ensued, during which Middleton unconsciously pulled the trigger of the pistol while the muzzle was turned away from him. It went off with a sharp report, and his opponent fell instantly and heavily to the ground,

muttering hoarsely, "I am shot through the body—I am a dead man!—I am a dead man!"

The flash of the pistol had revealed to Middleton for a moment the face of his antagonist, whose features he could not recognise. He now glanced at them again; the paleness of death seemed to be upon them, and he started back, shuddering and thrilling through his whole frame at the thought that he was standing over the body of a fellow-creature slain by himself. Of shedding human blood, under whatever pretext, he had always cherished a peculiar horror, and the terrors of the deed he had perpetrated now flashed rapidly across his burning brain, as his eyes fell upon his own blood-stained hands, one of which grasped the fatal pistol, still reeking at the pan and muzzle. All his wrathful feelings had suddenly fled; compunction and remorse succeeded, not unmixed with hideous misgivings and affright, as he reflected (for his thoughts succeeded one another with a lightning velocity) that he might be deemed a murderer, since he himself had been the first aggressor, in pursuing, striking,

and collaring a stranger, whom he had no authority to apprehend, still less to destroy. The evidences of guilt were upon him; his hands were bloody—the murderous weapon was in his grasp—the victim, whom he had pursued under the shades of night into a lonesome copse, was lying dead at his foot! "Dead!" he ejaculated—"he may *not* be dead!—he may recover—perhaps he is only wounded!" As this new hope darted across his burning brain, he rushed back towards the cottage, shouting out, "Help! help!—a surgeon! a surgeon!" phrases which he repeated with an increased vehemence as he knocked loudly and incessantly at the door. Hoarse as it was from speed and agitation, his voice had been recognized by Chritty, who hurried almost unconsciously to open the door, starting back with a cry of terrified surprise as she beheld the spectacle before her. "Help! help!" reiterated Middleton, rushing towards the parlour. "Where is Mr. Norberry?—where shall I find a surgeon? I have shot a man—accidentally shot him; for Heaven's

sake, assist me to convey him to the cottage! He may be dead before we can reach him !"

A neighbour of the name of Talford, who had been spending the evening with Mr. Norberry, was seated beside him at the moment of this alarming irruption. Both started from their chairs, utterly aghast at the looks and language of the figure before them, and so completely bewildered that neither could utter a syllable. Chritty, having hurried back into the parlour, was the first to find a tongue. " Good heavens !" she exclaimed, " what has happened? Who is shot? Ha! there is blood upon your hands! Are you hurt? are you wounded? Speak! speak! tell me, for God's sake, tell me !"

Surmounting, as she uttered these words, the natural repugnance of females to the handling of fire-arms and the touching of a blood-stained hand, she hastily detached the pistol from her lover's grasp, under the notion that it might still be fraught with danger to his safety, and threw it to the end of the room.

" Dearest Christiana !" cried Middleton, " I

am not hurt—not wounded—not in the least; I have shot—it was all an accident—I have shot a stranger: it is his blood that you behold. Oh! let us fly to succour him; there is not a moment to be lost; he is lying in the copse."

"We will bring him instantly to the cottage," said Chritty; "but pray, pray, be composed: you are pale—dreadfully pale. You are ill: are you sure—quite, quite sure, that you are not hurt?" Fixing her eyes, full of affectionate inquiry upon his face, she suddenly uttered a piercing shriek, clasped her hands together in an agony, and cried, in a broken voice:—"O God! you *are* wounded! —the blood is oozing from your shoulder—see!—see!" Pale as ashes, and shuddering all over, she averted her eyes, and, faintly murmuring "Help! help!" tottered towards the door, as if to seek assistance. But before she could reach it, her limbs and her senses failed her: the scene swam before her. Overcome by a faint sickness, she made an unavailing attempt to support herself by the wall, and,

ere Middleton could reach her, sank with a deep sigh to the ground.

"Dearest Christiana!" cried the latter, as he gently raised her up, and, assisted by his companions, placed her upon the sofa; "it is nothing—nothing whatever. I was not even aware that I was wounded; it can only be a scratch!"

While Middleton thus hung over her, uttering the tenderest and most impassioned expressions, and filled with a heart-thrilling solicitude, that, for the moment, drove from his recollection the occurrence in the copse, Mr. Norberry, whose affection for his daughter, in spite of his churlish temper, always broke out upon emergencies like the present, pressed her repeatedly to his heart, alternately ejaculating her name, and assuring her, in hoarse, incoherent phrases, that there was no cause for alarm. Mr. Talford, the only one of the party who preserved his self-possession, threw open the window, held a salt-bottle to the sufferer, and suggested to Middleton, that he should wipe the stains from his hands, and button up

his coat, or the sight of his blood might occasion a relapse, after they had recovered their fair patient from her fainting-fit, which did not promise to be of long endurance. Scarcely had these suggestions been complied with, when the quivering of Chritty's eyelids announced that the faintness was leaving her: she breathed pantingly, and, half unclosing her eyes, said, in a faint, tremulous voice:—"I am better—I am well—I am sorry that—O Mr. Middleton! send, for heaven's sake—a surgeon!—a surgeon!"

"Indeed, indeed, dearest Christiana! I am scarcely touched—a mere nothing. Behold! I have no blood about me now; it was that of the stranger. Ha! I had forgotten him: he may bleed to death. Come, my friends, let us not lose another moment; let us hasten to bear him to the cottage."

He was about to quit the sofa, and make towards the door, when Chritty, raising herself up with a sudden effort, seized his arm, exclaiming, as she grasped it with a nervous agitation:—"Middleton! you *are* hurt; I know

it. I saw the blood; I sicken at the recollection. You shall not quit the house till your wound has been examined:—nay, I will hold you fast till you promise me this."

"Dearest Christiana! I will, I will; but your fears are groundless. My friends! will you be my surgeons? I entreat, I implore you, not to lose a moment, or the wretch whom I left in the copse may expire before we reach him."

"Father! Mr. Talford!" said Chritty, in a solemn voice, "I hold you both responsible for the safety of our friend, and I charge you to tell me the whole truth at your return."

"We shall be back in three minutes," said Middleton, hastening into the adjoining chamber, where his companions, on examining his shoulder, found the wound to be so trifling, that it was easily stanched with the hasty bandage of a handkerchief. His amended looks, for the colour had now returned to his cheeks, gave assurance to Chritty, when he rejoined her, that he had not sustained any serious injury, and she consented to his leaving

the house, exclaiming, as she held forth her hand, "I entreat you to take care of yourself —for my sake." The latter words seemed to have escaped involuntarily from her lips, and a slight blush suffused her still pallid face, as her lover, pressing the extended hand to his heart, passionately ejaculated, "I will;—for your dear sake I swear that I will!" and then hurried from the room, followed by her father and his friend Talford.

The latter had taken the precaution to provide a lantern, which enabled himself and Mr. Norberry, neither of whom were so quick-sighted as their young companion, to keep up with him, though he advanced at a rapid pace. "We must be now approaching the spot," said Middleton, whose sympathies were once more absorbed by his supposed victim; "ay, here is the oak, under the dark boughs of which I lost him for a moment. He must be lying just beyond it." To his utter amazement, however, when he reached the scene of their scuffle, a spot easily identified by the marks still left, where their heels had torn up

the earth, nothing whatever was to be seen. The presumed victim had made his escape; nor, upon holding the lantern close to the ground, could any traces of blood be discovered. A heavy load seemed to be taken from the heart of Middleton, who turned his looks towards the sky, and fervently ejaculated, "Thank Heaven! I am not a murderer! The fellow may have been stunned or frightened, but had he been badly or even slightly wounded, he could not so soon have made his escape, without leaving a spot of blood in any direction. That with which my hands were stained, must have proceeded, then, from my own trifling wound. Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!"

"I can distinguish the fellow's footmark," said Mr. Norberry; "it is shorter than yours; we may perhaps be able to track him; see! he has evidently gone down the lane towards the common; let us dog his heels!" With the assistance of the lantern they pursued the clue thus offered to them. By the distances of the footmarks it was manifest the fellow had

been running, and by their evenness it was equally clear that he had not staggered or faltered in his course, whence was drawn a confirmation that he could not have been wounded, especially as no blood-spots were discernible. In this manner they tracked him as far as the common, where he appeared to have taken to the grass and the furze, among which his foot-prints were no longer to be seen, and it became necessary to abandon the pursuit. Middleton, indeed, would still have prosecuted the search, although the night was now quite dark, and the extensive common was tangled with tall gorse bushes; but Mr. Norberry, objecting with his usual grunting exclamation that the ground was swampy, the air cold and damp, recommended their immediate return to the cottage. This advice being backed by Mr. Talford, who reminded their young companion of his promise to take care of himself, Middleton yielded, though unwillingly, to their solicitations, and they all made their way back to the house, where Chritty, who was anxiously awaiting their arrival, ran to meet them,

renewing her eager and affectionate inquiries as to her lover's wound. He declared that it did not occasion him the smallest inconvenience, and, taking her hand, which he tenderly pressed, while he whispered the most impassioned acknowledgments of the warm and gratifying sympathy she had displayed, accompanied her back to the parlour.

It was well for Chritty, whose blushes and confusion might otherwise have been noticed, that the attention of her friends was entirely directed towards Middleton, whom they beset with inquiries as to the cause and circumstances of his encounter with the stranger, requisitions which he could not well parry, and yet hardly knew how to answer without producing the anonymous letter that made allusion to his attachment, and contained such foul aspersions upon the integrity of his mistress. This he could not well do, either in her presence or in that of Mr. Talford, with whom he had but slight acquaintance. That he might gain time for deliberation, he pleaded, therefore, great exhaustion in consequence of the exertions he

had made, asked permission to sleep at the cottage, and promised to satisfy their curiosity on the following morning. "That 's the least you can do," said Mr. Talford, "and you are bound to furnish us a romantic tale in recompense for the one you have marred and interrupted. Miss Norberry, who had been reading to us the whole evening, had just arrived at the most interesting crisis of a powerfully written novel, when your startling irruption broke the thread of our story, and substituted reality for romance."

With these words the visitant took his departure. Chritty, after having charged her father again to examine their guest's wound, waited to receive his report, which, being quite satisfactory, she at length retired to rest. Mr. Norberry did the same, and a deep silence soon reigned throughout the sequestered cottage of Maple Hatch: but only a portion of its inmates were able, for some hours, to enjoy the tranquil oblivion of which they had need, both Chritty and her lover being kept awake by fears and hopes which may safely be left

to the imagination of such readers as have known the tender anxieties of love, while no description could render them intelligible to those at whom the blind archer has never shot a shaft.

CHAPTER VIII.

At first heard solemn o'er the verge of heaven,
The tempest growls; but, as it nearer comes,
And rolls its awful burden on the wind,
The lightnings flash a larger curve, and more
The noise astounds——
Guilt hears, appall'd with deeply-troubled thought.

THOMSON.

ON the following morning, he had scarcely descended the stairs, when Mr. Norberry and his daughter eagerly called for the redemption of his pledge. "I am prepared to satisfy your curiosity," said Middleton; "but previously to my doing so, allow me, Christiana, to explain a circumstance which, on a former occasion, you would not permit me to elucidate, but to which you will now, perhaps, listen

with more interest, since I am indebted to it for the preservation of my life. A religious feeling induced me, when a student at Cambridge, to purchase a beautiful miniature of our Saviour, after a painting of Carlo Dolci, which I constantly wore in my bosom, imagining, that by having that monitor ever pressing upon my heart, I might be more pointedly and unremittingly urged to the fulfilment of his divine precepts, and thus secure a mediator against the perpetual reprobation to which I have sometimes conceived myself to be doomed. Accident having disclosed this fact to some of my brother collegians, they persecuted me with taunts and ridicule, which, though they could not wean me from my purpose, impelled me, both then and subsequently, to keep it as secret as possible, lest it might be thought that I was affecting a superior degree of sanctity. From hypocritical pretensions of this or any other nature I trust that I am free; and I only mention the affair now, in order that I may clear up a former occurrence, of which you were an unexpected witness, and account for

my preservation from the dagger of the assassin who attacked me last night." With these words, he detached the miniature from his bosom, and put it into the hands of Chritty, by whom its exquisite beauty was much admired, though her father declared, that its greatest merit was the thickness of the ivory, which had enabled it to resist so deadly a thrust from a small, but very formidable, weapon. In illustration of his averment, he drew from the table-drawer the pistol, which was provided with a three-edged spring-bayonet, of the finest steel. Chritty turned pale, and shuddered at the sight, while her lover, resuming the miniature, and showing the deep scratch made upon the painting by the point of the weapon, exclaimed, in a solemn and impressive voice:—"May this most significant and soul-binding mark ever be unto me as a memento, that the life thus saved should be specially dedicated to the service of its heavenly Saviour! May my gratitude be evinced by an increased endeavour to perform his will, and by a more zealous determination to benefit

my fellow-creatures to the utmost extent of my ability!" So saying, he pressed the miniature reverently to his heart, and again secured it by the ribbon from which he had detached it.

After a short delay, occasioned by waiting for the arrival of Mr. Talford, from whom his friends wished nothing to be concealed, Middleton produced the letter, and, stating the grounds of his belief that the villain who had written or dictated it was the same who had more than once practised against his life, explained the motives by which he had been prompted to seize him, if possible, and force him to a confession, adding, as he concluded his narrative, that, so far as the dim light enabled him to see his features, the caitiff seemed to be a perfect stranger. Not less various than vehement were the emotions of his auditors, as they listened to this strange narrative. Chritty, whose conscious innocence made her treat with a proud disdain the scandalous imputations levelled against herself, blushed, nevertheless, at the recollection that she had completely betrayed, by her conduct on the previous night,

the reciprocity of the attachment between herself and Middleton. Her father's indignation seemed to have merged into utter amazement that it was possible for his daughter to have an enemy,—an apparent prodigy, which he declared himself unable to fathom, until Middleton exclaimed:—"Not against her, but against me, was this infamous charge directed. Nothing but the friendship with which she honours me has occasioned her to be implicated in the diabolical machinations so often hatched, though Heaven knows why, against my happiness and my life. To suppose that any one who knew Christiana could be her enemy were to imagine a moral impossibility."

"How, then," asked Chritty, thrilling with secret pleasure at this proof of her lover's unbounded confidence; "how is it, then, that you yourself are pursued with a hatred which never can have been merited?"

"Come, come," cried Talford, a shrewd, blunt man of business, "we don't meet here to bandy compliments, but to investigate facts, and detect villany, if we can. The scoundrel

who disturbed us all last night must have been lying *perdu* in the china-closet while Chritty, little thinking what sort of a visitant we had got, was reading a novel to us. We should examine this closet, not only to ascertain how he stole into it—for the window is some distance from the ground—but to see whether he have left any traces that may lead to his discovery."

On proceeding to execute this purpose, they found that the window had been forced open, and that a short ladder, affixed to the wall, had facilitated the ascent of the intruder: but there were no other indications that might afford a clue to his detection. "We have secured the fellow's pistol at all events," said Talford, "and I should like to inspect it. Many such miscreants have been hung upon circumstantial evidence, and though this weapon, unfortunately, missed its owner in the first instance, it may, possibly, occasion his death after all. It is quite new," he continued, after the pistol had been placed in his hands; "I doubt whether it has been fired off more

than once; and I am quite confident, from its expensive workmanship, that it does not belong to any vulgar malefactor. By the maker's address, engraven under the pan, I find that he resides in London: I am going thither to-morrow, and, if you wish it, will make such inquiries as may not improbably lead to some important result; for if he knows not the name of the party to whom he sold it, we may, perhaps, obtain from him some description of his person."

This offer was gratefully accepted, when Mr. Talford, alleging that he had preparations to make for his journey, took his leave, and the conversation, still restricted to the recent strange occurrence, was carried on by the remainder of the party. "Upon former occasions," said Middleton, addressing himself to Chritty, "you have more than once told me that I acted like a philanthropist and talked like a misanthrope; desiring me to receive your declaration as a compliment, since our actions are of much more importance than our opinions. But, after all, dear Christiana, is it not

frightful to think that our character and our happiness may be destroyed by any individual slanderer who is base enough to assail them? Suppose, for instance, that, from an unfortunate combination of circumstances, the foul calumnies directed against yourself had found credence with the world, what would have been left to you?"

"God and my conscience!" said Chritty, laying her hand upon the table with the proud dignity of virtue. "Being innocent, I should still deem unhappiness an ingratitude to Heaven, and I would appeal from the injustice of man to the loving kindness of nature, and to the religious consolations of which nothing could deprive me, until the light of truth, of whose ultimate prevalence none need despair, should dissipate the clouds that darkened my fair fame."

"O, Christiana! how I envy you that stedfast fortitude of mind, which empowers you, under all trials, to sustain your cheerful confidence in Heaven and in yourself!"

"Why should you not imitate, rather than

envy me? If you doubt the power, let me remind you, in the fine language of Wordsworth, that—

> ' 'Tis Nature's privilege
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy, for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.' "

" This inspiriting and delightful creed I find it not difficult to hold when I am in your presence, dear Christiana; but no sooner do I miss my guardian angel, than I am again liable to be assailed with occasional misgivings."

From the turn of the conversation, and the affectionate cordiality of Chritty's looks and demeanour, it appeared to Middleton that he could not have a more favourable opportunity than the present for soliciting the permanent protection of this guardian angel, by imploring her to become the companion of his life; but the declaration which he had now summoned

courage to make, with every prospect of success, was prevented by the unwelcome presence of Mr. Norberry, who teased him with trifling inquiries about the last night's occurrence. Never had he felt his company so irksome, and never had he given so many and such broad hints that his absence would be acceptable; but the old gentleman, as if on purpose to annoy him, maintained his ground, until Middleton took his leave in despair and returned to the Lodge, resolving to come over again on the following day, in the hope of obtaining a *tête-à-tête* with Chritty and of executing his long-cherished purpose.

So little, however, can we answer for our own resolutions, that a night's reflection determined him to defer this proceeding for an indefinite period. It occurred to him, that, while he remained exposed to the secret machinations of some assassin, or perhaps a band of villains, who were conspiring against his life, and lurking in his immediate neighbourhood, it would be the very height of selfishness to implicate in his fate one whom he loved far better than

himself. From what motive he knew not, but it was evident that his concealed foe wished to prevent his union with Chritty, and might, in the event of their marriage, wreak upon her the vengeance which had hitherto been directed against himself. He would not expose her to become either a victim or a widow, even should she generously consent to share the dangers with which he was menaced. At another time, this train of argument might not perhaps have influenced him to defer his suit, but he now participated in the hopes of Mr. Talford that the pistol might lead to some important discovery, and by unmasking his foe, relieve him from the perils with which he was environed. As a very short time would prove whether these expectations were well or ill founded, he determined, at all events, not to compromise Chritty's safety by prosecuting his suit, until he should have heard from London.

In two or three days, he received tidings from Mr. Talford which gave reason to believe that he might succeed in his object; but, after a correspondence of some weeks, it appeared

that the parties employed, though sanguine in the first instance, had been completely baffled, and at length had abandoned their search. These letters were regularly shown to Chritty, with whom Middleton had almost daily interviews, increasing the intensity of his own passion, and confirming his impression that it was fully reciprocated, although the very depth of his love, and the tender fears that it elicited, made him withhold any fresh and formal declaration of it.

On the day that he received the last letter from London, which happened to be the Sabbath, he was attending afternoon service in the church at Brookshaw, when the heavens were suddenly and deeply overcast, and a furious storm, involving the whole neighbourhood in unusual darkness, burst immediately over the village. For some time it was limited to a heavy rain, broken by violent gusts of wind that howled menacingly around the pile, occasionally plashing sheets of water against the windows, or wrestling with the old trees in the church-yard, which

writhed and groaned as if they were about to be torn up by the roots. Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning irradiated the building — the tattered hatchments rattled in the rushing wind — an apparently deeper gloom succeeded to the momentary blaze, and a deafening peal of thunder shook the whole sacred edifice. Mr. Hargrave, who was preaching at the instant, remained silent until his voice could again become audible, when he made an extemporaneous allusion to the awful terrors of the passing tempest, in order to enforce the necessity of being always prepared for death, exclaiming with a solemn energy of look and tone—

" Oh, my brethren! if there be one among us who still locketh up in his bosom an undivulged crime — one impenitent who hath never implored forgiveness of his sins — one evil doer who hath wronged his fellow-creature, and hath never made atonement or confession—now let him tremble, now let him resolve to flee from the wrath to come!—now, now, ere it be too late, let him reconcile him-

self to God and man. At all times we are surrounded with death; but at a moment like this we stand more especially in the immediate presence of the king of terrors. There is yet time to enter into a solemn covenant with Heaven, to make a soul-binding vow of repentance and expiation, in order that, if we are doomed to instant death, we may at least expire with a prayer upon our lips and a pious resolution in our heart. And what sinner can be assured that his life shall be spared even for another moment? Now, even now, may the right hand of a justly-offended God be stretched forth to smite him!—the dread thunder may be pronouncing his sentence of condemnation, and the lightning, the fire-winged minister of Divine wrath, may at the same instant be commissioned to strike him dead, even in the temple of the Lord!"

As he concluded these words, a blinding flash of lightning smote the great window of the church, which it shivered to atoms; and an almost simultaneous thunder-clap, stun-

ning the ears of the congregation, made the ground tremble beneath their feet, as if it had been shaken by an earthquake. Terror itself being absorbed by a heart-thrilling sentiment of profound awe, the whole flock remained for a few seconds transfixed and aghast, the breathless silence that succeeded to the roar of the thunder being only broken by a single, deep, shuddering groan uttered by a peasant in a dark-coloured smock-frock, who fell heavily upon the pavement immediately under the window that had been shivered by the lightning. Too much appalled to be able to quit their seats, his neighbours offered him no assistance, until Middleton hurried from his pew, raised him from the ground, and, calling upon three or four of the villagers who were nearest to the body, demanded their assistance in bearing it to the Lodge. Encouraged by his example, they now willingly tendered their services; the sufferer was presently conveyed to the contiguous mansion, and placed upon a sofa, when Middleton, who knew the importance of dispatch

in such cases, and who fortunately possessed sufficient surgical skill for the purpose, opened a vein in his arm with a penknife, conjecturing, as there was no mark of external injury from the lightning, that the man had been seized with a fit brought on by terror. The blood flowed freely, and, as Middleton stood over his patient, compassionately watching his countenance to catch the first signs of returning animation, he observed with surprise that he wore a flaxen wig, which having been displaced while they were conveying him to the house, revealed a shock of black hair beneath it. On opening his coarse smock-frock for the purpose of giving him air, his under-garments were found to be of a quality very superior to his apparent condition, and a diamond pin sparkled in the bosom of his shirt. His curiosity being excited by these appearances, he examined the man's features with some attention, and felt confident that he had seen him before, though he could not tell when or where. While he was pursuing this scrutiny, the patient ut-

tered two or three deep-drawn sobs, shuddered convulsively all over, and then murmured in a hoarse whisper—

"The judgment of God! the judgment of God! I am smitten for my sins. Is there no time for repentance? Oh! mercy, mercy!"

The shuddering returned; his head, which had been partially raised, though he had never unclosed his eyes, fell back, and he relapsed into insensibility.

After a brief interval, his lips were again perceived to move, and he ejaculated, in so faint a voice as to be scarcely audible—

"Where is my darling boy — my dear Harry? Let me — let me kiss him before I die!"

Obtaining from these few words the clue that was wanting to his memory, Middleton now recognized in the figure before him the man whom he had last seen in the livery of a coachman, and whose strange agitation, when they had met, coupled with his instant flight from Brookshaw, had given rise to so many vain conjectures. Taking no notice

of this discovery, he immediately sent for the boy and his aunt, thinking their presence might console the patient, who was evidently labouring under great agony of mind. They shortly reached the Lodge; when the child, breaking from his companion, burst into the parlour, exclaiming—

"Father, dear father! what has happened? —what is the matter?"

At the sound of his son's voice, the sick man drew himself suddenly up on the sofa, and, as his quivering eyes peered vacantly around the room, evidently without distinguishing a single object, Middleton now perceived that he had been blinded by the lightning.

"The darkness of death is upon me!" groaned the wretched man, covering his convulsed eyes with his hands. "I hear my boy's voice close to me, but I cannot see him. Speak to me again, Harry."

The child did so, at the same time kissing him, and shaking his hand, when the muscles of the father's face began to work with an

irrepressible emotion: he sobbed gaspingly, clasped his son to his bosom, burst into tears, and fell back with him on the sofa, exclaiming—

"Harry, my darling Harry!—my boy! my boy! my boy!"

As the vehemence of his agitation, which had found vent in this passionate weeping, subsided into a seeming exhaustion, the aunt entered the room, exclaiming, after she had affectionately embraced him—

"Oh, Henry! if you were well enough to go down upon your knees, you should do so this moment to thank the squire for having saved your life, as he did our dear boy's! Surely, it was the mercy of Heaven that he happened to be in the church; for he it was, as they tell me, who picked you up and helped to bring you to his own house, and bled you with his own hand, and so brought you out of the fit which would otherwise have been the death of you."

"O God!" ejaculated the patient with a groan of agony, "this is too much; it is

more than I can bear. Am I in the house of Squire Middleton, and has he done all this for *me?*—for such a miscreant—such a villain — such a reprobate — such an ungrateful, hardened, damnable —— ! Oh! hide me, hide me! Away! away!—let him not see me —bear me away from his house quickly, instantly!—I would rather die anywhere than here."

In concluding these words he made a vain effort to rise from the sofa, when Middlecon said, in a soothing voice—

" My good friend, why should you wish to quit my roof? You are not well enough to be moved. I have already sent for a surgeon; and while you remain in my house, I will attend to you as carefully as if you were my own brother."

" Oh, that voice! that voice! Those words of kindness," groaned the man, as he struck his bosom in an agony of remorse, " they make me shudder with horror — they will kill me outright! The surgeon, did you say? It is all useless—I am a dead man; but I have much

to confess before I die: it is the only atonement I can make—my only chance of escaping eternal torment. Oh! no, no, no, there is not any chance for such a guilty wretch as I am!"

Middleton besought him to compose himself, urging that it was never too late to hope for mercy, and offering, if he desired religious consolation, to send for the minister whom he had just heard preaching. "Not now—not now," was the reply; "to you, and you only do I wish to make my confession. Not for worlds would I let my boy hear me; take him away, and Mary too; let us be quite alone."

As the room was cleared in compliance with his wish, and he heard the door close, he again asked whether they were quite alone, and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, clasped his hands together, held them up imploringly, and with a passionate energy exclaimed, "Mercy! mercy! mercy! will you, can you forgive me?"

"I know not the nature of your offences," replied Middleton; "but whatever they may

be, I forgive them as freely as I myself look for forgiveness from Heaven."

"Bless you! God bless you! I do not deserve such generosity—I cannot believe it possible.—Will you swear not to recall your pardon after you have heard my confession?"

"I swear it;" said Middleton, giving his hand to the blind man as a pledge of his truth; "nay more, I promise to pray with you that you may obtain forgiveness from Heaven, should your sins be of a nature to require it."

"They are—they are! I fear that I have broken every commandment, except committing murder, and even that I have attempted; but if *you* can forgive me; if *you* can pray for me; *you* whom I have so cruelly wronged, I may yet hope for mercy from Heaven."

"Not only do I renew my pledge of pardon, but if your boy should be left fatherless, I promise to be a friend to him."

The blood suddenly rushed to the face of the wretched man, who strove eagerly to express the greatful feelings with which his heart was

overflowing, but the words were choked by his emotion, and it seemed as if he would have been suffocated, had he not again burst into tears, and sobbed for some time like a child. Middleton, after this ebullition had somewhat subsided, desired him to compose himself, and then demanded, "Who are you? and how have you wronged me?"

Another struggle of violent emotion denied utterance to the sick man, but at length he subdued his organs to obedience, and, speaking with rapidity, as if anxious to get rid of the revolting subject as fast as possible, replied, "My name is Henry Clements; I am the villain who was employed to effect your murder in London; it was not my hand that struck you to the earth, but I engaged the ruffians who were to dispatch you; and when we threw you into the grave, none of us doubted that we had succeeded in our object. I am the wretch who wrote you the false and infamous letter criminating Miss Norberry, and you will now understand the cause of my remorseful agitation and sudden flight from Brookshaw, when,

in the person whom I had thus atrociously outraged, I discovered the preserver of my dear boy's life." A deep groan concluded this part of his confession, and his whole frame shuddered, as if his inmost soul were revolted at the statement of his own monstrous villainy.

"A new light flashes upon me," said Middleton, "and in spite of your disguise, methinks I now recognise the man who, when I was assaulted at Widow Allan's house, was addressed by his comrades as Gentleman Joe."

"I am that monster," groaned Clements, striking his forehead with his clenched fist.

"Monster indeed!" cried his interrogator, recoiling with involuntary horror. "What injury had I done you to justify so ruthless and deadly a hatred?"

"None—none—I knew you not—I had never seen you;—but I was in sharp distress—in danger; and a devil—a fiend in the likeness of a man, bribed me with gold to practise against your life."

"Gracious heavens! have I then another

enemy still more cruel than yourself? Keep me not in suspense—his name?—his name!"

"Caleb Ball," said Clements, speaking through his closed teeth, and clutching his hands convulsively, as if the very mention of the words filled him with disgust and detestation.

"Impossible! utterly impossible! nothing shall persuade me to believe so monstrous a fiction. Caleb Ball! He is my cousin—my friend. I never did him an injury in my life. Psha! your brain is bewildered by your illness—you know not what you say."

"There is indeed a fiery anguish in my brain, as if the pangs of death were upon me; but well, too well do I know what I am saying, and I repeat my words, it was your cousin, Caleb Ball, who set me on to murder you, who dictated the letter about Miss Norberry, and who has since attempted to poison you, though I was no party to that atrocious deed. I have more—more—more to tell you, but I am sinking—brandy—let me have brandy that I may—that I may—Oh, mercy—mercy—!" His lips

still slowly moved, but without any articulate sound, and he fell back upon the sofa, utterly overcome by contending emotions, and the efforts he had made to tell his tale, shortly and imperfectly as he had been enabled to narrate it.

CHAPTER IX.

No ; man is dear to man ; the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life,
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings ; have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this simple cause,
That we have all of us one human heart.

WORDSWORTH.

Certain it is, that whenever the future is hopeless, the mind is easily converted from the rugged to the criminal.

E. L. BULWER.

MIDDLETON was still sitting by the sofa, reflecting upon the strange statement he had just heard, which he attributed, so far as it related to Caleb Ball, to mental aberration, when the medical man arrived, and, after feeling the pulse of the patient, recommended that he

should be left perfectly undisturbed, as his present exhaustion would probably induce sleep, from which he would derive more benefit than from all the resources of art. This prediction was verified. He slept for several hours, and though, upon awaking, his ideas remained for some time perturbed and confused, his strength had evidently returned to him, and his bodily faculties had nearly recovered their pristine vigour. As his blindness, however, continued, he could not be persuaded that he was long to remain in a world from which he was thus shut out; the fear of immediate death was still strongly upon him: and, after enquiring with much tenderness for his boy and his sister, he addressed himself to Middleton, expressing an anxious desire to give a short account of his life, in order that he might explain more fully the origin of his connection with Caleb Ball, and the circumstances that had reduced him from a respectable station, to become the associate of thieves and murderers. In his compunctious solicitude to make what atonement was yet possible, he desired that witnesses

might be present to hear his deposition, so that it might be rendered available, should death prevent him from completing his purpose of unmasking Caleb Ball, by personally confronting him, and proving his nefarious misdeeds. Middleton suggested that the clergyman might attend, as he could remain and pray with him, after he had finished his narration; the proposal was thankfully accepted, and Hargrave being presently seated by the bed-side, provided with pen and ink to note down the heads of the confession, Clements, after many remorseful throes and fresh appeals for mercy and forgiveness, thus briefly stated the outlines of his melancholy history.

"Knowing what a vile and guilty wretch I am, and what infamous ruffians I have had for my comrades, you would little imagine, gentlemen, that I have received a good and virtuous education, and once moved in reputable society. My father was a small farmer, and, as I was his only son, he allowed me to indulge in habits of expense which were, perhaps, hardly consistent with my station. I affected fashionable

dress, regularly followed the hunt, and thought more of being in at the death than of attending to the business of the farm. Towards the conclusion of the late war my father died, leaving me nothing but the remainder of his lease: at the end of a twelvemonth I married the handsome, but portionless daughter of a neighbouring farmer; and shortly afterwards my troubles began, although I had now given up the hunt, abandoned my expensive habits, and applied myself to my farming concerns, in which I was assisted by a most industrious wife. My rent had been fixed during the war, when corn was at its highest rate; prices had now fallen very considerably, a young family had increased my expenses, and, in spite of all my exertions, I could not help getting behindhand with my landlord. Unfortunately, he was at this time amusing himself on the Continent, or he might perhaps have granted me some indulgence, for he was a kind-hearted man; but his steward, far from showing me any mercy, turned me out at the expiration of my lease, seized my farming-stock for arrears

of rent, sold it at a period of great depression for half its value, and sent me out upon the wide world little better than a beggar, and scarcely knowing where to find a shelter for my wife and three young children.

" I now took a small cottage situated on the skirts of a common, and by labouring in the garden, contrived for some time to support my family, and even to make small savings, with which I purchased a cow and some other live stock, pasturing them on the common. Thus were we once more in a state of comparative prosperity. We worked hard, it is true, and we had nothing to spare, but we had enough; my wife and I were tenderly attached to each other and to our children; and, for my own part, I was happier in the cottage owing no man a shilling, than I had ever been in the farm, where I could not avoid running into arrears with my landlord. At this time we went regularly to church, ourselves and some of our humbler neighbours occupying a large pew, in what was called the free sittings. But this was soon after taken, by what law I know

not, to be fitted up with curtains and cushions for a rich family that had lately come into the neighbourhood, and we were told we might sit upon benches placed in the great aisle. Perhaps, gentlemen, it was a foolish pride, but I could not forget that I had once occupied a pew of my own, and I could not brook being thus treated. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'are the rich to monopolise the next world as well as this? Will they not even allow a poor man to pray beneath the same roof with them, unless he be thrust into a remote corner, or stand in a public thoroughfare, like an outcast, branded with an ignominious pauperism?' But for the entreaties of my wife I should altogether have discontinued going to church; and in fact I soon did so, owing to an occurrence that at once wounded my pride, which I had not yet learned to subdue; and irritated my temper which had always been passionate, though my disposition was kind and affectionate.

"The foot-path that led from the common to the church crossed the grounds and skirted the preserve of a neighbouring squire, who had

made himself odious to the poor by pounding their cattle, and by the rigorous execution of the game laws. This man, with the assistance of a brother magistrate, passed an order for shutting up the path, under the pretext that the passengers sometimes trespassed, and disturbed his pheasants. To go round his domain to the church, instead of crossing it, added at least two miles to the walk, and the same in returning, which being too much for my wife, who was now falling into bad health, I would not suffer her to attempt it, nor would I quit her for the purpose of doing so myself, pleading that it was high time to stay away from church, when rich folks grudged us a decent sitting, and attached more importance to the sabbath repose and quiet of a pheasant than to the salvation of a fellow Christian. My wife, however, still read prayers of a Sunday, and though my temper had become soured, and I gave way to feelings of angry discontent, I had not yet committed any crime.

"Alas! my days of innocence were soon destined to expire. Some of the surrounding

proprietors procured a law for enclosing the common, which was carried into immediate execution, and I found myself once more a ruined man. Deprived of the free pasturage which had been enjoyed by the neighbouring poor from time immemorial, I was obliged to sell the whole of my live stock for what it would bring, while I could no longer derive emolument from cutting the furze, which had also been an uncontested privilege, perhaps for centuries. Had we been rich, we might have raised a clamour about vested rights, the sacred nature of property and prescription, and our just claims to indemnity: but we were obscure and poverty-stricken, and no one heeded our complaints. Even my garden was no longer remunerative, for the distance to the next town was so much increased by the new inclosures, that my time was wasted on the road till it was scarcely worth while to carry my produce to market. Had the common from which I formerly gained my support been appropriated to the production of food for others, I might have submitted to my privation with a

better grace; but the part that joined my cottage was added to the preserve of the neighbouring squire, and the furze was encouraged in order that it might afford the better cover for hares and foxes. 'Ay, ay,' did I often exclaim in bitter spirit, 'the Squire will do any thing for the comfort of beasts and birds, but he cares not how many of his Christian neighbours are left to starve. One of his gamekeepers shot my dog, the only friend left to me in the whole world, because he found it one day running over the new enclosures, and from that time I began to look upon the squire as my personal enemy.

"My difficulties rapidly increased; however, a feeling of pride, and the remembrance of better days, prevented my applying for parochial assistance, and I struggled with my fate when I should have done better to submit to it. I even became an agricultural day-labourer, than which it is impossible to conceive a more hopeless and wretched destiny. By an improvement in mechanics, or a lucky discovery of some new manufacturing process, the lowest

artisan may achieve fortune and distinction. I have seen enormous capitalists and leading men in the state, whose fathers were common weavers ; but the rural labourer has not even hope to cheer him ; he can never emerge, never break the chain of servitude, whatever may be his industry, his strength, or his talent. He sees nothing before him but incessant drudgery for a pittance that will scarcely keep life and soul together, the dismal prospect being wound up by the hardships of a poor-house, from which he can only be released by death.

" The shooting season had now come round ; the Squire had invited a party of sporting gentlemen, who had been amusing themselves from an early hour until sunset in the preserves, and as I strayed disconsolately homewards in the evening to my necessitous family, I reflected upon the strange laws which appropriated certain wild animals to the amusement of a privileged class, while the poor and the hungry, who had certainly as much natural right to them, and infinitely more need of them, were unrelentingly punished if they pre-

sumed to interfere with the recreations of the rich. These thoughts came into my head at an unlucky moment, for just then a wounded hare crossed my path: it was the dusk of evening; the poor creature was limping away to die in some hedge, where, in all probability, it would never have been found. I put it out of its misery by a blow of my stick, and was carrying it home to my family, when two of the Squire's gamekeepers overtook me, instantly seized me as a poacher, and the result of this unlucky exploit was my committal to the county gaol for three months. Here I associated with hardened and depraved felons, by whom I was so effectually corrupted, that when I left prison, at the expiration of my sentence, I was little better than themselves.

"My wife, who might have redeemed me from the evil courses upon which I was rushing, had expired during my confinement, having caught the fever which had previously carried off our eldest child. I soon followed another to the grave, and there now only remained to me the youngest, my darling Harry,

whose life you were the means of saving. All these losses only hardened my heart, particularly towards the Squire, whom I considered the author of my misfortunes, though I did not limit my feelings of enmity to a single individual. All mankind seemed to have declared war against me; I began to practise hostilities in return against all mankind, and, when by poaching and pilfering I had made the country too hot to hold me, I betook myself to London, where I joined some of my old gaol acquaintance, and soon became a regular and expert thief.

"You may think it strange, gentlemen, but, knowing that I was superior to my comrades by birth and education, I piqued myself upon being more gentlemanly in my appearance and demeanour, studying the fashions in my dress, and even affecting the foppery of rings and jewels; while, in the use of slang language, and in the vulgar profligacy of my life, I was scarcely to be distinguished from the lowest of my associates. A more excusable pride made me conceal my real name, and assume that of

Joseph Hudson, which, in conjunction with my pretensions to gentility, procured for me the nickname of Gentleman Joe, while my ability to sing a merry song, my appearance and address, or perhaps my reckless gaiety, often the result of desperation, obtained me introductions to some of the loose women about town, who wanted a lively companion, capable of acting upon occasion the part of a bully. It was in such society that I first encountered Caleb Ball, who gave up his nights to feasting, riot, and gambling among adventurers and profligates, and lavished his money upon the most licentious women of an abandoned class. Upon these occasions, however, he assumed a different name, and it was not until I had known him some time that I accidentally discovered his real one."

"Nay," interposed Middleton, "now am I quite sure that you are mistaken as to the identity of my cousin, who was always remarkable for his punctual attention to business, and never could have had any such sums to scatter."

"Whence he procured his money I know not, for at the gaming-table he was generally a loser; but for any sensual enjoyment or extravagant night-freak, his cash was ever ready and abundant; and as to his seeming attention to business, I have often assisted him at an early hour of the morning to rig himself out in his demure-looking city dress, and helped him into a hackney-coach, that he might arrive at the counting-house in time to take his station at the desk and gull old Hurlo-thrumbo, which was the appellation he generally bestowed upon his uncle Sir Matthew, when talking of him to his confidential friends."

"All this iniquity appears still incredible to me," said Middleton; "but proceed, proceed—I shall be the better enabled to judge when you have completed your narrative."

"Upon one occasion," resumed Clements, "I was in great distress for fifty guineas. I had been concerned in a capital felony; a knavish constable discovered me as I was retreating from the premises, and threatened to have me immediately apprehended, unless

I gave him the sum I have mentioned for hush-money. Death might have been the consequence—transportation for life was the least I had to fear, if detected. The fellow required instant payment, and I happened at that moment to be almost penniless. Having always seen Caleb Ball so flush of money, I applied to him for assistance, frankly stating, for I knew he was not squeamish, the perilous dilemma in which I was placed. After hearing me out, he tapped his box, took snuff, and said, in his cold, drawling manner, 'Joe, your situation is desperate; the halter is already round your neck, and if you must come to the crap, you may as well swing for a sheep as a lamb. If you will do a little job for me, you shall not only have the fifty guineas down, but twenty-five for each of your comrades, and I will, besides, stand your friend in all future scrapes.' He then stated that he wanted me to dispatch a fellow of the name of Middleton, urging how easily and securely it might be effected in his evening visits to the lonesome hovels of Petty France; and adding

that we might expect a handsome booty besides, as he generally carried his pockets well lined with gold. Amidst all my misdeeds, I had never yet been concerned in bloodshed, and at first I recoiled, not without a shudder, from his horrid proposition; but he reminded me of the perilous predicament in which I was placed—maintained that self-preservation was the first law of nature—told me that it was better to inflict death than suffer it—spread out before me the fifty guineas, and finally conquered all my scruples. Ask me not the particulars of that dreadful transaction; I cannot bear even now to think of it; and do not, oh, do not recall the pardon you have so solemnly pronounced!—promise it to me again." Clements stretched out his hands in an agony of remorse; Middleton complied with his request, and then said—

"Supposing that you are not mistaken in the identity of Caleb Ball, and you admit that your tempter assumed a different name, what reason can you assign for his animosity against me, for his even seeking my life?"

"I never asked, and I never heard him state it; I only know that he was exceedingly wroth when he found we had not accomplished our purpose, and particularly complained that I had quite mistaken his orders, in engaging with the resurrection-men to conceal your body in the grave from which it was intended to remove the corpse of Widow Allen."

"How came that purpose to be frustrated?"

"We were scared away by the police, and never had an opportunity of returning before daylight. Caleb Ball meant us to have left you in the cottage or in the street, after having rifled your pockets, that it might appear you had been robbed and murdered by common thieves, since it was his object, as he said, that your death should be publicly and immediately known."

"Most strange!" exclaimed Middleton. "And how can you explain the remarkable fact, that none of your confederates ever turned king's evidence?"

"Ball told me that he had cunningly de-

terred you from offering a large reward; but to make all sure, we contrived to have my two confederates apprehended for some former misdemeanour, and they were shortly afterwards transported. To secure my secrecy, he gave me small sums of money from time to time, and fed me with promises of more. I was well paid for writing the letter about Miss Norberry: I was offered a round sum for copying out another, and a still larger one if I would attempt to poison you; but this happened after you had saved my dear boy's life, and I not only indignantly rejected his proposition, but threatened to bring him to public shame, if he did not forego his infamous practices against your life. In fact, we have both of us been living in a state of enmity and misery ever since, at least if I may judge by my own feelings; for as often as I had occasion for money I extorted it from him by menaces, and in return, he never failed to threaten that he would rid himself of my importunities by having me hung."

"What is your reason," asked Middleton, "for supposing that it was Caleb Ball who sought to poison me?"

"Because he had previously proposed that I should do it; but more especially because I met him, on the very night of the attempt, lurking about the plantations in the disguise of a Jew. He did not recognise me at first; for when I ran down to Brookshaw to see little Harry, I left off my coachman's livery, lest you should meet and question me, and wore a dark-coloured smock-frock. Guessing that he was about some fresh mischief, I again threatened to expose him; but he told me nobody would believe me, since his character as a respectable citizen was above all suspicion —reminded me that my life was in his hands— desired me to take care of my own neck: we parted with mutual defiance, and I have never seen him since."

"But why did you not inform against him," asked Hargrave, "for you must have heard that he had a second time attempted to destroy your benefactor?"

" Why, sir, I was frightened by his threats, when he told me, that the oath of a notorious thief would weigh nothing against that of a well-known merchant, connected with one of the first houses in the City, and that I should only be putting my own neck into the halter, if I attempted to throw a noose over his. God knows, my life was miserable enough; but I was afraid to die, as well I might be, and so I am still; and then I thought what would become of my poor boy, and my sister, if I were to be taken off or transported. In all my distresses, I never suffered them to want for any thing, though I ought not to boast of it; for the money I sent them was never honestly gained: but 'tis hard, gentlemen, very hard, to see one's own flesh and blood, especially if they have known better days, asking bread of the parish. Oh! my pride, my guilty pride! it has been the ruin of me!"

Overcome by a fresh ebullition of tenderness and remorse, the wretched man clasped his hands together, burst into tears, raved incoherently about his boy, and then implored

Hargrave to pray for him, if he thought that such a vile sinner as himself could ever hope for mercy. Middleton withdrew, and, at the expiration of an hour, was rejoined by Hargrave, who informed him, that he had left Clements in a very penitent and more composed state, and had promised that his boy should pass the following day with him. They now held a consultation as to the proper steps to be adopted, Hargrave suggesting, that the accomplice should be confronted as speedily as possible with Caleb Ball, of whose guilt, from the description he had given of his person, and other corroborating circumstances, it was scarcely possible to entertain a doubt. To this opinion Middleton assented with a groan, adding, that his cousin must unquestionably be mad, since there was no other way of accounting for such mingled folly and atrocity; but agreeing that it would be right to bring him face to face with his accuser, as soon as the latter should be well enough to go up to London.

On the morning of the second day, Clements

found, on awaking, that he had recovered his eye-sight, an occurrence which only filled him with fresh misgivings. During his blindness, he had made up his mind to die; but no sooner was he restored to the visible world, and to the consequent hopes of life, than the terrors of a public execution, and the indelible disgrace that would be entailed upon his boy, haunted his imagination with the most hideous phantasms. Middleton, having renewed his solemn assurance, that he would never proceed criminally against him, and that he would always be a friend to his boy, the wretched man once more recovered his self-possession, and on the following day declared himself well enough to proceed to London, for which place they accordingly took their departure, Hargrave, at the solicitation of his friend, consenting to accompany them.

CHAPTER X.

Por.—Is he not able to discharge the money?
Bass.—Yes, here I tender it for him in the court.
Merchant of Venice.

What is thy enterprise—thy aim—thy object?
Hast honestly confessed it to thyself?
Coleridge's Wallenstein.

It was agreed that their proceedings should be as secret as possible, in order that Sir Matthew and the family in general might be spared the pain and disgrace of an exposure, should Caleb prove to be as deeply implicated as it was feared. The unexpected tidings they received on reaching Ball's residence in the city, were of a nature that almost dissuaded Middleton from executing his purpose; for he found that his cousin had been married two days be-

fore, and had gone to spend a week with his bride at Salt Hill. "This man cannot be guilty," he ejaculated; "impossible! impossible! If he were leading the profligate life we have heard, and engaged in such murderous designs, he could never, never think of marriage."

"In that case," said Hargrave, "it is more than ever necessary for his own exculpation, and for the honour of your family, that the charges against him should be fully and finally disproved. I am for proceeding instantly to Salt Hill."

This consideration, coupled with the recollection that it was indispensably necessary to discover and unmask his secret enemy before he could again offer himself to Chritty Norberry, overcame Middleton's scruples, and, with a heavy heart, he stepped into a post-chaise, which was ordered to drive to Salt Hill. Clements suggested, that they should take officers with them, for the purpose of securing the culprit; but this was overruled by Middleton, who, with a characteristic generosity, had pre-

determined to give him an opportunity of escaping from England, in case he acknowledged his guilt and explained the grounds of his unaccountable enmity. Still, however, he cherished a faint hope that he might prove innocent, though the kind wishes of his gentle heart were little seconded by the convictions of his judgment; for, during their drive, Clements had mentioned several minute particulars that powerfully corroborated the statement he had made.

On their arrival at Salt Hill, they learned that the newly-married couple were in a sitting-room upstairs. Clements, having thrown off his smock-frock, had resumed his ordinary dress, and the three men following close upon one another, suddenly entered the apartment where the bride and bridegroom were seated at table partaking of a morning collation, the former being occupied at the moment in pouring out a glass of champagne. Exclamations of amazement burst from the lips of several of the party, and well they might from those of Middleton and Hargrave, who in the bride

recognised the well-known Clara Manning, alias Clara Horton, to whom each of them had once been passionately attached—to whom they had both been betrothed. The splendour of her dress could not conceal the rapid decay of her beauty — a process which seemed to have been accelerated by sickness and anxiety rather than by the ravages of time. Aghast with astonishment, the whole party preserved, for some seconds after the first burst of wonder, a profound silence; while the eyes of Caleb Ball glanced rapidly from the door to Clements, and thence to his companions, as if anxious to gather the purport of their unwelcome visit. Reddening with mingled scorn and anger, the bride at length found words to demand the meaning of such an unwarrantable intrusion; when Middleton, anxious to spare her feelings, replied that they came upon a most distressing errand, and implored her to withdraw while they interrogated her husband.

"No!" was the indignant reply; "I am his wife, and I insist upon remaining where I am."

As her look and tone bespoke an unflinching purpose, Middleton replied—

"I am truly sorry for it: you leave us no alternative, and we must fulfil without delay the painful mission upon which we come."

Hargrave then stepped forward, and distinctly recapitulated all the charges brought forward by Clements, during which the leaden countenance of the accused underwent no change, though he repeatedly took snuff with a nervous eagerness, while the perspiration that oozed from his forehead betrayed the inward workings of his mind.

"Have you done?" he asked, as Hargrave concluded; "have you done?"—and his restless eye still glanced at the windows and door, as if thoughts of escape were hurrying through his mind. "Then I will prove this Clements to be so base a scoundrel, and so infamous a liar, that my cousin and his friend shall blush to have ever listened to him, and still more, that they should have insulted me by such horrible suspicions. My dear Gale, has this miscreant, whom I pledge

myself to bring to the gallows, adduced a single proof against me beyond his own unsupported assertion, which, even had it been an oath, would not have been worth a rush?"

"None whatever; but he has mentioned circumstances——."

"I can explain them all. Let him be kept in confinement for only two days, which can be no hardship, since he is an avowed and notorious thief, and I undertake to disprove, to your entire satisfaction, every one of his infamous calumnies, which are only advanced for the sake of extorting money."

"Or, in other words," said Clements, "you want two days to effect your escape from the country. I have no objection to be confined myself; but I demand——."

At this moment a noise was heard without, and an attempt was made to open the door, which was prevented by Clements, who suddenly turned the lock, imagining that some of Ball's unprincipled associates might be coming to rescue him.

"Open the door instantly!" was uttered in

a loud and imperative tone of voice, while the lock was violently shaken.

"No one can be admitted at present," said Clements, setting his back to the door.

Hargrave and Middleton looked at one another, wondering what this clamorous and authoritative demand might mean; while the bride, turning pale, clung for protection to her husband, who took hurried pinches of snuff without altering a muscle of his face.

"Nay, then," cried a voice from without, "we act in the king's name, and we must use force;" with which words the door was violently broken open, and two officers of justice, followed by three gentlemen, hastily entered the room.

"Mr. Ball," said one of the former, advancing towards him, "you are our prisoner: we have a warrant for your apprehension; you stand charged with forgery to a large amount."

"Forgery!" exclaimed Ball; and as he cast a hasty glance at one of the gentlemen, and recognised the banker whom he had de-

frauded, he continued, in a voice of calm and sullen desperation, "Ha! the game is all up, I see. Fool that I was to linger here! I thought I had five or six days good. Well, well—this ends the farce!" So saying, he hastily snatched a phial from his waistcoat pocket, plucked out the cork, and was applying it to his lips, when his wife, with a cry of terror, struck it from his hand, and it was dashed to pieces on the floor.

For the first time her husband's countenance underwent a change, and an expression of fell malignity distorted his features as he cried in a wrathful voice—

"Curses upon you, wretched woman!—what have you done? I was about to offer you the only atonement in my power, by making you a widow: I will now punish your officious prevention of my purpose by apprising you that you are the wife of Caleb Ball, who confesses himself guilty of everything with which he is charged, and who must perish ignominiously upon a scaffold, because you would not suffer him to die like a

gentleman!" At these words he threw off from his arm the miserable woman, who fell instantly into violent hysterics, and, being borne out of the room by Middleton and Hargrave, was committed to the care of the landlady and her female servants.

On their return they found Ball sitting in a chair, handcuffed, with an officer on either side of him; while the gentlemen were consulting earnestly together in another part of the room. Every thought of his own wrongs, manifold and grievous as they were, having been driven from the generous mind of Middleton by horror at the new charge brought against his cousin, and the frightful consequences to which it might lead, he implored the strangers to accompany him to an adjoining apartment; which they had no sooner reached than he demanded the particulars of the capital offence with which the prisoner stood charged, and was informed that he had forged acceptances to a large amount, which had been paid by the bankers,

without the smallest hope of recovering the money, since they had ascertained that the whole of it had been lost at the gaming-table.

"Is there no hope of hushing up or compromising this dreadful affair?" demanded Middleton in great perturbation.

"None," replied the banker: "we have fully made up our minds that the law shall take its course, unless, indeed, the whole amount should be refunded to us, of which we have now no expectation whatever."

"Why not? Large as is the amount, and unpardonable as has been the conduct of my unfortunate cousin, I am confident that Sir Matthew would much rather advance the whole sum than suffer his own nephew to be brought to a public and ignominious death."

"Sir Matthew! have you not then heard that his house has this morning stopped payment?"

"Gracious Heaven! what house?"

"That of Middleton, Thwaytes, and Hob-

son, the junior partners of which, taking advantage of Sir Matthew's absence at the seaside, and acting, in conjunction with Mr. Ball, have embarked in such wild speculations, both in stocks and merchandise, all attended with enormous losses, for which the house are accountable, that Sir Matthew was no sooner apprized of this frantic course than he gave immediate orders for stopping payment."

"But surely there will be a considerable surplus; my father was reputed wealthy; his fortune cannot all be gone."

"It grieves me to say that Sir Matthew, for whom I have a sincere respect, is a beggar. So far from any surplus, there will be a considerable deficiency."

Middleton sank into a chair, burying his face in his hands to hide his tears, which, however, trickled through his fingers, and betrayed the gush of filial tenderness and sorrow that he would fain have concealed. In a few minutes he recovered his self-possession, for a sudden thought had darted across his mind, and his look was animated with hope, as he eagerly

demanded of the banker whether he had ever been at Brookshaw. "Yes, in the time of your godfather, old James Gale," was the reply.

"Then you know the extent and value of the property. Would it produce, if sold, enough to cover your demand against Caleb Ball?"

"Certainly, more than enough."

"Then take it; it is yours! I would part with a hundred Brookshaws rather than that my dear father, at such a moment of distress, should suffer one additional pang. I know him well; he is proud of his fair fame; he is fond of Caleb; and though this feeling must now naturally cease, I verily believe that he would never show his face again, that he would die rather than go upon the Royal Exchange, if his nephew's public execution were to entail disgrace upon his whole family."

"Considering your cousin's conduct towards you," said the banker, "your proposal is magnanimous, and I accept it with gratitude; but there is no occasion to sell Brookshaw. Give me a mortgage upon it to the amount of my loss, and I will gladly drop all proceedings."

"Agreed!" said Middleton, stretching out his hand, as if to bind the bargain; but be it understood that I stipulate for a solemn compact of secrecy. Not an inkling of this transaction must escape, especially to my father. Gentlemen, will you all stand bound to this condition, and will you pledge yourselves for the silence of the officers whom you have employed?"

A willing consent being given to this arrangement, one of the party, who was an attorney, drew up a paper, which Middleton signed, and it was agreed that the prisoner should remain in the custody of the officers at a lock-up house, until the proper legal instruments could be prepared and mutually executed. It was further stipulated that Middleton should be allowed to interrogate his cousin, without any witnesses, before he was conveyed to his place of confinement, for which purpose he betook himself to the adjoining apartment, and desiring the officers to wait outside the door, seated himself by the side of Ball, whose hand-

cuffs had not been removed. His countenance had resumed its stolid, imperturbable expression, and his leaden eye remained fixed upon the floor. "Caleb!" said his cousin in a mild tone of voice, "do you really mean to confess yourself guilty of all the heavy charges brought against you by Henry Clements?"

"Yes. If I am to be hanged for forgery what is the use of denying them? Let that answer suffice for all. I will not be pestered with interrogatories. I know my fate, and am prepared to meet it: I should be still more so if I could get at my snuff-box."

Though not a little surprised at such a remark in so trying a crisis, Middleton kindly took out the box and held it to his nose, when he drew a large portion of its contents into his nostrils, and seemed gratified by this little act of attention. "But if you were *not* to be hanged for forgery," resumed Gale,—"if by mortgaging my estate at Brookshaw, and paying the amount of their loss, I prevailed upon the bankers to drop all criminal proceedings,

would you pledge yourself to give me full and complete information upon every point connected with the charges of Henry Clements ?"

" I am not an idiot," was the sullen answer ; " and though I had resolved to die if my forgeries were detected, and I could not escape from England within a week, as I had intended, I had much rather live. I am just married, you know." There was a sneer in his tone, while the slight curl of his lip approximated towards a bitter smile.

" I am happy then to inform you that your life is saved," resumed Middleton, " for I have made this arrangement with the bankers, who have given me a written engagement to stop the prosecution."

" Have they ?—have they ?" cried Ball, and his usually dull and fishy eyes, after moving rapidly from side to side, became again fixed upon the floor, as if he were weighing the consequences of this sudden change in his fate, for which, however, he did not express one word of thanks to his cousin, who added, " Remember, Caleb, that every thing will de-

pend upon your giving me frank and explicit answers to all my questions."

"Will you pledge me your honour that if I do so you will never take advantage of my replies, never institute proceedings against me?"

"I promise this most solemnly."

"Speak, then; you have removed every impediment to my making a full and free confession."

"In the first place, did I ever offend you,—ever do you an injury?"

"Never!"

"Why then did you seek my life with such a remorseless perseverance?"

"Did you ever read old Gale's will? In order to deter you from leading a single life, which he always declared had been a miserable one to himself, he conditioned that, in the event of your dying unmarried, the Brookshaw estate should come to me."

"I had quite forgotten it; but—gracious heavens! is it possible, is it to be believed that for so base and sordid an object you would

have condemned me to a violent and cruel death ?"

" Ay !" said Ball, with a sullen nod.

" And was it to prevent my marriage with Miss Norberry that you procured those infamous letters to be written ?"

The " ay" was repeated, in precisely the same tone and manner.

" And with a similar view you doubtless employed some accomplice to conceal himself in the china closet at Maple Hatch ?"

" It was myself whom you pursued on that occasion."

" You !—you !—impossible ! how comes it that I did not recognise you ?"

" I wore a mask. When you had wrenched the pistol from me, and I found myself in your power, I pretended to be wounded. You ran for succour, and I was thus enabled to make my escape."

" You are the stranger, then, whom we saw more than once lurking about the premises, after you had failed in your attempt to poison me. What was your object ?"

"Cannot you guess it?"

"Caleb Ball! Caleb Ball! I believe in my heart that you are mad, and the amazement, the indignation, the horror that I might otherwise feel, merges into compassion. You were already in comfortable circumstances; you would shortly have been a partner in the house; what necessity then, or rather, what devil can have driven you to the commission of such monstrous atrocities?"

"The gaming-table, which is a whole legion of devils. My nights were devoted to it—I could not exist without it—I should have gone mad had I not possessed the means of high and desperate play. To procure these means I stuck at no enormity. I speculated—I ran in debt, I forged acceptances:—detection, disgrace, a scaffold, were constantly staring me in the face. Your death would have given me Brookshaw, and the sale of the estate would have enabled me to take up the forged acceptances before they became due, and to extricate myself from all my difficulties. Self-preservation, as I told Clements, is the first law of nature. Can you

wonder that I wished to save my own life at the expense of your's ?"

" Henceforth I ought to wonder at nothing, though I am still filled with amazement, that, at such a terrible moment, in the very crisis of your fate, you could have the temerity to think of marriage."

" I did it in self-defence, which justifies everything. My wife has five thousand pounds. From the arrangements I had made, I calculated that my forgeries on the bankers could not be detected for a week to come. To-morrow I should have set off for Portsmouth, and on the following day I should have been sailing for New York, having already engaged my passage on board an American vessel lying in the Downs."

" And does your unfortunate wife know any thing of this purposed flight ?"

" Nothing ; but she seems attached to me, and I doubt not would have willingly accompanied me, when she understood the necessity for my flight. Poor Clara ! I am sorry for her ; I

shall never use her ill; I have no motive for doing so."

"Caleb! I have only one more question to ask, and I have reserved it for the last, because it is infinitely the most important, so far as concerns yourself. You are an accountable being, you possess an immortal soul, you have been educated as a Christian, you must believe in a future state of rewards and punishments—how then can you have so seared your conscience as to perpetrate such wanton and enormous crimes with so much seeming indifference? Above all, steeped as you already are in guilt, how can you have dared to rush into the presence of an offended God by attempting to commit the additional and inexpiable sin of suicide?"

"Have you forgotten that our tutor always assured me I was one of the elect—a vessel predestined from all time to honour and glory? This has been latterly confirmed to me by a divine of the same persuasion, with the addition, that they who have once been chosen can never forfeit their birthright, whatever sins

they may have committed. I am an Antinomian—I have faith—what need have I of good works in this world? I am one of the elect, how then can I forfeit salvation in the next?"

Shuddering as he heard him, Middleton exclaimed, "Now then am I more than ever persuaded that Heaven and the Gospel cannot possibly have sanctioned that doctrine of our tutor, which filled me with despondency and terror, though I was free from offence; while it has seared your heart, and even given you a presumptuous confidence of Divine favour, at the very moment that you have been leading a life of unbridled licentiousness, or meditating schemes of the most remorseless villainy. Caleb Ball, I pity you! Evil instruction hath fallen upon the rank soil of an evil mind, and the growth has been a frightful turpitude, upon which it is appalling to look back, and still more so to anticipate its future consequences. May you awake from the delusions of your superstitious faith, and by a life of future penitence merit and obtain the forgiveness of

Heaven! Your offences against myself I have already pardoned, but I will never see you again. We part for ever. Farewell!"

With these words he quitted the chamber, the two officers who had been stationed at the door, re-entered it, and the prisoner's first and only demand was for snuff, with which his handcuffs prevented him from supplying himself!

Middleton, ever considerate for the feelings of others, even of those who had most deeply injured him, broke to the wretched wife, as tenderly and delicately as he could, the painful predicament in which her husband was placed, suggesting, that as he must necessarily be accompained by the officers of justice, and conveyed to a place of confinement, she would do well to seek some other mode of conveyance, and betake herself to her friends in London. Terrified, humiliated, and almost broken-hearted, the unfortunate woman expressed the deepest gratitude for his kindness, but declined taking his advice, exclaiming in an interval of

her sobs and tears, " No, Caleb is my husband —my lot is cast—I deserve it—I will do my duty !"

A few minutes afterwards, Ball, his wife, and the two officers mounted a coach and set off for London. Middleton, agitated by contending emotions, and absolutely horrified at the confessions of his cousin, waited till he had in some degree recovered himself, when he rejoined Hargrave, and the friends, still accompanied by Clements, returned together to the metropolis.

CHAPTER XI.

Whiles a wedlock hymn we sing,
Feed yourselves with questioning;
That reason, wonder may diminish
How thus we met and these things finish.

As you like it.

He, therefore, who retards the progress of intellect, countenances crime—nay, to a state, is the greatest of criminals; while he, who circulates that mental light, more precious than the visual, is the holiest improver, and the surest benefactor of his race!

The Disowned.

IN a few days, all the legal documents relative to the mortgage having been executed, Caleb Ball was released from his confinement, and, accompanied by his wife, proceeded to the American vessel in the Downs, on board which

he had engaged his passage for New York. An account of their having sailed was shortly afterwards received by Middleton, in a letter of the most fervent and impassioned thanks from Mrs. Ball, who at the same time, wrote the following to Chritty Norberry—

"MADAM,

"Before the pilot-boat leaves us, and I am conveyed away, not unwillingly, from a country where for several years I have known nothing but humiliation and anguish of mind, I feel myself called upon to perform an act of justice, equally due to yourself, and to the generous, the noble-minded man who, at such a sacrifice of fortune, has rescued his direst enemy from an ignominious death. On interrogating my guilty husband, I find, that in the defamatory letters which he procured to be written to his cousin, he made allusion to certain occurrences at Cambridge, wherewith he was but imperfectly acquainted, and of which none can render a true account but myself and Mr. Middleton. That gentleman has made a vow

of secrecy upon the subject, and it is because I know his high and punctilious sense of honour, that I have determined upon the painful, the revolting, disclosures which I am now about to make to you.

"How wickedly I forswore myself towards your brother-in-law, Mr. Hargrave, as well as of the swift and terrible retribution entailed upon my crime, you have doubtless heard, for that affair was too notorious to be concealed. Alas! my punishment did not end with the tragical catastrophe that then blighted my hopes. I had always been wayward, daring, and self-willed. I was an orphan, living with an uncle, my guardian. He condemned my conduct towards Mr. Hargrave so severely, that, in a moment of irritation, I quitted his house, and betook myself to that of a distant relative, a woman of eccentric habits and of doubtful reputation. Here I learned to scorn the opinion of the world; to ridicule all those who had censured me, as prudes and pretenders; to cast off the decorous observances of society, which we branded with the names of

squeamishness and hypocrisy; and here, too, I was introduced to companions, with whom I ought never to have mingled. As I have always found the frailest of my own sex the most censorious and unforgiving, I believe that the purest will generally be the most indulgent towards an erring fellow-creature, or I should have never felt emboldened to make you the depositary of my shame. Oh! pity me, Madam, when I confess that, under the influence of evil example and my own unregulated passions, I fell from the paths of virtue, and eloped from the house of my relative with a married man! Pity me still more when I tell you, that, on awaking from my infatuation, filled with horror, and remorse, and expressing a passionate anxiety to be restored, if possible, to the station I had forfeited, the wretch for whom I had sacrificed every thing confessed that he was already tired of me, observed that it was still possible to conceal my guilt, and offered to become my confederate in deluding the world, and endeavouring to procure me a respectable husband.

"To this suggestion I gave my consent, although with a compunctious loathing that I should in vain endeavour to describe. Assuming the name and character of my guardian uncle, which his age and appearance did not disqualify him from supporting, my accomplice carried me immediately to a house in the vicinity of Cambridge, hoping to entrap some young and unsuspecting student of the University. Fixing for this purpose upon Mr. Middleton, he contrived to make acquaintance with him, and brought him frequently to our home, where my deep melancholy—how could I be otherwise than miserable?—assisted me in winning the affections of one who was tender and compassionate, because he was himself unhappy. Now was my heart exposed to a struggle still more lacerating than any with which it had yet been harrowed. I became deeply attached to my suitor, and the more I loved him, the more bitterly did I reproach myself with the cruel deception I was about to practise. I had, nevertheless agreed to accept him as my husband, and he was on the

point of writing to demand the sanction of his father, when accident disclosed to him the real character of my companion, and the whole truth of my situation. My pretended uncle, enraged at this detection, blustered and talked of compelling him to his engagement by the alternative of a challenge; but Mr. Middleton who was not a man to be bullied, drove him from his presence with upbraidings, and, hastening to take a last farewell of me, solemnly bound himself, at my earnest prayer, never to divulge my humiliating secret.

"With a bleeding, an almost broken heart, I suddenly quitted Cambridge, in order that we might renew our fraudulent machinations in some other quarter. Sometimes we succeeded in blinding the world, sometimes we were unmasked, and obliged to decamp with a degrading precipitation. Upon the death of a relative residing abroad, who left me a small property, I assumed his name of Horton, a circumstance which materially facilitated our subsequent operations, and procured me admission to that circle at Brighton, where I was

overcome, by so unexpectedly encountering the two men to whom I had been betrothed, and whose affections I had justly forfeited by my own inexcusable criminality.

"Of the indignities and wretchedness that I have endured, living with a man whom I detested, haunted with the perpetual dread of exposure and disgrace, abhorring the treacherous designs I was ever hatching, and yet incessantly renewing them, that I might in some degree recover the station I had forfeited, I will spare both you and myself the recital. Suffice it to state, that I at length became acquainted with Caleb Ball; the motives with which I consented to marry him, for attachment was out of the question, I have already detailed; *his* sole inducement to the match, as he hesitates not to avow, was my little fortune. That we shall both be unhappy, it is but reasonable to anticipate; but I have the satisfaction of feeling that *my* misery will not be of long endurance. Sorrow and sickness have already undermined my constitution; death, I trust, will ere long release me from my woes;

and the world will soon forget that there ever existed such a being as the unfortunate, the guilty, the wretched, but truly penitent

"CLARA BALL."

Although Sir Matthew Middleton, whose temper was choleric, burst into a paroxysm of rage, on first learning that his partners had dissipated by their wild speculations the fortune that he had slowly heaped up during a long course of industry, he subsequently submitted to his reverses with a better grace than could have been expected. They were occasioned by the misconduct of others; they did not impugn his mercantile sagacity; they did not affect his character as a man; and though there may be some justice in the Latin adage, that the burthen which is well and patiently borne soon becomes light, there is perhaps more truth, where Englishmen are concerned, in the reverse of the proposition. We are all constitutionally grumblers, and sometimes derive a benefit from complaint, since the grievances which might explode in bursts of passion or

sorrow, if confined to our own bosom, soon evaporate through the safety-valve of the mouth. So much and so loudly did the worthy Baronet talk of the scandalous maltreatment he had experienced, that he quickly ceased to feel it. His conduct was in every respect highly honourable. All was cheerfully given up to the creditors; he returned with his family to the house in Laurence-Pountney-lane; and, resolving never again to expose himself to the risk of a partnership, set vigorously to work in recovering some portion of what he had lost. That benevolent dispensation of Providence which so often conceals blessings amid the misfortunes with which we are visited, and justifies the scriptural averment, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," was forcibly exemplified in the Middleton family. Ned Travers, whom the reader may recollect as "the first broker on the Russia walk," not only lent Sir Matthew five thousand pounds to assist him in recommencing business, but renewed his offer to Cecilia, who, having always stood well-affected towards her civic

suitor, though she had suffered her mother to reject his addresses, now gladly accepted them. The delighted father could not lose this opportunity of twitting his wife, exclaiming, as he communicated the grateful tidings, "Ned's no jack-a-dandy—isn't all gold that glisters—can't make a silken purse of a sow's ear: don't ask'ee, Meg, what 'ee think of the cut of his coat, but what 'ee think of his conduct? *That's* what *I* call being a real gentleman, hey? what, hick!"

Cecilia, happy in the name of Mrs. Travers, shortly afterwards took up her residence in Broad-street Buildings, where her father, on whose spirits the city air seemed to operate like the laughing or paradise gas, frequently dropped in, to partake of the beef-steak puddings for which Ned's cook still retained her celebrity.

Lady Middleton, a wiser and a happier woman, now that she had abandoned all her fantastical aspirations after fashionable distinction and was restored to her proper element, received marks of attention and friendship from

her old city acquaintance with which she could not fail to be highly gratified, though the recollection of her past follies was not always unattended with humiliating sensations. One of the most pleasing results of her altered circumstances was a perfect reconciliation with Mrs. Howard Maltby, who prevailed upon her husband to complete the sum required by Sir Matthew as a capital for his new business, and who evinced a delicate and generous feeling towards her sister, which the latter, now that she was no longer embittered by attempts at rivalry, appreciated as she ought. For shining in her present station Lady Middleton was eminently qualified, and she found it much more pleasant to take the lead where her claims were willingly admitted, than to dangle at the heels of fashion, at the constant risk of being spurned away with a contemptuous kick.

Gale Middleton, who was ever ready to sacrifice the dearest wishes of his own heart to the comfort and the interests of others, remained in London to be present at the marriage of his sister, as well as to offer the con-

solation of his presence and the benefit of his advice to his father and mother; when he set off for Maple Hatch, his long absence from which had in some degree been alleviated by an active correspondence with its fair inmate. Here he was received by Chritty with an expression of cordial and undisguised delight, that recompensed him in some degree for their separation; nor was he less gratified by her ardent admiration of his magnanimous conduct towards his cousin, and the great sacrifices he had made to spare the feelings and preserve the honour of his family. "At the time," said Middleton, "I gave not a thought to the diminution of my fortune, for as the possession of money afforded me no happiness, I would not suffer its privation to occasion me a moment's annoyance; but latterly it has weighed upon my mind more heavily, perhaps, than I ought to have allowed it. During my late residence in London, dear Christiana, I have been feeding myself with the hope that I should return to you freed from most of the objections which had hitherto

thwarted the fondest wishes of my heart. My secret, my only enemy, is detected and expatriated; you yourself have dispelled the superstition that darkened and saddened my mind, and other minor impediments are removed; one difficulty, however, still remains, and it is not of a nature to be easily overcome. Two-thirds of the rental of Brookshaw will be absorbed in paying the interest of the mortgage, and though Sir Matthew insists on being ultimately answerable for the whole amount, and is sanguine that in a very few years he shall be enabled to clear me from all my incumbrances, I can at present only sue you in *formâ pauperis*, and am almost afraid, by renewing the offer of my hand, to ask you to share my humble lot, when I am sensible that your unrivalled merits entitle you——"

"Nay," interposed Chritty, blushing, and speaking in a tone of gentle reproach, "this is equally unworthy of you and of me. For shame, Middleton! Say no more, I beseech you, though I know the generous motive by which you are actuated. Deem me frank

rather than forward, or call me proud if you will, when I declare that I accept your hand with the greater pleasure, because our humble fortunes will now be nearly equal. You have seen me the happiest of the happy upon a bare competency; will my felicity be less, when, with added means, I am united to a man whose tried attachment I can sincerely reciprocate, and whose society, added to that of our dear Lucy and her husband, with such congenial friends as we may select for our occasional companions, will supply me all the enjoyments that my utmost ambition can desire?"

"Dearest Christiana!" exclaimed her lover, snatching her proffered hand, and pressing it passionately to his heart, "you are everything that is generous and high-minded; your cheerfulness and contented disposition will ever be a source of wealth, more precious than the mines of Golconda; and for my own part, if I can but secure your happiness, which will of course include my own, I shall not care whether the mortgage upon Brookshaw be rapidly cleared off, or remain as a perpetual incumbrance."

"Upon that subject you cannot feel more indifferent than I do. To the proud and the luxurious, who foolishly exclude themselves from wedlock, unless they can live in gay cities and support an expensive establishment, we will willingly leave the enjoyment of their selfish celibacy; we, fortunately, are dwellers in the country, and it will be for Hargrave and our dear Lucy, for you and for myself, to prove how humble a competency will command the comforts and even the elegancies of life, as well as how large a share of happiness may be brought within the reach of narrow means."

Of the wedding, which was celebrated shortly afterwards in the most simple and unostentatious manner, we have little to record. Hargrave performed the sacred ceremony: Sir Matthew and Lady Middleton were present, as well as Cecilia and her husband, the latter of whom, blushing and apologizing for the liberty he was taking, made very handsome presents to the bride, and to her friends, the Misses Talford, who acted as bridemaids. Mr. Norberry actually smiled during the whole time

that he was in church, while Aunt Patty presented her ever-ready snuff-box first to the astonished clerk, then to each individual of the party, and finally, to the spectators, with accompanying curtsies and simpers of more than ordinary depth and suavity. The marriage dinner, which was given at the Parsonage House, did credit to the hospitality of Lucy, who, having been weeping with joy all the morning, made ample atonement to her guests during the remainder of the day, by a brilliant and unabated vivacity, that made every heart as gladsome as her own.

In conformity with a previous arrangement, Maple Hatch was given up, and the family removed to the Lodge, where Mr. Norberry was propitiated by a daily modicum of old Jemmy Gale's "London particular" Madeira, and the exclusive use of a summer-house for his afternoon pipe; while Aunt Patty presided over the poultry and the garden, never failing to carry out her camp-stool every morning, that she might sit in the sun, and twiddle her thumbs at ease, as she watched old Robin

trimming his grotesque favourites, the huge evergreen peacocks.

How to dispose of Clements had been a subject of some difficulty. No one would employ a man of such abandoned character, and yet to turn him loose and penniless upon the world would almost necessitate a recurrence to his former evil courses. "This unfortunate man," said Middleton, "is of violent temper: he has a morbid feeling of disaffection towards what he calls the injustice of the world. Circumstances and evil example have been his ruin; but his powerful affection for his child as well as his sister, and his anxiety to give the former a virtuous education, convince me that there is good in his nature, that he is reclaimable to society; and I am determined to try the experiment by finding him employment upon one of my farms."

In this benevolent resolution he persevered, although it was loudly condemned by some of his acquaintance. Nothing could exceed the gratitude and delight of Clements when it was communicated to him. "Oh! sir," he ex-

claimed, " only let me once more follow the plough, and smell the fresh earth as I turn it up; only let me see in the hedges the wild flowers that I loved when I was a boy; only let my darling Harry drive the team; only let me feel that I am living as an honest man, and that my dear son will never know the miseries of guilt, and I shall be in heaven!"

He was allowed to realize this wish, and his feelings for the moment justified his anticipation, although they were quickly succeeded, as he reflected upon his past life, by remorseful pangs and an unconquerable despondency. He became moral, industrious, and religious, while his boundless gratitude towards his benefactor often furnished Middleton an opportunity of remarking, that there was no more effectual way of destroying your enemies, than that of making them your friends. Clements, a thoroughly reformed character, is now unimpeachable in his general conduct; but he is any thing but a happy man, living in perpetual apprehension of being visited for some of his former misdeeds, while his religious terrors

often plunge him into a prostration of spirits from which he cannot be aroused.

The unfortunate wife of Caleb Ball was right in her melancholy prognostication. She expired on the day after her arrival at New York: her husband, who thus became possessed of her property, being still uncured of his addiction to high play, presently lost the whole of it at the gaming-table, and was left, by the last accounts, in a state of utter destitution.

One of the first retrenchments practised at Brookshaw was the dismantling of the laboratory, the maintenance of which had been attended with considerable expense. Middleton abandoned his chemical pursuits without regret, the reasons that had first turned his thoughts to physical philosophy being no longer operative, now that he imagined a much larger and more useful sphere to be opened to him in the moral world. His originally sanguine and cheerful temperament being now rapidly developed, he would have become almost overweening in his confidence of accele-

rating the improvement of his species, had not his reveries been checked by the soberer judgment of his wife, who was, however, much more anxious to regulate than to discourage his enthusiasm. Some there were who tauntingly asked him what he could hope to effect unaided and alone, with such scanty financial means, and without any political or other power. "What can I do?" would he reply to such objectors, with a noble confidence in himself and in his species; "what can I *not* do? We have found that which Archimedes wanted: the press supplies the resting-place for the lever, or rather it *is* the lever by which even so humble an individual as myself may hope to raise the moral world. Let no man, then, distrust his ability to benefit his fellow-creatures: the will alone is wanting; confidence gives success; and where the press is free nothing is impossible. Brute force is every where so rapidly succumbing before mental power, that a thought will soon become stronger than a sword, public opinion more powerful than an army; and the despots who

fulminate decrees against the rights and liberties of nations may be compelled to bow down their crowned heads to a solitary magician, sitting in his closet, and wielding no other weapon than that omnipotent sword of reason—a pen."

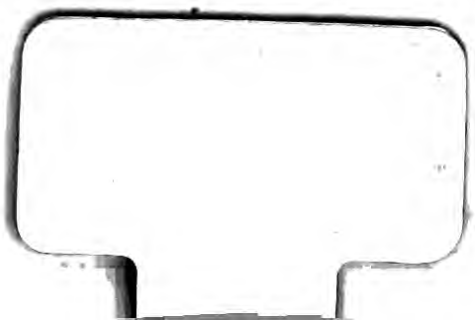
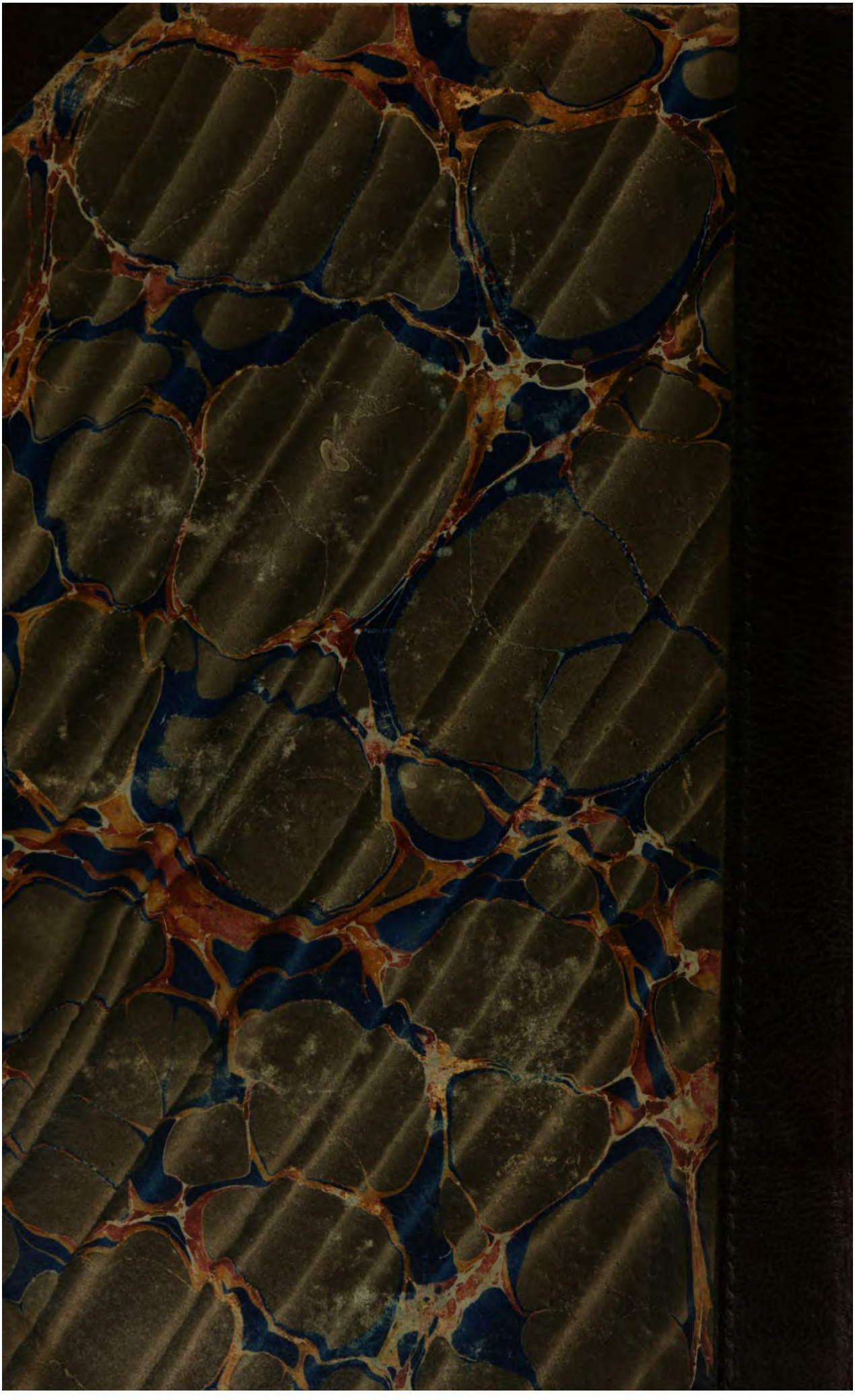
Excited by these lofty convictions, and animated by a philanthropic ardour, Middleton determined not to limit the sphere of his utility to the immediate vicinity of Brookshaw, but to dedicate a portion of every year to a tour through the different counties of England, on the first of which excursions, accompanied by the best of all possible assistants, his wife, he was employed, when the manuscript of this work was sent to the press, both of them gathering into the garner of their own bosoms an abundant harvest from the happiness they were disseminating. To contribute to the improvement of the poorer classes by establishing schools, Temperance, and Friendly Societies, and similar institutions is Middleton's main object; but his views are not limited to one class or to a single purpose. "England, reformed England," he exclaimed to a friend,

as he took leave of him, "is now in the crisis of a political regeneration, which, if I mistake not, will enable her to emerge from her throes and difficulties, like a giant refreshed with wine, and to re-assert her proud prerogative of teaching the nations how to live. For the attainment of this glorious end all her sons, without distinction, should unite in a solemn league and covenant, the Reformers to realize their sanguine anticipations, the Anti-reformers to prevent, as far as possible, the evils they have prognosticated. In our views we may have differed, but let each of us believe his opponent to have been actuated by motives as honourable as his own, and that none have had any other object than the advancement and prosperity of our dear native land. So shall the Whig and the Tory, the Radical and the Conservative, give the right hand of fellowship to one another, vowing to forget past animosities, and to unite in promoting the liberty, peace, morality, and happiness of a country endeared to us by such august and noble recollections, as if each indi-

vidual felt the patriotic inspiration which led the poet Wordsworth to exclaim,—

> In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible knights of old:
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakspeare spake;—the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held:—in every thing we are sprung
> Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

For his occasional eccentricities of thought and action, for his continuing to wear at his heart the miniature of the Saviour, in the belief that it might influence him to a better observance of the Christian duties; for having sacrificed a large portion of his fortune to preserve his direst enemy from shame; and for receiving into his service an acknowledged thief, who had once attempted his life, the hero of the preceding pages continues to receive from some the title of *crazy* Middleton. Whether or not he deserves the epithet prefixed to his name, we leave to the decision of the reader.

THE END.

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