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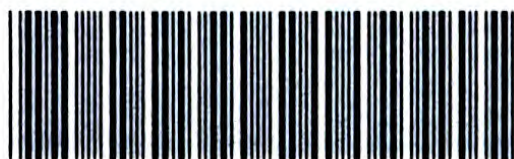
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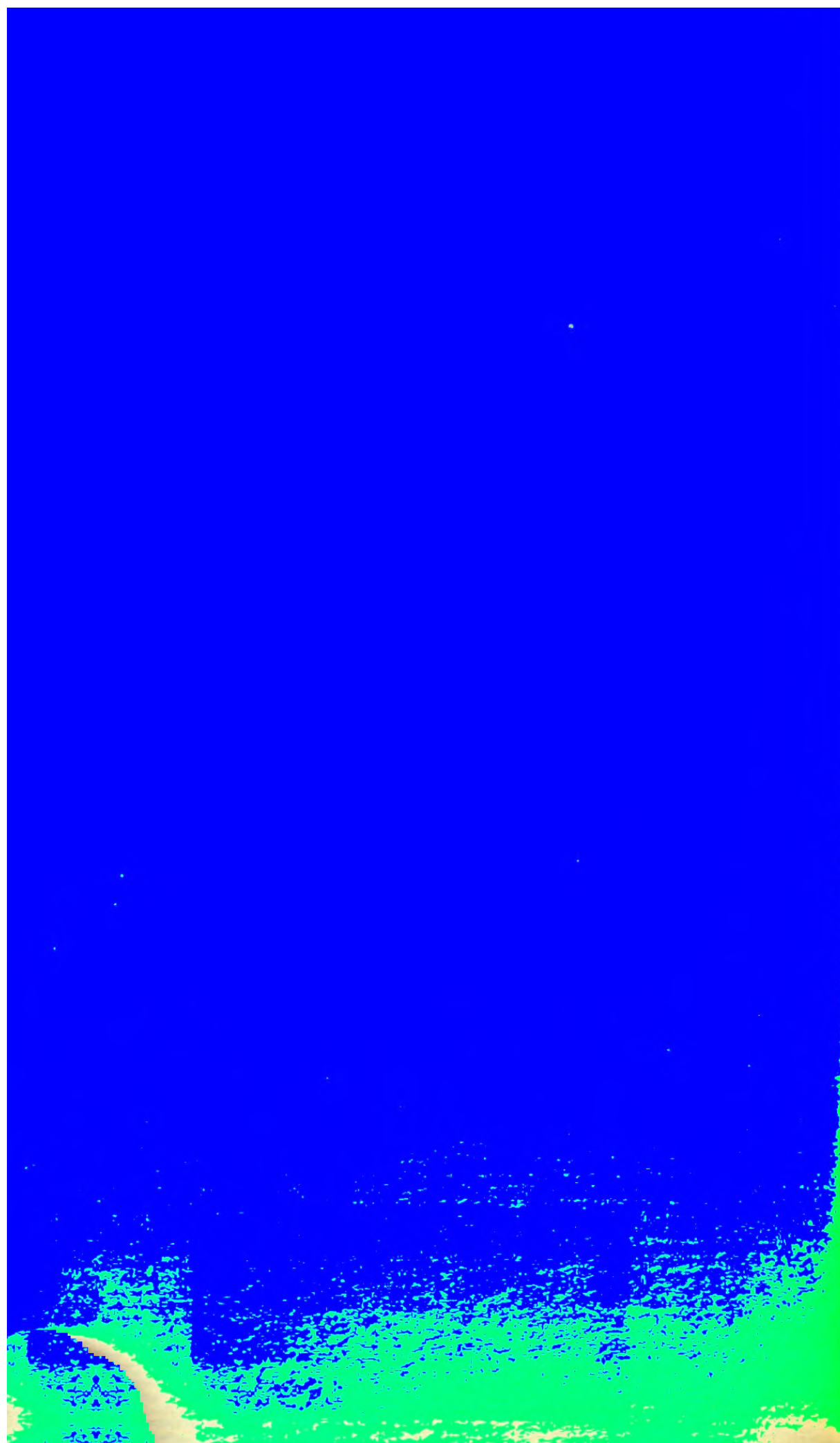


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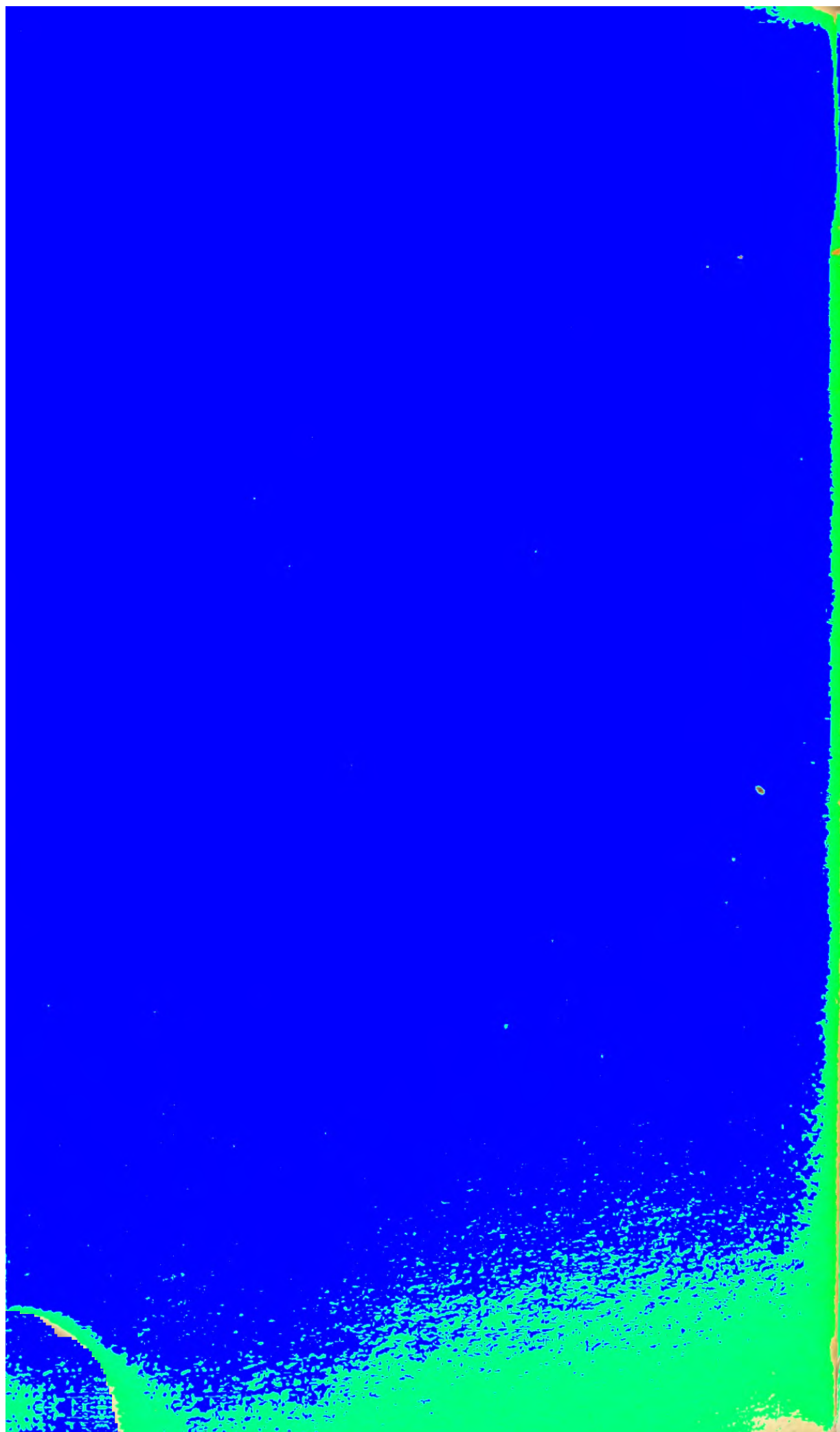
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W. Harvey.

E. Smith.

BELINDA.

Clarence was in one moment behind him, and, seizing hold of the pistol, he snatched it from Vincent's grasp.—

Belinda, Vol. 2, page 249.

LONDON, PUBLISHED 1833, BY BALDWIN & CRADOCK, PATERNOSTER ROW.

THE LILIA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

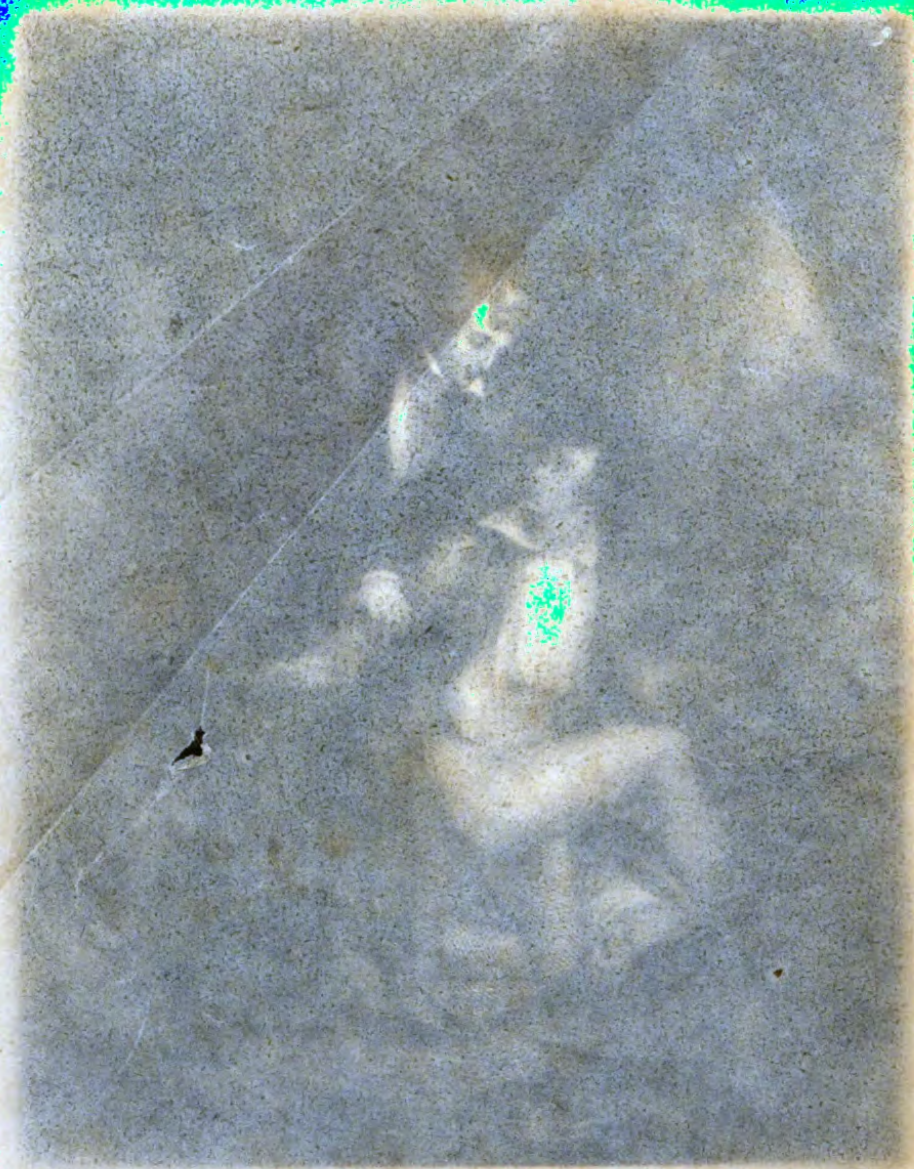
1833



As she passed through the garden, she saw a young man
held up his hands in surprise, and offered her one of
the roses.

LONDON: BALDWIN & CRADOCK, PATERNOSTER ROW.
AND OTHER PROPRIETORS

1833



BERLINDA.

Portrait of the moment, holding the
light, and the light is the light.

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY

BELINDA,

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

VOL. II.

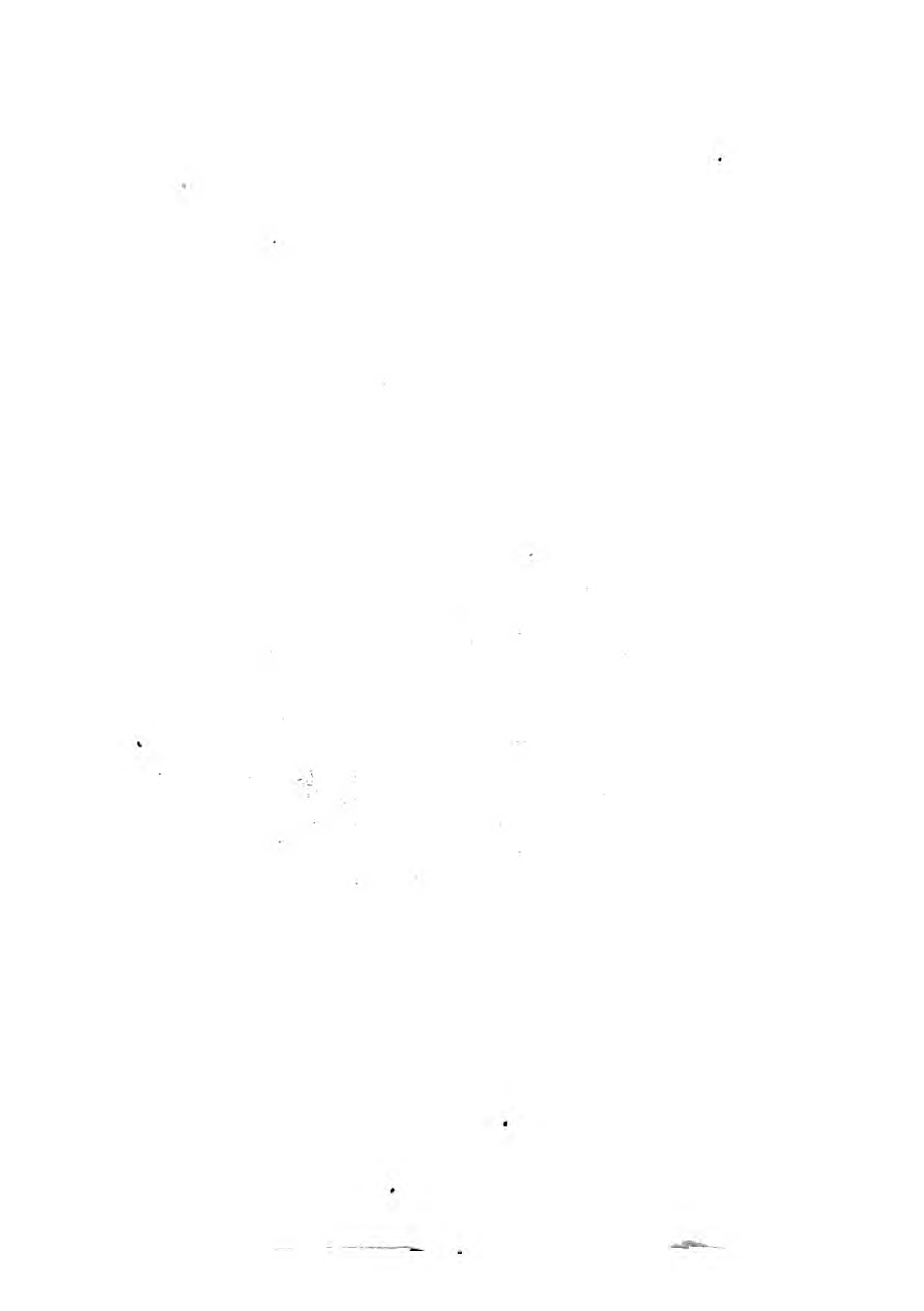


As she passed him, the girl, with a sweet innocent smile,
held up the basket to Clarence, and offered him one of
the roses.

Belinda, Page 184.

LONDON: BALDWIN & CRADOCK, PATERNOSTER ROW,
AND OTHER PROPRIETORS.

1833.



TALES AND NOVELS

BY

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

IN EIGHTEEN VOLUMES.

VOL. XII.

CONTAINING

BELINDA,

VOL. II.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR BALDWIN AND CRADOCK ;

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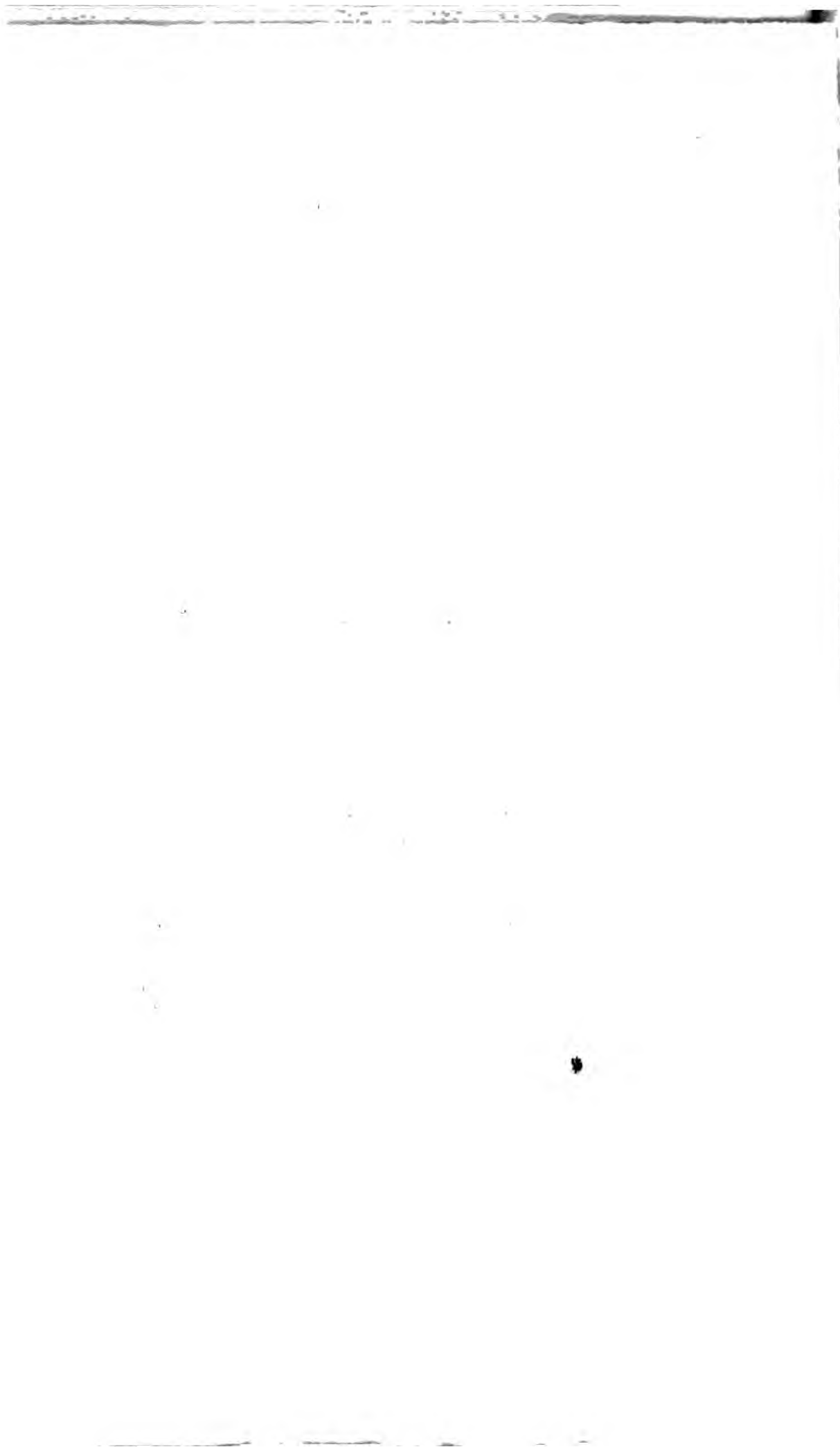
1833.



**" A prudence undeceiving, undeceived,
That nor too little nor too much believed ;
That scorn'd unjust suspicion's coward fear,
And without weakness knew to be sincere."
*Lord Lyttelton's Monody on his Wife.***

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BELINDA.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DECLARATION.

“ I’VE found it !—I’ve found it, mamma ! ” cried little Charles Percival, running eagerly into the room with a plant in his hand. “ Will you send this in your letter to Helena Delacour, and tell her that is the thing that gold fishes are so fond of ? And tell her that it is called lemna, and that it may be found in any ditch or pool.”

“ But how can she find ditches and pools in Grosvenor-square, my dear ? ”

“ O, I forgot that. Then will you tell her, mamma, that I will send her a great quantity ? ”

“ How, my dear ? ”

“ I don’t know, mamma, yet—but I will find out some way.”

“ Would it not be as well, my dear,” said his mother, smiling, “ to consider how you can perform your promises before you make them ? ”

“ A gentleman,” said Mr. Vincent, “ never makes a promise that he cannot perform.”

“ I know that very well,” said the boy, proudly :

"miss Portman, who is very good-natured, will, I am sure, be so good, when she goes back to lady Delacour, as to carry food for the gold fishes to Helena—you see that I have found out a way to keep my promise."

"No, I'm afraid not," said Belinda; "for I am not going back to lady Delacour's."

"Then I am *very* glad of it!" said the boy dropping the weed, and clapping his hands joyfully; "for then I hope you will always stay here, don't you, mamma?—don't *you*, Mr. Vincent? Oh, *you* do, I am sure, for I heard you say so to papa the other day! But what makes you grow so red?"

His mother took him by the hand, as he was going to repeat the question, and leading him out of the room, desired him to show her the place where he found the food for the gold fishes.

Belinda, to Mr. Vincent's great relief, seemed not to take any notice of the child's question, nor to have any sympathy in his curiosity; she was intently copying Westall's sketch of lady Anne Percival and her family, and she had been roused, by the first mention of Helena Delacour's name, to many painful and some pleasing recollections. "What a charming woman, and what a charming family!" said Mr. Vincent, as he looked at the drawing; "and how much more interesting is this picture of domestic happiness than all the pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, and gods and goddesses, that ever were drawn!"

"Yes," said Belinda, "and how much more interesting this picture is to us, from our knowing that it is not a fancy-piece; that the happiness is real,

not imaginary: that this is the natural expression of affection in the countenance of the mother; and that these children, who crowd round her, are what they seem to be—the pride and pleasure of her life!”

“There cannot,” exclaimed Mr. Vincent, with enthusiasm, “be a more delightful picture! O miss Portman, is it possible that you should not feel what you can paint so well?”

“Is it possible, sir,” said Belinda, “that you should suspect me of such wretched hypocrisy, as to affect to admire what I am incapable of feeling?”

“You misunderstand—you totally misunderstand me: Hypocrisy! No; there is not a woman upon earth whom I believe to be so far above all hypocrisy, all affectation. But I imagined—I feared——”

As he spoke these last words he was in some confusion, and hastily turned over the prints in a portfolio which lay upon the table. Belinda’s eye was caught by an engraving of lady Delacour in the character of the comic muse. Mr. Vincent did not know the intimacy that had subsisted between her ladyship and miss Portman—she sighed from the recollection of Clarence Hervey, and of all that had passed at the masquerade.

“What a contrast!” said Mr. Vincent, placing the print of lady Delacour beside the picture of lady Anne Percival. “What a contrast! Compare their pictures—compare their characters—compare——”

“Excuse me,” interrupted Belinda; “lady Delacour was once my friend, and I do not like to make a comparison so much to her disadvantage. I have

never seen any woman who would not suffer by a comparison with lady Anne Percival."

"I have been more fortunate, I *have* seen one—one equally worthy of esteem—admiration—love."

Mr. Vincent's voice faltered in pronouncing the word love; yet Belinda, prepossessed by the idea that he was attached to some creole lady, simply answered, without looking up from her drawing, "You are indeed very fortunate—peculiarly fortunate. Are the West-Indian ladies——"

"West-Indian ladies!" interrupted Mr. Vincent. "Surely, miss Portman cannot imagine that I am at this instant thinking of any West-Indian lady!" Belinda looked up with an air of surprise. "Charming miss Portman," continued he, "I have learnt to admire *European beauty, European excellence!* I have acquired new ideas of the female character—ideas—feelings that must henceforward render me exquisitely happy or exquisitely miserable."

Miss Portman had been too often called "*charming*" to be much startled or delighted by the sound: the word would have passed by unnoticed, but there was something so impassioned in Mr. Vincent's manner, that she could no longer mistake it for common gallantry, and she was in evident confusion. Now for the first time the idea of Mr. Vincent as a lover came into her mind: the next instant she accused herself of vanity, and dreaded that he should read her thoughts. "Exquisitely miserable!" said she, in a tone of raillery: "I should not suppose, from what I have seen of Mr. Vincent, that any thing could make him exquisitely miserable."

“Then you do not know my character—you do not know my heart: it is in *your* power to make me exquisitely miserable. Mine is not the cold, hackneyed phrase of gallantry, but the fervid language of passion,” cried he, seizing her hand.

At this instant one of the children came in with some flowers to Belinda; and, glad of the interruption, she hastily put her up her drawings and left the room, observing that she should scarcely have time to dress before dinner. However, as soon as she found herself alone, she forgot how late it was; and though she sat down before the glass to dress, she made no progress in the business, but continued for some time motionless, endeavouring to recollect and to understand all that had passed. The result of her reflections was the conviction that her partiality for Clarence Hervey was greater than she ever had till this moment suspected. “I have told my aunt Stanhope,” thought she, “that the idea of Mr. Hervey had no influence in my refusal of sir Philip Baddely; I have said that my affections are entirely at my own command: then why do I feel this alarm at the discovery of Mr. Vincent’s views? Why do I compare him with one whom I thought I had forgotten?—And yet, how are we to judge of character? How can we form any estimate of what is amiable, of what will make us happy or miserable, but by comparison? Am I to blame for perceiving superiority? Am I to blame if one person be more agreeable, or seem to be more agreeable, than another? Am I to blame if I cannot love Mr. Vincent?”

Before Belinda had answered these questions to

her satisfaction, the dinner-bell rang. There happened to dine this day at Mr. Percival's a gentleman who had just arrived from Lisbon, and the conversation turned upon the sailors' practice of stilling the waves over the bar of Lisbon by throwing oil upon the water. Charles Percival's curiosity was excited by this conversation, and he wished to see the experiment. In the evening his father indulged his wishes. The children were delighted at the sight, and little Charles insisted upon Belinda's following him to a particular spot, where he was well convinced that she could see better than any where else in the world. "Take care," cried lady Anne, "or you will lead your friend into the river, Charles." The boy paused, and soon afterwards asked his father several questions about swimming and drowning, and bringing people to life after they had been drowned. "Don't you remember, papa," said he, "*that* Mr. Hervey, who was almost drowned in the Serpentine river in London?"—Belinda coloured at hearing unexpectedly the name of the person of whom she was at that instant thinking, and the child continued—"I liked that Mr. Hervey very much—I liked him from the first day I saw him. What a number of entertaining things he told us at dinner! We used to call him the good-natured gentleman: I like him very much—I wish he was here this minute. Did you ever see him, miss Portman?—O yes, you must have seen him; for it was he who carried Helena's gold fishes to her mother, and he used often to be at lady Delacour's—was not he?"

"Yes, my dear, often."

“And did not you like him very much?”—This simple question threw Belinda into inexpressible confusion: but fortunately the crimson on her face was seen only by lady Anne Percival. To Belinda’s great satisfaction, Mr. Vincent forbore this evening any attempt to renew the conversation of the morning; he endeavoured to mix, with his usual animation and gaiety, in the family society; and her embarrassment was much lessened when she heard the next day, at breakfast, that he was gone to Harrogate. Lady Anne Percival took notice that she was this morning unusually sprightly.

After breakfast, as they were passing through the hall to take a walk in the park, one of the little boys stopped to look at a musical instrument which hung up against the wall.

“What is this, mamma?—It is not a guitar, is it?”

“No, my dear, it is called a banjore; it is an African instrument, of which the negroes are particularly fond. Mr. Vincent mentioned it the other day to miss Portman, and I believe she expressed some curiosity to see one. Juba went to work immediately to make a banjore, I find. Poor fellow! I dare say that he was very sorry to go to Harrogate, and to leave his African guitar half finished; especially as it was intended for an offering to miss Portman. He is the most grateful, affectionate creature I ever saw.”

“But why, mamma,” said Charles Percival, “is Mr. Vincent gone away? I am sorry he is gone; I hope he will soon come back. In the mean time, I must run and water my carnations.”

“His sorrow for his friend Mr. Vincent’s departure does not seem to affect his spirits much,” said lady Anne. “People who expect sentiment from children of six years old will be disappointed, and will probably teach them affectation. Surely it is much better to let their natural affections have time to expand. If we tear the rosebud open we spoil the flower.” Belinda smiled at this parable of the rosebud, which, she said, might be applied to men and women, as well as to children.

“And yet, upon reflection,” said lady Anne, “the heart has nothing in common with a rosebud. Nonsensical allusions pass off very prettily in conversation. I mean, when we converse with partial friends: but we should reason ill, and conduct ourselves worse, if we were to trust implicitly to poetical analogies. Our affections,” continued lady Anne, “arise from circumstances totally independent of our will.”

“That is the very thing I meant to say,” interrupted Belinda, eagerly.

“They are excited by the agreeable or useful qualities that we discover in things or in persons.”

“Undoubtedly,” said Belinda.

“Or by those which our fancies discover,” said lady Anne.

Belinda was silent; but, after a pause, she said, “That it was certainly very dangerous, especially for women, to trust to fancy in bestowing their affections.” “And yet,” said lady Anne, “it is a danger to which they are much exposed in society. Men have it in their power to assume the appearance of

every thing that is amiable and estimable, and women have scarcely any opportunities of detecting the counterfeit."

"Without Ithuriel's spear, how can they distinguish the good from the evil?" said Belinda. "This is a common-place complaint, I know; the ready excuse that we silly young women plead, when we make mistakes for which our friends reproach us, and for which we too often reproach ourselves."

"The complaint is common-place precisely because it is general and just," replied lady Anne. "In the slight and frivolous intercourse, which fashionable belles usually have with those fashionable beaux who call themselves their lovers, it is surprising that they can discover any thing of each other's real character. Indeed they seldom do; and this probably is the cause why there are so many unsuitable and unhappy marriages. A woman who has an opportunity of seeing her lover in private society, in domestic life, has infinite advantages; for if she has any sense, and he has any sincerity, the real character of both may perhaps be developed."

"True," said Belinda (who now suspected that lady Anne alluded to Mr. Vincent); "and in such a situation a woman would readily be able to decide whether the man who addressed her would suit her taste or not; so she would be inexcusable if, either from vanity or coquetry, she disguised her real sentiments."

"And will miss Portman, who cannot, by any one to whom she is known, be suspected of vanity or

coquetry, permit me to speak to her with the freedom of a friend?"

Belinda, touched by the kindness of lady Anne's manner, pressed her hand, and exclaimed, "Yes, dear lady Anne, speak to me with freedom—you cannot do me a greater favour. No thought of my mind, no secret feeling of my heart, shall be concealed from you."

"Do not imagine that I wish to encroach upon the generous openness of your temper," said lady Anne; "tell me when I go too far, and I will be silent. One who, like miss Portman, has lived in the world, has seen a variety of characters, and probably has had a variety of admirers, must have formed some determinate idea of the sort of companion that would make her happy, if she were to marry—unless," said lady Anne, "she has formed a resolution against marriage."

"I have formed no such resolution," said Belinda. "Indeed, since I have seen the happiness which you and Mr. Percival enjoy in your own family, I have been much more disposed to think that a union—that a union such as yours, would increase my happiness. At the same time, my aversion to the idea of marrying from interest, or convenience, or from any motives but esteem and love, is increased almost to horror. O lady Anne! there is nothing that I would not do to please the friends to whom I am under obligations, except sacrificing my peace of mind, or my integrity, the happiness of my life, by——"

Lady Anne, in a gentle tone, assured her, that

she was the last person in the world who would press her to any union which would make her unhappy. "You perceive that Mr. Vincent has spoken to me of what passed between you yesterday. You perceive that I am his friend, but do not forget that I am also yours. If you fear *undue influence* from any of your relations in favour of Mr. Vincent's large fortune, &c. let his proposal remain a secret between ourselves, till you can decide, from farther acquaintance with him, whether it will be in your power to return his affection."

"I fear, my dear lady Anne," cried Belinda, "that it is not in my power to return his affection."

"And may I ask your objections?"

"Is it not a sufficient objection, that I am persuaded I cannot love him?"

"No; for you may be mistaken in that persuasion. Remember what we said a little while ago, about *fancy and spontaneous affections*. Does Mr. Vincent appear to you defective in any of the qualities which you think essential to happiness? Mr. Percival has known him from the time he was a man, and can answer for his integrity and his good temper. Are not these the first points you would consider? They ought to be, I am sure, and I believe they are. Of his understanding I shall say nothing, because you have had full opportunities of judging of it from his conversation."

"Mr. Vincent appears to have a good understanding," said Belinda.

"Then to what do you object?—Is there any thing disgusting to you in his person or manners?"

"He is very handsome, he is well bred, and his manners are unaffected," said Belinda; "but—do not accuse me of caprice—altogether he does not suit my taste; and I cannot think it sufficient not to feel disgust for a husband—though I believe this is the fashionable doctrine."

"It is not mine, I assure you," said lady Anne. "I am not one of those who think it 'safest to begin with a little aversion;' but since you acknowledge that Mr. Vincent possesses the essential good qualities that entitle him to your esteem, I am satisfied. We gradually acquire knowledge of the good qualities of those who endeavour to please us; and if they are really amiable, their persons become agreeable to us by degrees, when we become accustomed to them."

"Accustomed!" said Belinda, smiling: "one does grow accustomed even to disagreeable things certainly; but at this rate, my dear lady Anne, I do not doubt but one might grow *accustomed* to Caliban."

"My belief in the reconciling power of custom does not go quite so far," said lady Anne. "It does not extend to Caliban, or even to the hero of *La Belle et la Bête*; but I do believe, that, in a mind so well regulated as yours, esteem may certainly in time be improved into love. I will tell Mr. Vincent so, my dear."

"No, my dear lady Anne! no; you must not—indeed you must not. You have too good an opinion of me—my mind is not so well regulated—I am much weaker, much sillier, than you imagine—than you can conceive," said Belinda.

Lady Anne soothed her with the most affectionate expressions, and concluded with saying, "Mr. Vincent has promised not to return from Harrowgate, to torment you with his addresses, if you be absolutely determined against him. He is of too generous, and perhaps too proud a temper, to persecute you with vain solicitations; and however Mr. Percival and I may wish that he could obtain such a wife, we shall have the common, or uncommon, sense and good-nature to allow our friends to be happy their own way."

"You are very good—too good. But am I then to be the cause of banishing Mr. Vincent from all his friends—from Oakly-park?"

"Will he not do what is most prudent, to avoid the charming miss Portman," said lady Anne smiling, "if he must not love her? This was at least the advice I gave him, when he consulted us yesterday evening. But I will not sign his writ of banishment lightly. Nothing but the assurance that the heart is engaged can be a sufficient cause for despair; nothing else could, in my eyes, justify you, my dear Belinda, from the charge of caprice."

"I can give you no such assurance, I hope—I believe," said Belinda, in great confusion; "and yet I would not for the world deceive you: you have a right to my sincerity." She paused; and lady Anne said with a smile, "Perhaps I can spare you the trouble of telling me in words what a blush told me, or at least made me suspect, yesterday evening, when we were standing by the river side, when little Charles asked you——"

“ Yes, I remember—I saw you look at me,

“ Undesignedly, believe me.”

“ Undesignedly, I am sure ; but I was afraid you would think——”

“ The truth.”

“ No ; but more than the truth. The truth you shall hear ; and the rest I will leave to your judgment and to your kindness.”

Belinda gave a full account of her acquaintance with Clarence Hervey ; of the variations in his manner towards her ; of his excellent conduct with respect to lady Delacour (of this, by the by, she spoke at large). But she was more concise when she touched upon the state of her own heart ; and her voice almost failed when she came to the history of the lock of beautiful hair, the Windsor incognita, and the picture of Virginia. She concluded by expressing her conviction of the propriety of forgetting a man, who was in all probability attached to another, and she declared it to be her resolution to banish him from her thoughts. Lady Anne said, “ that nothing could be more prudent or praiseworthy than forming such a resolution—except keeping it.” Lady Anne had a high opinion of Mr. Hervey ; but she had no doubt, from Belinda’s account, and from her own observations on Mr. Hervey, and from slight circumstances which had accidentally come to Mr. Percival’s knowledge, that he was, as Belinda suspected, attached to another person. She wished, therefore, to confirm miss Portman in this belief, and to turn her thoughts towards one who, beside being deserving of her esteem and love, felt for her the most sincere af-

fection. She did not, however, press the subject farther at this time, but contented herself with requesting that Belinda would take three days (the usual time given for deliberation in fairy tales) before she should decide against Mr. Vincent.

The next day they went to look at a porter's lodge, which Mr. Percival had just built ; it was inhabited by an old man and woman, who had for many years been industrious tenants, but who, in their old age, had been reduced to poverty, not by imprudence, but by misfortune. Lady Anne was pleased to see them comfortably settled in their new habitation ; and whilst she and Belinda were talking to the old couple, their grand-daughter, a pretty looking girl of about eighteen, came in with a basket of eggs in her hand. " Well, Lucy," said lady Anne, " have you overcome your dislike to James Jackson ? " The girl reddened, smiled, and looked at her grandmother, who answered for her in an arch tone, " O, yes, my lady ! We are not afraid of Jackson *now* ; we are grown very great friends. This pretty cane chair for my good man was his handiwork, and these baskets he made for me. Indeed, he's a most industrious, ingenious, good-natured youth ; and our Lucy takes no offence at his courting her now, my lady, I can assure you. That necklace, which is never off her neck now, he turned for her, my lady ; it is a present of his. So I tell him he need not be discouraged, though so be she did not take to him at the first ; for she's a good girl, and a sensible girl—I say it, though she's my own : and the eyes are used to a face after a time, and then it's nothing. They say, fancy's all in all in love : now in

my judgment, fancy's little or nothing with girls that have sense. But I beg pardon for prating at this rate, more especially when I am so old as to have forgot all the little I ever knew about such things."

"But you have the best right in the world to speak about such things, and your grand-daughter has the best reason in the world to listen to you," said lady Anne, "because, in spite of all the crosses of fortune, you have been an excellent and happy wife, at least ever since I can remember."

"And ever since I can remember, that's more ; no offence to your ladyship," said the old man, striking his crutch against the ground. "Ever since I can remember, she has made me the happiest man in the whole world, in the whole parish, as every body knows, and I best of all !" cried he, with a degree of enthusiasm that lighted up his aged countenance, and animated his feeble voice.

"And yet," said the honest dame, "if I had followed my fancy, and taken up with my first love, it would not ha' been with *he*, Lucy. I had a sort of a fancy (since my lady's so good as to let me speak), I had a sort of a fancy for an idle young man ; but he, very luckily for me, took it into his head to fall in love with another young woman, and then I had leisure enough left me to think of your grandfather, who was not so much to my taste like at first. But when I found out his goodness and cleverness, and, joined to all, his great tenderness for me, I thought better of it, Lucy (as who knows but you may do, though there shall not be a word said on my part to press you, for poor Jackson?); and my thinking

better is the cause why I have been so happy ever since, and am so still in my old age. Ah, Lucy, dear! what a many years that same old age lasts, after all! But young folks, for the most part, never think what's to come after thirty or forty at farthest. But I don't say this for you, Lucy; for you are a good girl, and a sensible girl, though my own granddaughter, as I said before, and therefore won't be run away with by fancy, which is soon past and gone: but make a prudent choice, that you won't never have cause to repent of. But I'll not say a word more; I'll leave it all to yourself and James Jackson."

"You do right," said lady Anne: "Good morning to you! Farewell, Lucy! That's a pretty necklace, and is very becoming to you—fare ye well!"

She hurried out of the cottage with Belinda, apprehensive that the talkative old dame might weaken the effect of her good sense and experience by a farther profusion of words.

"One would think," said Belinda, with an ingenuous smile, "that this lesson upon the dangers of *fancy* was intended for me: at any rate, I may turn it to my own advantage!"

"Happy those who can turn all the experience of others to their own advantage!" said lady Anne: "this would be a more valuable privilege than the power of turning every thing that is touched to gold."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes; and then miss Portman, pursuing the train of her own thoughts, and unconscious that she had not explained

them to lady Anne, abruptly exclaimed, "But if I should be entangled, so as not to be able to retract!—and if it should not be in my power to love him at last, he will think me a coquette, a jilt, perhaps: he will have reason to complain of me, if I waste his time, and trifle with his affections. Then is it not better that I should avoid, by a decided refusal, all possibility of injury to Mr. Vincent, and of blame to myself?"

"There is no danger of Mr. Vincent's misunderstanding or misrepresenting you. The risk that he runs is by his voluntary choice; and I am sure that if, after farther acquaintance with him, you find it impossible to return his affection, he will not consider himself as ill-used by your refusal."

"But after a certain time—after the world suspects that two people are engaged to each other, it is scarcely possible for the woman to recede: when they come within a certain distance, they are pressed to unite, by the irresistible force of external circumstances. A woman is too often reduced to this dilemma: either she must marry a man she does not love, or she must be blamed by the world—either she must sacrifice a portion of her reputation, or the whole of her happiness.

"The world is indeed often too curious, and too rash in these affairs," said lady Anne. "A young woman is not in this respect allowed sufficient time for freedom of deliberation. She sees, as Mr. Percival once said, 'the drawn sword of tyrant custom suspended over her head by a single hair.'"

"And yet, notwithstanding you are so well aware

of the danger, your ladyship would expose me to it?" said Belinda.

"Yes; for I think the chance of happiness, in this instance, overbalances the risk," said lady Anne. "As we cannot alter the common law of custom, and as we cannot render the world less gossiping, or less censorious, we must not expect always to avoid censure; all we can do is, never to deserve it—and it would be absurd to enslave ourselves to the opinion of the idle and ignorant. To a certain point, respect for the opinion of the world is prudence; beyond that point, it is weakness. You should also consider that the *world* at Oakly-park and in London are two different worlds. In London if you and Mr. Vincent were seen often in each other's company, it would be immediately buzzed about that miss Portman and Mr. Vincent were going to be married; and if the match did not take place, a thousand foolish stories might be told to account for its being broken off. But here you are not surrounded by busy eyes and busy tongues. The butchers, bakers, ploughmen, and spinsters, who compose our world, have all affairs of their own to mind. Besides, their comments can have no very extensive circulation; they are used to see Mr. Vincent continually here; and his staying with us the remainder of the autumn will not appear to them any thing wonderful or portentous."

Their conversation was interrupted. Mr. Vincent returned to Oakly-park—but upon the express condition that he should not make his attachment public by any particular attentions, and that he should draw

no conclusions in his favour from Belinda's consenting to converse with him freely upon every common subject. To this treaty of amity lady Anne Percival was guarantee.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WEDDING.

BELINDA and Mr. Vincent could never agree in their definition of the word *flattery*; so that there were continual complaints on the one hand of a breach of treaty, and, on the other, solemn protestations of the most scrupulous adherence to his compact. However this might be, it is certain that the gentleman gained so much, either by truth or fiction, that, in the course of some weeks, he got the lady as far as "gratitude and esteem."

One evening, Belinda was playing with little Charles Percival at spillikins. Mr. Vincent, who found pleasure in every thing that amused Belinda, and Mr. Percival, who took an interest in every thing which entertained his children, were looking on at this simple game.

"Mr. Percival," said Belinda, "condescending to look at a game of jack-straws!"

"Yes," said lady Anne; "for he is of Dryden's opinion, that, if a straw can be made the instrument of happiness, he is a wise man who does not despise it."

"Ah! miss Portman, take care!" cried Charles,

who was anxious that she should win, though he was playing against her. "Take care! don't touch that knave!"

"I would lay a hundred guineas upon the steadiness of miss Portman's hand," cried Mr. Vincent.

"I'll lay you sixpence, though," cried Charles, eagerly, "that she'll stir the king, if she touches that knave—I'll lay you a shilling."

"Done! done!" cried Mr. Vincent.

"Done! done!" cried the boy, stretching out his hand, but his father caught it.

"Softly! softly, Charles!—No betting, if you please, my dear. Done and done sometimes ends in—undone."

"It was my fault—it was I who was in the wrong," cried Vincent immediately.

"I am sure you are in the right, now," said Mr. Percival; "and, what is better than my saying so, miss Portman thinks so, as her smile tells me."

"You moved, miss Portman!" cried Charles:—"O, indeed! the king's head stirred, the very instant papa spoke. I knew it was impossible that you could get that knave clear off without shaking the king. Now, papa, only look how they were balanced."

"I grant you," said Mr. Vincent, "I should have made an imprudent bet. So it is well I made none; for now I see the chances were ten to one, twenty to one, a hundred to one against me."

"It does not appear to me to be a matter of chance," said Mr. Percival. "This is a game of address, not chance, and that is the reason I like it."

"O papa! O miss Portman! look how nicely these

are balanced. There ! my breath has set them in motion. Look, they shake, shake, shake, like the great rocking-stones at Brimham Craggs."

"That is comparing small things to great, indeed !" said Mr. Percival.

"By the by," cried Mr. Vincent, "miss Portman has never seen those wonderful rocking-stones—suppose we were to ride to see them to-morrow?"

The proposal was warmly seconded by the children, and agreed to by every one. It was settled, that after they had seen Brimham Craggs they should spend the remainder of the day at lord C——'s beautiful place in the neighbourhood.

The next morning was neither too hot nor too cold, and they set out on their little party of pleasure; the children went with their mother, to their great delight, in the *sociable*; and Mr. Vincent, to his great delight, rode with Belinda. When they came within sight of the Craggs, Mr. Percival, who was riding with them, exclaimed—"What is that yonder, on the top of one of the great rocking-stones?"

"It looks like a statue," said Vincent. "It has been put up since we were here last."

"I fancy it has got up of itself," said Belinda, "for it seems to be getting down of itself. I think I saw it stoop. O! I see now, it is a man who has got up there, and he seems to have a gun in his hand, has not he? He is going through his manual exercise for his diversion—for the diversion of the spectators below, I perceive—there is a party of people looking at him."

"Him!" said Mr. Percival.

"I protest it is a woman!" said Vincent.

"No, surely," said Belinda: "it cannot be a woman!"

"Not unless it be Mrs. Freke," replied Mr. Percival.

In fact, it was Mrs. Freke, who had been out shooting with a party of gentlemen, and who had scrambled upon this rocking-stone, on the summit of which she went through the manual exercise at the word of command from her officer. As they rode nearer to the scene of action, Belinda heard the shrill screams of a female voice, and they descried amongst the gentlemen a slight figure in a riding habit.

"Miss Moreton, I suppose," said Mr. Vincent.

"Poor girl! what are they doing with her?" cried Belinda. "They seem to be forcing her up to the top of that place, where she has no mind to go. Look how Mrs. Freke drags her up by the arm!"

As they drew nearer, they heard Mrs. Freke laughing loud as she rocked this frightened girl upon the top of the stone.

"We had better keep out of the way, I think," said Belinda: "for perhaps, as she has vowed vengeance against me, she might take a fancy to setting me upon that pinnacle of glory."

"She dare not," cried Vincent, his eyes flashing with anger: "you may trust to us to defend you."

"Certainly!—But I will not run into danger on purpose to give you the pleasure of defending me," said Belinda; and as she spoke, she turned her horse another way.

"You won't turn back, miss Portman?" cried

Vincent, eagerly, laying his hand on her bridle.—
“ Good Heavens, ma’am ! we can’t run away !—We came here to look at these rocking-stones !—We have not half seen them. Lady Anne and the children will be here immediately. You would not deprive them of the pleasure of seeing these things !”

“ I doubt whether they would have much pleasure in seeing *some of these things* ! and as to the rest, if I disappoint the children now, Mr. Percival will, perhaps, have the goodness to bring them some other day.”

“ Certainly,” said Mr. Percival : “ miss Portman shows her usual prudence.”

“ The children are so good tempered, that I am sure they will forgive me,” continued Belinda ; “ and Mr. Vincent will be ashamed not to follow their example, though he seems to be rather angry with me at present for obliging him to turn back—out of the path of danger.”

“ You must not be surprised at that,” said Mr. Percival, laughing ; “ for Mr. Vincent is a lover and a hero. You know it is a ruled case, in all romances, that, when a lover and his mistress go out riding together, some adventure must befall them. The horse must run away with the lady, and the gentleman must catch her in his arms just as her neck is about to be broken. If the horse has been too well trained for the heroine’s purpose, ‘ some footpad, bandit fierce, or mountaineer,’ some jealous rival must make his appearance quite unexpectedly at the turn of a road, and the lady must be carried off—robes flying—hair streaming—like Buerger’s Leonora. Then

her lover must come to her rescue just in the proper moment. But if the damsel cannot conveniently be run away with, she must, as the last resource, tumble into a river to make herself interesting, and the hero must be at least half drowned in dragging her out, that she may be under eternal obligations to him, and at last be forced to marry him out of pure gratitude."

"Gratitude!" interrupted Mr. Vincent: "he is no hero, to my mind, who would be content with gratitude, instead of love."

"You need not alarm yourself: miss Portman does not seem inclined to put you to the trial, you see," said Mr. Percival, smiling. "Now it is really to be regretted, that she deprived you of an opportunity of fighting some of the gentlemen in Mrs. Freke's train, or of delivering her from the perilous height of one of those rocking-stones. It would have been a new incident in a novel."

"How that poor girl screamed!" said Belinda. "Was her terror real or affected?"

"Partly real, partly affected, I fancy," said Mr. Percival.

"I pity her," said Mr. Vincent; "for Mrs. Freke leads her a weary life."

"She is certainly to be pitied, but also to be blamed," said Mr. Percival. "You do not know her history. Miss Moreton ran away from her friends to live with this Mrs. Freke, who has led her into all kinds of mischief and absurdity. The girl is weak and vain, and believes that every thing becomes her which Mrs. Freke assures her is becoming. At one

time she was persuaded to go to a public ball with her arms as bare as Juno's, and her feet as naked as Mad. Tallien's. At another time miss Moreton (who unfortunately has never heard the Greek proverb, that half is better than the whole) was persuaded by Mrs. Freke to lay aside her half boots, and to equip herself in men's whole boots ; and thus she rode about the country, to the amazement of all the world. These are trifles ; but women who love to set the world at defiance in trifles seldom respect its opinion in matters of consequence. Miss Moreton's whole boots in the morning, and her bare feet in the evening, were talked of by every body, till she gave them more to talk of about her attachment to a young officer. Mrs. Freke, whose philosophy is professedly latitudinarian in morals, laughed at the girl's prejudice in favour of the ceremony of marriage. So did the officer ; for miss Moreton had no fortune. It is suspected that the young lady did not feel the difficulty, which philosophers are sometimes said to find in suiting their practice to their theory. The *unenlightened* world reprobated the theory much, and the practice more. I am inclined, in spite of scandal, to think the poor girl was only imprudent : at all events, she repents her folly too late. She has now no friend upon earth but Mrs. Freke, who is, in fact, her worst enemy, and who tyrannizes over her without mercy. Imagine what it is to be the butt of a buffoon !”

“What a lesson to young ladies in the choice of female friends!” said Belinda. “But had miss Moreton no relations, who could interfere to get her out of Mrs. Freke's hands ?”

“ Her father and mother were old, and, what is more contemptible, old-fashioned : she would not listen to their advice ; she ran away from them. Some of her relations were, I believe, willing that she should stay with Mrs. Freke, because she was a dashing, fashionable woman, and they thought it might be what is called *an advantage* to her. She had one relation, indeed, who was quite of a different opinion, who saw the danger of her situation, and remonstrated in the strongest manner—but to no purpose. This was a cousin of miss Moreton’s, a respectable clergyman. Mrs. Freke was so much incensed by his *insolent interference*, as she was pleased to call it, that she made an effigy of Mr. Moreton dressed in his canonicals, and hung the figure up as a scarecrow in a garden close by the high road. He was so much beloved and respected for his benevolence and unaffected piety, that Mrs. Freke totally failed in her design of making him ridiculous ; her scarecrow was torn to pieces by his parishioners ; and though, in the true spirit of charity, he did all he could to moderate their indignation against his enemy, the lady became such an object of detestation, that she was followed with hisses and groans whenever she appeared, and she dared not venture within ten miles of the village.

“ Mrs. Freke now changed the mode of her persecution : she was acquainted with a nobleman from whom our clergyman expected a living, and she worked upon his lordship so successfully, that he insisted upon having an apology made to the lady. Mr. Moreton had as much dignity of mind as gentle-

ness of character ; his forbearance was that of principle, and so was his firmness : he refused to make the concessions that were required. His noble patron bullied. Though he had a large family to provide for, the clergyman would not degrade himself by any improper submission. The incumbent died, and the living was given to a more compliant friend. So ends the history of one of Mrs. Freke's numerous frolics."

"This was the story," said Mr. Vincent, "which effectually changed my opinion of her. Till I heard it, I always looked upon her as one of those thoughtless, good-natured people, who, as the common saying is, do nobody any harm but themselves."

"It is difficult in society," said Mr. Percival, "especially for women, to do harm to themselves, without doing harm to others. They may begin in frolic, but they must end in malice. They defy the world—the world in return excommunicates them—the female outlaws become desperate, and make it the business and pride of their lives to disturb the peace of their sober neighbours. Women who have lowered themselves in the public opinion cannot rest without attempting to bring others to their own level."

"Mrs. Freke, notwithstanding the blustering merriment that she affects, is obviously unhappy," said Belinda ; "and since we cannot do her any good, either by our blame or our pity, we had better think of something else."

"Scandal," said Mr. Vincent, "does not seem to give you much pleasure, miss Portman You will

be glad to hear that Mrs. Freke's malice against poor Mr. Moreton has not ruined him. Do you know, Mr. Percival, that he has just been presented to a good living by a generous young man, who heard of his excellent conduct?"

"I am extremely glad of it," said Mr. Percival. "Who is this generous young man? I should like to be acquainted with him."

"So should I," said Mr. Vincent; "he is a Mr. Hervey."

"Clarence Hervey, perhaps?"

"Yes, Clarence was his name."

"No man more likely to do a generous action than Clarence Hervey," said Mr. Percival.

"Nobody more likely to do a generous action than Mr. Hervey," repeated Belinda, in rather a low tone. She could now praise Clarence Hervey without blushing, and she could think even of his generosity without partiality, though not without pleasure. By strength of mind, and timely exertion, she had prevented her prepossession from growing into a passion that might have made her miserable. Proud of this conquest over herself, she was now disposed to treat Mr. Vincent with more favour than usual. Self-complacency generally puts us in good-humour with our friends.

After spending some pleasant hours in lord C——'s beautiful grounds, where the children explored to their satisfaction every dingle and bushy dell, they returned home in the cool of the evening. Mr. Vincent thought it the most delightful evening he had ever felt.

“What ! as charming as a West Indian evening ?” said Mr. Percival. “This is more than I expected ever to hear you acknowledge in favour of England. Do you remember how you used to rave of the climate and of the prospects of Jamaica ?”

“Yes, but my taste has quite changed.”

“I remember the time,” said Mr. Percival, “when you thought it impossible that your taste should ever change ; when you told me that taste, whether for the beauties of animate or inanimate nature, was immutable.”

“You and miss Portman have taught me better sense. First loves are generally silly things,” added he, colouring a little. Belinda coloured also.

“First loves,” continued Mr. Percival, “are not necessarily more foolish than others ; but the chances are certainly against them. From poetry or romance, young people usually form their earlier ideas of love, before they have actually felt the passion ; and the image which they have in their own minds of the *beau ideal* is cast upon the first objects they afterward behold. This, if I may be allowed the expression, is Cupid’s Fata Morgana. Deluded mortals are in ecstasy whilst the illusion lasts, and in despair when it vanishes.”

Mr. Percival appeared to be unconscious that what he was saying was any way applicable to Belinda. He addressed himself to Mr. Vincent solely, and she listened at her ease.

“But,” said she, “do not you think that this prejudice, as I am willing to allow it to be, in favour of first loves, may in *our sex* be advantageous ? Even

when a woman may be convinced that she ought not to indulge a *first* love, should she not be prevented by delicacy from thinking of a second?"

"Delicacy, my dear miss Portman, is a charming word, and a still more charming thing, and Mrs. Freke has probably increased our affection for it; but even delicacy, like all other virtues, must be judged of by the test of utility. We should run into romance and error, and misery, if we did not constantly refer to this standard. Our reasonings as to the conduct of life, as far as moral prudence is concerned, must depend ultimately upon facts. Now, of the numbers of people in this world, how many do you think have married their *first loves*? Probably not one out of ten. Then, would you have nine out of ten pine all their lives in celibacy, or fret in matrimony, because they cannot have the persons who first struck their *fancy*?"

"I acknowledge this would not add to the happiness of society," said Belinda.

"Nor to its virtue," said Mr. Percival. "I scarcely know an idea more dangerous to domestic happiness than this belief in the unextinguishable nature of a first flame. There are people who would persuade us that, though it may be smothered for years, it must break out at last, and blaze with destructive fury. Pernicious doctrine! false as it is pernicious!—The struggles between duty and passion may be the charm of romance, but must be the misery of real life. The woman who marries one man, and loves another, who, in spite of all that an amiable and estimable husband can do to win her con-

fidence and affection, nourishes in secret a *fatal* prepossession for her first love, may perhaps, by the eloquence of a fine writer, be made an interesting heroine ;—but would any man of sense or feeling choose to be troubled with such a wife?—Would not even the idea that women admired such conduct necessarily tend to diminish our confidence, if not in their virtue, at least in their sincerity? And would not this suspicion destroy our happiness? Husbands may sometimes have delicate feelings as well as their wives, though they are seldom allowed to have any by these unjust novel writers. Now, could a husband who has any delicacy be content to possess the person without the mind?—the duty without the love?—Could he be perfectly happy, if, in the fondest moments, he might doubt whether he were an object of disgust or affection?—whether the smiles of apparent joy were only the efforts of a suffering martyr?—Thank Heaven! I am not married to one of these charming martyrs. Let those live with them who admire them. For my part, I admire and love the wife, who not only seems but is happy—as I,” added Mr. Percival, smiling, “have the fond credulity to believe. If I have spoken too long or too warmly upon the chapter of *first loves*, I have at least been a perfectly disinterested declaimer ; for I can assure you, miss Portman, that I do not suspect lady Anne Percival of sighing in secret for some vision of perfection, any more than she suspects me of pining for the charming lady Delacour, who, perhaps, you may have heard was my *first love*. In these days, however, so few people marry with even the pretence to

love of any sort, that you will think I might have spared this tirade. No; there are ingenuous minds which will never be enslaved by fashion or interest, though they may be exposed to be deceived by romance, or by the *delicacy* of their own imaginations."

"I hear," said Belinda, smiling, "I hear and understand the emphasis with which you pronounce that word *delicacy*. I see you have not forgotten that I used it improperly half an hour ago, as you have convinced me."

"Happy they," said Mr. Percival, "who can be convinced in half an hour! There are some people who cannot be convinced in a whole life, and who end where they began, with saying—'This is my opinion—I always thought so, and always shall.'"

Mr. Vincent at all times loved Mr. Percival; but he never felt so much affection for him as he did this evening, and his arguments appeared to him unanswerable. Though Belinda had never mentioned to Mr. Vincent the name of Clarence Hervey till this day, and though he did not in the least suspect from her manner that this gentleman ever possessed any interest in her heart; yet, with her accustomed sincerity, she had confessed to him that an impression had been made upon her mind before she came to Oakly-park.

After this conversation with Mr. Percival, Mr. Vincent perceived that he gained ground more rapidly in her favour; and his company grew every day more agreeable to her taste: he was convinced

that, as he possessed her esteem, he should in time secure her affections.

"In time," repeated lady Anne Percival: "you must allow her time, or you will spoil all."

It was with some difficulty that Mr. Vincent restrained his impatience, even though he was persuaded of the prudence of his friend's advice. Things went on in this happy, but as he thought slow, state of progression till towards the latter end of September.

One fine morning lady Anne Percival came into Belinda's room with a bridal favour in her hand. "Do you know," said she, "that we are to have a wedding to-day? This favour has just been sent to my maid. Lucy, the pretty girl whom you may remember to have seen some time ago with that prettily turned necklace, is the bride, and James Jackson is the bridegroom. Mr. Vincent has let them a very pretty little farm in the neighbourhood, and—hark! there's the sound of music."

They looked out of the window, and they saw a troop of villagers, gaily dressed, going to the wedding. Lady Anne, who was always eager to promote innocent festivity, sent immediately to have a tent pitched in the park; and all the rural company were invited to a dance in the evening: it was a very cheerful spectacle. Belinda heard from all sides praises of Mr. Vincent's generosity; and she could not be insensible to the simple but enthusiastic testimony which Juba bore to his master's goodness. Juba had composed, in his broken dialect, a little song in

honour of his master, which he sang to his banjore with the most touching expression of joyful gratitude. In some of the stanzas Belinda could distinguish that her own name was frequently repeated. Lady Anne called him, and desired to have the words of this song. They were a mixture of English and of his native language; they described in the strongest manner what had been his feelings whilst he was under the terror of Mrs. Freke's fiery obeah woman, then his joy on being relieved from these horrors, with the delightful sensations of returning health;—and thence he suddenly passed to his gratitude to Belinda, the person to whom he owed his recovery. He concluded with wishing her all sorts of happiness, and, above all, that she might be fortunate in her love; which Juba thought the highest degree of felicity. He had no sooner finished his song, which particularly touched and pleased miss Portman, than he begged his master to offer to her the little instrument, which he had made with much pains and ingenuity. She accepted the banjore with a smile that enchanted Mr. Vincent; but at this instant they were startled by the sound of a carriage driving rapidly into the park. Belinda looked up, and between the heads of the dancers she just caught a glimpse of a well-known livery. “Good heavens!” she exclaimed, “lady Delacour's carriage!—Can it be lady Delacour?”

The carriage stopped, and Marriott hastily jumped out of it. Belinda pressed forward to meet her; poor Marriot was in great agitation:—“O miss Portman! my poor lady is very ill—very ill, indeed.

She has sent me for you—here's her letter. Dear miss Portman, I hope you won't refuse to come: she *has* been very ill, and *is* very ill; but she would be better, if she could see you again. But I'll tell every thing, ma'am, when we are by ourselves, and when you have read your letter."

Miss Portman immediately accompanied Marriott towards the house; and as they walked thither, she learned that lady Delacour had applied to the quack-doctor in whom she had such implicit faith, and had in vain endeavoured to engage him to perform for her the operation to which she had determined to submit. He was afraid to hazard it, and he prevailed upon her to give up the scheme, and to try some new external remedy from which he promised wonders. No one knew what his medicines were, but they affected her head in the most alarming manner.

In her delirium she called frequently upon miss Portman; sometimes accusing her of the basest treachery, sometimes addressing her as if she were present, and pouring forth the warmest expressions of friendship. "In her lucid intervals, ma'am," continued Marriott, "she for some weeks scarcely ever mentioned your name, nor could bear to hear me mention it. One day, when I was saying how much I wished that you were with her again, she darted at me the most terrible look that ever I beheld.

" 'When I am in my grave,' Marriott, cried my lady, 'it will be time enough for miss Portman again to visit this house, and you may then express your

attachment to her with more propriety than at present.' These were my lady's own words—I shall never forget them: they struck and astonished me, ma'am, so much, I stood like one stupified, and then left the room to think them over again by myself, and make sense of them, if I could. Well, ma'am, to be sure, it then struck me like a flash of lightning, that my lady was jealous—and, begging your pardon, ma'am—of you. This seemed to me the most unnatural thing in the world, considering how easy my lady had always seemed to be about my lord; but it was now clear to me, that this was the cause of your leaving us so suddenly, ma'am. Well, I was confident that Mr. Champfort was at the bottom of the business from the first; and now that I knew what scent to go upon, I went to work with fresh spirit to find him out, which was a thing I was determined upon—and what I'm determined upon, I generally do, ma'am. So I put together things about miss Portman and my lord, that had dropped at odd times from sir Philip Baddely's gentleman; and I, partly serious and partly flirting, which in a good cause is no sin, drew from him (for he pretends to be a little an admirer of mine, ma'am, though I never gave him the smallest encouragement) all he knew or suspected, or had heard reported, or whispered; and out it came, ma'am, that Mr. Champfort was the original of all; and that he had told a heap of lies about some bank-notes that my lord had given you, and that you and my lord were to be married as soon as my lady was dead; and I don't know what, which he maliciously circulated through sir Philip's

gentleman to sir Philip himself, and so round again to my lady. Now, sir Philip's man behaved like a gentleman upon the occasion, which I shall ever be free to acknowledge and remember: and when I represented things properly, and made him sensible of the mischief, which, he assured me, was done purely with an eye to serve sir Philip, his master, he very candidly offered to assist me to unmask that villain Champfort, which he could easily do with the assistance of a few bottles of claret, and a few fair words; which, though I can't abide hypocrisy, I thought quite allowable upon such an occasion. So, ma'am, when Mr. Champfort was thrown off his guard by the claret, sir Philip's gentleman began to talk of my lord and my lady, and miss Portman; and he observed that my lord and my lady were coming together more than they used to be since miss Portman left the house. To which Champfort replied with an oath, like an unmannered reprobate as he is, and in his gibberish, French and English, which I can't speak; but the sense of it was this:—
'My lord and lady shall never come together, if I can help it. It was to hinder this I got miss Portman banished; for my lord was quite another man after she got miss Helena into the house; and I don't doubt but he might have been brought to leave off his burgundy, and set up for a sober, regular man; which would not suit me at all. If my lady once was to get power over him again, I might go whistle—so (with another reprobate oath) my lord and my lady shall never come together again whilst I live.'

"Well, ma'am," continued Marriott, "as soon as

I was in possession of this precious speech, I carried it and a letter of sir Philip Baddely's gentleman vouching it to my lady. My lady was thunder-struck, and so vexed to have been, as she said, a dupe, that she sent for my lord directly, and insisted upon his giving up Mr. Champfort. My lord demurred, because my lady spoke so high, and said *insist*. He would have done it, I'm satisfied, of his own accord with the greatest pleasure, if my lady had not, as it were, commanded it. But he answered at last, 'My lady Delacour, I'm not a man to be governed by a wife—I shall keep or part with my own servants in my own house, according to my own pleasure;' and saying so, he left the room. I never saw my lady so angry as she was at this refusal of my lord to part with him. The house was quite in a state of distraction for some days. I never would sit down to the same table, ma'am, with Mr. Champfort, nor speak to him, nor look at him, and parties ran high above and below stairs. And at last my lady, who had been getting better, took to her bed again with a nervous fever, which brought her almost to death's door; she having been so much weakened before by the quack medicines and convulsions, and all her sufferings in secret. She would not see my lord on no account, and Champfort persuaded him her illness was pretence, to bring him to her purpose; which was the more readily believed, because nobody was ever let into my lady's bedchamber but myself. All this time she never mentioned your name, ma'am; but once, when I was sitting by her bedside, as she

was asleep, she started suddenly, and cried out, ‘O my dearest Belinda! are you come back to me?’—She awakened herself with the start; and raising herself quite up in her bed, she pulled back the curtains, and looked all round the room. I’m sure she expected to see you; and when she found it was a dream, she gave a heavy sigh, and sank down upon her pillow. I then could not forbear to speak, and this time my lady was greatly touched when I mentioned your name:—she shed tears, ma’am; and you know it is not a little thing that can draw tears from my lady. But when I said something about sending for you, she answered, she was sure you would not return to her, and that she would never condescend to ask a favour in vain, even from you. Then I replied that I was sure you loved her still, and as well as ever: and that the proof of that was, that Mrs. Luttridge and Mrs. Freke together, by all their wiles, could not draw you over to their party at Harrowgate, and that you had affronted Mrs. Freke by defending her ladyship. My lady was all surprise at this, and eagerly asked how I came to know it. Now, ma’am, I had it all by a post letter from Mrs. Luttridge’s maid, who is my cousin, and knows every thing that’s going on. My lady from this moment forward could scarce rest an instant without wishing for you, and fretting for you as I knew by her manner. One day my lord met me on the stairs as I was coming down from my poor lady’s room, and he asked me how she was, and why she did not send for a physician. ‘The best physician, my lord, she could send for,’ said I,

‘would be miss Portman ; for she’ll never be well till that good young lady comes back again, in my humble opinion.’

“ ‘And what should prevent that good young lady from coming back again? Not I, surely,’ rejoined my lord, ‘for I wish she was here, with all my heart.’

“ ‘It is not easy to suppose, my lord,’ said I, ‘after all that has passed, that the young lady would choose to return, or that my lady would ask her, whilst Mr. Champfort remains paramount in the house.’ ‘If that’s all,’ cried my lord, ‘tell your lady I’ll part with Champfort upon the spot; for the rascal has just had the insolence to insist upon it, that a pair of new boots are not too tight for me, when I said they were. I’ll show him I can be master, and will, in my own house.’ Ma’am, my heart leaped for joy within me at hearing these words, and I ran up to my lady with them. I easily concluded in my own mind, that my lord was glad of the pretence of the boots, to give up handsomely after his standing out so long. To be sure, my lord’s mightily jealous of being master, and mighty fond of his own way; but I forgive him every thing for doing as I would have him at last, and dismissing that prince of mischief-makers, Mr. Champfort. My lady called for her writing desk directly, and sat up in her bed, and with her trembling hand, as you see by the writing, ma’am, wrote a letter to you as fast as ever she could, and the postchaise was ordered. I don’t know what fancy seized her—but if you remember, ma’am, the hammercloth to her new carriage had orange and black fringe at first: she

would not use it, till this had been changed to blue and white. Well, ma'am, she recollected this on a sudden, as I was getting ready to come for you ; and she set the servants at work directly to take off the blue and white, and put on the black and orange fringe again, which she said must be done before your coming. And my lady ordered her own footman to ride along with me ; and I have come post, and have travelled night and day, and will never rest till I get back. But, ma'am, I won't keep you any longer from reading your letter, only to say, that I hope to Heaven you will not refuse to return to my poor lady, if it be only to put her mind at ease before she dies. She cannot have long to live."

As Marriott finished these words they reached the house, and Belinda went to her own room to read lady Delacour's letter. It contained none of her customary '*éloquence du billet*,' no sprightly wit, no real, no affected gaiety ; her mind seemed to be exhausted by bodily suffering, and her high spirit subdued. She expressed the most poignant anguish for having indulged such unjust suspicions and intemperate passions. She lamented having forfeited the esteem and affection of the only real friend she had ever possessed—a friend of whose forbearance, tenderness, and fidelity, she had received such indisputable proofs. She concluded by saying, "I feel my end fast approaching, and perhaps, Belinda, your humanity will induce you to grant my last request, and to let me see you once more before I die."

Belinda immediately decided to return to lady Delacour—though it was with real regret that she

thought of leaving lady Anne Percival, and the amiable and happy family to whom she had become so much attached. The children crowded round her when they heard that she was going, and Mr. Vincent stood in silent sorrow—but we spare our readers this parting scene. Miss Portman promised to return to Oakly-park as soon as she possibly could. Mr. Vincent anxiously requested permission to follow her to town: but this she positively refused; and he submitted with as good a grace as a lover can submit to any thing that crosses his passion.

CHAPTER XX.

RECONCILIATION.

AWARE that her remaining in town at such an unusual season of the year would appear unaccountable to her fashionable acquaintance, lady Delacour contrived for herself a characteristic excuse; she declared that there was no possibility of finding pleasure in any thing but novelty, and that the greatest novelty to her would be to remain a whole summer in town. Most of her friends, amongst whom she had successfully established a character for caprice, were satisfied that this was merely some new whim, practised to signalize herself by singularity. The real reason that detained her was her dependence upon the empiric, who had repeatedly visited and constantly prescribed for her. Convinced,

however, by the dreadful situation to which his prescriptions had lately reduced her, that he was unworthy of her confidence, she determined to dismiss him : but she could not do this, as she had a considerable sum to pay him, till Marriott's return, because she could not trust any one but Marriott to let him up the private staircase into the boudoir.

During Marriott's absence, her ladyship suffered no one to attend her but a maid who was remarkable for her stupidity. She thought that she could have nothing to fear from this girl's spirit of inquiry, for never was any human being so destitute of curiosity. It was about noon when Belinda and Marriott arrived. Lady Delacour, who had passed a restless night, was asleep. When she awoke, she found Marriott standing beside her bed.

"Then it is all in vain, I see," cried her ladyship; "miss Portman is not with you?—Give me my laudanum."

"Miss Portman is come, my lady," said Marriott; "she is in the dressing-room : she would not come in here with me, lest she should startle you."

"Belinda is come, do you say? Admirable Belinda!" cried lady Delacour, and she clasped her hands with ecstasy.

"Shall I tell her, my lady, that you are awake?"

"Yes—no—stay—lord Delacour is at home. I will get up immediately. Let my lord be told that I wish to speak with him—that I beg he will breakfast with me in my dressing-room half an hour hence. I will dress immediately."

Marriott in vain represented that she ought not

to hurry herself in her present weak state. Intent upon her own thoughts, she listened to nothing that was said, but frequently urged Marriott to be expeditious. She put on an unusual quantity of rouge: then looking at herself in the glass, she said, with a forced smile, "Marriott, I look so charmingly, that miss Portman, perhaps, will be of lord Delacour's opinion, and think that nothing is the matter with me. Ah! no; she has been behind the scenes—she knows the truth too well!—Marriott, pray did she ask you many questions about me?—Was not she very sorry to leave Oakly-park?—Were not they all extremely concerned to part with her?—Did she ask after Helena?—Did you tell her that I insisted upon my lord's parting with Champfort?"

At the word Champfort, Marriott's mouth opened eagerly, and she began to answer with her usual volubility. Lady Delacour waited not for any reply to the various questions which, in the hurry of her mind, she had asked; but, passing swiftly by Marriott, she threw open the door of her dressing-room. At the sight of Belinda she stopped short; and, totally overpowered, she would have sunk upon the floor, had not miss Portman caught her in her arms, and supported her to a sofa. When she came to herself, and heard the soothing tone of Belinda's voice, she looked up timidly in her face for a few moments without being able to speak.

"And are you really here once more, my dear Belinda?" cried she at last; "and may I still call you my friend?—and do you forgive me?—Yes, I *see* you do—and from you I can endure the humilia-

tion of being forgiven. Enjoy the noble sense of your own superiority."

"My dear lady Delacour," said Belinda, "you see all this in too strong a light: you have done me no injury—I have nothing to forgive."

"I *cannot* see it in too strong a light—Nothing to forgive!—Yes, you have; that which it is the most difficult to forgive—injustice. Oh, how you must have despised me for the folly, the meanness of my suspicions! Of all tempers that which appears to me, and I am sure to you, the most despicable, the most intolerable, is a suspicious temper. Mine was once open, generous as your own—you see how the best dispositions may be depraved—what am I now?—Fit only

'To point a moral, or adorn a tale'—

a mismatched, misplaced, miserable, perverted being."

"And now you have abused yourself till you are breathless, I may have some chance," said Belinda, "of being heard in your defence. I perfectly agree with you in thinking that a suspicious temper is despicable and intolerable; but there is a vast difference between an acute fit of jealousy, as our friend Dr. X—— would say, and a chronic habit of suspicion. The noblest natures may be worked up to suspicion by designing villany; and then a handkerchief, or a hammercloth, 'trifles as light as air'——"

"O my dear, you are too good. But my folly

admits of no excuse, no palliation," interrupted lady Delacour ; " mine was jealousy without love."

" That indeed would admit of no excuse," said Belinda ; " therefore you will pardon me if I think it incredible—especially as I have detected you in feeling something like affection for your little daughter, after you had done your best, I mean your worst, to make me believe that you were a monster of a mother."

" That was quite another affair, my dear. I did not know Helena was worth loving. I did not imagine my little daughter could love me. When I found my mistake, I changed my tone. But there is no hope of mistake with my poor husband. Your own sense must show you, that lord Delacour is not a man to be loved."

" That could not *always* have been your ladyship's opinion," said Belinda, with an arch smile.

" Lord ! my dear," said lady Delacour, a little embarrassed, " in the highest paroxysm of my madness, I never suspected that you could *love* lord Delacour ; I surely only hinted that you were in love with his coronet. That was absurd enough in all conscience—don't make me more absurd than I am."

" Is it then the height of absurdity to love a husband ?"

" Love ! Nonsense !—Impossible !—Hush ! here he comes, with his odious creaking shoes. What man can ever expect to be loved who wears creaking shoes ?" pursued her ladyship, as lord Delacour entered the room his shoes creaking at every step ;

and assuming an air of levity, she welcomed him as a stranger to her dressing-room. "No speeches, my lord! no speeches, I beseech you," cried she, as he was beginning to speak to miss Portman. "Believe me that explanations always make bad worse. Miss Portman is here, thank Heaven! and her; and Champfort is gone, thank you—or your boots. And now let us sit down to breakfast, and forget as soon as possible every thing that is disagreeable."

When lady Delacour had a mind to banish painful recollections, it was scarcely possible to resist the magical influence of her conversation and manners; yet her lord's features never relaxed to a smile during this breakfast. He maintained an obstinate silence, and a profound solemnity—till at last, rising from table, he turned to miss Portman, and said, "Of all the caprices of fine ladies, that which surprises me the most is the whim of keeping their beds without being sick. Now, miss Portman, you would hardly suppose that my lady Delacour, who has been so lively this morning, has kept her bed, as I am informed, a fortnight—is not this astonishing?"

"Prodigiously astonishing, that my lord Delacour, like all the rest of the world, should be liable to be deceived by appearances," cried her ladyship. "Honour me with your attention for a few minutes, my lord, and perhaps I may increase your astonishment."

His lordship, struck by the sudden change of her voice from gaiety to gravity fixed his eyes upon her and returned to his seat. She paused—then addressing herself to Belinda, "My incomparable

friend," said she, "I will now give you a convincing proof of the unlimited power you have over my mind. My lord, miss Portman has persuaded me to the step which I am now going to take. She has prevailed upon me to make a decisive trial of your prudence and kindness. She has determined me to throw myself on your mercy."

"Mercy!" repeated lord Delacour; and a confused idea, that she was now about to make a confession of the justice of some of his former suspicions, took possession of his mind: he looked aghast.

"I am going, my lord, to confide to you a secret of the utmost importance—a secret which is known to but three people in the world, miss Portman, Marriott, and a man whose name I cannot reveal to you."

"Stop, lady Delacour!" cried his lordship, with a degree of emotion and energy which he had never shown till now: "stop, I conjure, I command you, madam! I am not sufficiently master of myself—I once loved you too well to bear such a stroke. Trust me with no such secret—say no more—you have said enough,—too much. I forgive you, that is all I can do; but we must part, lady Delacour!" said he, breaking from her with agony expressed in his countenance.

"The man has a heart, a soul, I protest! You knew him better than I did, miss Portman. Nay, you are not gone yet, my lord! You really love me, I find."

"No, no, no," cried he, vehemently: "weak as you take me to be, lady Delacour, I am incapable of

loving a woman who has disgraced me, disgraced herself, her family, her station, her high endowments, her ——” His utterance failed.

“O lady Delacour!” cried Belinda, “how can you trifle in this manner?”

“I meant not,” said her ladyship, “to trifle: I am satisfied. My lord, it is time that you should be satisfied. I *can* give you the most irrefragable proof that, whatever may have been the apparent levity of my conduct, you have had no serious cause for jealousy. But the proof will shock—disgust you. Have you courage to know more?—Then follow me.”

He followed her.—Belinda heard the boudoir door unlocked.—In a few minutes they returned.—Grief, and horror, and pity, were painted in lord Delacour’s countenance, as he passed hastily through the room.

“My dearest friend, I have taken your advice: would to Heaven I had taken it sooner!” said lady Delacour to miss Portman. “I have revealed to lord Delacour my real situation. Poor man! he was shocked beyond expression. He behaved incomparably well. I am convinced that he would, as he said, let his hand be cut off to save my life. The moment his foolish jealousy was extinguished, his love for me revived in full force. Would you believe it? he has promised me to break with odious Mrs. Luttridge. Upon my charging him to keep my secret from her, he instantly, in the handsomest manner in the world, declared he would never see her more, rather than give me a moment’s uneasiness. How I reproach myself for having been for years the torment of this man’s life!”

"You may do better than reproach yourself, my dear lady Delacour," said Belinda; "you may yet live for years to be the blessing and pride of his life. I am persuaded that nothing but your despair of obtaining domestic happiness has so long enslaved you to dissipation; and now that you find a friend in your husband, now that you know the affectionate temper of your little Helena, you will have fresh views and fresh hopes; you will have the courage to live for yourself, and not for what is called the world."

"The world!" cried lady Delacour, with a tone of disdain: "how long has that word enslaved a soul formed for higher purposes!" She paused, and looked up towards heaven with an expression of fervent devotion, which Belinda had once, and but once, before seen in her countenance. Then, as if forgetful even that Belinda was present, she threw herself upon a sofa, and fell, or seemed to fall, into a profound reverie. She was roused by the entrance of Marriott, who came into the room to ask whether she would now take her laudanum. "I thought I had taken it," said she in a feeble voice; and as she raised her eyes and saw Belinda, she added, with a faint smile, "Miss Portman, I believe, has been laudanum to me this morning: but even that will not do long, you see; nothing will do for me now but *this*," and she stretched out her hand for the laudanum. "Is not it shocking to think," continued she, after she had swallowed it, "that in laudanum alone I find the means of supporting existence?"

She put her hand to her head, as if partly conscious

of the confusion of her own ideas: and ashamed that Belinda should witness it, she desired Marriott to assist her to rise, and to support her to her bedchamber. She made a sign to miss Portman not to follow her. "Do not take it unkindly, but I am quite exhausted, and wish to be alone; for I am grown fond of being alone some hours in the day, and perhaps I shall sleep."

Marriott came out of her lady's room about a quarter of an hour afterward, and said that her lady seemed disposed to sleep, but that she desired to have her book left by her bedside. Marriott searched among several which lay upon the table, for one in which a mark was put. Belinda looked over them along with Marriott, and she was surprised to find that they had almost all methodistical titles. Lady Delacour's mark was in the middle of Wesley's Admonitions. Several pages in other books of the same description miss Portman found marked in pencil, with reiterated lines, which she knew to be her ladyship's customary mode of distinguishing passages that she particularly liked. Some were highly oratorical, but most of them were of a mystical cast, and appeared to Belinda scarcely intelligible. She had reason to be astonished at meeting with such books in the dressing-room of a woman of lady Delacour's character. During the solitude of her illness, her ladyship had first begun to think seriously on religious subjects, and the early impressions that had been made on her mind in her childhood, by a methodistical mother, recurred. Her understanding, weakened perhaps by disease, and never accustomed to

reason, was incapable of distinguishing between truth and error ; and her temper, naturally enthusiastic, hurried her from one extreme to the other—from thoughtless scepticism to visionary credulity. Her devotion was by no means steady or permanent ; it came on by fits usually at the time when the effect of opium was exhausted, or before a fresh dose began to operate. In these intervals she was low spirited—bitter reflections on the manner in which she had thrown away her talents and her life obtruded themselves ; the idea of the untimely death of colonel Lawless, of which she reproached herself as the cause, returned ; and her mind, from being a prey to remorse, began to sink in these desponding moments under the most dreadful superstitious terrors—terrors the more powerful as they were secret. Whilst the stimulus of laudanum lasted, the train of her ideas always changed, and she was amazed at the weak fears and strange notions by which she had been disturbed ; yet it was not in her power entirely to chase away these visions of the night, and they gained gradually a dominion over her, of which she was heartily ashamed. She resolved to conceal this *weakness*, as in her gayer moments she thought it, from Belinda, from whose superior strength of understanding she dreaded ridicule or contempt. Her experience of miss Portman's gentleness and friendship might reasonably have prevented or dispelled such apprehensions ; but lady Delacour was governed by pride, by sentiment, by whim, by enthusiasm, by passion—by any thing but reason.

When she began to revive after her fit of languor,

and had been refreshed by opium and sleep, she rang for Marriott, and inquired for Belinda. She was much provoked when Marriott, by way of proving to her that miss Portman could not have been tired of being left alone, told her that she had been in the dressing-room *rummaging over the books*.

“What books?” cried lady Delacour. “I forgot that *they* were left there. Miss Portman is not reading them still, I suppose? Go for them, and let them be locked up in my own bookcase, and bring me the key.”

Her ladyship appeared in good spirits when she saw Belinda again. She rallied her upon the serious studies she had chosen for her morning’s amusements. “Those methodistical books, with their strange quaint titles,” said she, “are, however, diverting enough to those who, like myself, can find diversion in the height of human absurdity.”

Deceived by the levity of her manner, Belinda concluded that the marks of approbation in these books were ironical, and she thought no more of the matter; for lady Delacour suddenly gave a new turn to the conversation by exclaiming, “Now we talk of the height of human absurdity, what are we to think of Clarence Hervey?”

“Why should we think of him at all?” said Belinda.

“For two excellent reasons, my dear: because we cannot help it, and because he deserves it. Yes, he deserves it, believe me, if it were only for having written these charming letters,” said lady Delacour,

opening a cabinet, and taking out a small packet of letters, which she put into Belinda's hands. "Pray, read them; you will find them amazingly edifying, as well as entertaining. I protest I am only puzzled to know whether I shall bind them up with Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* or Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women*. Here, my love, if you like description," continued her ladyship, opening one of the letters, "here is a Radcliffean tour along the picturesque coasts of Dorset and Devonshire. Why he went this tour, unless for the pleasure and glory of describing it, Heaven knows! Clouds and darkness rest over the tourist's private history; but this, of course, renders his letters more *piquant* and interesting. All who have a just taste either for literature or for gallantry, know how much we are indebted to the obscure for the sublime, and orators and lovers feel what felicity there is in the use of the fine figure of suspension."

"Very good description, indeed!" said Belinda, without raising her eyes from the letter or seeming to pay any attention to the latter part of lady Delacour's speech; "very good description, certainly!"

"Well, my dear; but here is something better than *pure description*—here is sense for you: and pray mark the politeness of addressing sense to a woman—to a woman of sense, I mean—and which of us is not? Then here is sentiment for you," continued her ladyship, spreading another letter before Belinda; "a story of a Dorsetshire lady, who had the misfortune to be married to a man as *unlike* Mr. Percival, and as like lord Delacour, as possible; and

yet, O, wonderful ! they make as happy a couple as one's heart could wish. Now, I am truly candid and good-natured to admire this letter ; for every word of it is a lesson to me, and evidently was so intended. But I take it all in good part, because, to do Clarence justice, he describes the joys of domestic Paradise in such elegant language, that he does not make me sick. In short, my dear Belinda, to finish my panegyric, as it has been said of some other epistles, if ever there were letters calculated to make you fall in love with the writer of them, these are they."

"Then," said miss Portman, folding up the letter which she was just going to read, "I will not run the hazard of reading them."

"Why, my dear," said lady Delacour, with a look of mingled concern, reproach, and raillery, "have you actually given up my poor Clarence, merely on account of this mistress in the wood, this Virginia St. Pierre? Nonsense ! Begging your pardon, my dear, the man loves you. Some entanglement, some punctilio, some doubt, some delicacy, some folly, prevents him from being just at this moment, where, I confess, he ought to be—at your feet ; and you, out of patience, which a young lady ought never to be if she can help it, will go and marry—I know you will—some stick of a rival, purely to provoke him."

"If ever I marry," said Belinda, with a look of proud humility, "I shall certainly marry to please myself, and not to provoke any body else ; and, at all events, I hope I shall never marry *a stick*."

"Pardon me that word," said lady Delacour. "I am convinced you never will—but one is apt to judge

of others by one's self. I am willing to believe that Mr. Vincent——”

“Mr. Vincent! How did you know——” exclaimed Belinda.

“How did I know? Why, my dear, do you think I am so little interested about you, that I have not found out some of your secrets? And do you think that Marriott could refrain from telling me, in her most triumphant tone, that ‘miss Portman has not gone to Oakly-park for nothing; that she has made a conquest of a Mr. Vincent, a West Indian, a ward, or lately a ward, of Mr. Percival's, the handsomest man that ever was seen, and the richest, &c. &c. &c.’ Now simple I rejoiced at the news; for I took it for granted you would never seriously think of marrying the man.”

“Then why did your ladyship rejoice?”

“Why? O, you novice at Cupid's chess-board! do not you see the next move? Check with your new knight, and the game is your own. Now, if your aunt Stanhope saw your look at this instant, she would give you up for ever—if she have not done that already. In plain, unmetaphorical prose, then, cannot you comprehend, my straight-forward Belinda, that if you make Clarence Hervey heartily jealous, let the impediments to your union be what they may, he will acknowledge himself to be heartily in love with you? I should make no scruple of frightening him within an inch of his life, for his good. Sir Philip Baddely was not the man to frighten him; but this Mr. Vincent, by all accounts, is just the thing.”

“And do you imagine that I could use Mr. Vincent so ill?—And can you think me capable of such double dealing?”

“O! in love and war, you know, all stratagems are allowable. But you take the matter so seriously, and you redden with such virtuous indignation, that I dare not say a word more—only—may I ask—are you absolutely engaged to Mr. Vincent?”

“No. We have had the prudence to avoid all promises, all engagements.”

“There’s my good girl!” cried lady Delacour, kissing her: “all may yet turn out well. Read those letters.—take them to your room, read them, read them; and depend upon it, my dearest Belinda! you are not the sort of woman that will, that can be happy, if you make a mere match of convenience. Forgive me—I love you too well not to speak the truth, though it may offend for a moment.”

“You do not offend, but you misunderstand me,” said Belinda. “Have patience with me, and you shall find that I am incapable of making a mere match of convenience.”

Then miss Portman gave lady Delacour a simple but full account of all that had passed at Oakly-park relative to Mr. Vincent. She repeated the arguments by which lady Anne Percival had first prevailed upon her to admit of Mr. Vincent’s addresses. She said, that she had been convinced by Mr. Percival, that the omnipotence of a *first love* was an idea founded in error, and realized only in romance; and that to believe that none could be happy in marriage, except with the first object of their fancy or their affections,

would be an error pernicious to individuals and to society. When she detailed the arguments used by Mr. Percival on this subject, lady Delacour sighed, and observed that Mr. Percival was certainly right, judging from *his own experience*, to declaim against the folly of *first loves*; “and for the same reason,” added she, “perhaps I may be pardoned if I retain some prejudice in their favour.” She turned aside her head to hide a starting tear, and here the conversation dropped. Belinda, recollecting the circumstances of her ladyship’s early history, reproached herself for having touched on this tender subject, yet at the same time she felt with increased force, at this moment, the justice of Mr. Percival’s observations; for, evidently, the hold which this prejudice had kept in lady Delacour’s mind had materially injured her happiness, by making her neglect, after her marriage, all the means of content that were in her reach. Her incessant comparisons between her *first love* and her husband excited perpetual contempt and disgust in her mind for her wedded lord, and for many years precluded all perception of his good qualities, all desire to live with him upon good terms, and all idea of securing that share of domestic happiness that was actually in her power. Belinda resolved at some future moment, whenever she could, with propriety and with effect, to suggest these reflections to lady Delacour, and in the mean time she was determined to turn them to her own advantage. She perceived that she should have need of all her steadiness to preserve her judgment unbiassed by her ladyship’s wit and persuasive eloquence on the one hand, and

on the other by her own high opinion of lady Anne Percival's judgment, and the anxious desire she felt to secure her approbation. The letters from Clarence Hervey she read at night, when she retired to her own room ; and they certainly raised not only Belinda's opinion of his talents, but her esteem for his character. She saw that he had, with great address, made use of the influence he possessed over lady Delacour, to turn her mind to every thing that could make her amiable, estimable, and happy—she saw that Clarence, so far from attempting, for the sake of his own vanity, to retain his pre-eminence in her ladyship's imagination, used on the contrary “ his utmost skill ” to turn the tide of her affections toward her husband and her daughter. In one of his letters, and but in one, he mentioned Belinda. He expressed great regret in hearing from lady Delacour that her friend, miss Portman, was no longer with her. He expatiated on the inestimable advantages and happiness of having such a friend—but this referred to lady Delacour, not to himself. There was an air of much respect and some embarrassment in all he said of Belinda, but nothing like love. A few words at the end of this paragraph were cautiously obliterated, however ; and, without any obvious link of connexion, the writer began a new sentence with a general reflection upon the folly and imprudence of forming romantic projects. Then he enumerated some of the various schemes he had formed in his early youth, and humorously recounted how they had failed, or how they had been abandoned. Afterward, changing his tone from playful wit to serious

philosophy, he observed the changes which these experiments had made in his own character.

“My friend, Dr. X——,” said he, “divides mankind into three classes: those who learn from the experience of others—they are happy men; those who learn from their own experience—they are wise men; and, lastly, those who learn neither from their own nor from other people’s experience—they are fools. This class is by far the largest. I am content,” continued Clarence, “to be in the middle class—perhaps you will say because I cannot be in the first: however, were it in my power to choose my own character, I should, forgive me the seeming vanity of the speech, still be content to remain in my present station upon this principle—the characters of those who are taught by their own experience must be progressive in knowledge and virtue. Those who learn from the experience of others may become stationary, because they must depend for their progress on the experiments that we brave volunteers, at whose expence they are to live and learn, are pleased to try. There may be much safety in thus snugly fighting, or rather seeing the battle of life, behind the broad shield of a stouter warrior; yet it seems to me to be rather an ignominious than an enviable situation.

“Our friend, Dr. X——, would laugh at my insisting upon being amongst the class of learners by their own experience. He would ask me, whether it be the ultimate end of my philosophy to try experiments, or to be happy. And what answer should I make? I have none ready. Common sense stares me

in the face, and my feelings, even at this instant, alas ! confute my system. I shall pay too dear yet for some of my experiment. ‘*Sois grand homme, et sois malheureux,*’ is, I am afraid, the law of nature, or rather the decree of the world. Your ladyship will not read this without a smile ; for you will immediately infer, that I think myself a great man ; and as I detest hypocrisy yet more than vanity, I shall not deny the charge. At all events, I feel that I am at present—however gaily I talk of it—in as fair a way to be unhappy for life, as if I were, in good earnest, the greatest man in Europe.

“ Your ladyship’s

most respectful admirer,

and sincere friend,

CLARENCE HERVEY.

“ P. S.—Is there any hope that your friend, miss Portman, may spend the winter in town ? ”

Though lady Delacour had been much fatigued by the exertion of her spirits during the day, she sat up at night to write to Mr. Hervey. Her love and gratitude to miss Portman interested her most warmly for her happiness, and she was persuaded that the most effectual way to secure it would be to promote her union with her *first love*. Lady Delacour, who had also the best opinion of Clarence Hervey, and the most sincere friendship for him, thought she was likewise acting highly for his interest ; and she felt that she had some merit in at once parting with him from the train of her admirers, and urging him to become

a dull, married man. Besides these generous motives, she was, perhaps, a little influenced by jealousy of the superior power which lady Anne Percival had in so short a time acquired over Belinda's mind. "Strange," thought she, "if love and I be not a match for lady Anne Percival and reason!" To do lady Delacour justice, it must be observed, that she took the utmost care in her letter not to *commit* her friend; she wrote with all the delicate address of which she was mistress. She began by rallying her correspondent on his indulging himself so charmingly in *the melancholy of genius*; and she prescribed as a cure to her *malheureux imaginaire*, as she called him, those joys of domestic life which he so well knew how to paint.

"*Precepte commence, exemple acheve*," said her ladyship. "You will never see me *la femme comme il y en a peu*, till I see you *le bon mari*. Belinda Portman has this day returned to me from Oaklypark, fresh, blooming, wise, and gay, as country air, flattery, philosophy, and love, can make her. It seems that she has had full employment for her head and heart. Mr. Percival and lady Anne, by right of science and reason, have taken possession of the head, and a Mr. Vincent, their *ci-devant* ward and declared favourite, has laid close siege to the heart, of which he is in a fair way, I think, to take possession, by the right of conquest. As far as I can understand—for I have not yet seen *le futur*—he deserves my Belinda; for besides being as handsome as any hero of romance, ancient or modern, he has a soul in which neither spot nor blemish can be found, except the

amiable weakness of being desperately in love—a weakness which we ladies are apt to prefer to the most philosophic stoicism: apropos of philosophy—we may presume, that notwithstanding Mr. V—— is a creole, he has been bred up by his guardian in the class of men who learn by the experience of others. As such, according to your system, he has a right to expect to be a *happy man*, has not he? According to Mrs. Stanhope's system, I am sure that he has: for his thousands and tens of thousands, as I am credibly informed, pass the comprehension of the numeration table.

“ But these will weigh not a grain in the estimation of her truly disinterested and noble-minded niece. Mrs. Stanhope knows nothing of Mr. Vincent's proposals; and it is well for him she does not, for her worldly good word would mar the whole. Not so as to lady Anne and Mr. Percival's approbation—their opinion is all in all with my friend. How they have contrived it, I know not, but they have gained over Belinda's mind a degree of power almost equal to parental authority; so you may guess that the doubtful beam will not much longer nod from side to side: indeed it seems to me scarcely necessary to throw in the sword of authority to turn the scale.

“ If you can persuade yourself to finish your picturesque tour before the ides of the charming month of November, do, my dear Clarence! make haste and come back to us in time for Belinda's wedding—and do not forget my commission about the Dorsetshire angel; bring me one in your right hand with a gold

ring upon her taper finger—so help you, Cupid ! or
never more expect a smile

“ From your sincere friend
and admirer,

T. C. H. DELACOUR.

“ P. S. Observe, my good sir, that I am not in
such a desperate hurry to congratulate you on your
marriage that I should be satisfied with an ordinary
Mrs. Hervey: so do not, under pretence of obliging
me, or for any other consideration, yoke yourself to
some damsel that you will be ashamed to produce.
For one woman worthy to be Clarence Hervey’s wife,
I have seen, at a moderate computation, a hundred
fit to be his mistress. If he should, on this subject,
mistake the *fitness of things or of persons*, he would
indeed be *in a fair way to be unhappy for life*.

“ The substance of a lady’s letter, it has been said,
always is comprised in the postscript.”

After Lady Delacour had finished this letter,
which she had no doubt would bring Clarence
immediately to town, she left it with Marriott,
with orders to have it sent by the next post.
Much fatigued, she then retired to rest, and was
not visible the next day till near dinner-time.
When miss Portman returned the packet of Mr.
Hervey’s letters, her ladyship was dissatisfied with
the measured terms of Belinda’s approbation, and
she said, with a sarcastic smile, “ So, they have
made a complete philosopher of you at Oakly-park !
You are perfect in the first lesson—not to admire.

And is the torch of Cupid to be extinguished on the altar of Reason?"

"Rather to be lighted there, if possible," said Belinda; and she endeavoured to turn the conversation to what she thought must be more immediately interesting to lady Delacour—her own health. She assured her, with perfect truth, that she was at present more intent upon her situation than upon Cupid or his torch.

"I believe you, my generous Belinda!" said lady Delacour; "and for that very reason I am interested in your affairs, I am afraid, even to the verge of impertinence. May I ask why this *preux chevalier* of yours did not attend you, or follow you to town?"

"Mr. Vincent?—He knew that I came to attend your ladyship. I told him that you had been confined by a nervous fever, and that it would be impossible for me to see him at present; but I promised, when you could spare me, to return to Oakly-park."

Lady Delacour sighed, and opened Clarence Hervey's letters one after another, looking over them without seeming well to know what she was about. Lord Delacour came into the room whilst these letters were still in her hand. He had been absent since the preceding morning, and he now seemed as if he was just come home, much fatigued. He began in a tone of great anxiety to inquire after lady Delacour's health. She was piqued at his having left home at such a time, and, merely bowing her head to him, she went on reading. His eyes glanced upon the letters which she held in her hand; and

when he saw the well-known writing of Clarence Hervey, his manner immediately altered, and, stammering out some commonplace phrases, he threw himself into an arm-chair by the fireside, protesting that he was tired to death—that he was half dead—that he had been in a post-chaise for three hours, which he hated—had ridden fifty miles since yesterday; and he muttered that he was a fool for his pains—an observation which, though it reached her ladyship's ears, she did not think proper to contradict.

His lordship had then recourse to his watch, his never-failing friend in need, which he always pulled out with a particular jerk when he was vexed.

“It is time for me to be gone—I shall be late at Studley's.”

“You dine with his lordship then?” said lady Delacour, in a careless tone.

“Yes; and his good burgundy, I hope, will wind me up again,” said he, stretching himself, “for I am quite down.”

“Quite down? Then we may conclude that my friend Mrs. Luttridge is not yet come to *Rantipole*. *Rantipole*, my dear,” continued lady Delacour, turning to miss Portman, “is the name of Harriot Freke's villa in Kent. However strange it may sound to your ears and mind, I can assure you the name has *made fortune* amongst a certain description of wits. And candour must allow that, if not elegant, it is appropriate; it gives a just idea of the manners and way of life of the place, for every thing at *Rantipole* is *rantipole*. But I am really concerned, my lord,

you should have ridden yourself down in this way for nothing. Why did not you get better intelligence before you set out? I am afraid you feel the loss of Champfort. Why did not you contrive to learn for certain, my dear good lord, whether *the Luttridge* was at Rantipole, before you set out on this wild goose chase?"

"My dear good lady," replied lord Delacour, assuming a degree of spirit which startled her as much as it became him, "why do you not get better intelligence before you suspect me of being a brute and a liar? Did not I promise you yesterday, that I would break with *the Luttridge*, as you call her? and how could you imagine that the instant afterwards, just at the time I was wrung to the soul, as you know I was—how could you imagine I would leave you to go to Rantipole, or to any woman upon earth?"

"O my lord! I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon a thousand times," cried lady Delacour, rising with much emotion; and, going towards him with a sudden impulse, she kissed his forehead.

"And so you ought to beg my pardon," said lord Delacour, in a faltering voice, but without moving his posture.

"You will acknowledge you left me, however, my lord? That is clear."

"Left you! Yes, so I did; to ride all over the country in search of a house that would suit you. For what else did you think I *could* leave you at such a time as this?"

Lady Delacour again stooped, and leaned her arm upon his shoulder.

“I wish to Heaven, my dear,” said his lordship, shrinking as he put away her hand, which still held Clarence Hervey’s letters, “I wish to Heaven, my dear, you would not hold those abominable perfumed papers just under my very nose. You know I cannot stand perfumes.”

“Are they perfumed? Ay; so every thing is that I keep in that cabinet of curiosities. Thank you, my dear miss Portman,” said her ladyship, as Belinda rose to take the letters from her hand. “Will you have the goodness to put them back into their cabinet, if you can endure to touch them, if the perfume has not overcome you as well as my lord? After all, it is only ottar of roses, to which few people’s olfactory nerves have an antipathy.”

“I have the honour to be one of the few,” said his lordship, rising from his seat with so sudden a motion as to displace lady Delacour’s arm which leaned upon him. “For my part,” continued he, taking down one of the Argand’s lamps from the chimney-piece, and trimming it, “I would rather a hundred to one snuff up the oil of this cursed lamp.”

Whilst his lordship applied himself to trimming the lamp with great earnestness, lady Delacour negligently walked away to the farthest end of the room, where stood the cabinet, which Belinda was trying to unlock.

“Stay, my love; it has a secret lock, which I alone can manage.”

“O, my dear lady Delacour!” whispered Belinda, holding her hand as she gave her the key, “I never

can love or esteem you if you use lord Delacour ill now."

"Ill now? ill now? This lock is spoilt, I do believe," said she aloud.

"Nay, you understand me, lady Delacour! You see what is passing in his mind."

"To be sure: I am not a fool, though he is. I see he is jealous, though he has had such *damning proof* that all's right—the man's a fool, that's all. Are you sure this is the key I gave you, my dear?"

"And can you think him a fool," pursued Belinda, in a still more earnest whisper, "for being more jealous of your mind than of your person? Fools have seldom so much penetration, or so much delicacy."

"But, Lord! what would you have me do? what would you have me say? That Lord Delacour writes better letters than these?"

"O no! but show him these letters, and you will do justice to him, to yourself, to Cla——, to every body."

"I am sure I should be happy to do justice to *every body*."

"Then pray do this very instant, my dearest lady Delacour! and I shall love you for it all my life."

"Done!—for who can withstand that offer?—Done!" said her ladyship. Then turning to lord Delacour, "My lord, will you come here and tell us what can be the matter with this lock?"

"If the lock be spoiled, lady Delacour, you had better send for a locksmith," replied his lordship,

who was still employed about the wick of the Argand: "I am no locksmith—I do not pretend to understand locks—especially secret locks."

"But you will not desert us at our utmost need, I am sure, my lord," said Belinda, approaching him with a conciliatory smile.

"You want the light, I believe, more than I do," said his lordship, advancing with the lamp to meet her. "Well! what is the matter with this confounded lock of yours, lady Delacour? I know I should be at Studley's by this time—but how in the devil's name can you expect me to open a secret lock when I do not know the secret, lady Delacour?"

"Then I will tell you the secret, lord Delacour—that there is no secret at all in the lock, or in the letters. Here, if you can stand the odious smell of ottar of roses, take these letters and read them, foolish man; and keep them till the shocking perfume is gone off."

Lord Delacour could scarcely believe his senses; he looked in lady Delacour's eyes to see whether he had understood her rightly.

"But I am afraid," said she, smiling, "that you will find the perfume too overcoming."

"Not half so overcoming," cried he, seizing her hand, and kissing it often with eager tenderness, "not half so overcoming as this confidence, this kindness, this condescension from you."

"Miss Portman will think us both a couple of old fools," said her ladyship, making a slight effort to withdraw her hand. "But she is almost as great a

simpleton herself, I think," continued she, observing that the tears stood in Belinda's eyes.

"My lord," said a footman who came in at this instant, "do you dress? The carriage is at the door, as you ordered, to go to lord Studley's."

"I'd see lord Studley at the devil, sir, and his burgundy along with him, before I'd go to him to-day; and you may tell him so, if you please," cried lord Delacour.

"Very well, my lord," said the footman.

"My lord dines at home—they may put up the carriage—that's all," said lady Delacour: "only let us have dinner directly," added she, as the servant shut the door. "Miss Portman will be famished amongst us: there is no living upon sentiment."

"And there is no living with such belles without being something more of a beau," said lord Delacour, looking at his splashed boots. "I will be ready for dinner before dinner is ready for me." With activity very unusual to him, he hurried out of the room to change his dress.

"O day of wonders!" exclaimed lady Delacour. "And O night of wonders! if we can get him through the evening without the help of lord Studley's wine. You must give us some music, my good Belinda, and make him accompany you with his flute. I can tell you he has really a very pretty taste for music, and knows fifty times more of the matter than half the dilettanti, who squeeze the human face divine into all manner of ridiculous shapes, by way of persuading you that they are in ecstasy! And, my dear, do not

forget to show us the charming little portfolio of drawings that you have brought from Oakly-park. Lord Delacour was with me at Harrowgate in the days of his courtship: he knows the charming views that you have been taking about Knaresborough and Fountain's Abbey, and all those places. I will answer for it, he remembers them a hundred times better than I do. And, my love, I assure you he is a better judge of drawing than many whom we saw ogling Venus rising from the sea, in the Orleans' gallery. Lord Delacour has let his talents go to sleep in a shameless manner; but really he has talents, if they could be wakened. By the by, pray make him tell you the story of lord Studley's original Titian: he tells that story with real humour. Perhaps you have not found it out, but lord Delacour has a vast deal of drollery in his own way, and——"

"Dinner's ready, my lady!"

"That is a pity!" whispered lady Delacour; "for if they had let me go on in my present humour, I should have found out that my lord has every accomplishment under the sun, and every requisite under the moon, to make the marriage state happy."

With the assistance of Belinda's portfolio and her harp, and the good-humour and sprightliness of lady Delacour's wit, his lordship got through the evening much to his own satisfaction. He played on the flute, he told the story of Studley's original Titian, and he detected a fault that had escaped Mr. Percival in the perspective of miss Portman's

sketch of Fountain's Abbey. The perception that his talents were *called out*, and that he appeared to unusual advantage, made him *excellent company*: he found that the spirits can be raised by self-complacency even more agreeably than by burgundy.

CHAPTER XXI.

HELENA.

WHILST they were at breakfast the next morning in lady Delacour's dressing-room, Marriott knocked at the door, and immediately opening it, exclaimed in a joyful tone, "Miss Portman, they're eating it! Ma'am, they're eating it as fast as ever they can!"

"Bring them in; your lady will give you leave, Marriott, I fancy," said miss Portman. Marriott brought in her gold fishes; some green leaves were floating on the top of the water in the glass globe.

"See, my lady," said she, "what miss Portman has been so good as to bring from Oakly-park for my poor gold fishes, who, I am sure, ought to be much obliged to her, as well as myself." Marriott set the globe beside her lady, and retired.

"From Oakly-park! And by what name impossible to pronounce must I call these green leaves, to please botanic ears?" said lady Delacour.

“ This,” replied Belinda, “ is what

‘ Th’ unlearned, duckweed—learned, lemna, call ;”

and it is to be found in any ditch or standing pool.”

“ And what possessed you, my dear, for the sake of Marriott and her gold fishes, to trouble yourself to bring such stuff a hundred and seventy miles?”

“ To oblige little Charles Percival,” said miss Portman. “ He was anxious to keep his promise of sending it to your Helena. She found out in some book that she was reading with him last summer, that gold fishes are fond of this plant ; and I wish,” added Belinda, in a timid voice, “ that she were here at this instant to see them eat it.”

Lady Delacour was silent for some minutes, and kept her eyes steadily upon the gold fishes. At length she said, “ I never shall forget how well the poor little creature behaved about those gold fishes. I grew amazingly fond of her whilst she was with me. But you know, circumstanced as I was, after you left me, I could not have her at home.”

“ But now I am here,” said Belinda, “ will she be any trouble to you? And will she not make your home more agreeable to you, and to Lord Delacour, who was evidently very fond of her?”

“ Ah, my dear!” said lady Delacour, “ you forget, and so do I at times, what I have to go through. It is in vain to talk, to think of making home, or any place, or any thing, or any person, agreeable to me now. What am I? The outside rind is left—the sap is gone. The tree lasts from day to day by

miracle—it cannot last long. You would not wonder to hear me talk in this way, if you knew the terrible time I had last night after we parted. But I have these nights constantly now. Let us talk of something else. What have you there—a manuscript?”

“Yes, a little journal of Edward Percival’s, which he sent for the entertainment of Helena.”

Lady Delacour stretched out her hand for it. “The boy will write as like his father as possible,” said she, turning over the leaves. “I wish to have this poor girl with me—but I have no spirits. And you know, whenever lord Delacour can find a house that will suit us, we shall leave town, and I could not take Helena with me. But this may be the last opportunity I may ever have of seeing her; and I *can* refuse you nothing, my dear. So will you go for her? She can stay with us a few days. Lady Boucher, that most convenient dowager, who likes going about, no matter where, all the morning, will go with you to Mrs. Dumont’s academy in Sloane-street. I would as soon go to a bird-fancier’s as to a boarding-school for young ladies: indeed, I am not well enough to go any where. So I will throw myself upon a sofa, and read this child’s journal. I wonder how that or any thing else can interest me now.”

Belinda, who had been used to the variations of lady Delacour’s spirits, was not much alarmed by the despondent strain in which she now spoke, especially when she considered that the thoughts of the dreadful trial this unfortunate woman was soon to

go through must naturally depress her courage. Rejoiced at the permission that she had obtained to go for Helena, miss Portman sent immediately to lady Boucher, who took her to Sloane-street.

"Now, my dear, considerate miss Portman," said lady Boucher, "I must beg and request that you will hurry miss Delacour into the carriage as fast as possible. I have not a moment to spare; for I am to be at a china auction at two, that I would not miss for the whole world. Well, what's the matter with the people? Why does not James knock at the door? Can't the man read? Can't the man see?" cried the purblind dowager. "Is not that Mrs. Dumont's name on the door before his eyes?"

"No, ma'am, I believe this name is Ellicot," said Belinda.

"Ellicot, is it? Ay, true. But what's the man stopping for, then? Mrs. Dumont's is the next door, tell the blind dunce. Mercy on us! To waste one's time in this way! I shall, as sure as fate, be too late for the china auction. What upon earth stops us?"

"Nothing but a little covered cart, which stands at Mrs. Dumont's door. There, now it is going; an old man is drawing it out of the way as fast as he can."

"Open the coach-door, James!" cried lady Boucher the moment that they had drawn up. "Now, my dear, considerate miss Portman, remember the auction, and don't let miss Delacour stay to change her dress or any thing."

Belinda promised not to detain her ladyship a

minute. The door at Mrs. Dumont's was open, and a servant was assisting an old man to carry in some geraniums and balsams out of the covered cart which had stopped the way. In the hall a crowd of children were gathered round a high stand, on which they were eagerly arranging their flower-pots; and the busy hum of voices was so loud, that when miss Portman first went in, she could neither hear the servant, nor make him hear her name. Nothing was to be heard but "O, how beautiful! O, how sweet! That's mine! That yours! The great rose geranium for miss Jefferson! The white Provence rose for miss Adderly! No, indeed, miss Pococke, that's for miss Delacour; the old man said so."

"*Silence, silence, mademoiselles!*" cried the voice of a French woman, and all was silence. The little crowd looked towards the hall door; and from the midst of her companions, Helena Delacour, who now caught a glimpse of Belinda, sprang forward, throwing down her white Provence rose as she passed.

"Lady Boucher's compliments, ma'am," said the servant to Mrs. Dumont; "she's in indispensable haste, and she begs you won't let miss Delacour think of changing her dress."

It was the last thing of which miss Delacour was likely to think at this instant. She was so much overjoyed, when she heard that Belinda was come by her mamma's desire to take her home, that she would scarcely stay whilst Mrs. Dumont was tying on her straw hat, and exhorting her to let lady

Delacour know how it happened that she was "so so far from fit to be seen."

"Yes, ma'am ; yes, ma'am, I'll remember ; I'll be sure to remember," said Helena, tripping down the steps. But just as she was getting into the carriage she stopped at the sight of the old man, and exclaimed, "O good old man ! I must not forget you."

"Yes, indeed, you must, though, my dear miss Delacour," said lady Boucher, pulling her into the carriage : "tis no time to think of good old men now."

"But I must. Dear miss Portman, will you speak for me ? I must pay—I must settle—and I have a great deal to say."

Miss Portman desired the old man to call in Berkley-square at lady Delacour's ; and this satisfying all parties, they drove away.

When they arrived in Berkley-square, Marriott told them that her lady was just gone to lie down. Edward Percival's little journal, which she had been reading, was left on the sofa, and Belinda gave it to Helena, who eagerly began to look over it. "Thirteen pages ! O, how good he has been to write so much for me !" said she ; and she had almost finished reading it before her mother came into the room.

Lady Delacour shrunk back as her daughter ran towards her ; for she recollected too well the agony she had once suffered from an embrace of Helena's. The little girl appeared more grieved than surprised at this ; and after kissing her mother's hand, with-

out speaking, she again looked down at the manuscript.

"Does that engross your attention so entirely, my dear," said lady Delacour, "that you can neither spare one word nor one look for your mother?"

"O mamma! I only tried to read because I thought you were angry with me."

"An odd reason for trying to read, my dear!" said lady Delacour with a smile: "have you any better reason for thinking I was angry with you?"

"Ah, I know you are not angry now, for you smile," said Helena; "but I thought at first that you were, mamma, because you gave me only your hand to kiss."

"Only my hand! The next time, simpleton, I'll give you only my foot to kiss," said her ladyship, sitting down, and holding out her foot playfully.

Her daughter threw aside the book, and kneeling down kissed her foot, saying, in a low voice, "Dear mamma, I never was so happy in my life; for you never looked so very, *very* kindly at me before."

"Do not judge always of the kindness people feel for you, child, by their looks; and remember that it is *possible* a person might have felt more than you could guess by their looks. Pray now, Helena, you who are such a good judge of physiognomy, should you guess that I was dying, by my looks?"

The little girl laughed, and repeated "*Dying?* O no, mamma."

"O no! because I have such a fine colour in my cheeks, hey?"

“Not for that reason, mamma,” said Helena, withdrawing her eyes from her mother’s face.

“What, then you know rouge already when you see it?—You perceive some difference, for instance, between miss Portman’s colour and mine? Upon my word, you are a nice observer. Such nice observers are sometimes dangerous to have near one.”

“I hope, mother,” said Helena, “that you do not think I would try to find out any thing that you wish, or that I imagined you wished, I should not know.”

“I do not understand you, child,” cried lady Delacour, raising herself suddenly upon the sofa, and looking full in her daughter’s face.

Helena’s colour rose to her temples; but, with a firmness that surprised even Belinda, she repeated what she had said nearly in the same words.

“Do you understand her, miss Portman?” said lady Delacour.

“She expresses, I think,” said Belinda, “a very honourable sentiment, and one that is easily understood.”

“Ay, in general, certainly,” said lady Delacour, checking herself; “but I thought that she meant to allude to something in particular—that was what I did not understand. Undoubtedly, my dear, you have just expressed a very honourable sentiment, and one that I should scarcely have expected from a child of your age.

“Helena, my dear,” said her mother, after a silence of some minutes, “did you ever read the Arabian Tales?—‘Yes, mamma,’ I know must be

the answer. But do you remember the story of Zobeide, who carried the porter home with her on condition that, let him hear or see what he might, he would ask no questions

“Yes, mamma.”

“On the same conditions should you like to stay with me for a few days?”

“Yes. On any conditions, mamma, I should like to stay with you.”

“Agreed, then, my dear!” said lady Delacour. “Now let us go to the gold fishes and see them eat lemna, or whatever you please to call it.”

While they were looking at the gold fishes, the old man, who had been desired by miss Portman to call, arrived. “Who is this fine, gray-haired old man?” said lady Delacour. Helena, who did not know the share which Belinda’s aunt and her own mother had in the transaction, began with great eagerness to tell the history of the poor gardener, who had been cheated by some fine ladies out of his aloe, &c. She then related how kind lady Anne Percival and her aunt Margaret had been to him; that they had gotten him a place as a gardener at Twickenham; and that he had pleased the family to whom he was recommended so much by his good behaviour, that, as they were leaving their house, and obliged to part with him, they had given him all the geraniums and balsams out of the green-house of which he had the care, and these he had been this day selling to the young ladies at Mrs. Dumont’s. “I received the money for him, and I was just going to pay him,” said Helena, “when miss Portman

came ; and that put every thing else out of my head. May I go and give him his money now, mamma ?”

“He can wait a few minutes,” said lady Delacour, who had listened to this story with much embarrassment and impatience. “Before you go, Helena, favour us with the names of *the fine ladies who cheated* this old gardener out of his aloe ?”

“Indeed, mamma, I don’t know their names.”

“No !—Did you never ask lady Anne Percival, or your aunt Margaret ?—Look in my face, child ! Did they never inform you ?”

“No, ma’am, never. I once asked lady Anne, and she said that she did not choose to tell me ; that it would be of no use to me to know.”

“I give lady Anne Percival more credit and more thanks for this,” cried lady Delacour, “than for all the rest. I see she has not attempted to lower me in my child’s opinion. I am the fine lady, Helena—I was the cause of his being cheated—I was intent upon *the noble end* of outshining a certain Mrs. Luttridge—the *noble means* I left to others, and the means have proved worthy of the end. I deserve to be brought to shame for my folly ; yet my being ashamed will do nobody any good but myself. Restitution is in these cases the best proof of repentance. Go, Helena, my love ! settle your little affairs with this old man, and bid him call here again to-morrow. I will see what we can do for him.”

Lord Delacour had this very morning sent home to her ladyship a handsome diamond ring, which had been intended as a present for Mrs. Luttridge, and which he imagined would therefore be peculiarly

acceptable to his lady. In the evening, when his lordship asked her how she liked the ring, which he desired the jeweller to leave for her to look at it, she answered, that it was a handsome ring, but that she hoped he had not purchased it for her.

"It is not actually bought, my dear," said his lordship; "but if it suits your fancy, I hope you will do me the honour to wear it for my sake."

"I will wear it for your sake, my lord," said lady Delacour, "if you desire it; and as a mark of your regard it is agreeable: but as to the rest—

‘ My taste for diamonds now is o’er,
The sparkling baubles please no more.’

If you wish to do me a kindness, I will tell you what I should like much better than diamonds, though I know it is rather ungracious to dictate the form and fashion of a favour. But as my dictatorship in all human probability cannot last much longer——"

"O, my dear lady Delacour! I must not hear you talk in this manner: your dictatorship, as you call it, will I hope last many, many happy years. But to the point—what should you like better, my dear, than this foolish ring?"

Her ladyship then expressed her wish that a small annuity might be settled upon a poor old man, whom she said she had unwittingly injured. She told the story of the rival galas and the aloe, and concluded by observing, that her lord was in some measure called upon to remedy part of the unnumbered ills which had sprung from her hatred of Mrs. Luttridge, as he had originally been the cause of her unextin-

guishable ire. Lord Delacour was flattered by this hint, and the annuity was immediately promised to the old gardener.

In talking to this old man afterward, lady Delacour found, that the family in whose service he lately lived had a house at Twickenham that would just answer her purpose. Lord Delacour's inquiries had hitherto been unsuccessful ; he was rejoiced to find what he wanted just as he was giving up the search. The house was taken, and the old man hired as gardener—a circumstance which seemed to give him almost as much pleasure as the annuity ; for there was a morello cherry-tree in the garden which had succeeded the aloe in his affection : “ it would have grieved him sorely,” he said, “ to leave his favourite tree to strangers, after all the pains he had been at *in netting* it to keep off the birds.”

As the period approached when her fate was to be decided lady Delacour's courage seemed to rise ; and at the same time her anxiety, that her secret should not be discovered, appeared to increase.

“ If I survive *this business*,” said she, “ it is my firm intention to appear in a new character, or rather to assert my real character. I will break through the spell of dissipation—I will at once cast off all the acquaintance that are unworthy of me—I will, in one word, go with you, my dear Belinda, to Mr. Percival's. I can bear to be mortified for my good ; and I am willing, since I find that lady Anne Percival has behaved generously to me, with regard to Helena's affections, I am willing that the recovery of my moral health should be attributed to the salubrious

air of Oakly-park. But it would be inexpressible, intolerable mortification to me, to have it said or suspected in the world of fashion, that I retreated from the ranks disabled instead of disgusted. A voluntary retirement is graceful and dignified; a forced retreat is awkward and humiliating. You must be sensible that I could not endure to have it whispered—‘Lady Delacour now sets up for being a prude, because she can no longer be a coquette.’ Lady Delacour would become the subject of witticisms, epigrams, caricatures without end. It would just be the very thing for Mrs. Luttridge; then she would revenge herself without mercy for *the ass and her panniers*. We should have ‘Lord and lady D——, or the Domestic Tête-à-tête, or The reformed Amazon,’ stuck up in a print-shop window! Oh, my dear, think of seeing such a thing! I should die with vexation; and of all deaths, that is the death I should like the least.”

Though Belinda could not entirely enter into those feelings, which thus made lady Delacour invent wit against herself, and anticipate caricatures; yet she did every thing in her power to calm her ladyship’s apprehension of a discovery.

“My dear,” said lady Delacour, “I have perfect confidence in lord Delacour’s promise, and in his good-nature, of which he has within these few days given me proofs that are not lost upon my heart; but he is not the most discreet man in the world. Whenever he is anxious about any thing, you may read it a mile off in his eyes, nose, mouth, and chin. And to tell you all my fears in one word, Marriott informed me this morning, that *the Luttridge*, who

came from Harrowgate to Rantipole, to meet lord Delacour, finding that there was no drawing him to her, has actually brought herself to town.

“To town!—At this strange time of year! How will my lord resist this unequivocal, unprecedented proof of passion? If she catch hold of him again, I am undone. Or, even suppose him firm as a rock, her surprise, her jealousy, her curiosity, will set all engines at work, to find out by what witchcraft I have taken my husband from her. Every precaution that prudence could devise against her malicious curiosity I have taken. Marriott, you know, is above all temptation. That vile wretch (naming the person whose quack medicines had nearly destroyed her), that vile wretch will be silent from fear, for his own sake. He is yet to be paid and dismissed. That should have been done long ago, but I had not money both for him and Mrs. Franks the milliner. She is now paid: and lord Delacour—I am glad to tell his friend how well he deserves her good opinion—lord Delacour in the handsomest manner supplied me with the means of satisfying this man. He is to be here at three o’clock to-day; and this is the last interview he will ever have with lady Delacour in *the mysterious boudoir*.”

The fears which her ladyship expressed of Mrs. Luttridge’s malicious curiosity were not totally without foundation. Champfort was at work for her and for himself. The memorable night of lady Delacour’s overturn, and the bustle that Marriott made about the key of the boudoir, were still fresh in his memory; and he was in hopes that, if he could discover

the mystery, he should at once regain his power over lord Delacour, re-instate himself in his lucrative place, and obtain a handsome reward, or, more properly speaking, bribe, from Mrs. Luttridge. The means of obtaining information of all that passed in lady Delacour's family were, he thought, still in his power, though he was no longer an inmate of the house. The *stupid maid* was not so stupid as to be impenetrable to the voice of flattery, or, as Mr. Champfort called it, the voice of love. He found it his interest to court, and she her pleasure to be courted. On these "coquettes of the *second* table," on these underplots in the drama, much of the comedy, and some of the tragedy, of life depend. Under the unsuspected mask of stupidity this worthy mistress of our intriguing valet-de-chambre concealed the quick ears of a listener, and the demure eyes of a spy. Long, however, did she listen, and long did she spy in vain, till at last Mr. Champfort gave her notice in writing that his love would not last another week, unless she could within that time contrive to satisfy his curiosity; and that, in short, she *must* find out the reason why the boudoir was always locked, and why Mrs. Marriott alone was to be trusted with the key. Now it happened that this billet-doux was received on the very day appointed for lady Delacour's last interview with the quack surgeon in the mysterious boudoir. Marriott, as it was her custom upon such occasions, let the surgeon in, and showed him up the back stairs into the boudoir, locked the door, and bade him wait there till her lady came. The man had not been punctual to the hour ap-

pointed; and lady Delacour, giving up all expectation of his coming till the next day, had retired to her bedchamber, where she of late usually at this hour secluded herself to read methodistical books, or to sleep. Marriott, when she went up to let her lady know that *the person*, as she always called him, was come, found her so fast asleep that she thought it a pity to waken her, as she had not slept at all the preceding night. She shut the door very softly, and left her lady to repose. At the bottom of the stairs she was met by *the stupid maid*, whom she immediately despatched with orders to wash some lace: "Your lady's asleep," said she, "and pray let me have no running up and down stairs." The room into which the stupid maid went was directly underneath the boudoir; and whilst she was there she thought that she heard the steps of a man's foot walking over head. She listened more attentively—she heard them again. She armed herself with a glass of jelly in her hand, *for my lady*, and hurried up stairs instantly to *my lady's* room. She was much surprised to see my lady fast asleep. Her astonishment at finding that Mrs. Marriott had told her the truth was such, as for a moment to bereave her of all presence of mind, and she stood with the door ajar in her hand. As thus she stood she was roused by the sound of some one clearing his throat very softly in the boudoir—*his* throat; for she recollected the footsteps she had heard before, and she was convinced it could be no other than a masculine throat. She listened again, and stooped down to try whether any feet could be seen under the door. As

she was in this attitude, her lady suddenly turned on her bed, and the book which she had been reading fell from the pillow to the floor with a noise, that made the listener start up instantaneously in great terror. The noise, however, did not waken lady Delacour, who was in that dead sleep which is sometimes the effect of opium. The noise was louder than what could have been made by the fall of a book alone, and the girl descried a key that had fallen along with the book. It occurred to her that this might possibly be the key of the boudoir. From one of those irresistible impulses which some people make an excuse for doing whatever they please, she seized it, resolved at all hazards to open the mysterious door. She was cautiously putting the key into the key-hole, so as not to make the least noise, when she was suddenly startled by a voice behind her, which said, "Who gave you leave to open that door?"

She turned, and saw Helena standing at the half open bedchamber door.

"Mercy, miss Delacour! who thought of seeing you? For God's sake, don't make a noise to waken my lady!"

"Did my mother desire you to go into that room?" repeated Helena.

"Dear me! no, miss," said the maid, putting on her stupid face; "but I only thought to open the door, to let in a little air to freshen the room, which my lady always likes, and bids me to do—and I thought——"

Helena took the key gently from her hand with-

out listening to any more of her thoughts, and the woman left the room muttering something about *jelly* and *my lady*. Helena went to the side of her mother's bed, determined to wait there till she awakened, then to give her the key, and tell her the circumstance. Notwithstanding the real simplicity of this little girl's character, she was, as her mother had discovered, *a nice observer*, and she had remarked that her mother permitted no one but Marriott to go into the boudoir. This remark did not excite her to dive into the mystery: on the contrary, she carefully repressed all curiosity, remembering the promise she had given to her mother when she talked of Zobeide and the porter. She had not been without temptation to break this promise; for the maid who usually attended her toilette had employed every art in her power to stimulate her curiosity. As she was dressing Helena this morning, she had said to her, "The reason I was so late calling you, miss, this morning, was because I was so late myself last night; for I went to the play, miss, last night, which was Bluebeard. Lord bless us! I'm sure, if I had been Bluebeard's wife, I should have opened the door, if I'd died for it; for to have the notion of living all day long, and all night too, in a house in which there was a room that one was never to go into, is a thing I could not put up with." Then after a pause, and after waiting in vain for some reply from Helena, she added, "Pray, miss Delacour, did you ever go into that little room within my lady's bedchamber, that Mrs. Marriott keeps the key of always?"

"No," said Helena.

"I've often wondered what's in it: but then that's only because I'm a simpleton. I thought to be sure, *you* knew."

Observing that Helena looked much displeased, she broke off her speech, hoping that what she had said would operate in due time, and that she should thus excite the young lady to get the secret from Marriott, which she had no doubt afterward of *worming* from miss Delacour.

In all this she calculated ill; for what she had said only made Helena distrust and dislike her. It was the recollection of this conversation, that made her follow the maid to her mother's bedchamber, to see what detained her there so long. Helena had heard Marriott say, that "she ought not to run up and down stairs, because her lady was asleep," and it appeared extraordinary that but a few minutes after this information she should have gone into the room with a glass of jelly in her hand.

"Ah, mamma!" thought Helena, as she stood beside her mother's bed, "you did not understand, and perhaps you did not believe me, when I said that I would not try to find out any thing that you wished me not to know. Now I hope you will *understand* me better."

Lady Delacour opened her eyes: "Helena," cried she, starting up, "how came you by that key?"

"O mother! don't look as if you suspected me." She then told her mother how the key came into her hands.

“My dear child, you have done me an essential service,” said lady Delacour: “you know not its importance, at least in my estimation. But what gives me infinitely more satisfaction, you have proved yourself worthy of my esteem—my love.”

Marriott came into the room, and whispered a few words to her lady.

“You may speak out, Marriott, before my Helena,” said lady Delacour, rising from the bed as she spoke: “child as she is, Helena has deserved my confidence; and she shall be convinced that, where her mother has once reason to confide, she is incapable of suspicion. Wait here for a few minutes, my dear.”

She went to her boudoir, paid and dismissed the surgeon expeditiously, then returned, and taking her daughter by the hand, she said, “You look all simplicity, my dear! I see you have no vulgar, school-girl curiosity. You will have all your mother’s strength of mind; may you never have any of her faults, or any of her misfortunes! I speak to you not as to a child, Helena, for you have reason far above your years; and you will remember what I now say to you as long as you live. You will possess talents, beauty, fortune; you will be admired, followed, and flattered, as I have been: but do not throw away your life as I have thrown away mine—to win the praise of fools. Had I used but half the talents I possess, as I hope you will use yours, I might have been an ornament to my sex—I might have been a lady Anne Percival.”

Here lady Delacour’s voice failed; but command-

ing her emotion, she in a few moments went on speaking.

“Choose your friends well, my dear daughter ! It was my misfortune, my folly, early in life to connect myself with a woman, who under the name of frolic led me into every species of mischief. You are too young, too innocent, to hear the particulars of my history now ; but you will hear them all at a proper time from my best friend, miss Portman. I shall leave you to her care, my dear, when I die.”

“When you die !—O mother !” said Helena, “but why do you talk of dying ?” and she threw her arms round her mother.

“Gently, my love !” said lady Delacour, shrinking back ; and she seized this moment to explain to her daughter why she shrunk in this manner from her caresses, and why she talked of dying.

Helena was excessively shocked.

“I wished, my dear,” resumed her mother, calmly, “I wished to have spared you the pain of knowing all this. I have given you but little pleasure in my life ; it is unjust to give you so much pain. We shall go to Twickenham to-morrow, and I will leave you with your aunt Margaret, my dear, till all is over. If I die, Belinda will take you with her immediately to Oakly-park—you shall have as little sorrow as possible. If you had shown me less of your affectionate temper, you would have spared yourself the anguish that you now feel, and you would have spared me——”

“My dear, kind mother,” interrupted Helena,

throwing herself on her knees at her mother's feet, "do not send me away from you—I don't wish to go to my aunt Margaret—I don't wish to go to Oaklypark—I wish to stay with you. Do not send me away from you; for I shall suffer ten times more if I am not with you, though I know I can be of no use."

Overcome by her daughter's entreaties, lady Delacour at last consented that she should remain with her, and that she should accompany her to Twickenham.

The remainder of this day was taken up in preparations for their departure. The *stupid maid* was immediately dismissed. No questions were asked, and no reasons for her dismissal assigned, except that lady Delacour had no farther occasion for her services. Marriott alone was to attend her lady to Twickenham. Lord Delacour, it was settled, should stay in town, lest the unusual circumstance of his attending his lady should excite public curiosity. His lordship, who was naturally a good-natured man, and who had been touched by the kindness his wife had lately shown him, was in extreme agitation during the whole of this day, which he thought might possibly be the last of her existence. She, on the contrary, was calm and collected; her courage seemed to rise with the necessity for its exertion.

In the morning, when the carriage came to the door, as she parted with lord Delacour, she put into his hand a paper that contained some directions and requests with which, she said, she hoped that he would comply, if they should prove to be her *last*.

The paper contained only some legacies to her servants, a provision for Marriott, and a bequest to her excellent and beloved friend, Belinda Portman, of the cabinet in which she kept Clarence Hervey's letters.

Interlined in this place, lady Delacour had written these words ; “ my daughter is nobly provided for ; and lest any doubt or difficulty should arise from the omission, I think it necessary to mention that the said cabinet contains the valuable jewels left to me by my late uncle, and that it is my intention that the said jewels should be part of my bequest to the said Belinda Portman.—If she marry a man of good fortune, she will wear them for my sake : if she do not marry an opulent husband, I hope she will sell the jewels without scruple, as they are intended for her convenience, and not as an ostentatious bequest. It is fit that she should be as independent in her circumstances as she is in her mind.”

Lord Delacour with much emotion looked over this paper, and assured her ladyship that she should be obeyed, if—— He could say no more.

“ Farewell, then, my lord !” said she : “ keep up your spirits, for I intend to live many years yet to try them.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A SPECTRE.

THE surgeon who was to attend lady Delacour was prevented from going to her on the day ap-

pointed ; he was one of the surgeons of the queen's household, and his attendance was required at the palace. This delay was extremely irksome to lady Delacour, who had worked up her courage to the highest point, but who had not prepared herself to endure suspense. She spent nearly a week at Twickenham in this anxious state, and Belinda observed that she every day became more and more thoughtful and reserved. She seemed as if she had some secret subject of meditation, from which she could not bear to be distracted. When Helena was present, she exerted herself to converse in her usual sprightly strain ; but as soon as she could escape, as she thought, unobserved, she would shut herself up in her own apartment, and remain there for hours.

"I wish to Heaven, miss Portman," said Marriott, coming one morning into her room with a portentous face, "I wish to Heaven, ma'am, that you could any way persuade my lady not to spend so many hours of the day and night as she does in reading those methodistical books that she keeps to herself!—I'm sure that they do her no good, but a great deal of harm, especially now when her spirits should be kept up as much as possible. I am sensible, ma'am, that 'tis those books that have made my lady melancholy of a sudden. Ma'am, my lady has let drop very odd hints within these two or three days, and she speaks in a strange *disconnected* sort of style, and at times I do not think she is quite right in her head."

When Belinda questioned Marriott more particularly about the strange hints which her lady had

let fall, she with looks of embarrassment and horror declined repeating the words that had been said to her; yet persisted in asserting that lady Delacour had been very *strange* for these two or three days. "And I'm sure, ma'am, you'd be shocked if you were to see my lady in a morning, when she wakens, or rather when I first go into the room—for, as to wakening, that's out of the question. I am certain she does not sleep during the whole night. You'll find, ma'am, it is as I tell you, those books will quite turn her poor head, and I wish they were burnt. I know the mischief that the same sort of things did to a poor cousin of my own, who was driven melancholy mad by a methodist preacher, and came to an untimely end. O ma'am! if you knew as much as I do, you'd be as much alarmed for my lady as I am."

It was impossible to prevail upon Marriott to explain herself more distinctly. The only circumstances that could be drawn from her seemed to Belinda so trifling as to be scarcely worth mentioning. For instance, that lady Delacour, contrary to Marriott's advice, had insisted on sleeping in a bedchamber upon the ground floor, and had refused to let a curtain be put up before a glass door that was at the foot of her bed. "When I offered to put up the curtain, ma'am," said Marriott, "my lady said she liked the moonlight, and that she would not have it put up till the fine nights were over. Now, miss Portman, to hear my lady talk of the moon, and moonlights, and liking the moon, is rather extraordinary and unaccountable;

for I never heard her say any thing of the sort in her life before; I question whether she ever knew there was a moon or not from one year's end to another. But they say the moon has a great deal to do with mad people; and, from my own experience, I'm perfectly sensible, ma'am, it had 'in my own cousin's case; for, before he came to the worst, he took a prodigious fancy to the moon, and was always for walking by moonlight, and talking to one of the beauty of the moon, and such melancholy nonsense, ma'am."

Belinda could not forbear smiling at this melancholy nonsense; though she was inclined to be of Marriott's opinion about the methodistical books, and she determined to talk to lady Delacour on the subject. The moment that she made the attempt, her ladyship, commanding her countenance, with her usual ability, replied only by cautious, cold monosyllables, and changed the conversation as soon as she could.

At night, when they were retiring to rest, Marriott, as she lighted them to their rooms, observed that she was afraid her lady would suffer from sleeping in so cold a bedchamber, and Belinda pressed her friend to change her apartment.

"No, my dear," replied lady Delacour, calmly. "I have chosen this for my bedchamber, because it is at a distance from the servants' rooms; and when *the operation*, which I have to go through, shall be performed, my cries, if I should utter any, will not be overheard. The surgeon will be here in a few days, and it is not worth while to make any change."

The next day, towards evening, the surgeon and Dr. X—— arrived. Belinda's blood ran cold at the sight of them.

"Will you be so kind, miss Portman," said Marriott, "as to let my lady know that they are come? for I am not well able to go, and you can speak more composed to her than I can."

Miss Portman went to lady Delacour's bedchamber. The door was bolted. As lady Delacour opened it, she fixed her eyes upon Belinda, and said to her with a mild voice, "You are come to tell me that the surgeon is arrived. I knew that by the manner in which you knocked at the door... I will see him this moment," continued she, in a firm tone; and she deliberately put a mark in the book which she had been reading, walked leisurely to the other end of the room, and locked it up in her book-case. There was an air of determined dignity in all her motions. "Shall we go? I am ready," said she, holding out her hand to Belinda, who had sunk upon a chair.

"One would think that you were the person that was going to suffer. But drink this water, my dear, and do not tremble for me; you see that I do not tremble for myself. Listen to me, dearest Belinda! I owe it to your friendship not to torment you with unnecessary apprehensions. Your humanity shall be spared this dreadful scene."

"No," said Belinda, "Marriott is incapable of attending you. I must—I will—I am ready now. Forgive me one moment's weakness. I admire, and will imitate, your courage. I will keep my promise."

“Your promise was to be with in my dying moments, and to let me breathe my last in your arms.”

“I hope that I shall never be called upon to perform that promise.”

Lady Delacour made no answer, but walked on before her with steady steps into the room where Dr. X—— and the surgeon were waiting. Without adverting in the least to the object of their visit, she paid her compliments to them, as if they came on a visit of mere civility. Without seeming to notice the serious countenances of her companions, she talked of indifferent subjects with the most perfect ease, occupying herself all the time with cleaning a seal, which she unhooked from her watch-chain. “This seal,” said she, turning to Dr. X——, “is a fine onyx—it is a head of Esculapius. I have a great value for it. It was given to me by your friend, Clarence Hervey; and I have left it in my will, doctor,” continued she, smiling, “to you, as no slight token of my regard. He is an excellent young man; and I request,” said she, drawing Dr. X—— to a window, and lowering her voice, “I request, when you see him again, and when I am out of the way, that you will tell him such were my sentiments to the hour of my death. Here is a letter which you will have the goodness to put into his hands, sealed with my favourite seal. You need have no scruple to take charge of it; it relates not to myself. It expresses only my opinion concerning a lady who stands almost as high in your esteem, I believe, as she does in mine. My affection and my gratitude

have not biassed my judgment in the advice which I have ventured to give to Mr. Hervey."

"But he will soon be here," interrupted Dr. X——, "and then——"

"And then I shall be gone," said lady Delacour coolly,

" 'To that undiscover'd country,
From whose bourn no traveller returns.' "

Dr. X—— was going to interrupt her, but she continued rapidly, "And now, my dear doctor, tell me candidly, have you seen any symptoms of cowardice in my manner this evening?"

"None," replied he. "On the contrary, I have admired your calm self-possession."

"Then do not suspect me of want of fortitude, when I request that this operation may not be performed to-day. I have changed my mind within these few hours. I have determined, for a reason which I am sure that you would feel to be sufficient, to postpone this affair till to-morrow. Believe me, I do not act from caprice."

She saw that Dr. X—— did not yield assent to her last assertion, and that he looked displeased.

"I will tell you my reason," said she; "and then you will have no right to be displeased if I persist, as I shall inflexibly, in my determination. It is my belief that I shall die this night. To submit to a painful operation to-day would be only to sacrifice the last moments of my existence to no purpose. If I survive this night, manage me as you please! But I

am the best judge of my own feelings—I shall die to-night.”

Dr. X—— looked at her with a mixture of astonishment and compassion. Her pulse was high, she was extremely feverish, and he thought that the best thing which he could do was to stay with her till the next day, and to endeavour to divert her mind from this fancy, which he considered as an insane idea. He prevailed upon the surgeon to stay with her till the next morning; and he communicated his intentions to Belinda, who joined with him in doing all that was possible to entertain and interest her by conversation during the remainder of the day. She had sufficient penetration to perceive that they gave not the least faith to her prognostic, and she never said one word more upon the subject; but appeared willing to be amused by their attempts to divert her, and resolute to support her courage to the last moment. She did not affect trifling gaiety: on the contrary, there was in all she said more strength and less point than usual.

The evening passed away, and lady Delacour seemed totally to have forgotten her own prophecy respecting the event of the ensuing night; so much so, that she spoke of several things that she intended to do the next day. Helena knew nothing of what had passed, and Belinda imagined that her friend put this constraint upon herself to avoid alarming her daughter. Yet, after Helena retired, her mother's manner continued to be so much the same, that Dr. X—— began to believe that her ladyship was actuated merely by caprice. In this opinion she con-

firmed him by bursting out a laughing when he proposed that some one should sit up with her during the night.

"My sage sir," said she, "have you lived to this time without ever having been duped by a woman before? I wanted a day's reprieve, and I have gained it—gained a day, spent in most agreeable conversation, for which I thank you. To-morrow," said she, turning to the surgeon, "I must invent some new excuse for my cowardice; and though I give you notice of it beforehand, as Barrington did when he picked the man's pocket, yet, nevertheless, I shall succeed. Good night!"

She hurried to her own apartment, leaving them all in astonishment and perplexity. Belinda was persuaded that she only affected this gaiety to prevent Dr. X—— from insisting upon sitting up in her room, as he had proposed. Doctor X——, judging, as he said, from her ladyship's general character, attributed the whole to caprice; and the surgeon, judging, as he said, from human nature in general, was decided in his belief that she had been influenced, as she herself declared, by cowardice. After having all expressed their opinions, without making any impression upon one another, they retired to rest.

Belinda's bedchamber was next to Helena's; and after she had been in bed about an hour, she fancied that she heard some one walking softly in the next room. She rose, and found lady Delacour standing beside her daughter's bed. She started at the sight of Belinda, but only said in a low voice, as she pointed to her child, "Don't waken her." She then

looked at her for some moments in silence. The moon shone full upon her face. She stooped over Helena, parted the ringlets of hair upon her forehead, and kissed her gently.

"You will be good to this poor girl when I am gone, Belinda!" said she, turning away from her as she spoke: "I only came to look at her for the last time."

"Are you then serious, my dear lady Delacour?"

"Hush! Don't waken her," said lady Delacour, putting her finger on her lips; and walking slowly out of the room, she forbade Belinda to follow.

"If my fears be vain," said she, "why should I disturb you with them? If they be just, you will hear my bell ring, and then come to me."

For some time afterward all was perfectly silent in the house. Belinda did not go to bed, but sat waiting and listening anxiously. The clock struck two; and as she heard no other sound, she began to hope that she had suffered herself to be falsely alarmed by a foolish imagination, and she lay down upon her bed, resolving to compose herself to rest. She was just sinking to sleep, when she thought she heard the faint sound of a bell. She was not sure whether she was dreaming or awake. She started up and listened. All was silent. But in a few minutes lady Delacour's bell rang violently. Belinda flew to her room. The surgeon was already there; he had been sitting up in the next room to write letters, and he had heard the first sound of the bell. Lady Delacour was senseless, supported in the surgeon's arms. Belinda, by his directions, ran imme-

diately for doctor X——, who was at the other end of the house. Before she returned, lady Delacour had recovered her senses. She begged that the surgeon would leave the room, and that neither Dr. X—— nor Marriott might be yet admitted, as she had something of importance to communicate to miss Portman. The surgeon withdrew, and she beckoned to Belinda, who sat down upon the side of her bed. Lady Delacour held out her hand to her; it was covered with a cold dew.

“My dear friend,” said she, “my prophecy is accomplishing—I know I must die.”

“The surgeon said that you were not in the least danger, my dear lady Delacour; that it was merely a fainting fit. Do not suffer a vain imagination thus to overpower your reason.”

“It is no vain imagination—I must die,” said lady Delacour.

“‘I hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay;
I see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away.’”

You perceive that I am in my perfect senses, my dear, or I could not quote poetry. I am not insane—I am not delirious.”

She paused.—“I am ashamed to tell you what I know will expose me to your ridicule.”

“Ridicule!” cried Belinda: “can you think me so cruel as to consider your sufferings as a subject for ridicule?”

Lady Delacour was overcome by the tenderness with which Belinda spoke.

“I will then speak to you,” said she, “without reserve. Inconsistent as it is with the strength of mind which you might expect from me, I cannot resist the impression which has been made on my mind by—a vision.”

“A vision !”

“Three times,” continued lady Delacour, “it has appeared to me about this hour. The first night after we came here I saw it; last night it returned; and to-night I have beheld it for the third time. I consider it as a warning to prepare for death. You are surprised—you are incredulous. I know that this must appear to you extravagant; but depend upon it that what I tell you is true. It is scarcely a quarter of an hour since I beheld the figure of —, that man for whose untimely death I am answerable. Whenever I close my eyes the same form appears before me.”

“These visions,” said Belinda, “are certainly the effects of opium.”

“The forms that flit before my eyes when I am between sleeping and waking,” said lady Delacour, “I am willing to believe, are the effects of opium; but, Belinda, it is impossible I should be convinced that my senses have deceived me with respect to what I have beheld when I have been as broad awake, and in as perfect possession of my understanding as I am at this instant. The habits of my life, and the natural gaiety, not to say levity, of my temper, have always inclined me rather to incredulity than to superstition. But there are things which no strength of mind, no temerity can resist. I repeat it—this is

a warning to me to prepare for death. No human means, no human power can save me !”

Here they were interrupted by Marriott, who could no longer be restrained from bursting into the room. Dr. X—— followed, and going calmly to the side of lady Delacour’s bed, took her hand to feel her pulse.

“Mrs. Marriott, you need not alarm yourself in this manner,” said he: “your lady is at this instant in as little danger as I am.”

“*You* think she’ll live! O my lady! why did you terrify us in this manner?”

Lady Delacour smiled, and calmly said, as doctor X—— still continued to count her pulse, “The pulse may deceive you, doctor, but I do not. Marriott, you may——”

Belinda heard no more ; for at this instant, as she was standing alone, near the glass-door that was opposite to the bed, she saw at a distance in the garden the figure which lady Delacour had described. Lady Delacour was now so intent upon speaking to Dr. X——, that she saw nothing but him. Belinda had the presence of mind to be perfectly silent. The figure stood still for some moments. She advanced a few steps nearer to the window, and the figure vanished. She kept her eye steadily fixed upon the spot where it had disappeared, and she saw it rise again and glide quickly behind some bushes. Belinda beckoned to Dr. X——, who perceived by the eagerness of her manner, that she wished to speak to him immediately. He resigned his patient to Marriott, and followed miss Portman out of the room. She told him what she had just seen, said it was of

the utmost consequence to lady Delacour to have the truth ascertained, and requested that Dr. X—— would go with some of the men-servants and search the garden, to discover whether any one was there concealed, or whether any footsteps could be traced. The doctor did not search long before he perceived footsteps in the borders opposite to the glass-door of lady Delacour's bedchamber; he was carefully following their track, when he heard a loud cry, which seemed to come from the other side of the garden wall. There was a breach in the wall over which he scrambled with some difficulty. The screams continued with redoubled violence. As he was making his way to the spot from which they proceeded, he was met by the old gardener, who was crossing one of the walks with a lantern in his hand.

“Ho! ho!” cried the gardener, “I take it that we have the thief at last. I fancy that the fellow whose footsteps I traced, and who has been at my morello cherry-tree every night, has been caught in the trap. I hope his leg is not broke, though!—This way, sir—this way!”

The gardener led the doctor to the place, and there they found a man, whose leg had actually been caught in the spring-trap which had been set for the defence of the cherry-tree. The man had by this time fallen into a swoon; they extricated him as fast as possible, and doctor X—— had him brought to lady Delacour's, in order that the surgeon, who was there, might see his leg.

As they were carrying him across the hall, Belinda met them. She poured out a glass of water for

the man, who was just recovering from his swoon ; but as she went nearer to give it him, she was struck with his wonderful resemblance to Harriot Freke.

"It must be Mrs. Freke herself !" whispered she to Marriott, whose wide opening eyes, at this instant, fixed themselves upon her.

"It must be Mrs. Freke herself, ma'am !" repeated Marriott.

And so in fact it was.

There is a certain class of people, who are incapable of generous confidence in their equals, but who are disposed to yield implicit credit to the underhand information of mean emissaries. Through the medium of Champfort and the *stupid maid*, Mrs. Freke had learned a confused story of a man's footsteps having been heard in lady Delacour's boudoir, of his being let in by Marriott secretly, of his having remained locked up there for several hours, and of the maid's having been turned away, merely because she innocently went to open the door whilst the gentleman was in concealment. Mrs. Freke was farther informed by the same unquestionable authority, that lady Delacour had taken a house at Twickenham, for the express purpose of meeting her lover : that miss Portman and Marriott were the only persons who were to be of this party of pleasure.

Upon the faith of this intelligence, Mrs. Freke, who had accompanied Mrs. Luttridge to town, immediately repaired to Twickenham, to pay a visit to a third cousin, that she might have an opportunity of detecting the intrigues, and afterwards of publishing the disgrace, of her former friend. The desire of re-

venging herself upon miss Portman, for having declined her civilities at Harrowgate, had also a powerful influence in stimulating her malicious activity. She knew that if it were proved that Belinda was the confidante of lady Delacour's intrigues, her reputation must be materially injured, and that the Percivals would then be as desirous to break off as they now were anxious to promote the match with Mr. Vincent. Charmed with this hope of a double triumph, the vindictive lady commenced her operations, nor was she ashamed to descend to the character of a spy. The general and convenient name of *frolic*, she thought, would cover every species of meanness. She swore that "it was charming fun to equip herself at night in men's clothes, and to sally forth to reconnoitre the motions of the enemy."

By an unfrequented path she used to gain the window that looked into lady Delacour's bedchamber. This was the figure which appeared at night at a certain hour, and which, to her ladyship's disturbed imagination, seemed to be the form of colonel Lawless. There was, indeed, a resemblance in their size and persons, which favoured the delusion. For several nights Mrs. Freke paid these visits without obtaining any satisfaction; but this night she thought herself overpaid for her exertions, by the charming discovery which she fancied she had made. She mistook the surgeon for a lover of lady Delacour's; and she was hurrying home with the joyful intelligence, when she was caught in the gardener's trap. The agony that she suffered was at first intense, but in a few hours the pain somewhat sub-

sided; and in this interval of rest she turned to Belinda, and with a malicious smile said,—“Miss Portman, 'tis fair I should pay for my peeping; but I shall not pay quite so dear for it as some of my friends.”

Miss Portman did not in the least comprehend her, till she added, “I'm sure you'll allow that 'tis better for a lady to lose her leg than her reputation—and for my part, I'd rather be caught in a man-trap, than have a man caught in my bedchamber. My service to your friend lady Delacour, and tell her so.”

“And do you know who that gentleman was, that you saw in her ladyship's room?”

“Not I, not yet; but I'll make it my business to find out. I give you fair notice; I'm a very devil when provoked. Why didn't you make me your friend when you could?—You'll not baffle me. I have seen all I wanted, and I am capable of painting all I saw. As to who the man might be, that's no matter; one Lothario is as good as another for my purpose.”

Longer had Mrs. Freke spoken with malignant triumph, had she not been interrupted by a burst of laughter from the surgeon. Her vexation was indescribable when he informed her, that he was the man whom she had seen in lady Delacour's bedchamber, and whom she had mistaken for a favoured lover.

Mrs. Freke's leg was much cut and bruised; and now that she was no longer supported by the hopes of revenge, she began to lament loudly and incessantly the injury that she had sustained. She im-

patiently inquired how long it was probable that she should be confined by this accident ; and she grew quite outrageous when it was hinted, that the beauty of her legs would be spoiled, and that she would never more be able to appear to advantage in man's apparel. The dread of being seen by lady Delacour in the deplorable yet ludicrous situation to which she had reduced herself operated next upon her mind, and every time the door of the apartment opened, she looked with terror towards it expecting to see her ladyship appear. But though lady Delacour heard from Marriott immediately the news of Mrs. Freke's disaster, she never disturbed her by her presence. She was too generous to insult a fallen foe.

Early in the morning Mrs. Freke was by her own desire conveyed to her cousin's house, where without regret we shall leave her to suffer the consequences of her frolic.

"A false prophetess! Notwithstanding all my visions, I have outlived the night, you see," said lady Delacour to miss Portman when they met in the morning. "I have heard, my dear Belinda, and I believe, that the passion of love, which can endure caprice, vice, wrinkles, deformity, poverty, nay disease itself, is notwithstanding so squeamish as to be instantaneously disgusted by the perception of folly in the object beloved. I hope friendship, though akin to love, is of a more robust constitution, else what would become of me? My folly and my visions, and my spectre—O, that I had not exposed myself to you in this manner! Harriot Freke herself is scarcely more contemptible. Spies and cowards are upon an

equal footing. Her malice and her *frolic* are consistent with her character, but my fears and my superstition are totally inconsistent with mine. Forget the nonsense I talked to you last night, my dear, or fancy that I was then under the dominion of laudanum. This morning you shall see lady Delacour *herself again*. Is doctor X——, is the surgeon ready? Where are they? I am prepared. My fortitude shall redeem me in your opinion, Belinda, and in my own."

Doctor X——and the surgeon immediately obeyed her summons.

Helena heard them go into lady Delacour's room, and she saw by Marriott's countenance, who followed, that her mother was going to submit to the operation. She sat down trembling on the steps which led to her mother's room, and waited there a long time, as she thought, in the most painful suspense. At last she heard some one call Helena. She looked up, and saw her father close to her.

"Helena," said he, "how is your mother?"

"I don't know. O papa, you cannot go in there *now*," said Helena, stopping him as he was pressing forwards.

"Why did not you or miss Portman write to me yesterday, as you promised?" said lord Delacour, in a voice that showed he was scarcely able to ask the question.

"Because, papa, we had nothing to tell you: nothing was done yesterday. But the surgeon is now there," said Helena, pointing towards her mother's room.

Lord Delacour stood motionless for an instant; then suddenly seizing his daughter's hand, "let us go," said he: "if we stay here, we shall hear her screams;" and he was hurrying her away, when the door of lady Delacour's apartment opened, and Belinda appeared, her countenance radiant with joy.

"Good news, dear Helena! O my lord! you are come in a happy moment—I give you joy."

"Joy! Joy! Joy!" cried Marriott, following.

"Is it all over?" said lord Delacour.

"And without a single shriek!" said Helena.
"What courage!"

"There's no need of shrieks, or courage, either, thank God," said Marriott. "Dr. X—— says so, and he is the best man in the world, and the cleverest. And I was right from the first; I said it was impossible my lady should have such a shocking complaint as she thought she had. There's no such thing at all in the case, my lord! I said so always, till I was persuaded out of my senses by that villainous quack, who contradicted me for his own 'molument. And doctor X—— says, if my lady will leave off the terrible quantities of laudanum she takes, he'll engage for her recovery."

The surgeon and Dr. X—— now explained to lord Delacour that the unprincipled wretch to whom her ladyship had applied for assistance had persuaded her that she had a cancer, though in fact her complaint arose merely from the bruise which she had received. He knew too well how to make a wound hideous and painful, and so continue her delusion for his own ad-

vantage. Dr. X—— observed, that if lady Delacour would have permitted either the surgeon or him to have *examined* sooner into the real state of the case, it would have saved herself infinite pain, and them all anxiety. Belinda at this moment felt too much to speak.

“I’m morally certain,” cried Marriott, “Mr. Champfort would die with vexation, if he could see the joy that’s painted in my lord’s face this minute. And we may thank miss Portman for this, for ’twas she made every thing go right, and I never expected to live to see so happy a day.”

Whilst Marriott ran on in this manner with all the volubility of joy, lord Delacour passed her with some difficulty, and Helena was in her mother’s arms in an instant.

Lady Delacour, struck to the heart by their affectionate looks and words, burst into tears. “How little have I deserved this kindness from you, my lord! or from you, my child! But my feelings,” added she, wiping away her tears, “shall not waste themselves in tears, nor in vain thanks. My actions, the whole course of my future life, shall show that I am not quite a brute. Even brutes are won by kindness. Observe, my lord,” continued she, smiling, “I said *won*, not *tamed*!—A tame lady Delacour would be a sorry animal, not worth looking at. Were she even to become domesticated, she would fare the worse.”

“How so?—How so, my dear?” said lord Delacour and Belinda almost in the same breath.

“How so?—Why, if lady Delacour were to wash off her rouge, and lay aside her air, and be as gentle, good, and kind as Belinda Portman, for instance, her lord would certainly say to her,

‘So alter’d are your face and mind,
‘Twere perjury to love you now.’”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHAPLAIN.

IN some minds, emotions of joy are always connected with feelings of benevolence and generosity. Lady Delacour’s heart expanded with the sensations of friendship and gratitude, now that she was relieved from those fears by which she had so long been oppressed.

“My dear daughter,” said she to Helena, “have you at this instant any wish that I can gratify?—Ask any thing you please, the fairy Goodwill shall contrive to get it for you in a trice. You have thought of a wish at this moment, I know, by your eyes, by your blush. Nay, do not hesitate. Do you doubt me because I do not appear before you in the shape of a little ugly woman, like Cinderella’s godmother? or do you despise me because you do not see a wand waving in my hand?—‘Ah, little skilled of fairy lore!’ know that I am in possession of a talisman that can command more than ever fairy granted. Behold my talisman,” continued she, drawing out her purse, and showing

the gold through the net-work, "Speak boldly, then," cried she to Helena, "and be obeyed."

"Ah, mamma," said Helena, "I was not thinking of what fairies or gold can give; but *you* can grant my wish, and if you will let me, I will whisper it to you."

Lady Delacour stooped to hear her daughter's whisper.

"Your wish is granted, my own grateful, charming girl," said her mother.

Helena's wish was, that her mother could be reconciled to her good aunt, Margaret Delacour. Her ladyship sat down instantly, and wrote to Mrs. Delacour. Helena was the bearer of this letter, and lady Delacour promised to wait upon this excellent old lady as soon as she should return to town.

In the mean time her ladyship's health rapidly improved under the skilful care of Dr. X——: it had been terribly injured by the ignorance and villany of the wretch to whom she had so long and so rashly trusted. The nostrums which he persuaded her to take, and the immoderate use of opium to which she accustomed herself, would have ruined her constitution, had it not been uncommonly strong. Dr. X—— recommended it to her ladyship to abstain gradually from opium, and this advice she had the resolution to follow with uninterrupted perseverance.

The change in lady Delacour's manner of life, in the hours and the company that she kept, contributed much to her recovery.* She was no longer in con-

* We spare the reader the medical journal of lady Delacour's health for some months. Her recovery was gradual and complete.

tinual anxiety to conceal the state of her health from the world. She had no secret to keep—no part to act; her reconciliation with her husband and with his friends restored her mind to ease and self-complacency. Her little Helena was a source of daily pleasure; and no longer conscious of neglecting her daughter, she no longer feared that the affections of her child should be alienated. Doctor X——, well aware that the passions have a powerful influence over the body, thought it full as necessary, in some cases, to attend to the mind as to the pulse. By conversing with lady Delacour, and by combining hints and circumstances, he soon discovered what had lately been the course of her reading, and what impression it had made on her imagination. Mrs. Marriott, indeed, assisted him with her opinion concerning *the methodistical books*; and when he recollected the forebodings of death which her ladyship had felt, and the terror with which she had been seized on the night of Mrs. Freke's adventure, he was convinced that superstitious horrors hung upon his patient's spirits, and affected her health. To argue on religious subjects was not his province, much less his inclination; but he was acquainted with a person qualified by his profession and his character 'to minister to a mind diseased,' and he resolved on the first favourable opportunity to introduce this gentleman to her ladyship.

One morning lady Delacour was complaining to Belinda, that the books in the library were in dreadful confusion. "My lord has really a very fine

library," said she; "but I wish he had half as many books twice as well arranged: I never can find any thing I want. Dr. X——, I wish to heaven you could recommend a librarian to my lord—not a chaplain, observe."

"Why not a chaplain, may I ask your ladyship?" said the doctor.

"O, because we had once a chaplain, who gave me a surfeit of the whole tribe. The meanest sycophant, yet the most impertinent busy-body—always cringing, yet always intriguing—wanting to govern the whole family, and at the same time every creature's humble servant—fawning to my lord the bishop, insolent to the poor curate—anathematizing all who differed from him in opinion, yet without dignity to enforce the respect due to his faith or his profession—greedy for preferment, yet without a thought of the duties of his office. It was the common practice of this man to leap from his horse at the church door on a holiday, after following a pack of hounds, huddle on his surplice, and gabble over the service with the most indecent mockery of religion. Do I speak with acrimony? I have reason. It was this chaplain who first led my lord to Newmarket; it was he who first taught my lord to drink. Then he was *a wit*—an insufferable wit. His conversation after he had drank was such as no woman but Harriot Freke could understand, and such as few *gentlemen* could hear. I have never, alas! been thought a prude, but in the heyday of my youth and gaiety, this man always disgusted

me. In one word, he was a buck parson. I hope you have as great a horror for this species of animal as I have?"

"Full as great," replied Dr. X——; "but I consider them as monsters, which, belonging to no species, can disgrace none."

"They ought to be hunted by common consent out of civilized society," said lady Delacour.

"They are by public opinion banished from all rational society; and your ladyship's just indignation proves, that they have no chance of being tolerated by fashion. But would it not allow such beings too much consequence, would it not extend their power to do mischief, if we perceived that one such person could disgust lady Delacour with the whole race of chaplains?"

"It is uncommon," replied her ladyship, "to hear a physician *earnest* in the defence of the clergy—and a literary philosophic physician too! Shall we have an eulogium upon bishops as well as chaplains?"

"We have had that already," replied Dr. X——. "All ranks, persuasions, and descriptions of people, including, I hope, those stigmatized by the name of philosophers, have joined in admiration of the bishop of St. Pol de Leon. The conduct of the real martyrs to their faith amongst the French clergy not even the most witty or brutal sceptic could ridicule."

"You surprise me, doctor!" said lady Delacour; "for I assure you that you have the character of being very liberal in your opinions."

"I hope I am liberal in my opinions," replied

the doctor, "and that I give your ladyship a proof of it."

"You would not then persecute a man or woman with ridicule for believing more than you do?" said lady Delacour.

"Those who persecute, to overturn religion, can scarcely pretend to more philosophy, or more liberality, than those who persecute to support it," said Dr. X——.

"Perhaps, doctor, you are only speaking popularly?"

"I believe what I now say to be true," said Dr. X——, "and I always endeavour to make truth popular."

"But possibly these are only truths for ladies. Doctor X—— may be such an ungallant philosopher, as to think that some truths are not fit for ladies. He may hold a different language with gentlemen."

"I should not only be an ungallant but a weak philosopher," said Dr. X——, "if I thought that truth was not the same for all the world who can understand it. And who can doubt lady Delacour's being of that number?"

Lady Delacour, who, at the beginning of this conversation, had spoken guardedly, from the fear of lowering the doctor's opinion of her understanding, was put at her ease by the manner in which he now spoke; and, half laying aside the tone of raillery, she said to him, "Well, doctor! seriously, I am not so *illiberal* as to condemn *all* chaplains for one, odious as he was. But where to find his contrast in these degenerate days? Can you, who are a defender of

the faith, and so forth, assist me? Will you recommend a chaplain to my lord?"

"Willingly," said Dr. X——; "and that is what I would not say for a world of fees, unless I were sure of my man."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Not a buck parson."

"And I hope not a pedant, not a dogmatist, for that would be almost as bad. Before we domesticate another chaplain, I wish to know all his qualities, and to have a full and true description of him."

"Shall I then give you a full and true description of him in the words of Chaucer?"

"In any words you please. But Chaucer's chaplain must be a little old-fashioned by this time, I should think."

"Pardon me. Some people, as well as some things, never grow old-fashioned. I should not be ashamed to produce Chaucer's parish priest at this day to the best company in England—I am not ashamed to produce him to your ladyship; and if I can remember twenty lines in his favour, I hope you will give me credit for being a sincere friend to the worthy part of the clergy. Observe, you must take them as I can patch them together; I will not promise that I can recollect twenty lines *de suite*, and without missing a word; that is what I would not swear to do for his grace the archbishop of Canterbury."

"His grace would probably excuse you from swearing; at least, I will," said lady Delacour, "on

the present occasion: so now for your twenty lines in whatever order you please."

Doctor X——, with sundry intervals of recollection, which may be spared the reader, repeated the following lines:

"Yet has his aspect nothing of severe,
But such a face as promis'd him sincere.
Nothing reserv'd or sullen was to see,
But sweet regards, and pleasing sanctity,
Mild was his accent, and his action free.
With eloquence innate his tongue was arm'd,
Though harsh the precept, yet the preacher charm'd;
For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upwards to the sky.
He taught the Gospel rather than the law,
And forc'd himself to drive, but loved to draw.
The tithes his parish freely paid, he took;
But never sued, or curs'd with bell and book.
Wide was his parish, not contracted close
In streets—but here and there a straggling house.
Yet still he was at hand, without request,
To serve the sick, and succour the distressed.
The proud he tam'd, the penitent he cheer'd,
Nor to rebuke the rich offender fear'd.
His preaching much, but more his practice wrought,
A living sermon of the truths he taught."

Lord Delacour wished that she could find a chaplain, who in any degree resembled this charming parish priest, and Dr. X—— promised that he would the next day introduce to her his friend Mr. Moreton.

"Mr. Moreton!" said Belinda, "the gentleman of whom Mr. Percival spoke, Mrs. Freke's Mr. Moreton?"

“Yes,” said Dr. X——, “the clergyman whom Mrs. Freke hanged in effigy, and to whom Clarence Hervey has given a small living.”

These circumstances, even if he had not precisely resembled Chaucer’s character of a benevolent clergyman, would have strongly interested lady Delacour in his favour. She found him, upon farther acquaintance, a perfect contrast to her former chaplain ; and he gradually acquired such salutary influence over her mind, that he relieved her from the terrors of methodism, and in their place substituted the consolations of mild and rational piety.

Her conscience was now at peace ; her spirits were real and equable, and never was her conversation so agreeable. Animated with the new feelings of returning health, and the new hopes of domestic happiness, she seemed desirous to impart her felicity to all around her, but chiefly to Belinda, who had the strongest claims upon her gratitude, and the warmest place in her affections. Belinda never made her friend feel the weight of any obligation, and consequently lady Delacour’s gratitude was a voluntary pleasure—not an expected duty. Nothing could be more delightful to miss Portman than thus to feel herself the object at once of esteem, affection, and respect ; to see that she had not only been the means of saving her friend’s life, but that the influence she had obtained over her mind was likely to be so permanently beneficial both to her and to her family.

Belinda did not take all the merit of this reformation to herself : she was most willing to share it, in her own imagination, not only with Dr. X—— and

Mr. Moreton, but with poor Clarence Hervey. She was pleased to observe that lady Delacour never omitted any occasion of doing justice to his merit, and she loved her for that generosity, which sometimes passed the bounds of justice in her eulogiums. But Belinda was careful to preserve her consistency, and to guard her heart from the dangerous effect of these enthusiastic praises ; and as lady Delacour was now sufficiently re-established in her health, she announced her intention of returning immediately to Oakly-park, according to her promise to lady Anne Percival and to Mr. Vincent.

“ But, my dear,” said lady Delacour, “ one week more is all I ask from you—may not friendship ask such a sacrifice from love ? ”

“ You expect, I know,” said miss Portman, ingenuously, “ that before the end of that time Mr. Hervey will be here.”

“ True. And have you no friendship for him ? ” said lady Delacour with an arch smile, “ or is friendship for every man in the creation, one Augustus Vincent always excepted, prohibited by the statutes of Oakly-park ? ”

“ By the statutes of Oakly-park nothing is forbidden,” said Belinda, “ but what reason —— ”

“ Reason ! Oh, I have done if you go to reason ! You are invulnerable to the light shafts of wit, I know, when you are cased in this heavy armour of reason ; Cupid himself may strain his bow, and exhaust his quiver upon you in vain. But have a care—you cannot live in armour all your life—lay it aside but for a moment, and the little bold urchin

will make it his prize. Remember, in one of Raphael's pictures, Cupid creeping into the armour of the conqueror of the world."

"I am sufficiently aware," said Belinda, smiling, "of the power of Cupid, and of his wiles. I would not brave his malice, but I will fly from it."

"It is so cowardly to fly!"

"Surely prudence, not courage, is the virtue of our sex; and seriously, my dear lady Delacour, I entreat you not to use your influence over my mind, lest you should lessen my happiness, though you cannot alter my determination."

Moved by the earnest manner in which Belinda uttered these words, lady Delacour rallied her no more, nor did she longer oppose her resolution of returning immediately to Oakly-park.

"May I remind you," said miss Portman, "though it is seldom either politic or polite to remind people of their promises,—but may I remind you of something like a promise you made, to accompany me to Mr. Percival's?"

"And would you have me behave so brutally to poor lord Delacour, as to run away from him in this manner the moment I have strength to run?"

"Lord Delacour is included in this invitation," said miss Portman, putting the last letter that she had received from lady Anne Percival into her hands.

"When I recollect," said lady Delacour, as she looked over the letter, "how well this lady Anne of yours has behaved to me about Helena, when I recollect, that, though you have been with her so long, she has not supplanted me in your affections, and

that she did not attempt to detain you when I sent Marriott to Oakly-park, and when I consider how much for my own advantage it will be to accept this invitation, I really cannot bring myself, from pride, or folly, or any other motive, to refuse it. So, my dear Belinda, prevail upon lord Delacour to spend his Christmas at Oakly-park, instead of at Studley-manoor (Rantipole, thank Heaven! is out of the question), and prevail upon yourself to stay a few days for me, and you shall take us all with you in triumph."

Belinda was convinced that, when lady Delacour had once tasted the pleasures of domestic life, she would not easily return to that dissipation which she had followed from habit, and into which she had first been driven by a mixture of vanity and despair. All the connexions which she had imprudently formed with numbers of fashionable but extravagant and thoughtless women would insensibly be broken off by this measure; for lady Delacour, who was already weary of their company, would be so much struck with the difference between their insipid conversation and the animated and interesting society in lady Anne Percival's family, that she would afterwards think them not only burdensome but intolerable. Lord Delacour's intimacy with lord Studley was one of his chief inducements to that intemperance, which injured almost equally his constitution and his understanding: for some weeks past he had abstained from all excess, and Belinda was well aware, that, when the immediate motive of humanity to lady Delacour ceased to act upon

him, he would probably return to his former habits, if he continued to visit his former associates. It was therefore of importance to break at once his connexion with lord Studley, and to place him in a situation where he might form new habits, and where his dormant talents might be roused to exertion. She was convinced that his understanding was not so much *below par* as she had once been taught to think it: she perceived, also, that since their reconciliation, lady Delacour was anxious to make him appear to advantage: whenever he said any thing that was worth hearing, she looked at Belinda with triumph; and whenever he happened to make *a mistake* in conversation, she either showed involuntary signs of uneasiness, or passed it off with that easy wit, by which she generally knew how "to make the worse appear the better reason." Miss Portman knew that Mr. Percival possessed the happy talent of drawing out all the abilities of those with whom he conversed, and that he did not value men merely for their erudition, science, or literature; he was capable of estimating *the potential* as well as *the actual range* of the mind. Of his generosity she could not doubt, and she was persuaded that he would take every possible means which good nature, joined to good sense, could suggest, to raise lord Delacour in his lady's esteem, and to make that union happy which was indissoluble. All these reflections passed with the utmost rapidity in Belinda's mind, and the result of them was, that she consented to wait lady Delacour's leisure for her journey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PEU A PEU.

THINGS were in this situation, when one day Marriott made her appearance at her lady's toilette with a face which at once proclaimed that something had discomposed her, and that she was impatient to be asked what it was.

"What is the matter, Marriott?" said lady Delacour; "for I know you want me to ask."

"Want you to ask! O dear, my lady, no!—for I'm sure, it's a thing that goes quite against me to tell; for I thought, indeed, my lady, *superiorly* of the person in question; so much so, indeed, that I wished what I declare I should now be ashamed to mention, especially in the presence of miss Portman, who deserves the best that this world can afford of every denomination. Well, ma'am, in one word," continued she, addressing herself to Belinda, "I am extremely rejoiced that things are as they are, though I confess that was not always my wish or opinion, for which I beg Mr. Vincent's pardon and yours; but I hope to be forgiven, since I'm now come entirely round to my lady Anne Percival's way of thinking, which I learnt from good authority at Oakly-park; and I am now convinced and confident, miss Portman, that every thing is for the best."

"Marriott will inform us, in due course of time,

what has thus suddenly and happily converted her," said lady Delacour to Belinda, who was thrown into some surprise and confusion by Marriott's address ; but Marriott went on with much warmth—

" Dear me ! I'm sure I thought we had got rid of all double-dealers, when the house was cleared of Mr. Champfort ; but, O mercy ! there's not traps enough in the world for them all ; I only wish they were all caught as finely as some people were—"Tis what all double-dealers, and Champfort at the head of the whole regiment, deserve—that's certain."

" We must take patience, my dear Belinda," said lady Delacour, calmly, " till Marriott has exhausted all the expletives in and out of the English language ; and presently, when she has fought all her battles with Champfort over again, we may hope to get at the fact."

" Dear ! my lady, it has nothing to do with Mr. Champfort, nor any such style of personage, I can assure you ; for, I'm positive, I'd rather think contemptibly of a hundred million Mr. Champforts than of one such gentleman as Mr. Clarence Hervey."

" Clarence Hervey !" exclaimed lady Delacour : taking it for granted that Belinda blushed, her ladyship, with superfluous address, instantly turned, so as to hide her friend's face from Mrs. Marriott. " Well, Marriott, what of Mr. Hervey ? "

" O my lady, something you'll be surprised to hear, and miss Portman, too. It is not, by any means, that I am more of a prude than is becoming, my lady : nor that I take upon me to be so innocent as not to know that young gentlemen of fortune

will, if it be only for fashion's sake, have such things as kept mistresses (begging pardon for mentioning such trash); but no one that has lived in the world thinks any thing of that, except," added she, catching a glimpse of Belinda's countenance, "except, to be sure, ma'am, morally speaking, it's very wicked and shocking, and makes one blush before company, till one's used to it, and ought certainly to be put down by act of parliament, ma'am; but, my lady, you know, in point of surprising any body, or being discreditable in a young gentleman of Mr. Hervey's fortune and pretensions, it would be mere envy and scandal to deem it any thing—worth mentioning."

"Then, for mercy's sake, or mine," said lady Delacour, "go on to something that *is* worth mentioning."

"Well, my lady, you must know, then, that yesterday I wanted some hempseed for my bullfinch—miss Helena's bullfinch, I mean; for it was she found it by accident, you know, miss Portman, the day after we came here. Poor thing! it got itself so entangled in the net over the morello cherry tree, in the garden, that it could neither get itself in nor out; but very luckily miss Helena saw it, and saved, and brought it in: it was almost dead, my lady."

"Was it?—I mean I am very sorry for it: that is what you expect me to say. Now, go on—get us once passed the bullfinch, or tell us what it has to do with Clarence Hervey."

"That is what I am aiming at, as fast as possible, my lady. So I sent for some hempseed for the bull-

finch, and along with the hempseed they brought me wrapped round it, as it were, a printed handbill, as it might be, or advertisement, which I threw off, disregardingly, taking for granted it might have been some of those advertisements for lozenges or razor-strops, that meet one wherever one goes ; but miss Delacour picked it up, and found it was a kind of hue and cry after a stolen or strayed bullfinch. Ma'am, I was so provoked, I could have cried, when I learnt it was the exact description of our little Bobby to a feather—gray upon the back, and red on——”

“ O ! spare me the description to a feather. Well, you took the bird, bullfinch, or Bobby, as you call it, home to its rightful owner, I presume ? Let me get you so far on your way.”

“ No, I beg your pardon, my lady, that is not the thing.”

“ Then you did not take the bird home to its owner—and you are a bird-stealer ? With all my heart : be a dog-stealer, if you will—only go on.”

“ But, my lady, you hurry me so, it puts every thing topsyturvy in my head ; I could tell it as fast as possible my own way.”

“ Do so, then.”

“ I was ready to cry, when I found our little Bobby was claimed from us, to be sure ; but miss Delacour observed, that those with whom it had lived till it was gray must be sorrier still to part with it : so I resolved to do the honest and genteel thing by the lady who advertised for it, and to take it back myself, and to refuse the five guineas reward

offered. The lady's name, according to the advertisement, was Ormond."

"Ormond!" repeated lady Delacour, looking eagerly at Belinda: "was not that the name sir Philip Baddely mentioned to us—you remember?"

"Yes, Ormond was the name, as well as I recollect," said Belinda, with a degree of steady composure that provoked her ladyship. "Go on, Marriott."

"And the words were, to leave the bird at a perfumer's in Twickenham, opposite to——; but that's no matter. Well, my lady, to the perfumer's I went with the bird, this morning. Now, I had my reasons for wishing to see this Mrs. Ormond myself, because, my lady, there was one thing rather remarkable about this bullfinch, that it sings a very particular tune, which I never heard any bullfinch, or any human creature, sing anything like before: so I determined, in my own cogitations, to ask this Mrs. Ormond to name the tunes her bullfinch could sing, before I produced it; and if she made no mention of its knowing any one out of the common way, I resolved to keep my bird to myself, as I might very conscientiously and genteelly too. So, my lady, when I got to the perfumer's I inquired where Mrs. Ormond was to be found? I was told that she received no visits from any, at least from the female sex; and that I must leave the bird there till called for. I was considering what to do, and the strangeness of the information made about the female sex, when in there came, into the shop, a gentleman, who saved me all the indelicacy of asking particulars. The bullfinch was at

this time piping away at a fine rate, and, as luck would have it, that very remarkable strange tune that I mentioned to you. Says the gentleman, as he came into the shop, fixing his eyes on the bullfinch as if they would have come fairly out of his head, 'How did that bird come here?'—'I brought it here, sir,' said I. Then he began to offer me mountains of gold in a very strange way, if I could tell him any tidings of the lady to whom it belonged. The shopman, from behind the counter now bent forward, and whispered the gentleman that he could give him some information, if he would make it worth his while; and they both went together to a little parlour behind the shop, and I saw no more of them. But, my lady, very opportunely for me, that was dying with curiosity, out of the parlour they turned a young woman in, to attend the shop, who proved to be an acquaintance of mine, whom I had done some little favours to when in service in London. And this young woman, when I told her my distress about the advertisement and the bullfinch, let me into the whole of the affair. 'Ma'am,' said she, 'all that is known about Mrs. Ormond, in this house, or any where else, is from me; so there was no occasion for turning me out of the parlour. I lived with Mrs. Ormond, ma'am,' says she, 'for half a year, in the very house she now occupies, and consequently nobody can be better informed than I am:—to which I agreed. Then she told me that the reason that Mrs. Ormond never saw any company of any sort was, because she is not fit to see company—proper company—for she's not a proper woman. She

has a most beautiful young creature there, shut up, who has been seduced, and is now deserted in a most cruel manner by a Mr. Hervey. O, my lady! how the name struck upon my ear! I hoped, however, it was not our Mr. Hervey; but it was the identical Mr. Clarence Hervey. I made the young woman describe him, for she had often and often seen him, when he visited the unfortunate creature; and the description could suit none but our Mr. Hervey, and besides it put it beyond a doubt, she told me his linen was all marked C. H. So our Mr. Hervey, ma'am," added Marriott, turning to Belinda, "it certainly proved to be, to my utter dismay and confusion."

"O Marriott! my poor head!" exclaimed lady Delacour, starting from under her hands: "that cruel comb went at least half an inch into my head—heads have feeling as well as hearts, believe me." And, as she spoke, she snatched out the comb, with which Marriott had just fastened up her hair, and flung it on a sofa at some yards' distance. Whilst Marriott went to fetch it, lady Delacour thought that Belinda would have time to recover from that utter dismay and confusion into which she hoped that she must now be thrown. "Come, Marriott, make haste. I have done *you* at least a great favour, for you have all this hair to perform upon again, and you will have leisure to finish this story of yours—which, at all events, if it is not in any other respect wonderful, we must allow is wonderfully long."

"Well, my lady, to be short, then—I was more curious than ever, when I heard all this, to hear

more ; and asked my friend how she could ever think of staying in a house with ladies of such a description ! Upon which she justified herself by assuring me, upon her honour, that at first she believed the young lady was married privately to Mr. Hervey, for that a clergyman came in secret, and read prayers, and she verily believes that the unfortunate young creature was deceived barbarously, and made to fancy herself married to all intents and purposes, till all at once Mr. Hervey threw off the mask, and left off visiting her, pretending a necessity to take a journey, and handing her over to that vile woman, that Mrs. Ormond, who bid her to be comforted, and all the things that are said by such women, on such occasions, by all accounts. But the poor deluded young thing saw how it was now too plain, and she was ready to break her heart ; but not in a violent, common sort of way, ma'am, but in silent grief, pining and drooping. My friend could not stand the sight, nor endure to look upon Mrs. Ormond now she knew what she was ; and so she left the house, without giving any reason, immediately. I forgot to mention, that the unfortunate girl's maiden name was St. Pierre, my lady : but her christian name, which was rather an out o' the way name, I quite forget."

"No matter," said lady Delacour ; "we can live without it ; or we can imagine it."

"To be sure—I beg pardon ; such sort of people's names can't be of any consequence, and, I'm sure, I blame myself now for going to the house, after all I had heard."

"You did go to the house, then ?"

“To my shame be it spoken; my curiosity got the better of me, and I went—but only on account of the bullfinch in the eyes of the world. It was a great while before I could get in: but I was so firm, that I would not give up the bird to no one but the lady herself, that I got in at last. O! never did my eyes light upon so beautiful a creature, nor so graceful, nor so innocent to look at!”—Belinda sighed—Marriott echoed the sigh, and continued: “She was by herself, and in tears, when I was shown in, ma’am, and she started as if she had never seen any body before in her life. But when she saw the bullfinch, ma’am, she clapped her hands, and, smiling through her tears like a child, she ran up to me, and thanked me again and again, kissing the bird between times, and putting it into her bosom. Well, I declare, if she had talked to all eternity, she could never have made me pity her half so much as all this did, for it looked so much like innocence. I’m sure, nobody that was not—or, at least, that did not think themselves innocent, could have such ways, and such an innocent affection for a little bird. Not but what I know ladies of a certain description often have birds, but then their fondness is all affectation and fashion; but this poor thing was all nature. Ah! poor unfortunate girl, thought I—but it’s no matter what I thought now,” said Marriott, shutting her eyes, to hide the tears that came into them at this instant; “I was ashamed of myself, when I saw Mrs. Ormond just then come into the room, which made me recollect what sort of company I was in. La! my lady, how I detested the sight of her! She looked at me, too, more like a dragon than

any thing else ; though in a civil way, and as if she was frightened out of her wits, she asked miss St. Pierre, as she called her, how I had got in (in a whisper), and she made all sort of signs afterward to her, to go out of the room. Never having been in such a situation before, I was quite robbed of all fluency, and could not,—what with the anger I felt for the one, and sorrow for the other,—get out a word of common sense, or even recollect what pretence brought me into the room, till the bird very luckily put it into my head by beginning to sing; so then I asked, whether they could certify it to be theirs by any particular tune of its own? ‘O yes,’ said miss St. Pierre; and she sung the very same tune. I never heard so sweet a voice; but, poor thing, something came across her mind in the middle of it, and she stopped; but she thanked me again for bringing back the bird, which, she said, had been hers for a great many years, and that she loved it dearly. I stood, I believe, like one stupified, till I was roused by *the woman’s* offering to put the five guineas reward, mentioned in the advertisement, into my hand. The touch of her gold made me start, as if it had been a snake, and I pushed it from me; and when she pressed it again, I threw it on the table, scarce knowing what I did; and just then, in her iniquitous hand, I saw a letter, directed to Clarence Hervey, esq. O, how I hated the sight of his name, and every thing belonging to him, ma’am, at that minute. I’m sure, I could not have kept myself from saying something quite outrageous, if I had

not taken myself out of the house, as I did, that instant.

“When there are women enough born and bred good for nothing, and ladies enough to flirt with that would desire no better, that a gentleman like Mr. Clarence Hervey, ma’am, should set his wits, as one may say, to be the ruin of such a sweet, innocent-looking young creature, and then desert her in that barbarous way, after bringing a clergyman to deceive her with a mock ceremony, and all—O! there is no fashion, nor nothing can countenance such wickedness! ’tis the worst of wickedness and cruelty—and I shall think and say so to the latest hour of my life.”

“Well said, Marriott,” cried lady Delacour.

“And now you know the reason, ma’am,” added Marriott, “that I said, I was glad *things are as they are*. To be sure I and every body once thought—but that’s all over now—and I am glad *things are as they are*.”

Lady Delacour once more turned her quick eyes upon Belinda, and was much pleased to see that she seemed to sympathise with Marriott’s indignation.

In the evening, when they were alone, lady Delacour touched upon the subject again, and observed, that as they should now, in all probability, see Mr. Hervey in a few days, they might be able to form a better judgment of this affair, which she doubted not had been exaggerated. “You should judge from the whole of Clarence’s conduct and character, and not

from any particular part," said her ladyship. "Do not his letters breathe a spirit of generosity?"

"But," interrupted miss Portman, "I am not called upon to judge of Mr. Hervey's whole conduct and character, nor of any part of it; his letters and his generosity are nothing——"

"To you?" said lady Delacour with a smile.

"This is no time, and no subject for raillery, my dear friend," said Belinda; "you assured me, and I believed you, that the idea of Mr. Hervey's return was entirely out of the question, when you prevailed upon me to delay my journey to Oakly-park. As I now understand that your ladyship has changed your mind, I must request your ladyship will permit me——"

"I will permit you to do what you please, dearest Belinda, except to call me *your ladyship* twice in one sentence. You shall go to Oakly-park the day after to-morrow: will that content you, my dear? I admire your strength of mind—you are much fitter to conduct yourself than I am to conduct you. I have done with raillery: my first, my only object, is your happiness. I respect and esteem as much as I love you, and I love you better than any thing upon earth—power excepted, you will say—power not excepted, believe me; and if you are one of those strange people that cannot believe without proof, you shall have proof positive upon the spot," added she, ringing the bell as she spoke. "I will no longer contend for power over your mind with your friends at Oakly-park. I will give orders, in your presence, to Marriott, to prepare for our march—I did not call

it retreat ; but there is nothing shows so much generalship as a good retreat, unless it be a great victory. I am, I confess, rather prejudiced in favour of victory."

"So am I," said Belinda, with a smile ; "I am so strongly prejudiced in favour of victory, that rather than obtain no other, I would even be content with a victory over myself."

Scarcely had Belinda pronounced these words, when lord Delacour, who had dined in town, entered the room, accompanied by Mr. Vincent.

"Give me leave, lady Delacour, to introduce to you," said his lordship, "a young gentleman, who has a great, and, I am sure, a most disinterested desire to cultivate your ladyship's further acquaintance."

Lady Delacour received him with all the politeness imaginable ; and even her prepossessions in favour of Clarence Hervey could not prevent her from being struck with his appearance. Il à infiniment l'air d'un héros de roman, thought she, and Belinda is not quite so great a philosopher as I imagined. In due time her ladyship recollected that she had orders to give to Marriott about her journey, that made it absolutely necessary she should leave miss Portman to entertain Mr. Vincent, if possible, without her, for a few minutes ; and lord Delacour departed, contenting himself with the usual excuse of—*letters to write*.

"I ought to be delighted with your gallantry, Mr. Vincent," said Belinda, "in travelling so many miles, to remind me of my promise about Oakly-park ; but, on the contrary, I am sorry you have taken so much

unnecessary trouble : lady Delacour is, at this instant, preparing for our journey to Mr. Percival's. We intend to set out the day after to-morrow."

"I am heartily glad of it—I shall be infinitely overpaid for my journey, by having the pleasure of going back with you."

After some conversation upon different subjects, Mr. Vincent, with an air of frankness which was peculiarly pleasing to Belinda, put into her hands an anonymous letter, which he had received the preceding day.

"It is not worth your reading," said he ; "but I know you too well to fear that it should give you any pain ; and I hope you know me too well, to apprehend that it could make any impression on my mind."

Belinda read with some surprise :—

"Rash young man ! beware of connecting yourself with the lady to whom you have lately been drawn in to pay your addresses : she is the most artful of women. She has been educated, as you may find upon inquiry, by one, whose successful trade it has been to draw in young men of fortune for her nieces, whence she has obtained the appellation of *the match-maker general*. The only niece whom she could not get rid of any other way she sent to the most dissipated and unprincipled viscountess in town. The viscountess fell sick, and, as it was universally reported last winter, the young lady was immediately, upon her friend's death, to have been married to the viscount widower. But the viscountess detected the connexion, and the young lady, to escape from her friend's rage, and from public shame, was obliged to

retreat to certain shades in the neighbourhood of Harrowgate; where she passed herself for a saint upon those who were too honourable themselves to be suspicious of others.

“At length the quarrel between her and the viscountess was made up, by her address and boldness in declaring, that if she was not recalled, she would divulge some secrets respecting a certain *mysterious boudoir* in her ladyship’s house: this threat terrified the viscountess, who sent off express for her late discarded humble companion. The quarrel was hushed up, and the young lady is now with her noble friend at Twickenham. The person who used to be let up the private stairs into the boudoir, by Mrs. Marriott, is now more conveniently received at Twickenham.”

Much more was said by the letter-writer in the same strain. The name of Clarence Hervey, in the last page, caught Belinda’s eye; and with a trepidation which she did not feel at the beginning of this epistle, she read the conclusion.

“The viscount is not supposed to have been unrivalled in the young lady’s favour. A young gentleman, of large fortune, great talents, and uncommon powers of pleasing, has, for some months, been her secret object; but he has been prudent enough to escape her matrimonial snares, though he carries on a correspondence with her, through the means of her friend the viscountess, to whom he privately writes. The noble lady has bargained to make over to her confidante all her interest in Hervey’s heart. He is expected every day to return from his tour; and, if the schemes upon him can be brought to bear, the

promised return to the neighbourhood of Harrowgate will never be thought of. Mr. Vincent will be left in the lurch; he will not even have the lady's fair hand—her *fair* heart is Clarence Hervey's, at all events. Further particulars shall be communicated to Mr. Vincent, if he pays due attention to this warning from

“A SINCERE FRIEND.”

As soon as Belinda had finished this curious production, she thanked Mr. Vincent, with more kindness than she had ever before shown him, for the confidence he placed in her, and for the openness with which he treated her. She begged his permission to show this letter to lady Delacour, though he had previously dreaded the effect which it might have upon her ladyship's feelings.

Her first exclamation was, “This is one of Harriot Freke's frolics;” but as her ladyship's indignation against Mrs. Freke had long since subsided into utter contempt, she did not waste another thought upon the writer of this horrible letter; but instantly the whole energy of her mind and fire of her eloquence burst forth in an eulogium upon her friend. Careless of all that concerned herself, she explained, without a moment's hesitation, every thing that could exalt Belinda: she described all the difficult circumstances in which her friend had been placed; she mentioned the secret with which she had been intrusted; the honour with which, even at the hazard of her own reputation, she had kept her promise of secrecy inviolable, when lord Delacour, in a fit of in-

toxication and jealousy, had endeavoured to wrest from Marriott the key of *the mysterious boudoir*. She confessed her own absurd jealousy, explained how it had been excited by the artifices of Champfort and sir Philip Baddely, how slight circumstances had worked her mind up almost to phrensy. "The temper, the dignity, the gentleness, the humanity, with which Belinda bore with me, during this paroxysm of madness," said lady Delacour, "I never can forget; nor the spirit with which she left my house, when she saw me unworthy of her esteem, and ungrateful for her kindness; nor the magnanimity with which she returned to me, when I thought myself upon my death-bed: all this has made an impression upon my soul, which never, whilst I have life and reason, can be effaced. She has saved my life. She has made my life worth saving. She has made me feel my own value. She has made me know my own happiness. She has reconciled me to my husband. She has united me with my child. She has been my guardian angel.—*She*, the confidante of my intrigues!—*she* leagued with me in vice!—No, I am bound to her by ties stronger than vice ever felt; than vice, even in the utmost ingenuity of its depravity, can devise."

Exhausted by the vehemence with which she had spoken, lady Delacour paused; but Vincent, who sympathised in her enthusiasm, kept his eyes fixed upon her, in hopes that she had yet more to say.

"I might, perhaps, you will think," continued she, smiling, "have spared you this history of myself, and of my own affairs, Mr. Vincent; but I

thought it necessary to tell you the plain facts, which malice has distorted into the most odious form. This is the quarrel, this is the reconciliation, of which your anonymous friend has been so well informed. Now, as to Clarence Hervey."

"I have explained to Mr. Vincent," interrupted Belinda, "every thing that he could wish to know on that subject, and I now wish you to tell him that I faithfully remembered my promise to return to Oakly-park, and that we were actually preparing for the journey."

"Look here, sir," cried lady Delacour, opening the door of her dressing-room, in which Marriott was upon her knees, locking a trunk, "here's dreadful note of preparation."

"You are a happier man than you yet know, Mr. Vincent," continued lady Delacour; "for I can tell you, that some persuasion, some raillery, and some wit, I flatter myself, have been used, to detain miss Portman from you."

"From Oakly-park," interrupted Belinda.

"From Oakly-park, &c. a few days longer. Shall I be frank with you, Mr. Vincent?—Yes, for I cannot help it—I am not of the nature of anonymous letter-writers: I cannot, either secretly or publicly, sign or say myself a *sincere friend*, without being one to the utmost extent of my influence. I never give my vote without my interest, nor my interest without my vote. Now Clarence Hervey is my friend. Start not at all, sir—you have no reason; for if he is my friend, miss Portman is yours: which

has the better bargain? But, as I was going to tell you, Mr. Clarence Hervey is my friend, and I am his. My vote, interest, and influence, have consequently been all in his favour. I had reason to believe that he has long admired *the dignity of miss Portman's mind, and the simplicity of her character,*" continued her ladyship, with an arch look at Belinda; "and though he was too much a man of genius to begin with the present tense of the indicative mood, 'I love,' yet I was, and am, convinced that he does love her."

"Can you, dear lady Delacour," cried Belinda, "speak in this manner, and recollect all we heard from Marriott this morning? And to what purpose all this?"

"To what purpose, my dear? To convince your friend, Mr. Vincent, that I am neither fool nor knave; but that I deal fairly by you, by him, and by all the world. Mr. Hervey's conduct towards miss Portman has, I acknowledge, sir, been undecided. Some circumstances have lately come to my knowledge which throw doubts upon his honour and integrity—doubts which, I firmly believe, he will clear up to *my* satisfaction at least, as soon as I see him, or as soon as it is in his power; with this conviction, and believing, as I do, that no man upon earth is so well suited to my friend,—pardon me, Mr. Vincent, if my wishes differ from yours: though my sincerity may give you present, it may save you from future pain."

"Your ladyship's sincerity, whatever pain it may

give me, I admire," said Mr. Vincent, with some pride in his manner; "but I see that I must despair of the honour of your ladyship's congratulations."

"Pardon me," interrupted lady Delacour; "there you are quite mistaken: the man of Belinda's choice *must* receive my congratulations; he must do more—he must become my friend. I would never rest till I had won his regard, nor should I in the least be apprehensive that he would not have sufficient greatness of mind to forgive my having treated him with a degree of sincerity which the common forms of politeness cannot justify, and at which common souls would be scandalized past recovery."

Mr. Vincent's pride was entirely vanquished by this speech; and with that frankness by which his manners were usually characterised, he thanked her for having distinguished him from *common souls*; and assured her that such sincerity as hers was infinitely more to his taste than that refined politeness of which he was aware no one was more perfect mistress than lady Delacour.

Here their conversation ended, and Mr. Vincent, as it was now late, took his leave.

"Really, my dear Belinda," said lady Delacour, when he was gone, "I am not surprised at your impatience to return to Oakly-park; I am not so partial to my knight, as to compare him, in personal accomplishments, with your hero. I acknowledge, also, that there is something vastly prepossessing in the frankness of his manners; he has behaved admirably well about this abominable letter; but, what is

better than all in a lady's eyes, he is *éperdument amoureux*."

"Not *éperdument*, I hope," said Belinda.

"Then, as you do not think it necessary for your hero to be *éperdument amoureux*, I presume," said lady Delacour, "you do not think it necessary that a heroine should be in love at all. So love and marriage are to be separated by philosophy, as well as by fashion. This is lady Anne Percival's doctrine! I give Mr. Percival joy. I remember the time, when he fancied love essential to happiness."

"I believe he not only fancies, but is sure of it now, from experience," said Belinda.

"Then he interdicts love only to his friends? He does not think it essential that you should know anything about the matter. You may marry his ward, and welcome, without being in love with him."

"But not without loving him," said Belinda.

"I am not casuist enough in these matters to understand the subtle distinction you make, with the true Percival emphasis, between loving and falling in love. But I suppose I am to understand by loving, loving as half the world do when they marry."

"As it would be happy for half the world if they did," replied Belinda, mildly, but with a firmness of tone that her ladyship felt. "I should despise myself and deserve no pity from any human being, if, after all I have seen, I could think of marrying for convenience or interest."

"Oh! pardon me; I meant not to insinuate such an idea: even your worst enemy, sir Philip Baddely,

would acquit you there. I meant but to hint, my dear Belinda, that a heart such as yours is formed for love in its highest, purest, happiest state."

A pause ensued.

"Such happiness can be secured only," resumed Belinda, "by a union with a man of sense and virtue."

"A man of sense and virtue, I suppose, means Mr. Vincent," said lady Delacour: "no doubt you have lately learned in the same sober style that a little love will suffice with a great deal of esteem."

"I hope I have learned lately that a great deal of esteem is the best foundation for a great deal of love."

"Possibly," said lady Delacour; "but we often see people working at the foundation all their lives without getting any farther."

"And those who build their castles of happiness in the air," said Belinda, "are they more secure, wiser, or happier?"

"Wiser! I know nothing about that," said lady Delacour; "but happier I do believe they are; for the castle-building is always *a labour of love*, but the foundation of drudgery is generally *love's labour lost*. Poor Vincent will find it so."

"Perhaps not," said Belinda; "for already his solid good qualities——"

"Solid good qualities!" interrupted lady Delacour: "I beg your pardon for interrupting you, but, my dear, you know we never fall in love with good qualities, except, indeed, when they are joined to an aquiline nose—oh! that aquiline nose of Mr.

Vincent's! I am more afraid of it than of all his solid good qualities. He has again, I acknowledge it, much the advantage of Clarence Hervey in personal accomplishments. But you are not a woman to be decided by personal accomplishments."

"And you will not allow me to be decided by solid good qualities," said Belinda. "So by what must I be determined?"

"By your heart, my dear; by your heart: trust your heart only."

"Alas!" said Belinda, "how many, many women have deplored their having trusted to their hearts only."

"*Their* hearts! but I said *your* heart: mind your pronouns, my dear; that makes all the difference. But, to be serious, tell me, do you really and *bona fide*, as my old uncle the lawyer used to say, love Mr. Vincent?"

"No," said Belinda, "I do not love him yet."

"But for that emphatic *yet*, how I should have worshipped you. I wish I could once clearly understand the state of your mind about Mr. Vincent, and then I should be able to judge how far I might indulge myself in raillery without being absolutely impertinent. So, without intruding upon your confidence, tell me whatever you please."

"I will tell you all I know of my own mind," replied Belinda, looking up with an ingenuous countenance. "I esteem Mr. Vincent; I am grateful to him for the proofs he has given me of steady attachment, and of confidence in my integrity. I like his manners and the frankness of his temper; but I do

not yet love him, and till I do no earthly consideration could prevail upon me to marry him."

"Perfectly satisfactory, my dear Belinda; and yet I cannot be quite at ease whilst Mr. Vincent is present, and my poor Clarence absent: proximity is such a dangerous advantage even with the wisest of us. The absent lose favour so quickly in Cupid's court, as in all other courts; and they are such victims to false reports and vile slanderers!"

Belinda sighed.

"Thank you for that sigh, my dear," said lady Delacour. "May I ask, would you, if you discovered that Mr. Vincent had a Virginia, discard him for ever from your thoughts?"

"If I discovered that he had deceived and behaved dishonourably to any woman, I certainly should banish him for ever from my regard."

"With as much ease as you banished Clarence Hervey?"

"With more, perhaps."

"Then you acknowledge—that's all I want—that you liked Clarence better than you do Vincent?"

"I acknowledge it," said Belinda, colouring up to her temples; "but that time is entirely past, and I never look back to it."

"But if you were forced to look back to it, my dear,—if Clarence Hervey proposed for you,—would not you cast a lingering look behind?"

"Let me beg of you, my dear lady Delacour, as my friend," cried Belinda, speaking and looking with great earnestness; "let me beg of you to forbear. Do not use your powerful influence over my

heart to make me think of what I ought not to think, or do what I ought not to do. I have permitted Mr. Vincent to address me. You cannot imagine that I am so base as to treat him with duplicity, or that I consider him only as a *pis-aller*; no—I have treated, I will treat him honourably. He knows exactly the state of my mind. He shall have a fair trial whether he can win my love; the moment I am convinced that he cannot succeed, I will tell him so decidedly: but if ever I should feel for him that affection which is necessary for my happiness and his, I hope I shall without fear, even of lady Delacour's ridicule or displeasure, avow my sentiments and abide by my choice."

"My dear, I admire you," said lady Delacour; "but I am incorrigible; I am not fit to hear myself convinced. After all, I am impelled by the genius of imprudence to tell you, that, in spite of Mr. Percival's cure for *first loves*, I consider love as a distemper that can be had but once."

"As you acknowledge that you are not fit to hear yourself convinced," said Belinda, "I will not argue this point with you."

"But you will allow," said lady Delacour, "as it is said or sung in Cupid's calendar, that—

' Un peu d'amour, un peu de soin,
Menent souvent un cœur bien loin ; ' "

and she broke off the conversation by singing that beautiful French air.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG.

THE only interest that honest people can take in the fate of rogues is in their detection and punishment; the reader, then, will be so far interested in the fate of Mr. Champfort, as to feel some satisfaction at his being safely lodged in Newgate. The circumstance which led to this desirable catastrophe was the anonymous letter to Mr. Vincent. From the first moment that Marriott saw or heard of the letter she was convinced, she said, that "Mr. Champfort *was at the bottom of it.*" Lady Delacour was equally convinced that Harriot Freke was the author of the epistle; and she supported her opinion by observing, that Champfort could neither write nor spell English. Marriott and her lady were both right. It was a joint, or rather a triplicate performance. Champfort, in conjunction with the stupid maid, furnished the intelligence, which Mrs. Freke manufactured; and when she had put the whole into proper style and form, Mr. Champfort got her rough draught fairly copied at his leisure, and transmitted his copy to Mr. Vincent. Now all this was discovered by a very slight circumstance. The letter was copied by Mr. Champfort upon a sheet of mourning paper, off which he thought that he had carefully cut the edges; but one bit of the black edge remained, which did not escape Marriott's scrutinizing eye. "Lord bless my stars! my lady," she exclaimed, "this must

be the paper—I mean may be the paper—that Mr. Champfort was cutting a quire of the very day before miss Portman left town. It's a great while ago, but I remember it as well as if it was yesterday. I saw a parcel of black jags of paper littering the place, and asked what had been going on? and was told, that it was only Mr. Champfort, who had been cutting some paper; which, to be sure, I concluded my lord had given to him, having no farther occasion for,—as my lord and you, my lady, were just going out of mourning at that time, as you may remember."

Lord Delacour, when the paper was shown to him, recognized it immediately by a private mark which he had put on the outside sheet of a division of letter paper, which, indeed, he had never given to Champfort, but which he had missed about the time Marriott mentioned. Between the leaves of this paper his lordship had put, as it was often his practice, some bank notes: they were notes but of small value, and when he missed them he was easily persuaded by Champfort that, as he had been much intoxicated the preceding night, he had thrown them away with some useless papers. He rummaged through his writing-desk in vain, and then gave up the search. It was true that on this very occasion he gave Champfort the remainder of some mourning paper, which he made no scruple, therefore, of producing openly. Certain that he could swear to his own private mark, and that he could identify his notes by their numbers, &c., of which he had luckily a memorandum, lord Delacour, enraged to find himself both robbed and duped by a favourite servant, in

whom he had placed implicit confidence, was effectually roused from his natural indolence: he took such active and successful measures, that Mr. Champfort was committed to gaol, to take his trial for the robbery. To make peace for himself, he confessed that he had been instigated by Mrs. Freke to get the anonymous letter written. This lady was now suffering just punishment for her *frolics*, and lady Delacour thought her fallen so much below indignation, that she advised Belinda to take no manner of notice of her conduct, except by simply returning the letter to her, with "miss Portman's, Mr. Vincent's, and lord and lady Delacour's, compliments and thanks to a *sincere friend*, who had been the means of bringing villainy to justice."

So much for Mrs. Freke and Mr. Champfort, who, both together, scarcely deserve an episode of ten lines.

Now to return to Mr. Vincent. Animated by fresh hope, he pressed his suit with Belinda with all the ardour of his sanguine temper. Though little disposed to fear any future evil, especially in the midst of present felicity, yet he was aware of the danger that might ensue to him from Clarence Hervey's arrival; he was therefore impatient for the intermediate day to pass, and it was with heartfelt joy that he saw the carriages at last at the door, which were actually to convey them to Oakly-park. Mr. Vincent, who had all the West Indian love for magnificence, had upon this occasion an extremely handsome equipage. Lady Delacour, though she was disappointed by Clarence Hervey's not appearing, did

not attempt to delay their departure. She contented herself with leaving a note, to be delivered to him on his arrival, which, she still flattered herself, would induce him immediately to go to Harrowgate. The trunks were fastened upon the carriages, the imperial was carrying out, Marriott was full of a world of business, lord Delacour was looking at his horses as usual, Helena was patting Mr. Vincent's great dog, and Belinda was rallying her lover upon his taste for "the pomp, pride, and circumstance" of glorious travelling—when an express arrived from Oakly-park. It was to delay their journey for a few weeks. Mr. Percival and lady Anne wrote word, that they were unexpectedly called from home by——. Lady Delacour did not stay to read by what, or by whom, she was so much delighted by this reprieve. Mr. Vincent bore the disappointment as well as could be expected; particularly when Belinda observed, to comfort him, that "the mind is its own place;" and that hers, she believed, would be the same at Twickenham as at Oakly-park. Nor did *she* give him any reason to regret that she was not immediately under the influence of his own friends. The dread of being unduly biassed by lady Delacour, and the strong desire Belinda felt to act honourably by Mr. Vincent, to show him that she was not trifling with his happiness, and that she was incapable of the meanness of retaining a lover as a *pis-aller*, were motives which acted more powerfully in his favour than all that even lady Anne Percival could have looked or said. The contrast between the openness and decision of his conduct towards her, and

Clarence Hervey's vacillation and mystery; the belief that Mr. Hervey was, or ought to be, attached to another woman; the conviction that Mr. Vincent was strongly attached to her, and that he possessed many of the good qualities essential to her happiness, operated every day more and more strongly upon Belinda's mind.

Where was Clarence Hervey all this time? lady Delacour, alas! could not divine. She every morning was certain that he would appear that day, and every night she was forced to acknowledge her mistake. No inquiries—and she had made all that could be made, by address and perseverance—no inquiries could clear up the mystery of Virginia and Mrs. Ormond; and her impatience to see her friend Clarence every hour increased. She was divided between her confidence in him and her affection for Belinda; unwilling to give him up, yet afraid to injure her happiness, or to offend her, by injudicious advice, and improper interference. One thing kept lady Delacour for some time in spirits—miss Portman's assurance that she would not bind herself by any promise or engagement to Mr. Vincent, even when decided in his favour; and that she should hold both him and herself perfectly free till they were actually married. This was according to lady Anne and Mr. Percival's principles; and lady Delacour was never tired of expressing directly or indirectly her admiration of the prudence and propriety of their doctrine.

Lady Delacour recollected her own promise, to give her *sincere congratulations to the victorious knight*;

and she endeavoured to treat Mr. Vincent with impartiality. She was, however, now still less inclined to like him, from a discovery, which she accidentally made, of his being still upon good terms with *odious Mrs. Luttridge*. Helena, one morning, was playing with Mr. Vincent's large dog, of which he was excessively fond. It was called Juba, after his faithful servant.

"Helena, my dear," said lady Delacour, "take care! don't trust your hand in that creature's monstrous mouth."

"I can assure your ladyship," cried Mr. Vincent, "that he is the very quietest and best creature in the world."

"No doubt," said Belinda, smiling, "since he belongs to you; for you know, as Mr. Percival tells you, every thing animate or inanimate, that is under your protection, you think must be the best of its kind in the universe."

"But, really, Juba is the best creature in the world," repeated Mr. Vincent, with great eagerness. "Juba is, without exception, the best creature in the universe."

"Juba, the dog, or Juba, the man?" said Belinda: "you know, they cannot be both the best creatures in the universe."

"Well! Juba, the man, is the best man—and Juba, the dog, is the best dog, in the universe," said Mr. Vincent, laughing, with his usual candour, at his own foible, when it was pointed out to him. "But, seriously, lady Delacour, you need not be in the least afraid to trust miss Delacour with this poor fellow;

for, do you know, during a whole month, that I lent him to Mrs. Luttridge, at Harrowgate, she used constantly to let him sleep in the room with her; and now, whenever he sees her, he licks her hand, as gently as if he were a lapdog; and it was but yesterday, when I had him there, she declared he was more gentle than any lapdog in London."

At the name of Luttridge lady Delacour changed countenance, and she continued silent for some time. Mr. Vincent, attributing her sudden seriousness to dislike or fear of his dog, took him out of the room.

"My dear lady Delacour," said Belinda, observing that she still retained an air of displeasure, "I hope your antipathy to *odious Mrs. Luttridge* does not extend to every body who visits her."

"Tout au contraire," cried lady Delacour, starting from her reverie, and assuming a playful manner: "I have made a general gaol-delivery of all my old hatreds; and even odious Mrs. Luttridge, though a hardened offender, must be included in this act of grace: so you need not fear that Mr. Vincent should fall under my royal displeasure for consorting with this state criminal. Though I can't sympathise with him, I forgive him, both for liking that great dog, and that little woman; especially, as I shrewdly suspect, that he likes the lady's E O table better than the lady."

"E O table! Good Heavens! you do not imagine Mr. Vincent——"

"Nay, my dear, don't look so terribly alarmed! I assure you, I did not mean to hint that there was any serious, *improper* attachment to the E O table; only

a little flirtation, perhaps, to which his passion for you has, doubtless, put a stop."

"I'll ask him the moment I see him," cried Belinda, "if he is fond of play: I know he used to play at billiards at Oakly-park, but merely as an amusement. Games of address are not to be put upon a footing with games of hazard."

"A man may, however, contrive to lose a good deal of money at billiards, as poor lord Delacour can tell you. But I beseech you, my dear, do not betray me to Mr. Vincent; ten to one I am mistaken, for his great dog put me out of humour——"

"But with such a doubt upon my mind, unsatisfied——"

"It shall be satisfied; lord Delacour shall make inquiries for me. Lord Delacour *shall* make inquiries, did I say?—*will*, I should have said. If Champfort had heard me, to what excellent account he might have turned that unlucky *shall*. What a nice grammarian a woman had need to be, who would live well with a husband inferior to her in understanding! With a superior or an equal, she might use *shall* and *will* as inaccurately as she pleases. Glorious privilege! How I shall envy it you, my dear Belinda! But how can you ever hope to enjoy it? Where is your superior? Where is your equal?"

Mr. Vincent, who had by this time seen his dog fed, which was one of his daily pleasures, returned, and politely assured lady Delacour that Juba should not again intrude. To make her peace with Mr. Vincent, and to drive the E O table from Belinda's

thoughts, her ladyship now turned the conversation from Juba, the dog, to Juba, the man. She talked of Harriot Freke's phosphoric Obeah woman, of whom, she said, she had heard an account from miss Portman. From thence she went on to the African slave trade, by way of contrast, and she finished precisely where she intended, and where Mr. Vincent could have wished, by praising a poem called 'The dying Negro,' which he had the preceding evening brought to read to Belinda. This praise was peculiarly agreeable, because he was not perfectly sure of his own critical judgment, and his knowledge of English literature was not as extensive as Clarence Hervey's; a circumstance which lady Delacour had discovered one morning, when they went to see Pope's famous Villa at Twickenham. Flattered by her present confirmation of his taste, Mr. Vincent readily complied with a request to read the poem to Belinda. They were all deeply engaged by the charms of poetry, when they were suddenly interrupted by the entrance of—Clarence Hervey!

The book dropped from Vincent's hand the instant that he heard his name. Lady Delacour's eyes sparkled with joy. Belinda's colour rose, but her countenance maintained an expression of calm dignity. Mr. Hervey, upon his first entrance, appeared prepared to support an air of philosophic composure, which forsook him before he had walked across the room. He seemed overpowered by the kindness with which lady Delacour received his congratulations on her recovery—struck by the reserve of Belinda's manner—but not surprised, or displeased, at the

sight of Mr. Vincent. On the contrary, he desired immediately to be introduced to him, with the air of a man resolute to cultivate his friendship. Provoked and perplexed, lady Delacour, in a tone of mingled reproach and astonishment, exclaimed, "Though you have not done me the honour, Mr. Hervey to take any other notice of my last letter, I am to understand, I presume, by the manner in which you desire me to introduce you to our friend, Mr. Vincent, that it has been received."

"Received! Good Heavens! have not you had my answer?" cried Clarence Hervey, with a voice and look of extreme surprise and emotion: "Has not your ladyship received a packet?"

"I have had no packet—I have had no letter. Mr. Vincent, do me the favour to ring the bell," cried lady Delacour eagerly: "I'll know, this instant, what's become of it."

"Your ladyship must have thought me——," and, as he spoke, his eye involuntarily glanced towards Belinda.

"No matter what I thought you," cried lady Delacour, who forgave him every thing for this single glance; "if I did you a little injustice, Clarence, when I was angry, you must forgive me; for, I assure you, I do you a great deal of justice at other times."

"Did any letter, any packet, come here for me? Inquire, inquire," said she, impatiently, to the servant who came in. No letter or packet was to be heard of. It had been directed, Mr. Hervey now remembered, to her ladyship's house in town. She gave orders to have it immediately sent for; but scarcely

had she given them, when, turning to Mr. Hervey, she laughed and said, "A very foolish compliment to you and your letter, for you certainly can speak as well as you can write ; nay, better, I think—though you don't write ill, neither—but you can tell me, in two words, what in writing would take half a volume. Leave this gentleman and lady to 'the dying Negro,' and let me hear your two words in lord Delacour's dressing-room, if you please," said she, opening the door of an adjoining apartment. "Lord Delacour will not be jealous if he find you tête-à-tête with me, I promise you. But you shall not be compelled. You look——"

"I look," said Mr. Hervey, affecting to laugh, "as if I felt the impossibility of putting half a volume into two words. It is a long story, and——"

"And I must wait for the packet, whether I will or no—well, be it so," said lady Delacour. Struck with the extreme perturbation into which he was thrown, she pressed him with no farther raillery, but instantly attempted to change the conversation to general subjects.

Again she had recourse to 'the dying Negro.' Mr. Vincent, to whom she now addressed herself, said, "For my part, I neither have, nor pretend to have, much critical taste ; but I admire in this poem the manly, energetic spirit of virtue which it breathes." From the poem, an easy transition was made to the author ; and Clarence Hervey, exerting himself to join in the conversation, observed, "that this writer (Mr. Day) was an instance that genuine eloquence must spring from the heart. Cicero was

certainly right," continued he, addressing himself to Mr. Vincent, "in his definition of a great orator, to make it one of the first requisites, that he should be a good man."

Mr. Vincent coldly replied, "This definition would exclude too many men of superior talents, to be easily admitted."

"Perhaps the appearance of virtue," said Belinda, "might, on many occasions, succeed as well as the reality."

"Yes, if the man be as good an actor as Mr. Hervey," said lady Delacour, "and if he suit 'the action to the word'—'the word to the action.'"

Belinda never raised her eyes whilst her ladyship uttered these words; Mr. Vincent was, or seemed to be, so deeply engaged in looking for something in the book, which he held in his hand, that he could take no farther part in the conversation; and a dead silence ensued.

Lady Delacour, who was naturally impatient in the extreme, especially in the vindication of her friends, could not bear to see, as she did by Belinda's countenance, that she had not forgotten Marriott's story of Virginia St. Pierre; and though her ladyship was convinced, that the *packet* would clear up all mysteries, yet she could not endure that even in the interim 'poor Clarence' should be unjustly suspected; nor could she refrain from trying an expedient, which just occurred to her, to satisfy herself and every body present. She was the first to break silence.

"To do ye justice, my friends, you are all good

company this morning. Mr. Vincent is excusable, because he is in love ; and Belinda is excusable, because—because—Mr. Hervey, pray help me to an excuse for miss Portman's stupidity, for I am dreadfully afraid of blundering out the truth. But why do I ask *you* to help me ? In your present condition, you seem totally unable to help yourself.—Not a word ! —Run over the commonplaces of conversation—weather—fashion—scandal—dress—deaths—marriages.—Will none of these do ? Suppose, then, you were to entertain me with other people's thoughts, since you have none of your own unpacked—Forfeit to arbitrary power," continued her ladyship, playfully seizing Mr. Vincent's book. "I have always observed that none submit with so good a grace to arbitrary power from our sex as your true men of spirit, who would shed the last drop of their blood to resist it from one of their own. Inconsistent creatures, the best of you ! So read this charming little poem to us, Mr. Hervey, will you ?"

He was going to begin immediately, but lady Delacour put her hand upon the book, and stopped him.

"Stay ; though I am tyrannical, I will not be treacherous. I warn you, then, that I have imposed upon you a difficult, a dangerous task. If you have any 'sins unwhipt of justice,' there are lines which I defy you to read without faltering—listen to the preface."

Her ladyship began as follows :

"Mr. Day, indeed, retained during all the period

of his life, as might be expected from his character, a strong detestation of female seduction * * * * Happening to see some verses, written by a young lady, on a recent event of this nature, which was succeeded by a fatal catastrophe—the unhappy young woman, who had been a victim to the perfidy of a lover, overpowered by her sensibility of shame, having died of a broken heart—he expresses his sympathy with the fair poetess in the following manner.”

Lady Delacour paused, and fixed her eyes upon Clarence Hervey. He, with all the appearance of conscious innocence, received the book, without hesitation, from her hands, and read aloud the lines, to which she pointed.

“ Swear by the dread avengers of the tomb,
By all thy hopes, by death’s tremendous gloom,
That ne’er by thee deceiv’d, the tender maid
Shall mourn her easy confidence betray’d,
Nor weep in secret the triumphant art,
With bitter anguish rankling in her heart ;
So may each blessing, which impartial fate
Throws on the good, but snatches from the great,
Adorn thy favour’d course with rays divine,
And Heaven’s best gift, a virtuous love, be thine ! ”

Mr. Hervey read these lines with so much unaffected, unembarrassed energy, that lady Delacour could not help casting a triumphant look at Belinda, which said or seemed to say—you see I was right in my opinion of Clarence !

Had Mr. Vincent been left to his own observations, he would have seen the simple truth ; but he was

alarmed and deceived by lady Delacour's imprudent expressions of joy, and by the significant looks that she gave her friend miss Portman, which seemed to be *looks of mutual intelligence*. He scarcely dared to turn his eyes toward his mistress, or upon him whom he thought his rival: but he kept them anxiously fixed upon her ladyship, in whose face, as in a glass, he seemed to study every thing that was passing.

"Pray, have you ever played at chess, since we saw you last?" said lady Delacour to Clarence. "I hope you do not forget that you are *my knight*. I do not forget it, I assure you—I own you as my knight to all the world, in public and private—do not I, Belinda?"

A dark cloud overspread Mr. Vincent's brow—he listened not to Belinda's answer. Seized with a transport of jealousy, he darted at Mr. Hervey a glance of mingled scorn and rage; and, after saying a few unintelligible words to miss Portman and lady Delacour, he left the room.

Clarence Hervey, who seemed afraid to trust himself longer with Belinda, withdrew a few minutes afterward.

"My dear Belinda," exclaimed lady Delacour, the moment that he was out of the room, "how glad I am he is gone, that I may say all the good I think of him! In the first place, Clarence Hervey loves you. Never was I so fully convinced of it as this day. Why had we not that letter of his sooner? that will explain all to us: but I ask for no explana-

tion, I ask for no letter, to confirm my opinion, my conviction—that he *loves* you : on this point I *cannot* be mistaken—he fondly loves you.”

“He fondly loves her!—Yes, to be sure, I could have told you that news long ago,” cried the dowager lady Boucher, who was in the room before they were aware of her entrance ; they had both been so eager, the one listening, and the other speaking.

“Fondly loves her!” repeated the dowager : “yes ; and no secret, I promise you, lady Delacour :” and then, turning to Belinda, she began a congratulatory speech, upon the report of her approaching marriage with Mr. Vincent. Belinda absolutely denied the truth of this report : but the dowager continued, “I distress you, I see, and it’s quite out of rule, I am sensible, to speak in this sort of way, miss Portman ; but, as I’m an old acquaintance, and an old friend, and an old woman, you’ll excuse me. I can’t help saying, I feel quite rejoiced at your meeting with such a match.” Belinda again attempted to declare that she was not going to be married ; but the invincible dowager went on : “Every way eligible, and every way agreeable. A charming young man, I hear, lady Delacour : I see I must only speak to you, or I shall make miss Portman sink to the centre of the earth, which I would not wish to do, especially at such a critical moment as this. A charming young man, I hear, with a noble West Indian fortune, and a noble spirit, and well connected, and passionately in love—no wonder. But I have done now, I promise you ; I’ll ask no

questions: so don't run away, miss Portman; I'll ask no questions, I promise you."

To ensure the performance of the promise, lady Delacour asked what news there was in the world? This question, she knew, would keep the dowager in delightful employment. "I live quite out of the world here; but since lady Boucher has the charity to come to see me, we shall hear all the 'secrets worth knowing,' from the best authority."

"Then, the first piece of news I have for you, is, that my lord and my lady Delacour are absolutely reconciled; and that they are the happiest couple that ever lived."

"All very true," replied lady Delacour.

"True!" repeated lady Boucher: "Why, my dear lady Delacour, you amaze me!—Are you in earnest?—Was there ever any thing so provoking?—There have I been contradicting the report, wherever I went; for I was convinced that the whole story was a mistake, and a fabrication."

"The history of the reformation might not be exact, but the reformation itself your ladyship may depend upon, since you hear it from my own lips."

"Well, how amazing! how incredible!—Lord bless me! But your ladyship certainly is not in earnest? for you look just the same, and speak just in the same sort of way: I see no alteration, I confess."

"And what alteration, my good lady Boucher, did you expect to see? Did you think that, by way of being exemplarily virtuous, I should, like lady

Q——, let my sentences come out of my mouth only at the rate of a word a minute?

‘ Like—minute—drops—from—off—the—eaves.’

Or did you expect, that, in hopes of being a pattern for the rising generation, I should hold my features in penance, immovably, thus—like some of the poor ladies of Antigua, who, after they have blistered their faces all over, to get a fine complexion are forced, whilst the new skin is coming, to sit without speaking, smiling, or moving muscle or feature, lest an indelible wrinkle should be the consequence?”

Lady Boucher was impatient to have this speech finished, for she had a piece of news to tell. “ Well!” cried she, “ there’s no knowing what to believe, or disbelieve, one hears so many strange reports; but I have a piece of news for you, that you may all depend upon. I have one secret worth knowing, I can tell your ladyship—and one, your ladyship and miss Portman, I’m sure, will be rejoiced to hear. Your friend, Clarence Hervey, is going to be married.”

“ Married! married!” cried lady Delacour.

“ Ay, ay, your ladyship may look as much astonished as you please, you cannot be more so than I was when I heard it. Clarence Hervey, miss Portman, that was looked upon so completely, you know, as not a marrying man; and now the last man upon earth that your ladyship would suspect of marrying in this sort of way!”

“ In what sort of way?—My dear Belinda, how can you stand this fire?” said lady Delacour, placing

a skreen dexterously, to hide her face from the dowager's observation.

"Now only guess who he is going to marry," continued lady Boucher: "who do *you* guess, miss Portman?"

"An amiable woman, I should guess, from Mr. Hervey's general character," cried lady Delacour.

"O, an amiable woman, I take for granted; every woman is amiable of course, as the newspapers tell us, when she is going to be married," said the dowager: "an amiable woman, to be sure; but that means nothing. I have not had a guess from miss Portman."

"From general character," Belinda began, in a constrained voice.

"Do not guess from general character, my dear Belinda," interrupted lady Delacour; "for there is no judging, in these cases, from general character, of what people will like or dislike."

"Then I will leave it to your ladyship to guess this time, if you please," said Belinda.

"You will neither of you guess till doomsday!" cried the dowager; "I must tell you. Mr. Hervey's going to marry—in the strangest sort of way!—a girl that nobody knows—a daughter of a Mr. Hartley. The father can give her a good fortune, it is true; but one should not have supposed that fortune was an object with Mr. Hervey, who has such a noble one of his own. It's really difficult to believe it."

"So difficult, that I find it quite impossible," said lady Delacour, with an incredulous smile.

"Depend upon it, my dear lady Delacour,"

said the dowager, laying the convincing weight of her arm upon her ladyship's, "depend upon it, my dear lady Delacour, that my information is correct. Guess whom I had it from."

"Willingly. But first let me tell you, that I have seen Mr. Hervey within this half hour, and I never saw a man look less like a bridegroom."

"Indeed! well, I've heard, too, that he didn't like the match: but what a pity, when you saw him yourself this morning, that you didn't get all the particulars out of him. But let him look like what he will, you'll find that my information is perfectly correct. Guess whom I had it from—from Mrs. Margaret Delacour: it was at her house that Clarence Hervey first met Mr. Hartley, who, as I mentioned, is the father of the young lady. There was a charming scene, and some romantic story, about his finding the girl in a cottage, and calling her Virginia something or other, but I didn't clearly understand about that. However, this much is certain, that the girl, as her father told Mrs. Delacour, is desperately in love with Mr. Hervey, and they are to be married immediately. Depend upon it, you'll find my information correct. Good morning to you. Lord bless me! now I recollect, I once heard that Mr. Hervey was a great admirer of miss Portman," said the dowager.

The inquisitive dowager, whose curiosity was put upon a new scent, immediately fastened her eyes upon Belinda's face; but from that she could make out nothing. Was it because she had not the best eyes, or because there was nothing to be seen? To

determine this question, she looked through her glass, to take a clearer view ; but lady Delacour drew off her attention, by suddenly exclaiming—
“ My dear lady Boucher, when you go back to town, do send me a bottle of concentrated anima of quassia.”

“ Ah ! ah ! have I made a convert of you at last ? ” said the dowager, and, satisfied with the glory of this conversion, she departed.

“ Admire my knowledge of human nature, my dear Belinda,” said lady Delacour. “ Now she will talk, at the next place she goes to, of nothing but of my faith in anima of quassia ; and she will forget to make a gossiping story out of that most imprudent hint I gave her, about Clarence Hervey’s having been an admirer of yours.”

“ Do not leave the room, Belinda ; I have a thousand things to say to you, my dear.”

“ Excuse me, at present, my dear lady Delacour ; I am impatient to write a few lines to Mr. Vincent. He went away——”

“ In a fit of jealousy, and I am glad of it.”

“ And I am sorry for it,” said Belinda ; “ sorry that he should have so little confidence in me as to feel jealousy without cause—without sufficient cause, I should say ; for certainly your ladyship gave pain, by the manner in which you received Mr. Hervey.”

“ Lord, my dear, you would spoil any man upon earth. You could not act more foolishly if the man were your husband. Are you privately married to him ?—If you be not—for my sake—for your own—

for Mr. Vincent's—do not write till we see the contents of Clarence Hervey's packet."

"It *can* make no alteration in what I write," said Belinda.

"Well, my dear, write what you please ; but I only hope you will not send your letter till the packet arrives."

"Pardon me, I shall send it as soon as I possibly can : the 'dear delight of giving pain' does not suit my taste."

Lady Delacour, as soon as she was left alone, began to reconsider the dowager's story ; notwithstanding her unbelieving smile, it alarmed her, for she could not refuse to give it some degree of credit, when she learnt that Mrs. Margaret Delacour was the authority from whom it came. Mrs. Delacour was a woman of scrupulous veracity, and rigid in her dislike to gossiping ; so that it was scarcely probable a report originating with her, however it might be altered by the way, should prove to be totally void of foundation. The name of Virginia coincided with sir Philip Baddely's hints, and with Marriott's discoveries : these circumstances considered, lady Delacour knew not what opinion to form ; and her eagerness to receive Mr. Hervey's packet every moment increased. She walked up and down the room—looked at her watch—fancied that it had stopped—held it to her ear—rang the bell every quarter of an hour, to inquire whether the messenger was not *yet* come back. At last, the long-expected packet arrived. She seized it, and hurried with it immediately to Belinda's room.

“Clarence Hervey’s packet, my love!—Now, woe to the person who interrupts us!” She bolted the door as she spoke—rolled an arm-chair to the fire—“Now for it!” said she, seating herself. “The devil upon two sticks, if he were looking down upon me from the house-top, or Champfort, who is the worse devil of the two, would, if he were peeping through the keyhole, swear I was going to open a love-letter—and so I hope I am. Now for it!” cried she, breaking the seal.

“My dear friend,” said Belinda, laying her hand upon lady Delacour’s, “before we open this packet, let me speak to you, whilst our minds are calm.”

“Calm! It is the strangest time for your mind to be calm. But I must not affront you by my incredulity. Speak, then, but be quick, for I do not pretend to be calm; it not being, thank my stars, ‘*mon métier d’être philosophe*.’ Crack goes the last seal—speak now, or for ever after hold your tongue, my *calm philosopher* of Oakly-park: but do you wish me to attend to what you are going to say?”

“Yes,” replied Belinda, smiling; “that is the usual wish of those who speak.”

“Very true: and I can listen tolerably well, when I don’t know what people are going to say; but when I know it all beforehand, I have an unfortunate habit of not being able to attend to one word. Now, my dear, let me anticipate your speech, and if my anticipation be wrong, then you shall rise to explain; and I will,” said she (putting her finger on her lips), “listen to you, like Harpocrates, without moving an eyelash.”

Belinda, as the most certain way of being heard, consented to hear before she spoke.

“I will tell you,” pursued lady Delacour, “if not what you are going to say to me, at least what you say to yourself, which is fully as much to the purpose. You say to yourself, ‘Let this packet of Clarence Hervey contain what it may, it comes too late. Let him say, or let him do, ’tis all the same to me—because—(now for the reasoning)—because things have gone so far with Mr. Vincent, that lady Anne Percival and all the world (at Oakly-park) will blame me, if I retract. In short, *things have gone so far* that I cannot recede ; because—*things have gone so far*. This is the rondeau of your argument. Nay, hear me out, then you shall have your turn, my dear, for an hour, if you please. Let things have gone ever so far, they can stop, and turn about again, cannot they ? Lady Anne Percival is your friend, of course can wish only for your happiness. You think she is ‘the thing that’s most uncommon, a reasonable woman :’ then she cannot be angry with you for being happy your own way. So I need not, as the orators say, *labour this point any more*. Now, as to your aunt. The fear of displeasing Mrs. Stanhope a little more or less is not to be put in competition with the hope of your happiness for life, especially as you have contrived to exist some months in a state of utter excommunication from her favour. After all, you know she will not grieve for any thing but the loss of Mr. Vincent’s fortune ; and Mr. Hervey’s fortune might do as well, or almost as well : at least, she may compound with her pride for the dif-

ference, by considering that an English member of parliament is, in the eyes of the world (the only eyes with which she sees), a better connexion than the son of a West India planter, even though he may be a protégé of lady Anne Percival.

“ Spare me your indignation, my dear !—What a look was there !—Reasoning for Mrs. Stanhope, must not I reason as Mrs. Stanhope does ?—Now I will put this stronger still. Suppose that you had actually acknowledged that Mr. Vincent had got beyond esteem with you ; suppose that you had in due form consented to marry him ; suppose that preparations were at this moment making for the wedding ; even in that desperate case I should say to you, you are not a girl to marry because your wedding-gown is made up. Some few guineas are thrown away, perhaps ; do not throw away your whole happiness after them—that would be sorry economy. Trust me, my dear, I should say, as I have to you, in time of need. Or, if you fear to be obliged to one who never was afraid of being obliged to you, ten to one the preparations for *a* wedding, though not *the* wedding, may be necessary immediately. No matter to Mrs. Franks who the bridegroom may be ; so that her bill be paid, she would not care the turning of a feather whether it be paid by Mrs. Vincent or Mrs. Hervey. I hope I have convinced, I am sure I have made you blush, my dear, and that is some satisfaction. A blush at this moment is an earnest of victory. Io, triumphe ! Now I will open my packet ; my hand shall not be held an instant longer.”

“ I absolve you from the penance of hearing me for an hour, but I claim your promise to attend to me for a few minutes, my dear friend,” said Belinda: “ I thank you most sincerely for your kindness ; and let me assure you that I should not hesitate to accept from you any species of obligation.”

“ Thanks ! thanks !—there’s a dear good girl !—my own Belinda !”

“ But indeed you totally misunderstand me ; your reasoning——”

“ Show me the fault of it : I challenge all the logic of all the Percivals.”

“ Your reasoning is excellent, if your facts were not taken for granted. You have taken it for granted, that Mr. Hervey is in love with me.”

“ No,” said lady Delacour ; “ I take nothing for granted, as you will find when I open this packet.

“ You have taken it for granted,” continued Belinda, “ that I am still secretly attached to him ; and you take it for granted that I am restrained only by fear of lady Anne Percival, my aunt, and the world, from breaking off with Mr. Vincent : if you will read this letter, which I was writing to him when you came into the room, perhaps you will be convinced of your mistake.”

“ Read a letter to Mr. Vincent at such a time as this ! then I will go and read my packet in my own room,” cried lady Delacour, rising hastily, with evident displeasure.

“ Not even your displeasure, my dear friend,” said Belinda, “ can alter my determination to behave

with consistency and openness towards Mr. Vincent; and I can bear your anger, for I know it arises from your regard for me."

"I never loved you so little as at this instant, Belinda."

"You will do me justice when you are cool."

"Cool!" repeated lady Delacour, as she was about to leave the room, "I never wish to be as cool as you are, Belinda! So, after all, you love Mr. Vincent—you'll marry Mr. Vincent!"

"I never said so," replied Belinda: "you have not read my letter. O lady Delacour, at this instant—you should not reproach me."

"I did you injustice," cried lady Delacour, as she now looked at Belinda's letter. "Send it—send it—you have said the very thing you ought; and now sit down with me to this packet of Clarence Hervey's—be just to him, as you are to Mr. Vincent, that's all I ask—give him a fair hearing—Now for it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

VIRGINIA.

CLARENCE HERVEY'S packet contained a history of his connexion with Virginia St. Pierre.

To save our hero from the charge of egotism, we shall relate the principal circumstances in the third person.

It was about a year before he had seen Belinda that Clarence Hervey returned from his travels ; he had been in France just before the revolution, when luxury and dissipation were at their height in Paris, and when a universal spirit of licentious gallantry prevailed. Some circumstances in which he was personally interested disgusted him strongly with the Parisian belles ; he felt that women who were full of vanity, affectation, and artifice, whose tastes were perverted, and whose feelings were depraved, were equally incapable of conferring or enjoying real happiness. Whilst this conviction was full in his mind, he read the works of Rousseau : this eloquent writer's sense made its full impression upon Clarence's understanding, and his declamations produced more than their just effect upon an imagination naturally ardent. He was charmed with the picture of Sophia, when contrasted with the characters of the women of the world with whom he had been disgusted ; and he formed the romantic project of educating a wife for himself. Full of this idea, he returned to England, determined to carry his scheme immediately into execution ; but was some time delayed by the difficulty of finding a proper object for his purpose : it was easy to meet with beauty in distress, and ignorance in poverty ; but it was difficult to find simplicity without vulgarity, ingenuity without cunning, or even ignorance without prejudice ; it was difficult to meet with an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction ; a heart wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility,

capable of all the enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational constancy. It is not wonderful that Mr. Hervey, with such high expectations, should not immediately find them gratified. Disappointed in his first search, he did not, however, relinquish his design ; and at length, by accident, he discovered, or thought that he discovered, an object formed expressly for his purpose.

One fine evening in autumn, as he was riding through the New Forest, charmed with the picturesque beauties of the place, he turned out of the beaten road, and struck into a fresh track, which he pursued with increasing delight, till the setting sun reminded him that it was necessary to postpone his farther reflections on forest scenery, and that it was time to think of finding his way out of the wood. He was now in the most retired part of the forest, and he saw no path to direct him ; but, as he stopped to consider which way he should turn, a dog sprang from a thicket, barking furiously at his horse : his horse was high-spirited, but he was master of him, and he obliged the animal to stand quietly till the dog, having barked himself hoarse, retreated of his own accord. Clarence watched to see which way he would go, and followed him, in hopes of meeting with the person to whom he belonged : he kept his guide in sight, till he came into a beautiful glade, in the midst of which was a neat but very small cottage, with numerous beehives in the garden, surrounded by a profusion of rose-trees, which were in full blow. This cultivated spot was strikingly contrasted with

the wildness of the surrounding scenery. As he came nearer, Mr. Hervey saw a young girl watering the rose-trees, which grew round the cottage, and an old woman beside her filling a basket with the flowers. The old woman was like most other old women, except that she had a remarkably benevolent countenance, and an air that had been acquired in better days; but the young girl did not appear to Clarence like any other young girl that he had ever seen. The setting sun shone upon her countenance, the wind blew aside the ringlets of her light hair, and the blush of modesty overspread her cheeks when she looked up at the stranger. In her large blue eyes there was an expression of artless sensibility with which Mr. Hervey was so powerfully struck that he remained for some moments silent, totally forgetting that he came to ask his way out of the forest. His horse had made so little noise upon the soft grass that he was within a few yards of them before he was perceived by the old woman. As soon as she saw him, she turned abruptly to the young girl, put the basket of roses into her hand, and bid her carry them into the house. As she passed him, the girl, with a sweet innocent smile, held up the basket to Clarence, and offered him one of the roses.

“Go in, Rachel!—go in, child,” said the old woman, in so loud and severe a tone, that both Rachel and Mr. Hervey started; the basket was overturned, and the roses all scattered upon the grass. Clarence, though he attempted some apology, was by no means concerned for the accident, as it detained Rachel some instants longer to collect her flowers, and gave him

an opportunity of admiring her finely shaped hands and arms, and the ease and natural grace of her motions.

“Go in, Rachel,” repeated the old woman, in a still more severe tone; “leave the roses there—I can pick them up as well as you, child—go in.”

The girl looked at the old woman with astonishment, her eyes filled with tears, and throwing down the roses that she held in her hand, she said, “*I am going, grandmother.*” The door closed after her before Clarence recollected himself sufficiently to tell the old lady how he had lost his way, &c. Her severity vanished, as soon as her grand-daughter was safe in the house, and with much readiness she showed him the road for which he inquired.

As soon, however, as it was in his power, he returned thither; for he had taken such good note of the place, that he easily found his way to the spot, which appeared to him a terrestrial paradise. As he descended into the valley, he heard the humming of bees, but he saw no smoke rising from the cottage chimney—no dog barked—no living creature was to be seen—the house door was shut—the window-shutters closed—all was still. The place looked as if it had been deserted by all its inhabitants: the roses had not been watered, many of them had shed their leaves; and a basket half full of dead flowers was left in the middle of the garden. Clarence alighted, and tried the latch of the door, but it was fastened; he listened, but heard no sound; he walked round to the back of the house: a small lattice window was half open, and, as he went toward it, he

thought he heard a low moaning voice ; he gently pulled aside the curtain, and peeped in at the window. The room was darkened, his eyes had been dazzled by the sun, so that he could not, at first, see any object distinctly ; but he heard the moaning repeated at intervals, and a soft voice at last said—

“O, speak to me!—speak to me once again—only once—only once again, speak to me!”

The voice came from a corner of the room, to which he had not yet turned his eyes: and as he drew aside more of the curtain, to let in more light, a figure started up from the side of a bed, at which she had been kneeling, and he saw the beautiful young girl, with her hair all dishevelled, and the strongest expression of grief in her countenance. He asked if he could do her any service. She beckoned to him to come in, and then, pointing to the bed, on which the old woman was stretched, said—

“She cannot speak to me—she cannot move one side—she has been so these three days—but she is not dead—she is not dead!”

The poor creature had been struck with the palsy. As Clarence went close to the bed, she opened her eyes, and fixing them upon him, she stretched out her withered hand, caught fast hold of her granddaughter, and then raising herself, with a violent effort, she pronounced the word “Begone!” Her face grew black, her features convulsed, and she sunk down again in her bed, without power of utterance. Clarence left the house instantly, mounted his horse, and galloped to the next town for medical assistance.

The poor woman was so far recovered by a skilful apothecary, that she could, in a few days, articulate so as to be understood. She knew that her end was approaching fast, and seemed piously resigned to her fate. Mr. Hervey went constantly to see her; but, though grateful to him for his humanity, and for the assistance he had procured for her, yet she appeared agitated when he was in the room, and frequently looked at him and at her grand-daughter with uncommon anxiety. At last, she whispered something to the girl, who immediately left the room; and she then beckoned to him to come closer to the arm-chair, in which she was seated.

“May be, sir,” said she, “you thought me out of my right mind the day when I was lying on that bed, and said to you, in such a peremptory tone, ‘Begone!’—It was all I could say then; and, in truth, I cannot speak quite plain yet; nor ever shall again. But God’s will be done. I had only one thing to say to you, sir, about that poor girl of mine——”

Clarence listened to her with eagerness. She paused, and then laying her cold hand upon his, she looked up earnestly in his face, and continued, “You are a fine young gentleman, and you look like a good gentleman; but so did the man who broke the heart of her poor mother. Her mother was carried off from a boarding-school, when she was scarcely sixteen, by a wretch, who, after privately marrying her, would not own his marriage, staid with her but two years, then went abroad, left his wife and his infant, and has never been heard of since. My daughter died of a broken heart. Rachel was then

between three and four years old ; a beautiful child. God forgive her father !—God's will be done !”—She paused to subdue her emotion, and then, with some difficulty, proceeded.

“ My only comfort is, I have bred Rachel up in innocence ; I never sent her to a boarding-school. No, no ; from the moment of her birth till now, I have kept her under my own eye. In this cottage she has lived with me, away from all the world. You are the first man she ever spoke to ; the first man who ever was within these doors. She is innocence itself !—O sir, as you hope for mercy, when you are as I am now, spare the innocence of that poor child !—Never, never come here after her, when I am dead and gone ! Consider, she is but a child, sir. God never made a better creature. O, promise me you will not be the ruin of my sweet innocent girl, and I shall die in peace ! ”

Clarence Hervey was touched. He instantly made the promise required of him ; and, as nothing less would satisfy the poor dying woman, confirmed it by a solemn oath.

“ Now I am easy,” said she, “ quite easy ; and may God bless you for it. In the village here, there is a Mrs. Smith, a good farmer's wife, who knows us well ; she will see to have me decently buried, and then has promised to sell all the little I have for my girl, and to take care of her. And you'll never come near her more ? ”

“ I did not promise that,” said Hervey.

The old woman again looked much disturbed.

“ Ah, good young gentleman ! ” said she, “ take

my advice; it will be best for you both. If you see her again, you will love her, sir—you can't help it; and if she sees you—poor thing, how innocently she smiled when she gave you the rose!—O sir, never come near her when I am gone! It is too late for me now to get her out of your way. This night, I'm sure, will be my last in this world—O, promise me you will never come here again!”

“After the oath I have taken,” replied Clarence, “that promise would be unnecessary. Trust to my honour.”

“Honour! O, that was the word the gentleman said that betrayed her poor mother, and left her afterward to die!—O sir, sir——”

The violent emotion that she felt was too much for her—she fell back exhausted—never spoke more—and an hour afterwards she expired in the arms of her grand-daughter. The poor girl could not believe that she had breathed her last. She made a sign to the surgeon, and to Clarence Hervey, who stood beside her, to be silent; and listened, fancying that the corpse would breathe again. Then she kissed the cold lips, and the shrivelled cheeks, and the eyelids that were closed for ever. She warmed the dead fingers with her breath—she raised the heavy arm, and when it fell she perceived there was no hope: she threw herself upon her knees:—“She is dead!” she exclaimed; “and she has died without giving me her blessing! She can never bless me again.”

They took her into the air, and Clarence Hervey sprinkled water upon her face. It was a fine night,

and the fresh air soon brought her to her senses. He then said that he would leave her to the care of the surgeon, and ride to the village in search of that Mrs. Smith who had promised to be her friend.

"And so *you* are going away from me, too?" said she; and she burst into tears. At the sight of these tears Clarence turned away, and hurried from her. He sent the woman from the village, but returned no more that night.

Her simplicity, sensibility, and, perhaps more than he was aware, her beauty, had pleased and touched him extremely. The idea of attaching a perfectly pure, disinterested, unpractised heart, was delightful to his imagination: the cultivation of her understanding, he thought, would be an easy and a pleasing task: all difficulties vanished before his sanguine hopes.

"Sensibility," said he to himself, "is the parent of great talents and great virtues; and evidently she possesses natural feeling in an uncommon degree; it shall be developed with skill, patience, and delicacy; and I will deserve before I claim my reward."

The next day he returned to the cottage, accompanied by an elderly lady, a Mrs. Ormond; the same lady, who afterward, to Marriott's prejudiced eyes, had appeared *more like a dragon than any thing else*; but who, to this simple, unsuspecting girl, seemed like what she really was, a truly good-natured, benevolent woman. She consented, most readily, to put herself under the protection of Mrs. Ormond, "provided Mrs. Smith would give her leave." There was no difficulty in persuading Mrs. Smith that it

was for her advantage. Mrs. Smith, who was a plain farmer's wife, told all that she knew of Rachel's history; but all that she knew was little. She had heard only hints at odd times from the old woman: these agreed perfectly with what Mr. Hervey had already heard.

"The *old gentlewoman*," said Mrs. Smith, "as I believe I should call her by rights, has lived in the forest there, where you found her, these many a year—she earned her subsistence by tending bees and making rose-water—she was a good soul, but very particular, especially about her grand-daughter, which, considering all things, one cannot blame her for. She often told me she would never put Rachel to no boarding-school, which I approved, seeing she had no fortune; and it is the ruin of girls, to my mind, to be bred above their means—as it was of her mother, sir. Then she would not never teach Rachel to write, for fear she should take to scrawling nonsense of love-letters, as her mother did before her. Now, sir, this I approved too, for I don't much mind about book-learning myself; and I even thought it would have been as well if the girl had not learnt to read; but that she did learn, and was always fond of, and I'm sure it was more plague than use too to her grandmother, for she was as particular about the books that the girl was to read as about all the rest. She went farther than all that, sir, for she never would let the girl speak to a man—not a man ever entered the doors of the house."

"So she told me."

"And she told you true enough. But there, I

thought, she was quite wrong ; for seeing the girl must, some time or other, speak to men, where was the use of her not learning to do it properly?—Lord, ma'am," continued Mrs. Smith, addressing herself to Mrs. Ormond, "Lord, ma'am, though it is a sin to be remembering so much of the particularities of the dead, I must say there never was an old lady who had more scrupulosities than the deceased. I verily thought, one day, she would have gone into fits about a picture of a man, that Rachel lit upon by accident ; as if a picture had any sense to hurt a body ! Now if it had been one of your naked pictures, there might have been some delicacy in her dislike to it ; but it was no such thing, but a very proper picture.

"A picture, ma'am, of a young sea officer, in his full uniform—quite proper, ma'am. It was his mother that left it with me, and I had it always in my own room, and the girl saw it, and was mightily taken with it, being the first thing of the kind she had ever lit upon, and the old lady comes in, *and took on*, till I verily thought she was crazed. Lord ! I really could not but laugh ; but I checked myself, when the poor old soul's eyes filled with tears, which made me know she was thinking of her daughter that was dead. When I thought on the cause of her particularity about Rachel, I could not laugh any more at her strangeness.

"I promised the good lady that day, in case of her death, to take care of her grand-daughter ; and I thought in my own mind that, in time to come, if one of my boys should take a fancy to her, I should make

no objections, because she was always a good, modest behaved girl; and, I'm sure, would make a good wife, though too delicate for hard country work: but, as it pleases God to send you, madam, and the good gentleman, to take the charge of her off my hands, I am content it should be so, and I will sell every thing here for her honestly, and bring it to you, madam, for poor Rachel."

There was nothing that Rachel was anxious to carry away with her but a little bullfinch, of which she was very fond. One, and but one, circumstance about Rachel stopped the current of Clarence Hervey's imagination, and this, consequently, was excessively disagreeable to him—her name: the name of Rachel he could not endure, and he thought it so unsuited to her, that he could scarcely believe it belonged to her. He consequently resolved to change it as soon as possible. The first time that he beheld her, he was struck with the idea that she resembled the description of Virginia in M. de St. Pierre's celebrated romance; and by this name he always called her, from the hour that she quitted her cottage.

Mrs. Ormond, the lady whom he had engaged to take care of his Virginia, was a widow, the mother of a gentleman who had been his tutor at college. Her son died, and left her in such narrow circumstances, that she was obliged to apply to her friends for pecuniary assistance.

Mr. Hervey had been liberal in his contributions; from his childhood he had known her worth, and her attachment to him was blended with the most pro-

found respect. She was not a woman of superior abilities, or of much information ; but her excellent temper and gentle disposition won affection, though she had not any talents to excite admiration. Mr. Hervey had perfect confidence in her integrity ; he believed that she would exactly comply with his directions, and he thought that her want of literature and ingenuity could easily be supplied by his own care and instructions. He took a house for her and his fair pupil at Windsor, and he exacted a solemn promise that she would neither receive nor pay any visits. Virginia was thus secluded from all intercourse with the world : she saw no one but Mrs. Ormond, Clarence Hervey, and Mr. Moreton, an elderly clergyman, whom Mr. Hervey engaged to attend every Sunday to read prayers for them at home. Virginia never expressed the slightest curiosity to see any other persons, or any thing beyond the walls of the garden that belonged to the house in which she lived ; her present retirement was not greater than that to which she had long been accustomed, and consequently she did not feel her seclusion from the world as any restraint : with the circumstances that were altered in her situation she seemed neither to be dazzled nor charmed ; the objects of convenience or luxury that were new to her she looked upon with indifference ; but with any thing that reminded her of her former way of life, and of her grandmother's cottage, she was delighted.

One day Mr. Hervey asked her, whether she should like better to return to that cottage, or to remain where she was ? He trembled for her answer.

She innocently replied, "I should like best to go back to the cottage, if you would go with me—but I would rather stay here with you than live there without you."

Clarence was touched and flattered by this artless answer, and for some time he discovered every day fresh indications, as he thought, of virtue and abilities in his charming pupil. Her indifference to objects of show and ornament appeared to him an indisputable proof of her magnanimity, and of the superiority of her unprejudiced mind. What a difference, thought he, between this child of nature and the frivolous, sophisticated slaves of art!

To try and prove the simplicity of her taste, and the purity of her mind, he once presented to her a pair of diamond earrings and a moss rosebud, and asked her to take whichever she liked best. She eagerly snatched the rose, crying, "O! it puts me in mind of the cottage:—how sweet it smells!"

She placed it in her bosom, and then, looking at the diamonds, said, "They are pretty, sparkling things—what are they? of what use are they?" and she looked with more curiosity and admiration at the manner in which the earring shut and opened than at the diamonds. Clarence was charmed with her. When Mrs. Ormond told her that these things were to hang in her ears, she laughed, and said, "How! how can I make them hang?"

"Have you never observed that I wear earrings?" said Mrs. Ormond.

"Ay! but yours are not like these, and—let me look—I never saw how you fastened them—let me

look—O! you have holes in your ears; but I have none in mine.”

Mrs. Ormond told her that holes could easily be made in her ears, by running a steel pin through them. She shrunk back, defending her ear with one hand, and pushing the diamonds from her with the other, exclaiming, “O, no, no!—unless,” added she, changing her tone, and turning to Clarence, “unless you wish it:—if you bid me, I will.”

Clarence was scarcely master of himself at this instant; and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could reply to her with that dispassionate calmness which became his situation and hers. And yet there was more of ignorance and timidity, perhaps, than of sound sense or philosophy in Virginia’s indifference to diamonds; she did not consider them as ornaments that would confer distinction upon their possessor, because she was ignorant of the value affixed to them by society. Isolated in the world, she had no excitements to the love of finery, no competition, no means of comparison, or opportunities of display; diamonds were consequently as useless to her as guineas were to Robinson Crusoe on his desert island. It could not justly be said that he was free from avarice, because he set no value on the gold; or that she was free from vanity, because she rejected the diamonds. These reflections could not possibly have escaped a man of Clarence Hervey’s abilities, had he not been engaged in defence of a favourite system of education, or if his pupil had not been quite so handsome. Virginia’s absolute ignorance of the world frequently gave an air of originality to her

most trivial observations, which made her appear at once interesting and entertaining. All her ideas of happiness were confined to the life she had led during her childhood; and as she had accidentally lived in a beautiful situation in the New Forest, she appeared to have an instinctive taste for the beauties of nature, and for what we call the picturesque. This taste Mr. Hervey perceived, whenever he showed her prints and drawings, and it was a fresh source of delight and self-complacency to him. All that was amiable or estimable in Virginia had a double charm, from the secret sense of his penetration, in having discovered and appreciated the treasure. The affections of this innocent girl had no object but himself and Mrs. Ormond, and they were strong, perhaps, in proportion as they were concentrated. The artless familiarity of her manner, and her unsuspecting confidence, amounting almost to credulity, had irresistible power over Mr. Hervey's mind; he felt them as appeals at once to his tenderness and his generosity. He treated her with the utmost delicacy, and his oath was never absent from his mind: but he felt proudly convinced, that if he had not been bound by any such solemn engagement, no temptation could have made him deceive and betray confiding innocence.

Conscious that his views were honourable, anticipating the generous pleasure he should have in showing his superiority to all mercenary considerations and worldly prejudices, in the choice of a wife, he indulged, with a species of pride, his increasing attachment to Virginia; but he was not sensible of

the rapid progress of the passion, till he was suddenly awakened by a few simple observations of Mrs. Ormond.

"This is Virginia's birthday—she tells me she is seventeen to-day."

"Seventeen!—is she only seventeen?" cried Clarence, with a mixture of surprise and disappointment in his countenance—"Only seventeen! Why she is but a child still."

"Quite a child," said Mrs. Ormond; "and so much the better."

"So much the worse, I think," said Clarence. "But are you sure she's only seventeen?—she must be mistaken—she must be eighteen, at least."

"God forbid!"

"God forbid!—Why, Mrs. Ormond?"

"Because, you know, we have a year more before us."

"That may be a very satisfactory prospect to you," said Mr. Hervey, smiling.

"And to you, surely," said Mrs. Ormond; "for, I suppose, you would be glad that your wife should, at least, know the common things that every body knows."

"As to that," said Clarence, "I should be glad that my wife were ignorant of what *every body knows*. Nothing is so tiresome to a man of any taste or abilities as *what every body knows*. I am rather desirous to have a wife who has an uncommon than a common understanding."

"But you would choose, would not you," said Mrs. Ormond, hesitating, with an air of great de-

ference, "that your wife should know how to write?"

"To be sure," replied Clarence, colouring: "Does not Virginia know how to write?"

"How should she?" said Mrs. Ormond: "it is no fault of hers, poor girl—she was never taught. You know it was her grandmother's notion that she should not learn to write, lest she should write love-letters."

"But *you* promised that she should be taught to write, and I trusted to you, Mrs. Ormond."

"She has been here only two months, and all that time, I am sure, I have done every thing in my power; but when a person comes to be sixteen or seventeen, it is up-hill work."

"I will teach her myself," cried Clarence: "I am sure she may be taught any thing."

"By you," said Mrs. Ormond, smiling; "but not by me."

"You have no doubts of her capacity, surely?"

"I am no judge of capacity, especially of the capacity of those I love; and I am grown very fond of Virginia; she is a charming, open-hearted, simple, affectionate creature. I rather think it is from indolence that she does not learn, and not from want of abilities."

"All indolence arises from want of excitement," said Clarence: "if she had proper motives, she would conquer her indolence."

"Why, I dare say, if I were to tell her that she would never have a letter from Mr. Hervey till she is able to write an answer, she would learn to write

very expeditiously; but I thought that would not be a proper motive, because you forbid me to tell her your future views. And indeed it would be highly imprudent, on your account, as well as hers, to give her any hint of that kind: because you might change your mind, before she's old enough for you to think of her seriously, and then you would not know what to do with her; and after entertaining hopes of becoming your wife, she would be miserable, I am sure, with that affectionate tender heart of hers, if you were to leave her. Now that she knows nothing of the matter, we are all safe, and as we should be."

Though Clarence Hervey did not at this time foresee any great probability of his changing his mind, yet he felt the good sense and justice of Mrs. Ormond's suggestions; and he was alarmed to perceive that his mind had been so intoxicated as to suffer such obvious reflections to escape his attention. Mrs. Ormond, a woman whom he had been accustomed to consider as far his inferior in capacity, he now felt was superior to him in prudence, merely because she was undisturbed by passion. He resolved to master his own mind: to consider that it was not a mistress, but a wife, he wanted in Virginia; that a wife without capacity or without literature could never be a companion suited to him, let her beauty or sensibility be ever so exquisite and captivating. The happiness of his life and of hers were at stake, and every motive of prudence and delicacy called upon him to command his affections. He was, however, still sanguine in his expectations from Virginia's understanding, and from his own power of developing her capacity. He

made several attempts, with the greatest skill and patience ; and his fair pupil, though she did not by any means equal his hopes, astonished Mrs. Ormond by her comparatively rapid progress.

“ I always believed that you could make her any thing you pleased,” said she. “ You are a tutor who can work miracles with Virginia.”

“ I see no miracles,” replied Clarence ; “ I am conscious of no such power. I should be sorry to possess any such influence, until I am sure that it would be for our mutual happiness.”

Mr. Hervey then conjured Mrs. Ormond, by all her attachment to him and to her pupil, never to give Virginia the most distant idea that he had any intentions of making her his wife. She promised to do all that was in her power to keep this secret, but she could not help observing that it had already been betrayed, as plainly as looks could speak, by Mr. Hervey himself. Clarence in vain endeavoured to exculpate himself from this charge: Mrs. Ormond brought to his recollection so many instances of his indiscretion, that it was substantiated even in his own judgment, and he was amazed to find that all the time he had put so much constraint upon his inclinations, he had, nevertheless, so obviously betrayed them. His surprise, however, was at this time unmixed with any painful regret ; he did not foresee the probability that he should change his mind ; and notwithstanding Mrs. Ormond assured him that Virginia’s sensibility had increased, he was persuaded that she was mistaken, and that his pupil’s heart and imagination were yet untouched. The in-

nocent openness with which she expressed her affection for him confirmed him, he said, in his opinion. To do him justice, Clarence had none of the presumption which too often characterises men who have been successful, as it is called, with the fair sex. His acquaintance with women had increased his persuasion that it is difficult to excite genuine love in the heart; and with respect to himself, he was upon this subject astonishingly incredulous. It was scarcely possible to convince him that he was beloved.

Mrs. Ormond, piqued upon this subject, determined to ascertain more decisively her pupil's sentiments.

"My dear," said she, one day to Virginia, who was feeding her bullfinch, "I do believe you are fonder of that bird than of any thing in the world—fonder of it, I am sure, than of me."

"O! you cannot think so," said Virginia, with an affectionate smile.

"Well! fonder than you are of Mr. Hervey, you will allow, at least?"

"No, indeed!" cried she, eagerly: "how can you think me so foolish, so childish, so ungrateful, as to prefer a little worthless bird to him——" (the bullfinch began to sing so loud at this instant, that her enthusiastic speech was stopped). "My pretty bird," said she, as it perched upon her hand, "I love you very much, but if Mr. Hervey were to ask it, to wish it, I would open that window, and let you fly; yes, and bid you fly away far from me for ever. Perhaps he does wish it?—Does he?—Did he tell you so?"

cried she, looking earnestly in Mrs. Ormond's face, as she moved towards the window.

Mrs. Ormond put her hand upon the sash, as Virginia was going to throw it up——

“Gently, gently, my love—Whither is your imagination carrying you?”

“I thought *something* by your look,” said Virginia, blushing.

“And I thought *something*, my dear Virginia,” said Mrs. Ormond, smiling.

“What did you think?—What *could* you think?”

“I cannot—I mean, I would rather not at present tell you. But do not look so grave; I will tell you some time or other, if you cannot guess.”

Virginia was silent, and stood abashed.

“I am sure, my sweet girl,” said Mrs. Ormond, “I do not mean, by any thing I said, to confuse or blame you. It is very natural that you should be grateful to Mr. Hervey, and that you should admire, and, *to a certain degree, love him.*”

Virginia looked up delighted, yet with some hesitation in her manner.

“He is indeed,” said Mrs. Ormond, “one of the first of human beings: such even *I* have always thought him; and I am sure I like you the better, my dear, for your sensibility,” said she, kissing Virginia as she spoke; “only we must take care of it, or this tenderness might go too far.”

“How so?” said Virginia, returning her caresses with fondness: “can I love you and Mr. Hervey too much?”

"Not me."

"Nor him, I'm sure—he is so good, so very good! I am afraid that I do not love him *enough*," said she, sighing. "I love him enough when he is absent, but not when he is present. When he is near I feel a sort of fear mixed with my love. I wish to please him very much, but I should not quite like that he should show his love for me as you do—as you did just now."

"My dear, it would not be proper that he should; you are quite right not to wish it."

"Am I? I was afraid that it was a sign of my not liking him as much as I ought."

"Ah, my poor child! you love him full as much as you ought."

"Do you think so? I am glad of it," said Virginia, with a look of such confiding simplicity, that her friend was touched to the heart.

"I do think so, my love," said Mrs. Ormond; "and I hope I shall never be sorry for it, nor you either. But it is not proper that we should say any more upon this subject now. Where are your drawings? Where is your writing? My dear, we must get forward with these things as fast as we can. That is the way to please Mr. Hervey, I can tell you."

Confirmed by this conversation in her own opinion, Mrs. Ormond was satisfied. From delicacy to her pupil, she did not repeat all that had passed to Mr. Hervey, resolving to wait till the *proper* moment. "She is too young and too childish for him to think of marrying her yet, for a year or two," thought

she ; “and it is better to repress her sensibility till her education is more finished ; by that time Mr. Hervey will find out his mistake.”

In the mean time she could not help thinking that he was blind, for he continued steady in his belief of Virginia’s indifference.

To dissipate his own mind, and to give time for the development of hers, he now, according to his resolution, left his pupil to the care of Mrs. Ormond, and mixed as much as possible in gay and fashionable company. It was at this period that he renewed his acquaintance with lady Delacour, whom he had seen and admired before he went abroad. He found that his gallantry, on the famous day of the battle between the turkeys and pigs, was still remembered with gratitude by her ladyship ; she received him with marked courtesy, and he soon became a constant visitor at her house. Her wit entertained, her eloquence charmed him, and he followed, admired, and *gallanted* her, without scruple, for he considered her merely as a coquette, who preferred the glory of conquest to the security of reputation. With such a woman he thought he could amuse himself without danger, and he every where appeared the foremost in the public train of her ladyship’s admirers. He soon discovered, however, that her talents were far superior to what are necessary for playing the part of a fine lady ; his visits became more and more agreeable to him, and he was glad to feel, that, by dividing his attention, his passion for Virginia insensibly diminished, or, as he said to himself, became more reasonable. In conversing with lady Delacour, his fa-

culties were always called into full play; in talking to Virginia, his understanding was passive: he perceived that a large proportion of his intellectual powers, and of his knowledge, was absolutely useless to him in her company; and this did not raise her either in his love or esteem. Her simplicity and naïveté, however, sometimes relieved him, after he had been fatigued by the extravagant gaiety and *glare* of her ladyship's manners; and he reflected that the coquetry which amused him in an acquaintance would be odious in a wife: the perfect innocence of Virginia promised security to his domestic happiness, and he did not change his views, though he was less eager for the period of their accomplishment. "I cannot expect every thing that is desirable," said he to himself: "a more brilliant character than Virginia's would excite my admiration, but could not command my confidence."

It was whilst his mind was in this situation that he became acquainted with Belinda. At first, the idea of her having been educated by the match-making Mrs. Stanhope prejudiced him against her; but as he had opportunities of observing her conduct, this prepossession was conquered, and when she had secured his esteem, he could no longer resist her power over his heart. In comparison with Belinda, Virginia appeared to him but an insipid, though innocent child: the one he found was his equal, the other his inferior; the one he saw could be a companion, a friend to him for life, the other would merely be his pupil, or his plaything. Belinda had cultivated taste, an active understanding, a know-

ledge of literature, the power and the habit of conducting herself ; Virginia was ignorant and indolent, she had few ideas, and no wish to extend her knowledge : she was so entirely unacquainted with the world, that it was absolutely impossible she could conduct herself with that discretion, which must be the combined result of reasoning and experience. Mr. Hervey had felt gratuitous confidence in Virginia's innocence ; but on Belinda's prudence, which he had opportunities of seeing tried, he gradually learned to feel a different and a higher species of reliance, which it is neither in our power to bestow nor to refuse. The virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment ; those of Belinda from reason.

Clarence, whilst he made all these comparisons, became every day more wisely and more fondly attached to Belinda ; and at length he became desirous to change the nature of his connexion with Virginia, and to appear to her only in the light of a friend or a benefactor. He thought of giving her a suitable fortune and of leaving her under the care of Mrs. Ormond, till some method of establishing her in the world should occur. Unfortunately, just at the time when Mr. Hervey formed this plan, and before it was communicated to Mrs. Ormond, difficulties arose which prevented him from putting it into execution.

Whilst he had been engaged in the gay world at lady Delacour's, his pupil had necessarily been left much to the management of Mrs. Ormond. This lady, with the best possible intentions, had not that reach of mind and variety of resource necessary to

direct the exquisite sensibility and ardent imagination of Virginia: the solitude in which she lived added to the difficulty of the task. Without companions to interest her social affections, without real objects to occupy her senses and understanding, Virginia's mind was either perfectly indolent, or *exalted* by romantic views, and visionary ideas of happiness. As she had never seen any thing of society, all her notions were drawn from books; the severe restrictions which her grandmother had early laid upon the choice of these seemed to have awakened her curiosity, and to have increased her appetite for books—it was insatiable. Reading, indeed, was now almost her only pleasure; for Mrs. Ormond's conversation was seldom entertaining, and Virginia had no longer those occupations which filled a portion of her day at the cottage.

Mr. Hervey had cautioned Mrs. Ormond against putting *common* novels into her hands, but he made no objection to romances: these, he thought, breathed a spirit favourable to female virtue, exalted the respect for chastity, and inspired enthusiastic admiration of honour, generosity, truth, and all the noble qualities which dignify human nature. Virginia devoured these romances with the greatest eagerness; and Mrs. Ormond, who found her a prey to ennui when her fancy was not amused, indulged her taste; yet she strongly suspected that they contributed to increase her passion for the only man who could, in her imagination, represent a hero.

One night Virginia found, in Mrs. Ormond's room, a volume of St. Pierre's *Paul and Virginia*. She knew that her own name had been taken from this

romance; Mr. Hervey had her picture painted in this character; and these circumstances strongly excited her curiosity to read the book. Mrs. Ormond could not refuse to let her have it; for, though it was not an ancient romance, it did not exactly come under the description of a common novel, and Mr. Hervey was not at hand to give his advice. Virginia sat down instantly to her volume, and never stirred from the spot till she had nearly finished it.

“What is it that strikes your fancy so much? What are you considering so deeply, my love?” said Mrs. Ormond, observing that she seemed lost in thought. “Let us see, my dear,” continued she, offering to take the book, which hung from her hand. —Virginia started from her reverie, but held the volume fast.—“Will not you let me read along with you?” said Mrs. Ormond. “Won’t you let me share your pleasure?”

“It was not pleasure that I felt, I believe,” said Virginia. “I would rather you should not see just that particular part that I was reading; and yet, if you desire it,” added she, resigning the book reluctantly.

“What can make you so much afraid of me, my sweet girl?”

“I am not afraid of you—but—of myself,” said Virginia, sighing.

Mrs. Ormond read the following passage :

“She thought of Paul’s friendship, more pure than the waters of the fountain, stronger than the united palms, and sweeter than the perfume of flowers; and

these images, in night and in solitude, gave double force to the passion, which she nourished in her heart. She suddenly left the dangerous shades, and went to her mother, to seek protection against herself. She wished to reveal her distress to her ; she pressed her hands, and the name of Paul was on her lips ; but the oppression of her heart took away all utterance, and, laying her head upon her mother's bosom, she only wept."

"And am I not a mother to you, my beloved Virginia?" said Mrs. Ormond. "Though I cannot express my affection in such charming language as this, yet, believe me, no mother was ever fonder of a child."

Virginia threw her arms round Mrs. Ormond, and laid her head upon her friend's bosom, as if she wished to realize the illusion, and to be the Virginia of whom she had been reading.

"I know all you think, and all you feel: I know," whispered Mrs. Ormond, "the name that is on *your* lips."

"No, indeed, you do not; you cannot," cried Virginia, suddenly raising her head, and looking up in Mrs. Ormond's face, with surprise and timidity: "how could you possibly know *all* my thoughts and feelings? I never told them to you; for, indeed, I have only confused ideas floating in my imagination from the books I have been reading. I do not distinctly know my own feelings."

"This is all very natural, and a proof of your perfect innocence and simplicity, my child. But why

did the passage you were reading just now strike you so much?"

"I was only considering," said Virginia, "whether it was the description of—love."

"And your heart told you that it was?"

"I don't know," said she, sighing. "But of this I am certain, that I had not the name, which you were thinking of, upon my lips."

Ah! thought Mrs. Ormond, she has not forgotten how I checked her sensibility some time ago. Poor girl! she is become afraid of me, and I have taught her to dissemble; but she betrays herself every moment.

"My dear," said Mrs. Ormond, "you need not fear me—I cannot blame you: in your situation, it is impossible that you could help loving Mr. Hervey."

"Is it?"

"Yes; quite impossible. So do not blame yourself for it."

"No, I do not blame myself for that. I only blame myself for not loving him *enough*, as I told you once before."

"Yes, my dear; and the oftener you tell me so, the more I am convinced of your affection. It is one of the strongest symptoms of love, that we are unconscious of its extent. We fancy that we can never do too much for the beloved object."

"That is exactly what I feel about Mr. Hervey."

"That we can never love him enough."

"Ah! that is precisely what I feel for Mr. Hervey."

“And what you ought—I mean, what it is natural you should feel; and what he will himself, I hope, indeed I dare say, some time or other wish, and be glad that you should feel.”

“Some time or other! Does not he wish it now?”

“I—he—My dear, what a question is that? And how shall I answer it? We must judge of what he feels by what he expresses: when he expresses love for you, it will then be the time to show yours for him.”

“He has always expressed love for me, I think,” said Virginia—“always, till lately,” continued she; “but lately he has been away so much, and when he comes home, he does not look so well pleased; so that I was afraid he was angry with me, and that he thought me ungrateful.”

“O my love, do not torment yourself with these vain fears! And yet I know that you cannot help it.”

“Since you are so kind, so very kind to me,” said Virginia, “I will tell you all my fears and doubts. But it is late—there! the clock struck one. I will not keep you up.”

“I am not at all sleepy,” said the indulgent Mrs. Ormond.

“Nor I,” said Virginia.

“Now, then,” said Mrs. Ormond, “for these doubts and fears.”

“I was afraid that, perhaps, Mr. Hervey would be angry if he knew that I thought of any thing in the world but him.”

"Of what else do you think?—Of nothing else from morning till night, that I can see."

"Ah, then you do not see into my mind. In the daytime I often think of those heroes, those charming heroes, that I read of in the books you have given me."

"To be sure you do."

"And is not that wrong? Would not Mr. Hervey be displeased if he knew it?"

"Why should he?"

"Because they are not quite like him. I love some of them better than I do him, and he might think that *ungrateful*."

How naturally love inspires the idea of jealousy, thought Mrs. Ormond. "My dear," said she, "you carry your ideas of delicacy and gratitude to an extreme; but it is very natural you should: however, you need not be afraid; Mr. Hervey cannot be jealous of those charming heroes, that never existed, though they are not quite like him."

"I am very glad that he would not think me ungrateful—but if he knew that I dream of them sometimes?"

"He would think you dreamed, as all people do, of what they think of in the daytime."

"And he would not be angry? I am very glad of it. But I once saw a picture——"

"I know you did—well," said Mrs. Ormond, "and your grandmother was frightened because it was the picture of a man—hey? If she was not your grandmother, I should say that she was a simpleton. I assure you, Mr. Hervey is not like her, if that is

what you mean to ask. He would not be angry at your having seen fifty pictures."

"I am glad of it—But I see it very often in my dreams."

"Well, if you had seen more pictures, you would not see this so often. It was the first you ever saw, and very naturally you remember it. Mr. Hervey would not be angry at that," said Mrs. Ormond, laughing.

"But sometimes, in my dreams, it speaks to me."

"And what does it say?"

"The same sort of things that those heroes I read of say to their mistresses."

"And do you never, in your dreams, hear Mr. Hervey say these sort of things?"

"No."

"And do you never see Mr. Hervey in these dreams?"

"Sometimes; but he does not speak to me; he does not look at me with the same sort of tenderness, and he does not throw himself at my feet."

"No; because he has never done all this in reality."

"No; and I wonder how I come to dream of such things."

"So do I; but you have read and thought of them, it is plain. Now go to sleep, there's my good girl; that is the best thing you can do at present—go to sleep."

It was not long after this conversation that sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochfort scaled the garden wall, to obtain a sight of Clarence Hervey's mistress.

Virginia was astonished, terrified, and disgusted, by their appearance ; they seemed to her a species of animals for which she had no name, and of which she had no prototype in her imagination. That they were men, she saw ; but they were clearly not *Clarence Herveys* : they bore still less resemblance to the courteous knights of chivalry. Their language was so different from any of the books she had read, and any of the conversations she had heard, that they were scarcely intelligible. After they had forced themselves into her presence, they did not scruple to address her in the most unceremonious manner. Amongst other rude things, they said, “ Damme, my pretty dear, you cannot love the man that keeps you prisoner in this manner, hey ? Damme, you’d better come and live with one of us. You can’t love this tyrant of a fellow.”

“ He is not a tyrant—I *do* love him as much as I detest you,” cried Virginia, shrinking from him with looks of horror.

“ Damme ! Good actress ! Put her on the stage when he is tired of her. So you won’t come with us ?—Good bye, till we see you again. You’re right, my girl, to be upon your good behaviour ; may be you may get him to marry you, child !”

Virginia, upon hearing this speech, turned from the man who insulted her with a degree of haughty indignation, of which her gentle nature had never before appeared capable.

Mrs. Ormond hoped, that after the alarm was over the circumstance would pass away from her pupil’s

mind; but on the contrary, it left the most forcible impression. Virginia became silent and melancholy, and whole hours were spent in reverie. Mrs. Ormond imagined, that notwithstanding Virginia's entire ignorance of the world, she had acquired from books sufficient knowledge to be alarmed at the idea of being taken for Clarence Hervey's mistress. She touched upon this subject with much delicacy, and the answers that she received confirmed her opinion. Virginia had been inspired by romances with the most exalted notions of female delicacy and honour! but from her perfect ignorance, these were rather vague ideas than principles of conduct.

"We shall see Mr. Hervey to-morrow; he has written me word that he will come from town, and spend the day with us."

"I shall be ashamed to see him after what has passed," said Virginia.

"You have no cause for shame, my dear; Mr. Hervey will try to discover the persons who insulted you, and he will punish them. They will never return here; you need not fear that. He is willing and able to protect you."

"Yes, of that I am sure. But what did that strange man mean, when he said——"

"What, my dear?"

"That, perhaps, Mr. Hervey would marry me."

Virginia pronounced these words with difficulty. Mrs. Ormond was silent, for she was much embarrassed. Virginia having conquered her first difficulty, seemed resolute to obtain an answer.

"You do not speak to me! Will you not tell me, dear Mrs. Ormond," said she, hanging upon her fondly "what did he mean?"

"What he said, I suppose."

"But he said, that if I behaved well, I might get Mr. Hervey to marry me. What did he mean by that?" said Virginia, in an accent of offended pride.

"He spoke very rudely and improperly; but it is not worth while to think of what he said, or what he meant."

"But, dear Mrs. Ormond, do not go away from me now: I never so much wished to speak to you in my whole life, and you turn away from me."

"Well, my love, well, what would you say?"

"Tell me one thing, only one thing, and you will set my heart at ease. Does Mr. Hervey *wish* me to be his wife?"

"I cannot tell you that, my dearest Virginia. Time will show us. Perhaps his heart has not yet decided."

"I wish it would decide," said Virginia, sighing deeply; "and I wish that strange man had not told me any thing about the matter; it has made me very unhappy."

She covered her eyes with her hand, but the tears trickled between her fingers, and rolled fast down her arm. Mrs. Ormond, quite overcome by the sight of her distress, was no longer able to keep the secret with which she had been intrusted by Clarence Hervey. And after all, thought she, Virginia will hear

it from himself soon. I shall only spare her some unnecessary pain; it is cruel to see her thus, and to keep her in suspense. Besides, her weakness might be her ruin, in his opinion, if it were to extinguish all her energy, and deprive her of the very power of pleasing. How wan she looks, and how heavy are those sleepless eyes! She is not, indeed, in a condition to meet him, when he comes to us to-morrow: if she had some hopes, she would revive and appear with her natural ease and grace.

"My sweet child," said Mrs. Ormond, "I cannot bear to see you so melancholy; consider, Mr. Hervey will be with us to-morrow, and it will give him a great deal of pain to see you so."

"Will it? Then I will try to be very gay."

Mrs. Ormond was so delighted to see Virginia smile, that she could not forbear adding, "The strange man was not wrong in every thing he said; you *will*, one of these days, be Mr. Hervey's wife."

"That, I am sure," said Virginia, bursting again into tears, "that, I am sure I do not wish, unless *he* does."

"He does, he does, my dear—do not let this delicacy of yours, which has been wound up too high, make you miserable. He thought of you, he loved you long and long ago."

"He is very good, too good," said Virginia, sobbing.

"Nay, what is more—for I can keep nothing from you—he has been educating you all this time on

purpose for his wife, and he only waits till your education is finished, and till he is sure that you feel no repugnance for him."

"I should be very ungrateful if I felt any repugnance for him," said Virginia; "I feel none."

"O, that you need not assure me," said Mrs. Ormond.

"But I do not wish to marry him—I do not wish to marry."

"You are a modest girl to say so; and this modesty will make you ten times more amiable, especially in Mr. Hervey's eyes. Heaven forbid that I should lessen it!"

The next morning Virginia, who always slept in the same room with Mrs. Ormond, wakened her, by crying out in her sleep, with a voice of terror, "O, save him!—save Mr. Hervey!—Mr. Hervey!—forgive me! forgive me!"

Mrs. Ormond drew back the curtain, and saw Virginia lying fast asleep; her beautiful face convulsed with agony.

"He's dead!—Mr. Hervey!" cried she, in a voice of exquisite distress: then starting up, and stretching out her arms, she uttered a piercing cry, and awoke.

"My love, you have been dreaming frightfully," said Mrs. Ormond.

"Is it all a dream?" cried Virginia, looking round fearfully.

"All a dream, my dear!" said Mrs. Ormond, taking her hand.

"I am very, very glad of it!—Let me breathe. It was, indeed, a frightful dream!"

"Your hand still trembles," said Mrs. Ormond; "let me put back this hair from your poor face, and you will grow cool, and forget this foolish dream."

"No; I must tell it you. I ought to tell it you. But it was all so confused, I can recollect only some parts of it. First, I remember that I thought I was not myself, but the Virginia that we were reading of the other night; and I was somewhere in the Isle of France. I thought the place was something like the forest where my grandmother's cottage used to be, only there were high mountains and rocks, and cocoa-trees and plantains."

"Such as you saw in the prints of that book?"

"Yes; only beautiful, beautiful beyond description! And it was moonlight, brighter and clearer than any moonlight I ever before had seen; and the air was fresh, yet perfumed; and I was seated under the shade of a plane-tree, beside Virginia's fountain."

"Just as you are in your picture?"

"Yes: but Paul was seated beside me."

"Paul!" said Mrs. Ormond, smiling: "that is Mr. Hervey."

"No; not Mr. Hervey's face, though it spoke with his voice—this is what I thought that I must tell you. It was another figure: it seemed a real living person: it knelt at my feet, and spoke to me so kindly, so tenderly; and just as it was going to kiss my hand, Mr. Hervey appeared, and I started terribly, for I was afraid he would be displeased, and that he would think me *ungrateful*; and he was displeased, and he called me *ungrateful Virginia*, and

frowned, and then I gave him my hand, and then every thing changed, I do not know how suddenly, and I was in a place like the great print of the cathedral, which Mr. Hervey showed me ; and there were crowds of people—I was almost stifled. *You* pulled me on, as I remember ; and Mr. Moreton was there, standing upon some steps by what you called the altar ; and then we knelt down before him, and Mr. Hervey was putting a ring on my finger ; but there came suddenly from the crowd that strange man, who was here the other day, and he dragged me along with him, I don't know how or where, swiftly down precipices, whilst I struggled, and at last fell. Then all changed again, and I was in a magnificent field, covered with cloth of gold, and there were beautiful ladies seated under canopies ; and I thought it was a tournament, such as I have read of, only more splendid ; and two knights, clad in complete armour, and mounted on fiery steeds, were engaged in single combat, and they fought furiously, and I thought they were fighting for me. One of the knights wore black plumes in his helmet, and the other white ; and, as he was passing by me, the vizor of the knight of the white plumes was raised, and I saw it was——”

“ Clarence Hervey ? ” said Mrs. Ormond.

“ No ; still the same figure that knelt to me ; and I wished him to be victorious. And he was victorious. And he unhorsed his adversary, and stood over him with his drawn sword ; and then I saw that the knight in the black plumes was Mr. Hervey, and I ran to save him, but I could not. I saw him

weltering in his blood, and I heard him say, ‘ Perfidious, *ungrateful* Virginia ! you are the cause of my death ! ’ — and I screamed, I believe, and that awakened me.”

“ Well, it is only a dream, my love,” said Mrs. Ormond ; “ Mr. Hervey is safe : get up and dress yourself, and you will soon see him.”

“ But was it not wrong and *ungrateful* to wish that the knight in the white plumes should be victorious ? ”

“ Your poor little head is full of nothing but these romances, and love for Mr. Hervey. It is your love for him that makes you fear that he will be jealous. But he is not so simple as you are. He will forgive you for wishing that the knight in the white plumes should be victorious, especially as you did not know that the other knight was Mr. Hervey. Come, my love, dress yourself, and think no more of these foolish dreams, and all will go well.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DISCOVERY.

INSTEAD of the open, childish, affectionate familiarity with which Virginia used to meet Clarence Hervey, she now received him with reserved, timid embarrassment. Struck by this change in her manner, and alarmed by the dejection of her spirits,

which she vainly strove to conceal, he eagerly inquired, from Mrs. Ormond, into the cause of this alteration.

Mrs. Ormond's answers, and her account of all that had passed during his absence, increased his anxiety. His indignation was roused by the insult which Virginia had been offered by the strangers who had scaled the garden-wall. All his endeavours to discover who they were proved ineffectual; but, lest they should venture to repeat their visit, he removed her from Windsor, and took her directly to Twickenham. Here he staid with her and Mrs. Ormond some days, to determine, by his own observation, how far the representations that had been made to him were just. Till this period he had been persuaded that Virginia's regard for him was rather that of gratitude than of love; and with this opinion, he thought that he had no reason seriously to reproach himself for the imprudence with which he had betrayed the partiality that he felt for her in the beginning of their acquaintance. He flattered himself that even should she have discerned his intentions, her heart would not repine at any alteration in his sentiments; and if her happiness were uninjured, his reason told him that he was not in honour bound to constancy. The case was now altered. Unwilling as he was to believe, he could no longer doubt. Virginia could neither meet his eyes nor speak to him without a degree of embarrassment which she had not sufficient art to conceal: she trembled whenever he came near her, and if he looked grave, or forbore to take notice of her, she

would burst into tears. At other times, contrary to the natural indolence of her character, she would exert herself to please him with surprising energy : she learned every thing that he wished ; her capacity seemed suddenly to unfold. For an instant, Clarence flattered himself that both her fits of melancholy and of exertion might arise from a secret desire to see something of that world from which she had been secluded. One day he touched upon this subject, to see what effect it would produce ; but, contrary to his expectations, she seemed to have no desire to quit her retirement : she did not wish, she said, for amusements such as he described ; she did not wish to go into the world.

It was during the time of his passion for her that Clarence had her picture painted in the character of St. Pierre's Virginia. It happened to be in the room in which they were now conversing, and when she spoke of loving a life of retirement, Clarence accidentally cast his eyes upon the picture, and then upon Virginia. She turned away—sighed deeply ; and when, in a tone of kindness, he asked her if she were unhappy, she hid her face in her hands, and made no answer.

Mr. Hervey could not be insensible to her distress or to her delicacy. He saw her bloom fading daily, her spirits depressed, her existence a burden to her, and he feared that his own imprudence had been the cause of all this misery.

“I have taken her out of a situation in which she might have spent her life usefully and happily ; I have excited false hopes in her mind, and now she

is a wretched and useless being. I have won her affections ; her happiness depends totally upon me ; and can I forsake her ? Mrs. Ormond says, that she is convinced Virginia would not survive the day of my marriage with another. I am not disposed to believe that girls often die or destroy themselves for love ; nor am I a coxcomb enough to suppose that love for me must be extraordinarily desperate. But here's a girl, who is of a melancholy temperament, who has a great deal of natural sensibility, whose affections have all been concentrated, who has lived in solitude, whose imagination has dwelt, for a length of time, upon a certain set of ideas, who has but one object of hope ; in such a mind, and in such circumstances, passion may rise to a paroxysm of despair."

Pity, generosity, and honour, made him resolve not to abandon this unfortunate girl ; though he felt that every time he saw Virginia, his love for Belinda increased. It was this struggle in his mind betwixt love and honour which produced all the apparent inconsistency and irresolution that puzzled lady Delacour and perplexed Belinda. The lock of beautiful hair, which so unluckily fell at Belinda's feet, was Virginia's ; he was going to take it to the painter, who had made the hair in her picture considerably too dark. How this picture got into the exhibition must now be explained.

Whilst Mr. Hervey's mind was in that painful state of doubt which has just been described, a circumstance happened that promised him some relief

from his embarrassment. Mr. Moreton, the clergyman who used to read prayers every Sunday for Mrs. Ormond and Virginia, did not come one Sunday at the usual time: the next morning he called on Mr. Hervey, with a face that showed he had something of importance to communicate.

“ I have hopes, my dear Clarence,” said he, “ that I have found out your Virginia’s father. Yesterday, a musical friend of mine persuaded me to go with him to hear the singing at the Asylum for children in St. George’s Fields. There is a girl there who has indeed a charming voice—but that’s not to the present purpose. After church was over, I happened to be one of the last that stayed; for I am too old to love bustling through a crowd. Perhaps, as you are impatient, you think that’s nothing to the purpose; and yet it is, as you shall hear. When the congregation had almost left the church, I observed that the children of the Asylum remained in their places, by order of one of the governors; and a middle-aged gentleman went round amongst the elder girls, examined their countenances with care, and inquired with much anxiety their ages, and every particular relative to their parents. The stranger held a miniature picture in his hand, with which he compared each face. I was not near enough to him,” continued Mr. Moreton, “ to see the miniature distinctly: but from the glimpse I caught of it, I thought that it was like your Virginia, though it seemed to be the portrait of a child but four or five years old. I understand that this

gentleman will be at the Asylum again next Sunday ; I heard him express a wish to see some of the girls who happened last Sunday to be absent."

"Do you know this gentleman's name, or where he lives?" said Clarence.

"I know nothing of him," replied Mr. Moreton, "except that he seems fond of painting ; for he told one of the directors, who was looking at his miniature, that it was remarkably well painted, and that, in his happier days, he had been something of a judge of the art."

Impatient to see the stranger, who, he did not doubt, was Virginia's father, Clarence Hervey went the next Sunday to the Asylum ; but no such gentleman appeared, and all that he could learn respecting him was, that he had applied to one of the directors of the institution for leave to see and question the girls, in hopes of finding amongst them his lost daughter ; that in the course of the week, he had seen all those who were not at the church the last Sunday. None of the directors knew any thing more concerning him ; but the porter remarked, that he came in a very handsome coach, and one of the girls of the Asylum said that he gave her half a guinea, because she was a little like *his poor Rachel, who was dead* ; but that he had added, with a sigh, "This cannot be my daughter, for she is only thirteen, and my girl, if she be now living, must be nearly eighteen."

The age, the name, every circumstance confirmed Mr. Hervey in the belief that this stranger was the father of Virginia, and he was disappointed and pro-

voked by having missed the opportunity of seeing or speaking to him. It occurred to Clarence, that the gentleman might probably visit the Foundling Hospital, and thither he immediately went, to make inquiries. He was told that a person, such as he described, had been there about a month before, and had compared the face of the oldest girls with a little picture of a child : that he gave money to several of the girls, but that they did not know his name, or any thing more about him.

Mr. Hervey now inserted proper advertisements in all the papers, but without producing any effect. At last, recollecting what Mr. Moreton told him of the stranger's love of pictures, he determined to put his portrait of Virginia into the exhibition, in hopes that the gentleman might go there and ask some questions about it, which might lead to a discovery. The young artist, who had painted this picture, was under particular obligations to Clarence, and he promised that he would faithfully comply with his request, to be at Somerset-house regularly every morning, as soon as the exhibition opened ; that he would stay there till it closed, and watch whether any of the spectators were particularly struck with the portrait of Virginia. If any person should ask questions respecting the picture, he was to let Mr. Hervey know immediately, and to give the inquirer his address.

Now it happened that the very day when lady Delacour and Belinda were at the exhibition, the painter called Clarence aside, and informed him that a gentleman had just inquired from him very

eagerly, whether the picture of Virginia was a portrait. This gentleman proved to be not the stranger who had been at the Asylum, but an eminent jeweller, who told Mr. Hervey that his curiosity about the picture arose merely from its striking likeness to a miniature, which had been lately left at his house to be new set. It belonged to a Mr. Hartley, a gentleman who had made a considerable fortune in the West Indies, but who was prevented from enjoying his affluence by the loss of an only daughter, of whom the miniature was a portrait, taken when she was not more than four or five years old. When Clarence heard all this, he was extremely impatient to know where Mr. Hartley was to be found ; but the jeweller could only tell him that the miniature had been called for the preceding day by Mr. Hartley's servant, who said his master was leaving town in a great hurry to go to Portsmouth, to join the West India fleet, which was to sail with the first favourable wind.

Clarence determined immediately to follow him to Portsmouth : he had not a moment to spare, for the wind was actually favourable, and his only chance of seeing Mr. Hartley was by reaching Portsmouth as soon as possible. This was the cause of his taking leave of Belinda in such an abrupt manner : painful indeed were his feelings at that moment, and great the difficulty he felt in parting with her, without giving any explanation of his conduct, which must have appeared to her capricious and mysterious. He was aware that he had explicitly avowed to lady Delacour his admiration of miss Portman, and that in

a thousand instances he had betrayed his passion. Yet of her love he dared not trust himself to think, whilst his affairs were in this doubtful state. He had, it is true, some faint hopes that a change in Virginia's situation might produce an alteration in her sentiments, and he resolved to decide his own conduct by the manner in which she should behave, if her father should be found, and she should become heiress to a considerable fortune. New views might then open to her imagination : the world, the fashionable world, in all its glory, would be before her ; her beauty and fortune would attract a variety of admirers, and Clarence thought that perhaps her partiality for him might become less exclusive, when she had more opportunities of choice. If her love arose merely from circumstances, with circumstances it would change ; if it were only a disease of the imagination, induced by her seclusion from society, it might be cured by mixing with the world ; and then he would be at liberty to follow the dictates of his own heart, and declare his attachment to Belinda. But if he should find that change of situation made no alteration in Virginia's sentiments, if her happiness should absolutely depend upon the realization of those hopes which he had imprudently excited, he felt that he should be bound to her by all the laws of justice and honour ; laws which no passion could tempt him to break. Full of these ideas, he hurried to Portsmouth in pursuit of Virginia's father. The first question he asked, upon his arrival there, may easily be guessed.

“ Has the West India fleet sailed ? ”

"No: it sails to-morrow morning," was the answer.

He hastened instantly to make inquiries for Mr. Hartley. No such person could be found, no such gentleman was to be heard of any where. *Hartley*, he was sure, was the name which the jeweller mentioned to him, but it was in vain that he repeated it; no Mr. Hartley was to be heard of at Portsmouth, except a pawnbroker. At last, a steward of one of the West Indiamen recollected that a gentleman of that name came over with him in the *Effingham*, and that he talked of returning in the same vessel to the West Indies, if he should ever leave England again.

"But we have heard nothing of him since, sir," said the steward. "No passage is taken for him with us."

"And my life to a china orange," cried a sailor who was standing by, "he's gone to kingdom come, or more likely to Bedlam, afore this; for he was plaguy crazy in his timbers, and his head wanted righting, I take it, if it was he, Jack, who used to walk the deck, you know, with a bit of a picture in his hand, to which he seemed to be mumbling his prayers from morning to night. There's no use in sounding for him, master; he's down in Davy's locker long ago, or stowed into the tight waistcoat before this time o' day."

Notwithstanding this knowing sailor's opinion, Clarence would not desist from his sounding; because having so lately heard of him at different places, he could not believe that he was gone either into Davy's locker or to Bedlam. He imagined that,

by some accident, Mr. Hartley had been detained upon the road to Portsmouth : and in the expectation that he would certainly arrive before the fleet should sail, Clarence waited with tolerable patience. He waited, however, in vain; he saw the Effingham and the whole fleet sail—no Mr. Hartley arrived. As he hailed one of the boats of the Effingham, which was rowing out with some passengers, who had been too late to get on board, his friend the sailor answered, “ We’ve no crazy man here: I told you, master, he’d never go out no more in the Effingham. He’s where I said, master, you’ll find, or nowhere.”

Mr. Hervey remained some days at Portsmouth, after the fleet had sailed, in hopes that he might yet obtain some information ; but none could be had ; neither could any farther tidings be obtained from the jeweller, who had first mentioned Mr. Hartley. Despairing of success in the object of his journey, he, however, determined to delay his return to town, for some time, in hopes that absence might efface the impression which had been made on the heart of Virginia. He made a tour along the picturesque coasts of Dorset and Devonshire, and it was during this excursion that he wrote the letters to lady Delacour which have so often been mentioned. He endeavoured to dissipate his thoughts by new scenes and employments ; but all his ideas involuntarily centred in Belinda. If he saw new characters, he compared them with hers, or considered how far she would approve or condemn them. The books that he read were perused with a constant reference to what she would think or feel ; and during his whole

journey he never beheld any beautiful prospect, without wishing that it could at the same instant be seen by Belinda. If her name were mentioned but once in his letters, it was because he dared not trust himself to speak of her ; she was for ever present to his mind : but while he was writing to lady Delacour, her idea pressed more strongly upon his heart ; he recollected that it was she who first gave him a just insight into her ladyship's real character ; he recollected that she had joined with him in the benevolent design of reconciling her to lord Delacour, and of creating in her mind a taste for domestic happiness. This remembrance operated powerfully to excite him to fresh exertions, and the eloquence which touched lady Delacour so much in these "*edifying*" letters, as she called them, was in fact inspired by Belinda.

Whenever he thought distinctly upon his future plans, Virginia's attachment, and the hopes which he had imprudently inspired, appeared insuperable obstacles to his union with miss Portman ; but, in more sanguine moments, he flattered himself with a confused notion that these difficulties would vanish. Great were his surprise and alarm when he received that letter of lady Delacour's, in which she announced the probability of Belinda's marriage with Mr. Vincent. In consequence of his moving from place to place in the course of his tour, he did not receive this letter till nearly a fortnight after it should have come to his hands. The instant he received it he set out on his way home ; he travelled with all that expedition which money can command in England :

his first thought and first wish when he arrived in town were to go to lady Delacour's ; but he checked his impatience, and proceeded immediately to Twickenham, to have his fate decided by Virginia. It was with the most painful sensations that he saw her again. The accounts which he received from Mrs. Ormond convinced him that absence had produced none of the effects which he expected on the mind of her pupil. Mrs. Ormond was naturally both of an affectionate disposition and a timid temper ; she had become excessively fond of Virginia, and her anxiety was more than in proportion to her love : it sometimes balanced and even overbalanced her regard and respect for Clarence Hervey himself. When he spoke of his attachment to Belinda, and of his doubts respecting Virginia, she could no longer restrain her emotion.

"O, indeed, Mr. Hervey," said she, "this is no time for reasoning and doubting. No man in his senses, no man who is not wilfully blind, could doubt her being distractedly fond of you."

"I am sorry for it," said Clarence.

"And why—O why, Mr. Hervey? Don't you recollect the time when you were all impatience to call her yours,—when you thought her the most charming creature in the whole world?"

"I had not seen Belinda Portman, then."

"And I wish to Heaven you never had seen her! But O surely, Mr. Hervey, you will not desert my Virginia!—Must her health, her happiness, her reputation, all be the sacrifice?"

"Reputation! Mrs. Ormond."

“Reputation, Mr. Hervey: you do not know in what a light she is considered here; nor did I till lately. But I tell you her reputation is injured, —fatally injured. It is whispered, and more than whispered everywhere, that she is your mistress. A woman came here the other day with the bullfinch, and she looked at me, and spoke in such an extraordinary way, that I was shocked more than I can express. I need not tell you all the particulars; it is enough that I have made inquiries, and am sure, too sure, of what I say, that nothing but your marriage with Virginia can save her reputation; or ——”

Mrs. Ormond stopped short, for at this instant Virginia entered the room, walking in her slow manner, as if she were in a deep reverie.

“Since my return,” said Clarence, in an embarrassed voice, “I have scarcely heard a syllable from miss St. Pierre’s lips.”

“*Miss St. Pierre!*—He used to call me Virginia,” said she, turning to Mrs. Ormond: “he is angry with me—he used to call me Virginia.”

“But you were a child then, you know, my love,” said Mrs. Ormond.

“And I wish I was still a child,” said Virginia. Then, after a long pause, she approached Mr. Hervey with extreme timidity, and, opening a portfolio which lay on the table, she said to him, “If you are at leisure—if I do not interrupt you—would you look at these drawings; though they are not worth your seeing, except as proofs that I *can* conquer my natural indolence?”

The drawings were views which she had painted

from memory, of scenes in the New Forest, near her grandmother's cottage. That cottage was drawn with an exactness that proved how fresh it was in her remembrance. Many recollections rushed forcibly into Clarence Hervey's mind at the sight of this cottage. The charming image of Virginia, as it first struck his fancy,—the smile, the innocent smile, with which she offered him the finest rose in her basket,—the stern voice in which her grandmother spoke to her,—the prophetic fears of her protectress,—the figure of the dying woman,—the solemn promise he made to her,—all recurred, in rapid succession, to his memory.

"You don't seem to like that," said Virginia; and then putting another drawing into his hands, "perhaps this may please you better."

"They are beautiful; they are surprisingly well done!" exclaimed he.

"I knew he would like them! I told you so!" cried Mrs. Ormond, in a triumphant tone.

"You see," said Virginia, "that though you have heard scarcely a syllable from miss St. Pierre's lips, since your return, yet she has not been unmindful of your wishes in your absence. You told her, some time ago, that you wished she would try to improve in drawing. She has done her best. But do not trouble yourself to look at them any longer," said Virginia, taking one of her drawings from his hand; "I merely wanted to show you that, though I have no genius, I have some——"

Her voice faltered so that she could not pronounce the word *gratitude*.

Mrs. Ormond pronounced it for her; and added, "I can answer for it, that Virginia is not ungrateful."

"Ungrateful!" repeated Clarence; "who ever thought her so? Why did you put these ideas into her mind?"

Virginia, resting her head on Mrs. Ormond's shoulder, wept bitterly.

"You have worked upon her sensibility till you have made her miserable," cried Clarence, angrily. "Virginia, listen to me: look at me," said he, affectionately taking her hand; but she pressed closer to Mrs. Ormond, and would not raise her head. "Do not consider me as your master,—your tyrant; do not imagine that I think you ungrateful!"

"O, I am—I am—I am ungrateful to you," cried she, sobbing; "but Mrs. Ormond never told me so; do not blame her: she has never worked upon my sensibility. Do you think," said she, looking up, while a transient expression of indignation passed over her countenance, "do you think I cannot *feel* without having been taught?"

Clarence uttered a deep sigh.

"But if you feel too much, my dearest Virginia,—if you give way to your feelings in this manner," said Mrs. Ormond, "you will make both yourself and Mr. Hervey unhappy."

"Heaven forbid! The first wish of my soul is——" She paused. "I should be the most ungrateful wretch in the world, if I were to make him unhappy."

“But if he sees you miserable, Virginia?”

“Then he shall not see it,” said she, wiping the tears from her face.

“To imagine that you were unhappy, and that you concealed it from us, would be still worse,” said Clarence.

“But why should you imagine it?” replied Virginia; “you are too good, too kind; but do not fancy that I am not happy: I am sure I ought to be happy.”

“Do you regret your cottage?” said Clarence: “these drawings show how well you remember it.”

Virginia coloured; and, with some hesitation, answered, “Is it my fault if I cannot forget?”

“You were happier then, Virginia, than you are now, you will confess,” said Mrs. Ormond, who was not a woman of refined delicacy, and who thought that the best chance she had of working upon Mr. Hervey’s sense of honour was by making it plain to him how much her pupil’s affections were engaged.

Virginia made no answer to this question, and her silence touched Clarence more than any thing she could have said. When Mrs. Ormond repeated her question, he relieved the trembling girl by saying, “My dear Mrs. Ormond, confidence must be won, not demanded.”

“I have no right to insist upon confessions, I know,” said Mrs. Ormond; “but——”

“Confessions! I do not wish to conceal any thing, but I think sincerity is not *always* in our sex consistent with—I mean—I don’t know what I mean,

what I say, or what I ought to say," cried Virginia ; and she sunk down on a sofa, in extreme confusion.

"Why will you agitate her, Mrs. Ormond, in this manner?" said Mr. Hervey, with an expression of sudden anger. It was succeeded by a look of such tender compassion for Virginia, that Mrs. Ormond rejoiced to have excited his anger ; at any price she wished to serve her beloved pupil.

"Do not be in the least apprehensive, my dear Virginia, that we should take ungenerous advantage of the openness and simplicity of your character," said Mr. Hervey.

"O no, no; I cannot, do not apprehend any thing ungenerous from you; you are, you ever have been, my best, my most generous friend ! But I fear that I have not the simplicity of character, the openness that you imagine; and yet, I am sure, I wish from the bottom of my heart—I wish to do right, if I knew how. But there is not one—no, not one—person in the whole world," continued she, her eyes moving from Mrs. Ormond to Mr. Hervey, and from him to Mrs. Ormond again, "not one person in the whole world I dare—I ought—to lay my heart open to. I have, perhaps, said more than is proper already. But this I know," added she, in a firm tone, rising, and addressing herself to Clarence, "*you* shall never be made unhappy by me. And do not think about my happiness so much," said she, forcing a smile; "I am, I will be, perfectly happy. Only let me always know your wishes, your sentiments, your feelings, and by them I will, as I ought, regulate mine."

"Amiable, charming, generous girl!" cried Clarence.

"Take care," said Mrs. Ormond; "take care, Virginia, lest you promise more than you can perform. Wishes, and feelings, and sentiments, are not to be so easily regulated."

"I did not, I believe, say it was easy; but I hope it is possible," replied Virginia. "I promise nothing but what I am able to perform."

"I doubt it," said Mrs. Ormond, shaking her head. "You *are*—you *will* be perfectly happy. O Virginia, my love, do not deceive yourself; do not deceive us so terribly. I am sorry to put you to the blush; but——"

"Not a word more, my dear madam, I beg—I insist," said Mr. Hervey, in a commanding tone; but, for the first time in her life, regardless of him, she persisted.

"I only ask you to call to mind, my dearest Virginia," said she, taking her hand, "the morning that you screamed in your sleep, the morning when you told me the frightful dream—were you perfectly happy then?"

"It is easy to force my thoughts from me," said Virginia, withdrawing her hand from Mrs. Ormond; "but it is cruel to do so." And with an air of offended dignity she passed them, and quitted the room.

"I wish to Heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond, "that miss Portman was married, and out of the way—I shall never forgive myself! We have used this poor girl cruelly amongst us: she loves you to

distraction, and I have encouraged her passion, and I have betrayed her—O, fool that I was! I told her that she would certainly be your wife.”

“ You have told her so!—Did I not charge you, Mrs. Ormond——”

“ Yes ; but I could not help it, when I saw the sweet girl fading away—and, besides, I am sure she thought it, from your manner, long and long before I told it to her. Do you forget how fond of her you were scarce one short year ago ? And do you forget how plainly you let her see your passion ? O, how can you blame her, if she loves you, and if she is unhappy !”

“ I blame no one but myself,” cried Clarence ; “ I must abide by the consequences of my own folly. Unhappy!—she shall not be unhappy; she does not deserve to be so.”

He walked backward and forward, with hasty steps, for some minutes; then sat down and wrote a letter to Virginia.

When he had finished it, he put it into Mrs. Ormond’s hands.

“ Read it—seal it—give it to her—and let her answer be sent to town to me, at Dr. X.’s, in Clifford-street.”

Mrs. Ormond clasped her hands, in an ecstasy of joy, as she glanced her eye over the letter, for it contained an offer of his hand.

“ This is like yourself ; like what I always knew you to be, dear Mr. Hervey !” she exclaimed.

But her exclamation was lost upon him. When she looked up, to repeat her praises, she perceived he

was gone. After the effort which he had made, he wished for time to tranquillize his mind, before he should again see Virginia. What her answer to this letter would be he could not doubt: his fate was now decided, and he determined immediately to write to lady Delacour to explain his situation; he felt that he had not sufficient fortitude at this moment to make such an explanation in person. With all the strength of his mind, he endeavoured to exclude Belinda from his thoughts, but *curiosity*—(for he would suffer himself to call it by no other name)—curiosity to know whether she were actually engaged to Mr. Vincent obtruded itself with such force, that it could not be resisted.

From Dr. X—— he thought he could obtain full information, and he hastened immediately to town. When he got to Clifford-street, he found that the doctor was not at home; his servant said, he might probably be met with at Mrs. Margaret Delacour's, as he usually finished his morning rounds at her house. Thither Mr. Hervey immediately went.

The first sound that he heard, as he went up her stairs, was the screaming of a macaw; and the first person he saw, through the open door of the drawing-room, was Helena Delacour. She was standing with her back to him, leaning over the macaw's cage, and he heard her say in a joyful tone, "Yes, though you do scream so frightfully, my pretty macaw, I love you as well as Marriott ever did. When my dear, good miss Portman sent this macaw—My dear aunt! here's Mr. Hervey!—you were just wishing to see him."

“Mr. Hervey,” said the old lady, with a benevolent smile, “your little friend Helena tells you truth; we were just wishing for you. I am sure it will give you pleasure to hear that I am at last a convert to your opinion of lady Delacour. She has given up all those that I used to call her rantipole acquaintance. She has reconciled herself to her husband, and to his friends; and Helena is to go home to live with her. Here is a charming note I have just received from her! Dine with me on Thursday next, and you will meet her ladyship, and see a happy family party. You have had some share in the *reformation*, I know, and that was the reason I wished that you should be with us on Thursday. You see I am not an obstinate old woman, though I was cross the first day I saw you at lady Anne Percival’s. I found I was mistaken in your character, and I am glad of it. But this note of lady Delacour’s seems to have struck you dumb.”

There were, indeed, a few words in this note, which deprived him, for some moments, of all power of utterance.

“The report you have heard (unlike most other reports) is perfectly well founded: Mr. Vincent, Belinda’s admirer, is here. I will bring him with us on Thursday.”

Mr. Hervey was relieved from the necessity of accounting to Mrs. Delacour for his sudden embarrassment, by the entrance of Dr. X—— and another gentleman, of whom, in the confusion of his mind, Clarence did not at first take any notice. Dr. X——, with his usual mixture of benevolence and raillery,

addressed himself to Clarence, whilst the stranger took out of his pocket some papers, and in a low voice entered earnestly into conversation with Mrs. Delacour.

"Now tell me, if you can, Clarence," said Dr. X——, "which of your three mistresses you like best? I think I left you some months ago in great doubt upon this subject: are you still in that philosophic state?"

"No," said Clarence; "all doubts are over—I am going to be married."

"Bravo!—But you look as if you were going to be hanged. May I, as it will so soon be in the newspaper, may I ask the name of the fair lady?"

"Virginia St. Pierre. You shall know her history and mine when we are alone," said Mr. Hervey, lowering his voice.

"You need not lower your voice," said Dr. X——, "for Mrs. Delacour is, as you see, so much taken up with her own affairs, that she has no curiosity for those of her neighbours; and Mr. Hartley is as busy as——"

"Mr. who? Mr. Hartley, did you say?" interrupted Clarence, eagerly turning his eyes upon the stranger, who was a middle-aged gentleman, exactly answering the description of the person who had been at the Asylum in search of his daughter.

"Mr. Hartley! yes. What astonishes you so much?" said Dr. X——, calmly. "He is a West Indian. I met him in Cambridgeshire last summer, at his friend Mr. Horton's; he has been very generous to the poor people who suffered by the fire, and he is now con-

sulting with Mrs. Delacour, who has an estate adjoining to Mr. Horton's, about her tenants, whose houses in the village were burnt. Now I have, in as few words and parentheses as possible, told you all I know of Mr. Hartley's history; but your curiosity still looks voracious."

"I want to know whether he has a miniature?" said Clarence, hastily. "Introduce me to him, for Heaven's sake, directly!"

"Mr. Hartley," cried the doctor, raising his voice, "give me leave to introduce my friend Mr. Hervey to you, and to your miniature picture, if you have one."

Mr. Hartley sighed profoundly as he drew from his bosom a small portrait, which he put into Mr. Hervey's hands, saying, "Alas! sir, you cannot, I fear, give me any tidings of the original; it is the picture of a daughter, whom I have never seen since she was an infant—whom I never shall see again."

Clarence instantly knew it to be Virginia; but as he was upon the point of making some joyful exclamation, he felt Dr. X—— touch his shoulder, and looking up at Mr. Hartley, he saw in his countenance such strong workings of passion, that he prudently suppressed his own emotion, and calmly said, "It would be cruel, sir, to give you false hopes."

"It would kill me—it would kill me, sir!—or worse!—worse! a thousand times worse!" cried Mr. Hartley, putting his hand to his forehead. "What," continued he, impatiently, "what was the meaning of the look you gave, when you first saw that picture?"

Speak, if you have any humanity! Did you ever see any one that resembles that picture?"

"I have seen, I think, a picture," said Clarence Hervey, "that has some resemblance to it."

"When? where?——"

"My good sir," said Dr. X——, "let me recommend it to you to consider that there is scarcely any possibility of judging, from the features of children, of what their faces may be when they grow up. Nothing can be more fallacious than these accidental resemblances between the pictures of children and of grown-up people."

Mr. Hartley's countenance fell.

"But," added Clarence Hervey, "you will perhaps, sir, think it worth your while to see the picture of which I speak; you can see it at Mr. F——'s, the painter, in Newman-street; and I will accompany you thither whenever you please."

"This moment, if you would have the goodness: my carriage is at the door; and Mrs. Delacour will be so kind to excuse——"

"O, make no apologies to me at such a time as this," said Mrs. Delacour. "Away with you, gentlemen, as soon as you please; upon condition, that if you have any good news to tell, some of you will remember, in the midst of your joy, that such an old woman as Mrs. Margaret Delacour exists, who loves to hear *good* news of those who deserve it."

It was so late in the day when they got to Newman-street, that they were obliged to light candles. Trembling with eagerness, Mr. Hartley drew near, while Clarence held the light to the picture.

"It is so like," said he, looking at his miniature, "that I dare not believe my senses. Dr. X——, pray do you look. My head is so dizzy, and my eyes so ——What do you think, sir? What do you say, doctor?"

"That the likeness is certainly striking—but this seems to be a fancy piece."

"A fancy piece," repeated Mr. Hartley, with terror: "why then did you bring me here?—A fancy piece!"

"No, sir; it is a portrait," said Clarence; "and if you will be calm, I will tell you more."

"I will be calm—only is she alive?"

"The lady of whom this is the portrait, is alive," replied Clarence Hervey, who was obliged to exert his utmost command over himself, to maintain that composure which he saw was necessary; "the lady, of whom this is the portrait, is alive, and you shall see her to-morrow."

"O, why not now? Cannot I see her now? I must see her to-night—this instant, sir!"

"It is impossible," said Mr. Hervey, "that you should see her this instant, for she is some miles off, at Twickenham."

"It is too late to go thither now; you cannot think of it, Mr. Hartley," continued Dr. X——, in a tone of command, to which he yielded more readily than to reason.

Clarence had the presence of mind to recollect that it would be necessary to prepare poor Virginia for this meeting, and he sent a messenger immediately to

request that Mrs. Ormond would communicate the intelligence with all the caution in her power.

The next morning, Mr. Hartley and Mr. Hervey set off together for Twickenham. In their way thither Clarence gradually confirmed Mr. Hartley in the belief that Virginia was his daughter, by relating all the circumstances that he had learned from her grandmother, and from Mrs. Smith, the farmer's wife, with whom she had formerly been acquainted: the name, the age, every particular, as it was disclosed, heightened his security and his joy.

For some time Mr. Hartley's mind was so intent that he could not listen to any thing, but at last Clarence engaged his intention and suspended his anxiety, by giving him a history of his own connexion with Virginia, from the day of his first discovering her in the New Forest, to the letter which he had just written, to offer her his hand. The partiality which it was suspected Virginia felt for him was the only circumstance which he suppressed, because, notwithstanding all Mrs. Ormond had said, and all he had himself heard and seen, his obstinate incredulity required confirmation under her own hand, or positively from her own lips. He still fancied it was possible that change of situation might alter her views and sentiments; and he earnestly entreated that she might be left entirely to her own decision. It was necessary to make this stipulation with her father; for in the excess of his gratitude for the kindness which Clarence had shown to her, he protested that he should look upon her as a monster if she did not

love him : he added, that if Mr. Hervey had not a farthing, he should prefer him to every man upon earth ; he, however, promised that he would conceal his wishes, and that his daughter should act entirely from the dictates of her own mind. In the fullness of his heart, he told Clarence all those circumstances of his conduct towards Virginia's mother which had filled his soul with remorse. She was scarcely sixteen when he ran away with her from a boarding-school ; he was at that time a gay officer, she a sentimental girl, who had been spoiled by early novel-reading. Her father had a small place at court, lived beyond his fortune, educated his daughter, to whom he could give no portion, as if she were to be heiress to a large estate ; then died, and left his widow absolutely in penury. This widow was the old lady who lived in the cottage in the New Forest. It was just at the time of her husband's death, and of her own distress, that she heard of the elopement of her daughter from school. Mr. Hartley's parents were so much incensed by the match, that he was prevailed upon to separate from his wife, and to go abroad, to push his fortune in the army. His marriage had been secret : his own friends disavowed it, notwithstanding the repeated, urgent entreaties of his wife, and of her mother, who was her only surviving relation. His wife, on her death-bed, wrote to urge him to take charge of his daughter ; and, to make the appeal stronger to his feelings, she sent him a picture of his little girl, who was then about four years old. Mr. Hartley, however, was intent upon forming a new connexion with the rich widow of a planter in

Jamaica. He married the widow, took possession of her fortune, and all his affections soon were fixed upon a son, for whom he formed, even from the moment of his birth, various schemes of aggrandizement. The boy lived till he was about ten years old, when he caught a fever, which at that time raged in Jamaica, and, after a few days' illness, died. His mother was carried off by the same disease; and Mr. Hartley, left alone in the midst of his wealth, felt how insufficient it was to happiness. Remorse now seized him; he returned to England in search of his deserted daughter. To this neglected child he now looked forward, for the peace and happiness of the remainder of his life. Disappointment in all his inquiries for some months preyed upon his spirits to such a degree that his intellects were at times disordered; this derangement was the cause of his not sooner recovering his child. He was in confinement during the time that Clarence Hervey's advertisements were inserted in the papers; and his illness was also the cause of his not going to Portsmouth, and sailing in the *Effingham*, as he had originally intended. The history of his connexion with Mr. Horton would be uninteresting to the reader; it is enough to say, that he was prevailed upon, by that gentleman, to spend some time in the country with him, for the recovery of his health. And it was there that he became acquainted with Dr. X——, who introduced him, as we have seen, to Mrs. Margaret Delacour, at whose house he met Clarence Hervey. This is the most succinct account that we can give of him and his affairs. His own

account was ten times as long; but we spare our readers his incoherencies and reflections, because, perhaps, they are in a hurry to get to Twickenham, and to hear of his meeting with Virginia.

Mrs. Ormond found it no easy task to prepare Virginia for the sight of Mr. Hartley. Virginia had scarcely ever spoken of her father; but the remembrance of things which she had heard of him from her grandmother was fresh in her mind; she had often pictured him in her fancy, and she had secretly nourished the hope that she should not for ever be a *deserted child*. Mrs. Ormond had observed, that in those romances, of which she was so fond, every thing that related to children who were deserted by their parents affected her strongly.

The belief in what the French call *la force du sang* was suited to her affectionate temper and ardent imagination, and it had taken full possession of her mind. The eloquence of romance persuaded her that she should not only discover but love her father with intuitive filial piety, and she longed to experience those yearnings of affection of which she had read so much.

The first moment that Mrs. Ormond began to speak of Mr. Clarence Hervey's hopes of discovering her father, she was transported with joy.

"My *father*!—How delightful that word *father* sounds!—*My father*!—May I say *my father*?—And will he own me, and will he love me, and will he give me his blessing, and will he fold me in his arms, and call me his daughter, his dear daughter?—O,

how I shall love him ! I will make it the whole business of my life to please him ! ”

“ The *whole* business ? ” said Mrs. Ormond, smiling.

“ Not the whole,” said Virginia ; “ I hope my father will like Mr. Hervey. Did not you say that he is rich ? I wish that my father may be *very* rich.”

“ That is the last wish that I should have expected to hear from you, my Virginia.”

“ But do you not know why I wish it ?—that I may show my gratitude to Mr. Hervey.”

“ My dear child,” said Mrs. Ormond, “ these are most generous sentiments, and worthy of you ; but do not let your imagination run away with you at this rate—Mr. Hervey is rich enough.”

“ I wish he was poor,” said Virginia, “ that I might make him rich.”

“ He would not love you the better, my dear,” said Mrs. Ormond, “ if you had the wealth of the Indies. Perhaps your father may not be rich ; therefore do not set your heart upon this idea.”

Virginia sighed : fear succeeded to hope, and her imagination immediately reversed the bright picture that it had drawn.

“ But I am afraid,” said she, “ that this gentleman is not my father—how disappointed I shall be ! I wish you had never told me all this, my dear Mrs. Ormond.”

“ I would not have told it to you, if Mr. Hervey had not desired that I should ; and you may be sure he would not have desired it, unless he had good reason to believe that you would not be disappointed.”

“But he is not sure—he does not say he is quite sure. And, even if I were quite certain of his being my father, how can I be certain that he will not disown me—he, who has deserted me so long? My grandmother, I remember, often used to say that he had no natural affection.”

“Your grandmother was mistaken, then; for he has been searching for his child all over England, Mr. Hervey says; and he has almost lost his senses with grief and with remorse!”

“Remorse!”

“Yes, remorse, for having so long deserted you: he fears that you will hate him.”

“Hate him!—is it possible to hate a father?” said Virginia.

“He dreads that you should never forgive him.”

“Forgive him!—I have read of parents forgiving their children, but I never remember to have read of a daughter forgiving her father. *Forgive!* you should not have used that word. I cannot *forgive* my father: but I can love him, and I will make him quite forget all his sorrows—I mean, all his sorrows about me.”

After this conversation Virginia spent her time in imagining what sort of person her father would be; whether he was like Mr. Hervey; what words he would say; where he would sit; whether he would sit beside her; and, above all, whether he would give her his blessing.

“I am afraid,” said she, “of liking my father better than *any body else*.”

"No danger of that, my dear," said Mrs. Ormond, smiling.

"I am glad of it, for it would be very wrong and *ungrateful* to like any thing in this world so well as Mr. Hervey."

The carriage now came to the door: Mrs. Ormond instantly ran to the window, but Virginia had not power to move—her heart beat violently.

"Is he come?" said she.

"Yes, he is getting out of the carriage this moment!"

Virginia stood with her eyes eagerly fixed upon the door: "Hark!" said she, laying her hand upon Mrs. Ormond's arm, to prevent her from moving, "Hush! that we may hear his voice."

She was breathless—no voice was to be heard: "They are not coming," said she, turning as pale as death. An instant afterwards her colour returned—she heard the steps of two people coming up the stairs.

"His step!—Do you hear it?—Is it my father?"

Virginia's imagination was worked to the highest pitch; she could scarcely sustain herself: Mrs. Ormond supported her. At this instant her father appeared.

"My child!—the image of her mother!" exclaimed he, stopping short: he sunk upon a chair.

"My father!" cried Virginia, springing forward, and throwing herself at his feet.

"The voice of her mother!" said Mr. Hartley.

"My daughter!—My long lost child!"

He tried to raise her, but could not; her arms were

clasped round his knee, her face rested upon it, and when he stooped to kiss her cheek, he found it cold—she had fainted.

When she came to her senses, and found herself in her father's arms, she could scarcely believe that it was not a dream.

"Your blessing!—give me your blessing, and then I shall know that you are indeed my father!" cried Virginia, kneeling to him, and looking up with an enthusiastic expression of filial piety in her countenance.

"God bless you, my sweet child!" said he, laying his hand upon her; "and God forgive your father!"

"My grandmother died without giving me her blessing," said Virginia; "but now I have been blessed by my father! Happy, happy moment!—O that she could look down from heaven, and see us at this instant!"

Virginia was so much astonished and overpowered by this sudden discovery of a parent, and by the novelty of his first caresses, that after the first violent effervescence of her sensibility was over, she might, to an indifferent spectator, have appeared stupid and insensible. Mrs. Ormond, though far from an indifferent spectator, was by no means a penetrating judge of the human heart: she seldom saw more than the external symptoms of feeling, and she was apt to be rather impatient with her friends if theirs did not accord with her own.

"Virginia, my dear," said she, in rather a reproachful tone, "Mr. Hervey, you see, has left the room, on purpose to leave you at full liberty to talk

to your father ; and I am going—but you are so silent !”

“ I have so much to say, and my heart is so full !” said Virginia.

“ Yes, I know you told me of a thousand things that you had to say to your father, before you saw him.”

“ But now I see him, I have forgotten them all. I can think of nothing but of him.”

“ Of him and Mr. Hervey,” said Mrs. Ormond.

“ I was not thinking of Mr. Hervey at that moment,” said Virginia, blushing.

“ Well, my love, I will leave you to think and talk of what you please,” said Mrs. Ormond, smiling significantly as she left the room.

Mr. Hartley folded his daughter in his arms with the fondest expressions of parental affection, and he was upon the point of telling her how much he approved of the choice of her heart ; but he recollected his promise, and he determined to sound her inclinations farther, before he even mentioned the name of Clarence Hervey.

He began by painting the pleasures of the world, that world from which she had hitherto been secluded.

She heard him with simple indifference : not even her curiosity was excited.

He observed, that though she had no curiosity to see, it was natural that she must have some pleasure in the thoughts of being seen.

“ What pleasure ? ” said Virginia.

“ The pleasure of being admired and loved : beauty

and grace such as yours, my child, cannot be seen without commanding admiration and love."

"I do not want to be admired," replied Virginia, "and I want to be loved by those only whom I love."

"My dearest daughter, you shall be entirely your own mistress; I will never interfere, either directly or indirectly, in the disposal of your heart."

At these last words, Virginia, who had listened to all the rest unmoved, took her father's hand, and kissed it repeatedly.

"Now that I have found you, my darling child, let me at least make you happy, if I can—it is the only atonement in my power; it will be the only solace of my declining years. All that wealth can bestow——"

"Wealth!" interrupted Virginia: "then you have wealth?"

"Yes, my child—may it make you happy! that is all the enjoyment I expect from it: it shall all be yours."

"And may I do what I please with it?—O, then it will indeed make me happy. I will give it all, all to Mr. Hervey. How delightful to have something to *give* to Mr. Hervey!"

"And had you never any thing to give to Mr. Hervey till now?"

"Never! never! he has given me every thing. Now—O joyful day!—I can prove to him that Virginia is not ungrateful!"

"Dear generous girl," said her father, wiping the tears from his eyes, "what a daughter have I found! But tell me, my child," continued he, smiling, "do

you think Mr. Hervey will be content if you give him only your fortune? Do you think that he would accept the fortune without the heart? Nay, do not turn away that dear blushing face from me; remember it is *your father* who speaks to you. Mr. Hervey will not take your fortune without yourself, I am afraid: what shall we do? Must I refuse him your hand?"

"Refuse him! do you think that I could refuse him any thing, who has given me every thing?—I should be a monster indeed! There is no sacrifice I would not make, no exertion of which I am not capable, for Mr. Hervey's sake. But, my dear father," said she, changing her tone, "he never asked for my hand till yesterday."

But he had won your heart long ago, I see, thought her father.

"I have written an answer to his letter; will you look at it, and tell me if you approve of it?"

"I do approve of it, my darling child: I will not read it—I know what it must be: he has a right to the preference he has so nobly earned."

"O, he has—he has, indeed!" cried Virginia, with an expression of strong feeling; "and now is the time to show him that I am not ungrateful."

"How I love you for this, my child!" cried her father, fondly embracing her. "This is exactly what I wished, though I did not dare to say so till I was sure of your sentiments. Mr. Hervey charged me to leave you entirely to yourself; he thought that your new situation might perhaps produce some change in your sentiments: I see he was mistaken:

and I am heartily glad of it. But you are going to say something, my dear ; do not let me interrupt you."

"I was only going to beg that you would give this letter, my dear father, to Mr. Hervey. It is an answer to one which he wrote to me when I was poor"—*and deserted*, she was near saying, but she stopped herself.

"I wish," continued she, "Mr. Hervey should know that my sentiments are precisely the same now that they have always been. Tell him," added she, proudly, "that he did me injustice by imagining that my sentiments could alter with my situation. He little knows Virginia." Clarence at this moment entered the room, and Mr. Hartley eagerly led his daughter to meet him.

"Take her hand," cried he ; "you have her heart—you deserve it ; and she has just been very angry with me for doubting. But read her letter,—that will speak better for her, and more to your satisfaction, no doubt, than I can."

Virginia hastily put the letter into Mr. Hervey's hand, and, breaking from her father, retired to her own apartment.

With all the trepidation of a person who feels that the happiness of his life is to be decided in a few moments, Clarence tore open Virginia's letter, and, conscious that he was not able to command his emotion, he withdrew from her father's inquiring eyes. Mr. Hartley, however, saw nothing in this agitation but what he thought natural to a lover, and

he was delighted to perceive that his daughter had inspired so strong a passion.

Virginia's letter contained but these few lines :

“ Most happy shall I be if the whole of my future life can prove to you how deeply I feel your goodness.

“ VIRGINIA ST. PIERRE.”

[*End of C. Hervey's packet.*]

An acceptance so direct left Clarence no alternative : his fate was decided. He determined immediately to force himself to see Belinda and Mr. Vincent ; for he fancied that his mind would be more at ease when he had convinced himself by ocular demonstration that she was absolutely engaged to another ; that, consequently, even if he were free, he could have no chance of gaining her affections. There are moments when we desire the conviction which at another time would overwhelm us with despair : it was in this temper that Mr. Hervey paid his visit to lady Delacour ; but we have seen that he was unable to support for many minutes that philosophic composure to which, at his first entrance into the room, he had worked up his mind. The tranquillity which he had expected would be the consequence of this visit he was farther than ever from obtaining. The extravagant joy with which lady Delacour received him, and an indescribable something in her manner when she looked from him to Belinda, and from Belinda to Mr. Vincent, persuaded

him her ladyship wished that he were in Mr. Vincent's place. The idea was so delightful, that his soul was entranced, and for a few minutes Virginia, and every thing that related to her, vanished from his remembrance. It was whilst he was in this state that lady Delacour (as the reader may recollect) invited him into her lord's dressing-room, to tell her the contents of the packet, which had not then reached her hands. The request suddenly recalled him to his senses, but he felt that he was not at this moment able to trust himself to her ladyship's penetration; he therefore referred her to his letter for that explanation which he dreaded to make in person, and he escaped from Belinda's presence, resolving never more to expose himself to such danger.

What effect his packet produced on lady Delacour's mind and on Belinda's, we shall not at present stop to inquire; but having brought up Clarence Hervey's affairs to the present day, we shall continue his history.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

E O.

THOUGH Clarence Hervey was not much disposed to see either Virginia or her father whilst he was in the state of perturbation into which he had been thrown by his interview with Belinda, yet he did not delay to send his servant home with a note to Mrs. Ormond, to say that he would meet Mr. Hartley,

whenever he pleased, at his lawyer's, to make whatever arrangements might be necessary for proper settlements.

As he saw no possibility of receding with honour, he, with becoming resolution, desired to urge things forward as fast as possible, and to strengthen in his mind the sense of the *necessity* of the sacrifice that he was bound to make. His passions were naturally impetuous, but he had by persevering efforts brought them under the subjection of his reason. His power over himself was now to be put to a severe trial.

As he was going to town, he met lord Delacour, who was riding in the park: he was extremely intent upon his own thoughts, and was anxious to pass unnoticed. In former times this would have been the most feasible thing imaginable, for lord Delacour used to detest the sight of Clarence Hervey, whom he considered as the successor of colonel Lawless in his lady's favour; but his opinion and his feelings had been entirely changed by the perusal of those letters, which were perfumed with ottar of roses: even this perfume had, from that association, become agreeable to him. He now accosted Clarence with a warmth and cordiality in his manner that at any other moment must have pleased as much as it surprised him; but Clarence was not in a humour to enter into conversation.

"You seem to be in haste, Mr. Hervey," said his lordship, observing his impatience; "but, as I know your good-nature, I shall make no scruple to detain you a quarter of an hour."

As he spoke he turned his horse, and rode with

Clarence, who looked as if he wished that his lordship had been more scrupulous, and that he had not such a reputation for good-nature.

"You will not refuse me this quarter of an hour, I am sure," continued lord Delacour, "when you hear that, by favouring me with your attention, you may perhaps materially serve an old, or rather a young, friend of yours, and one whom I once fancied was a particular favourite—I mean, miss Belinda Portman."

At the name of Belinda Portman Clarence Hervey became all attention: he assured his lordship that he was in no haste; and all his difficulty now was to moderate the eagerness of his curiosity.

"We can take a turn or two in the park, as well as any where," said his lordship: "nobody will overhear us, and the sooner you know what I have to say the better."

"Certainly," said Clarence.

The most malevolent person upon earth could not have tired poor Clarence's patience more than good-natured lord Delacour contrived to do, with the best intentions possible, by his habitual circumlocution.

He descanted at length upon the difficulties, as the world goes, of meeting with a confidential friend, whom it is prudent to trust in any affair that demands delicacy, honour, and address. Men of talents were often, he observed, devoid of integrity, and men of integrity devoid of talents. When he had obtained Hervey's assent to this proposition, he next paid him sundry handsome, but long-winded, compliments: then he complimented himself for having just thought

of Mr. Hervey as the fittest person he could apply to: then he congratulated himself upon his good luck in meeting with the very man he was just thinking of. At last, after Clarence had returned thanks for all his kindness, and had given assent to all his lordship's truisms, the substance of the business came out.

Lord Delacour informed Mr. Hervey, "that he had been lately commissioned, by lady Delacour, to discover what attractions drew a Mr. Vincent so constantly to Mrs. Luttridge's——"

Here he was going to explain who Mr. Vincent was; but Clarence assured him that he knew perfectly well that he had been a ward of Mr. Percival's, that he was a West Indian of large fortune, &c.

"And a lover of miss Portman's—that is the most material part of the story to *me*," continued lord Delacour; "for otherwise, you know, Mr. Vincent would be no more to me than any other gentleman. But in that point of view—I mean as a lover of Belinda Portman, and I may say, not quite unlikely to be her husband—he is highly interesting to my lady Delacour, and to me, and to you, as miss Portman's well-wisher, doubtless."

"Doubtless!" was all Mr. Hervey could reply.

"Now, you must know," continued his lordship, "that lady Delacour has, for a woman, an uncommon share of penetration, and can put things together in a wonderful way: in short, it has come to her (my lady Delacour's) knowledge, that before miss Portman was at Oakly-park last summer, and after she left it this autumn, Mr. Vincent was a constant

visitor at Mrs. Luttridge's, whilst at Harrowgate, and used to play high (though unknown to the Percivals, of course) at billiards with Mr. Luttridge—a *man*, I confess, I disliked *always*, even when I carried the election for them. But no matter: it is not from enmity I speak now. But it is very well known that Luttridge has but a small fortune, and yet lives as if he had a large one; and all the young men who like high play are sure to be well received at his house. Now, I hope Mr. Vincent is not well received on that footing.

“Since my lady Delacour and I have been such good friends,” continued his lordship, “I have dropped all connexion with the Luttridges; so cannot go there myself: moreover, I do not wish to be tempted to lose any more thousands to the lady. But you never play, and you are not likely to be tempted to it now; so you will oblige me and lady Delacour if you will go to Luttridge's to-night: she is always charmed to see you, and you will easily discover how the land lies. Mr. Vincent is certainly a very agreeable, open-hearted young man; but, if he game, God forbid that miss Portman should ever be his wife!”

“God forbid!” said Clarence Hervey.

“The man,” resumed lord Delacour, “must, in my opinion, be very superior indeed who is deserving of Belinda Portman. O Mr. Hervey, you do not—you cannot know her merit, as I do. It is one thing, sir, to see a fine girl in a ball-room, and another—quite another—to live in the house with her for months, and to see her, as I have seen Belinda Portman, in every-day life, as one may call it. *Then* it is

one can judge of the real temper, manners, and character; and never woman had so sweet a temper, such charming manners, such a fair, open, generous, decided, yet gentle character, as this miss Portman."

"Your lordship speaks *con amore*," said Clarence.

"I speak, Mr. Hervey, from the bottom of my soul," cried lord Delacour, pulling in his horse, and stopping short. "I should be an unfeeling, ungrateful brute, if I were not sensible of the obligations—yes, the obligations—which my lady Delacour and I have received from Belinda Portman. Why, sir, she has been the peacemaker between us——But we will not talk of that now. Let us think of her affairs. If Mr. Vincent once gets into Mrs. Luttridge's cursed set, there's no knowing where it will end. I speak from my own experience, for I really never was fond of high play; and yet, when I got into that set, I could not withstand it. I lost by hundreds and thousands; and so will he, before he is aware of it, no doubt. Mrs. Luttridge will look upon him as her dupe, and make him such. I always—but this is between ourselves—suspected that I did not lose my last thousand to her fairly. Now, Hervey, you know the whole, do try and save Mr. Vincent, for Belinda Portman's sake."

Clarence Hervey shook hands with lord Delacour, with a sentiment of real gratitude and affection; and assured him that his confidence was not misplaced. His lordship little suspected that he had been soliciting him to save his rival. Clarence's love was not of that selfish sort which the moment that it is deprived of hope sinks into indifference, or is converted into

hatred. Belinda could not be his; but, in the midst of the bitterest regret, he was supported by the consciousness of his own honour and generosity: he felt a noble species of delight in the prospect of promoting the happiness of the woman upon whom his fondest affections had been fixed; and he rejoiced to feel that he had sufficient magnanimity to save a rival from ruin. He was even determined to make that rival his friend, notwithstanding the prepossession which, he clearly perceived, Mr. Vincent felt against him.

“His jealousy will be extinguished the moment he knows my real situation,” said Clarence to himself. “He will be convinced that I have a soul incapable of envy; and, if he suspect my love for Belinda, he will respect the strength of mind with which I can command my passions. I take it for granted that Mr. Vincent must possess a heart and understanding such as I should desire in a friend, or he could never be—what he is to Belinda.”

Full of these generous sentiments, Clarence waited with impatience for the hour when he might present himself at Mrs. Luttridge's. He went there so early in the evening that he found the drawing-room quite empty; the company, who had been invited to dine, had not yet left the dining-room, and the servants had but just set the card-tables and lighted the candles. Mr. Hervey desired that nobody should be disturbed by his coming so early; and, fortunately, Mrs. Luttridge was detained some minutes by lady Newland's lingering glass of Madeira. In the mean time, Clarence executed his design. From his former observations, and from the hints that lord Delacour

had let fall, he suspected that there was sometimes in this house not only high play, but foul play: he recollected that once, when he played there at billiards, he had perceived that the table was not perfectly horizontal; and it occurred to him, that perhaps the E O table might be so contrived as to put the fortunes of all who played at it in the power of the proprietor. Clarence had sufficient ingenuity to invent the method by which this might be done; and he had the infallible means in his possession of detecting the fraud. The E O table was in an apartment adjoining to the drawing-room: he found his way to it; and he discovered, beyond a possibility of doubt, that it was constructed for the purposes of fraud. His first impulse was to tell this immediately to Mr. Vincent, to put him on his guard; but, upon reflection, he determined to keep his discovery to himself, till he was satisfied whether that gentleman had or had not any passion for play.

"If he have," thought Clarence, "it is of the utmost consequence to miss Portman that he should early in life receive a shock that may leave an indelible impression upon his mind. To save him a few hours of remorse, I will not give up the power of doing him the most essential service. I will let him go on—if he be so inclined—to the very verge of ruin and despair: I will let him feel all the horrors of a gamester's fate, before I tell him that I have the means to save him. Mrs. Luttridge must, when I call upon her, refund whatever he may lose: she will not brave public shame—she cannot stand a public prosecution."

Scarcely had Clarence arranged his scheme, when he heard the voices of the ladies, who were coming up stairs.

Mrs. Luttridge made her appearance, accompanied by a very pretty, modish, affected young lady, miss Annabella Luttridge, her niece. Her little coquettish airs were lost upon Clarence Hervey, whose eye was intently fixed upon the door, watching for the entrance of Mr. Vincent. He was one of the dinner party, and he came up soon after the ladies. He seemed prepared for the sight of Mr. Hervey, to whom he bowed with a cold, haughty air; and then addressed himself to miss Annabella Luttridge, who showed the most obvious desire to attract his attention.

From all that passed this evening, Mr. Hervey was led to suspect, notwithstanding the reasons which made it apparently improbable, that the fair Annabella was the secret cause of Mr. Vincent's frequent visits at her aunt's. It was natural that Clarence should be disposed to this opinion, from the circumstances of his own situation. During three hours that he staid at Mrs. Luttridge's, Mr. Vincent never joined any of the parties at play; but, just as he was going away, he heard some one say—"How comes it, Vincent, that you've been idle all night?" This question revived Mr. Hervey's suspicions; and, uncertain what report he should make to lord Delacour, he resolved to defer making any, till he had farther opportunities of judging.

When Mr. Hervey asked himself how it was possible that the pupil of Mr. Percival could become a

gamester, he forgot that Mr. Vincent had not been educated by his guardian ; that he had lived in the West Indies till he was eighteen ; and that he had only been under the care of Mr. Percival for a few years, after his habits and character were in a great measure formed. The taste for gambling he had acquired whilst he was a child ; but as it was then confined to trifles, it had been passed over, as a thing of no consequence, a boyish folly, that would never grow up with him : his father used to see him, day after day, playing with eagerness at games of chance, with his negroes, or with the sons of neighbouring planters ; yet he was never alarmed : he was too intent upon making a fortune for his family to consider how they would spend it ; and he did not foresee that this boyish fault might be the means of his son's losing, in a few hours, the wealth which he had been many years amassing. When young Vincent came over to England, Mr. Percival had not immediate opportunities of discovering this particular foible in his ward ; but he perceived that in his mind there was that presumptuous belief in his special good fortune, which naturally leads to the love of gambling. Instead of lecturing him, his guardian appealed to his understanding, and took opportunities of showing him the ruinous effects of high play in real life. Young Vincent was touched, and, as he thought, convinced ; but his emotion was stronger than his conviction—his feelings were always more powerful than his reason. His detestation of the selfish character of a gamester was felt and expressed with enthusiasm and eloquence ; and his indignation

rose afterwards at the slightest hint that *he* might ever in future be tempted to become what he abhorred. Unfortunately he disdained prudence, as the factitious virtue of inferior minds: he thought that the *feelings* of a man of honour were to be his guide in the first and last appeal; and for his conduct through life, as a man and as a gentleman, he proudly professed to trust to the sublime instinct of a good heart. His guardian's doubts of the infallibility and even of the existence of this moral instinct wounded Mr. Vincent's pride instead of alarming his understanding; and he was rather eager than averse to expose himself to the danger, that he might prove his superiority to the temptation. How different are the feelings in different situations! Yet often as this has been repeated, how difficult it is to impress the truth upon inexperienced, sanguine minds!—Whilst young Vincent was immediately under his guardian's eye at Oakly-park his safety from vice appeared to him inglorious; he was impatient to sally forth into the world, confident rather of his innate than acquired virtue.

When he first became acquainted with Mrs. Luttridge at Harrowgate he knew that she was a professed gambler, and he despised the character; yet without reflecting on the danger, or perhaps for the pleasure of convincing Mr. Percival that he was superior to it, he continued his visits. For some time he was a passive spectator. Billiards, however, was a game of address, not chance; there was a billiard-table at Oakly-park, as well as at Mr. Luttridge's, and he had played with his guardian. Why, then,

should he not play with Mr. Luttridge? He did play: his skill was admired; he betted, and his bets were successful: but he did not call this gaming, for the bets were not to any great amount, and it was only playing at billiards. Mr. Percival was delayed in town some weeks longer than usual, and he knew nothing of the manner in which his young friend spent his time. As soon as Mr. Vincent heard of his arrival at Oakly-park, he left half finished his game at billiards; and, fortunately for him, the charms of Belinda made him forget for some months that such a thing as a billiard-table existed. All that had happened at Mr. Luttridge's passed from his mind as a dream; and whilst his heart was agitated by his new passion, he could scarcely believe that he had ever been interested by any other feelings. He was surprised when he accidentally recollected the eagerness with which he used to *amuse* himself in Mr. Luttridge's company; but he was certain that all this was past for ever; and precisely because he was under the dominion of one strong passion, he thought he could never be under the dominion of another. Thus persisting in his disdain of reason as a moral guide, Mr. Vincent thought, acted, and suffered as a man of feeling. Scarcely had Belinda left Oakly-park for one week when the ennui consequent to violent passion became insupportable; and to console himself for her absence he flew to the billiard-table. Emotion of some kind or other was become necessary to him; he said that not to feel was not to live; and soon the suspense, the anxiety, the hopes, the fears, the perpetual vicissitudes of a gamester's

life, seemed to him almost as delightful as those of a lover's. Deceived by these appearances, Mrs. Luttridge thought that his affection for Belinda either was or might be conquered, and her hopes of obtaining his fortune for her niece Annabella revived. As Mr. Vincent could not endure Mrs. Freke, she abstained, at her friend's particular desire, from appearing at her house whilst he was there, and Mrs. Luttridge interested him much in her own favour, by representing her indignation at *Harriot's* conduct to be such that it had occasioned a total breach in their friendship. Mrs. Freke's sudden departure from Harrowgate confirmed the probability of this quarrel; yet these two ladies were secretly leagued together in a design of breaking off Mr. Vincent's match with Belinda, against whom Mrs. Freke had vowed revenge. The anonymous letter, which she hoped would work her purpose, produced, however, an effect totally unexpected upon his generous mind: he did not guess the writer; but his indignation against such base accusations burst forth with a violence that astounded Mrs. Luttridge. His love for Belinda appeared ten times more enthusiastic than before—the moment she was accused, he felt himself her defender, as well as her lover. He was dispossessed of the evil spirit of gambling as if by a miracle; and the billiard-table, and Mrs. Luttridge, and miss Annabella vanished from his view. He breathed nothing but love; he would ask no permission, he would wait for none from Belinda: he declared that instant he would set out in search of her, and he would tear that infamous letter to atoms in her presence; he

would show her how impossible suspicion was to his nature. The first violence of the hurricane Mrs. Luttridge could not stand, and thought not of opposing; but whilst his horses and curricie were getting ready, she took such an affectionate leave of his dog Juba, and she protested so much that she and Annabella should not know how to live without poor Juba, that Mr. Vincent, who was excessively fond of his dog, could not help sympathising in their sorrow: reasoning just as well as they wished, he extended his belief in their affection for this animal to friendship, if not love, for his master. He could not grant Mrs. Luttridge's earnest supplication to leave the dog behind him under her protection; but he promised—and laid his hand upon his heart when he promised—that Juba should wait upon Mrs. Luttridge as soon as she went to town. This appointment being made, miss Annabella permitted herself to be somewhat consoled. It would be injustice to omit that she did all that could be done by a cambric handkerchief to evince delicate sensibility in this parting scene. Mrs. Luttridge also deserves her share of praise for the manner in which she reproved her niece for giving way to her feelings, and for the address with which she wished to Heaven that poor Annabella had the calm philosophic temper of which miss Portman was, she understood, a most uncommon example.

As Mr. Vincent drove toward London he reflected upon these last words; and he could not help thinking that if Belinda had more faults she would be more amiable.

These thoughts were, however, driven from his mind, and scarcely left a trace behind them, when he once more saw and conversed with her. The dignity, sincerity, and kindness which she showed the evening that he put the anonymous letter into her hands charmed and touched him, and his real feelings and his enthusiasm conspired to make him believe that his whole happiness depended on her smiles. The confession which she made to him of her former attachment to Clarence Hervey, as it raised in Vincent's mind strong emotions of jealousy, increased his passion as much as it piqued his pride, and she appeared in a new and highly interesting light when he discovered that the coldness of manner which he had attributed to want of sensibility arose probably from its excess—that her heart should have been preoccupied was more tolerable to him than the belief of her settled indifference. He was so intent upon these delightful varieties in his love for Belinda that it was not till he had received a reproachful note from Mrs. Luttridge, to remind him of his promised visit with Juba, that he could prevail upon himself to leave Twickenham, even for a few hours. Lady Delacour's hatred or fear of Juba, which he accidentally mentioned to miss Annabella, appeared to her and to her aunt "the most extraordinary thing upon earth;" and when it was contrasted with their excessive fondness, it seemed to him indeed unaccountable. From pure consideration for her ladyship's nerves, Mrs. Luttridge petitioned Vincent to leave the dog with her, that Helena might not be in such imminent danger from "the animal's mon-

strous jaws." The petition was granted; and as the petitioners foresaw, Juba became to them a most useful auxiliary. Juba's master called daily to see him, and sometimes when he came in the morning Mrs. Luttridge was not at home, so that his visits were repeated in the evening; and the evening in London is what in other places is called the night. Mrs. Luttridge's nights could not be passed without deep play. The sight of the E O table at first shocked Mr. Vincent: he thought of Mr. Percival, and he turned away from it; but to his active social disposition it was extremely irksome to stand idle and uninterested where all were busy and eager in one common pursuit; to his generous temper it seemed ungentlemanlike to stand by the silent censor of the rest of the company; and when he considered of how little importance a few hundreds or even thousands could be to a man of his large fortune, he *could not help feeling* that it was sordid, selfish, avaricious, to dread their possible loss; and thus social spirit, courage, generosity, all conspired to carry our man of feeling to the gaming-table. Once there, his ruin was inevitable. Mrs. Luttridge, whilst she held his doom in her power, hesitated only whether it would be more her interest to marry him to her niece, or to content herself with his fortune. His passion for Belinda, which she saw had been by some means or other increased, in spite of the anonymous letter, gave her little hopes of Anna-bella's succeeding, even with the assistance of Juba and delicate sensibility. So the aunt, careless of her niece's disappointment, determined that Mr. Vincent

should be *her* victim ; and sensible that she must not give him time for reflection, she hurried him on, till, in the course of a few evenings spent at the E O table, he lost not only thousands, but tens of thousands. One lucky night, she assured him, would set all to rights ; the run could not always be against him, and fortune must change in his favour, if he tried her with sufficient perseverance.

The horror, the agony of mind, which he endured at this sudden ruin which seemed impending over him—the recollection of Belinda, of Mr. Percival, almost drove him to distraction. He retreated from the E O table one night, swearing that he never would hazard another guinea. But his ruin was not yet complete—he had thousands yet to lose, and Mrs. Luttridge would not thus relinquish her prey. She persuaded him to try his fortune *once* more. She now suffered him to regain courage, by winning back some of his own money. His mind was relieved from the sense of immediate danger ; he rejoiced to be saved from the humiliation of confessing his losses to Mr. Percival and Belinda. The next day he saw her with unusual pleasure, and this was the very morning Clarence Hervey paid his visit. The imprudence of lady Delacour, joined perhaps to his own consciousness that he had a secret fault, which ought to lower him in the esteem of his mistress, made him misinterpret every thing that passed—his jealousy was excited in the most sudden and violent manner. He flew from lady Delacour's to Mrs. Luttridge's—he was soothed and flattered by the apparent kindness with which he was received by Annabella and

her aunt ; but after dinner, when one of the servants whispered to Mrs. Luttridge, who sat next to him, that Mr. Clarence Hervey was above stairs, he gave such a start, that the fair Annabella's lap did not escape a part of the bumper of wine which he was going to drink to her health. In the confusion and apologies which this accident occasioned, Mrs. Luttridge had time to consider what might be the cause of the start, and she combined her suspicions so quickly and judiciously that she guessed the truth—that he feared to be seen at the E O table by a person who might find it for his interest to tell the truth to Belinda Portman. “ Mr. Vincent,” said she, in a low voice, “ I have such a terrible head-ache, that I am fit for nothing—I am not *up to E O* to-night, so you must wait for your revenge till to-morrow.”

Mr. Vincent was heartily glad to be relieved from his engagement, and he endeavoured to escape Clarence's suspicions, by devoting his whole time this evening to Annabella, not in the least apprehensive that Mr. Hervey would return the next night. Mr. Vincent was at the E O table at the usual hour, for he was excessively anxious to regain what he had lost, not so much for the sake of the money, which he could afford to lose, but lest the defalcation in his fortune should lead Mr. Percival to the knowledge of the means which had occasioned it. He could not endure, after his high vaunts, to see himself humbled by his rash confidence in himself, and he secretly vowed, that if he could but reinstate himself, by one night's good luck, he would for ever quit the society of gamblers. A few months before this time, he

would have scorned the idea of concealing any part of his conduct, any one of his actions, from his best friend, Mr. Percival; but his pride now reconciled him to the meanness of concealment; and here, the acuteness of his feelings was to his own mind an excuse for dissimulation: so fallacious is moral instinct, unenlightened or uncontrolled by reason and religion.

Mr. Vincent was disappointed in his hopes of regaining what he had lost. This was not the fortunate night, which Mrs. Luttridge's prognostics had vainly taught him to expect: he played on, however, with all the impetuosity of his natural temper; his judgment forsook him; he scarcely knew what he said or did; and, in the course of a few hours, he was worked up to such a pitch of insanity, that in one desperate moment he betted nearly all that he was worth in the world—and lost! He stood like one stupified: the hum of voices scarcely reached his ear—he saw figures moving before him; but he did not distinguish who or what they were.

Supper was announced, and the room emptied fast, whilst he remained motionless leaning on the E O table. He was roused by Mrs. Luttridge saying, as she passed, “Don't you sup to-night, Mr. Hervey?”—Vincent looked up, and saw Clarence Hervey opposite to him. His countenance instantly changed, and the lightning of anger flashed through the gloom of despair: he uttered not a syllable; but his looks said, “How is this, sir? Here again to-night to watch me?—to enjoy my ruin?—to be ready to carry the first news of it to Belinda?”

At this last thought, Vincent struck his closed hand with violence against his forehead; and rushing by Mr. Hervey, who in vain attempted to speak to him, he pressed into the midst of the crowd on the stairs, and let himself be carried along with them into the supper-room. At supper he took his usual seat between Mrs. Luttridge and the fair Annabella; and, as if determined to brave the observing eyes of Clarence Hervey, who was at the same table, he affected extravagant gaiety; he ate, drank, talked, and laughed, more than any of the company. Toward the end of the supper, his dog, who was an inmate at Mrs. Luttridge's, licked his hand to put him in mind that he had given him nothing to eat.

"Drink, Juba!—drink, and never have done, boy!" cried Vincent, holding a bumper of wine to the dog's mouth: "he's the only dog I ever saw taste wine." Then snatching up some of the flowers, which ornamented the table, he swore that Juba should henceforward be called Anacreon, and that he deserved to be crowned with roses by the hand of beauty. The fair Annabella instantly took a hot-house rose from her bosom, and assisted in making the garland, with which she crowned the new Anacreon. Insensible to his honours, the dog, who was extremely hungry, turned suddenly to Mrs. Luttridge, by whom he had, till this night, regularly been fed with the choicest morsels, and lifting up his huge paw, laid it, as he had been wont to do, upon her arm. She shook it off: he, knowing nothing of the change in his master's affairs, laid the

paw again upon her arm ; and with that familiarity to which he had long been encouraged, raised his head almost close to the lady's cheek.

"Down, Juba!—down, sir, down!" cried Mrs. Luttridge, in a sharp voice.

"Down, Juba!—down, sir!" repeated Mr. Vincent, in a tone of bitter feeling, all his assumed gaiety forsaking him at this instant: "Down, Juba!—down, sir, down!" as low as your master, thought he ; and pushing back his chair, he rose from table, and precipitately left the room.

Little notice was taken of his retreat ; the chairs closed in ; and the gap which his vacant place left was visible but for a moment : the company were as gay as before ; the fair Annabella smiled with a grace as attractive ; and Mrs. Luttridge exulted in the success of her schemes—whilst her victim was in the agonies of despair.

Clarence Hervey, who had watched every change of Vincent's countenance, saw the agony of soul with which he rose from the table, and quitted the room : he suspected his purpose, and followed him immediately ; but Mr. Vincent had got out of the house before he could overtake him ; which way he was gone no one could tell, for no one had seen him ; the only information he could gain was, that he might possibly be heard of at Nerot's hotel, or at governor Montford's, in Portland-place. The hotel was but a few yards from Mrs. Luttridge's. Clarence went there directly. He asked for Mr. Vincent. One of the waiters said, that he was not yet come in ; but

another called out, "Mr. Vincent, sir, did you say? I have just shown him up to his room."

"Which is the room?—I must see him instantly," cried Hervey.

"Not to-night—you can't see him now, sir. Mr. Vincent won't let you in, I can assure you, sir. I went up myself three minutes ago, with some letters, that came whilst he was away, but he would not let me in. I heard him double-lock the door, and he swore terribly. I can't go up again at this time o'night—for my life I dare not, sir."

"Where is his own man?—Has Mr. Vincent any servant here?—Mr. Vincent's man!" cried Clarence; "let me see him!"

"You can't, sir. Mr. Vincent has just sent his black, the only servant he has here, out on some message. Indeed, sir, there's no use in going up," continued the waiter, as Clarence sprang up two or three stairs at once: "Mr. Vincent has desired nobody may disturb him. I give you my word, sir, he'll be very angry; and, besides, 'twould be to no purpose, for he'll not unlock the door."

"Is there but one door to the room?" said Mr. Hervey; and, as he asked the question, he pulled a guinea out of his pocket, and touched the waiter's hand with it.

"Oh, now I recollect—yes, sir, there's a private door through a closet: may be that may'nt be fastened."

Clarence put the guinea into the waiter's hand, who instantly showed him the way up the back

staircase to the door that opened into Mr. Vincent's bed-chamber.

"Leave me, now," whispered he, "and make no noise."

The man withdrew; and as Mr. Hervey went close to the concealed door, to try if it was fastened, he distinctly heard a pistol cocked. The door was not fastened: he pushed it softly open, and saw the unfortunate man upon his knees, the pistol in his hand, his eyes looking up to heaven. Clarence was in one moment behind him; and, seizing hold of the pistol, he snatched it from Vincent's grasp with so much calm presence of mind and dexterity, that, although the pistol was cocked, it did not go off.

"Mr. Hervey!" exclaimed Vincent, starting up. Astonishment overpowered all other sensations. But the next instant recovering the power of speech, "Is this the conduct of a gentleman, Mr. Hervey—of a man of honour," cried he, "thus to intrude upon my privacy; to be a spy upon my actions; to triumph in my ruin; to witness my despair; to rob me of the only——"

He looked wildly at the pistol which Clarence held in his hand; then snatching up another, which lay upon the table, he continued, "You are my enemy—I know it; you are my rival—I know it; Belinda loves you! Nay, affect not to start—this is no time for dissimulation—Belinda loves you—you know it: for her sake, for your own, put me out of the world—put me out of torture. It shall not be called murder: it shall be called a duel. You have been a spy upon my actions—I demand satisfaction.

If you have one spark of honour or of courage within you, Mr. Hervey, show it now—fight me, sir, openly as man to man, rival to rival, enemy to enemy—fire.”

“If you fire upon me, you will repent it,” replied Clarence, calmly; “for I am not your enemy—I am not your rival.”

“You *are*,” interrupted Vincent, raising his voice to the highest pitch of indignation: “you are my rival, though you dare not avow it! The denial is base, false, unmanly. O Belinda, is this the being you prefer to *me*? Gamester—wretch, as I am, my soul never stooped to falsehood! Treachery I abhor; courage, honour, and a heart worthy of Belinda, I possess. I beseech you, sir,” continued he, addressing himself, in a tremulous tone of contempt to Mr. Hervey, “I beseech you, sir, to leave me to my own feelings—and to myself.”

“You are not yourself at this moment, and I cannot leave you to such mistaken feelings,” replied Hervey: “command yourself for a moment, and hear me; use your reason, and you will soon be convinced that I am your friend.”

“My friend!”

“Your friend. For what purpose did I come here, to snatch this pistol from your hand? If it were my interest, my wish, that you were out of the world, why did I prevent you from destroying yourself? Do you think *that* the action of an enemy? Use your reason.”

“I cannot,” said Vincent, striking his forehead; “I know not what to think—I am not master of

myself. I conjure you, sir, for your own sake, to leave me."

"For my *own* sake!" repeated Hervey, disdainfully: "I am not thinking of myself; nor can any thing you have said provoke me from my purpose. My purpose is to save you from ruin, for the sake of a woman, whom, though I am no longer your rival, I have loved longer, if not better, than you have."

There was something so open in Hervey's countenance, such a strong expression of truth in his manner, that it could not be resisted, and Vincent, in an altered voice, exclaimed, "You acknowledge that you have loved Belinda—and could you cease to love her? Impossible!—And, loving her, must you not detest me?"

"No," said Clarence, holding out his hand to him; "I wish to be your friend. I have not the baseness to wish to deprive others of happiness because I cannot enjoy it myself. In one word, to put you at ease with me for ever, I have no pretensions, I can have none, to miss Portman. I am engaged to another woman—in a few days you will hear of my marriage."

Mr. Vincent threw the pistol from him, and gave his hand to Hervey.

"Pardon what I said to you just now," cried he; "I knew not what I said—I spoke in the agony of despair: your purpose is most generous—but it is in vain—you come too late—I am ruined, past all hope."

He folded his arms, and his eyes reverted involuntarily to his pistols.

"The misery that you have this night experienced," said Mr. Hervey, "was necessary to the security of your future happiness."

"Happiness!" repeated Vincent; "happiness—there is no happiness left for me. My doom is fixed—fixed by my own folly—my own rash, headstrong folly. Madman that I was, what could tempt me to the gaming-table? O! if I could recall but a few days, a few hours, of my existence! But remorse is vain—prudence comes too late. Do you know," said he, fixing his eyes upon Hervey, "do you know that I am a beggar? that I have not a farthing left upon earth? Go to Belinda; tell her so; tell her, that if she had ever the slightest regard for me, I deserve it no longer. Tell her to forget, despise, detest me. Give her joy that she has escaped having a gamester for a husband."

"I will," said Clarence, "I will, if you please, tell her what I believe to be true, that the agony you have felt this night, the dear-bought experience you have had, will be for ever a warning."

"A warning!" interrupted Vincent: "O, that it could yet be useful to me!—But I tell you, it comes too late—nothing can save me."

"I can," said Mr. Hervey. "Swear to me, for Belinda's sake—solemnly swear to me, that you will never more trust your happiness and hers to the hazard of a die—swear that you will never more, directly, or indirectly, play at any game of chance, and I will restore to you the fortune that you have lost."

Mr. Vincent stood as if suspended between ecstasy

and despair: he dared not trust his senses: with a fervent and solemn adjuration he made the vow that was required of him; and Clarence then revealed to him the secret of the E O table.

“When Mrs. Luttridge knows that I have it in my power to expose her to public shame, she will instantly refund all that she has iniquitously won from you. Even among gamblers she would be blasted for ever by this discovery: she knows it, and if she dared to brave public opinion, we have then a sure resource in the law—prosecute her. The laws of honour, as well as the laws of the land, will support the prosecution. But she will never let the affair go into a court of justice. I will see her early, as early as I can to-morrow, and put you out of suspense.”

“Most generous of human beings!” exclaimed Vincent; “I cannot express to you what I feel; but your own heart, your own approbation——”

“Farewell, good night,” interrupted Clarence; “I see that I have made a friend—I was determined that Belinda’s husband should be my friend—I have succeeded beyond my hopes. And now I will *intrude* no longer,” said he, as he closed the door after him. His sensations at this instant were more delightful even than those of the man he had relieved from the depth of despair. How wisely has Providence made the benevolent and generous passions the most pleasurable!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A JEW.

IN the silence of the night, when the hurry of action was over, and the enthusiasm of generosity began to subside, the words, which had escaped from Mr. Vincent in the paroxysm of despair and rage—the words “*Belinda loves you*”—recurred to Clarence Hervey; and it required all his power over himself to banish the sound from his ear, and the idea from his mind. He endeavoured to persuade himself that these words were dictated merely by sudden jealousy, and that there could be no real foundation for the assertion: perhaps this belief was a necessary support to his integrity. He reflected, that, at all events, his engagement with Virginia could not be violated; his proffered services to Mr. Vincent could not be withdrawn: he was firm and consistent. Before two o'clock the next day, Vincent received from Clarence this short note:

“Enclosed is Mrs. Luttridge's acknowledgment, that she has no claims upon you, in consequence of what passed last night. I said nothing about the money she had previously won, as I understand you have paid it.

“The lady fell into fits, but it would not do. The husband attempted to bully me; I told him I should be at his service, after he had made the whole affair public, by calling you out.

“ I would have seen you myself this morning, but that I am engaged with lawyers and marriage settlements.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ CLARENCE HERVEY.”

Overjoyed at the sight of Mrs. Luttridge's acknowledgment, Vincent repeated his vow never more to hazard himself in her dangerous society. He was impatient to see Belinda ; and, full of generous and grateful sentiments, in his first moment of joy he determined to conceal nothing from her ; to make at once the confession of his own imprudence and the eulogium of Clarence Hervey's generosity. He was just setting out for Twickenham, when he was sent for by his uncle, governor Montford, who had business to settle with him, relative to his West India estates. He spent the remainder of the morning with his uncle ; and there he received a charming letter from Belinda—that letter which she had written and sent whilst lady Delacour was reading Clarence Hervey's packet. It would have cured Vincent of jealousy, even if he had not, in the interim, seen Mr. Hervey, and learnt from him the news of his approaching marriage. Miss Portman, at the conclusion of her letter, informed him that lady Delacour purposed being in Berkeley-square the next day ; that they were to spend a week in town, on account of Mrs. Margaret Delacour, who had promised her ladyship a visit ; and to go to Twickenham would be a formidable journey to an infirm old lady, who seldom stirred out of her house.

Whatever displeasure lady Delacour felt towards her friend Belinda, on account of her coldness to Mr. Hervey, and her steadiness to Mr. Vincent, had by this time subsided. Angry people, who express their passion, as it has been justly said, always speak worse than they think. This was usually the case with her ladyship.

The morning after they arrived in town she came into Belinda's room, with an air of more than usual sprightliness and satisfaction. "Great news!—Great news!—Extraordinary news!—But it is very imprudent to excite your expectations, my dear Belinda. Pray, did you hear a wonderful noise in the square a little while ago?"

"Yes, I thought I heard a great bustle; but Marriott appeased my curiosity, by saying that it was only a battle between two dogs."

"It is well if this battle between two dogs do not end in a duel between two men," said lady Delacour.

"This prospect of mischief seems to have put your ladyship in wonderfully good spirits," said Belinda, smiling.

"But what do you think I have heard of Mr. Vincent?" continued lady Delacour: "that miss Annabella Luttridge is dying for love of him—or of his fortune. Knowing, as I do, the vanity of mankind, I suppose that your Mr. Vincent, all perfect as he is, was flattered by the little coquet; and perhaps he condescends to repay her in the same coin. I take it for granted—for I always fill up the gaps in a story my own way—I take it for granted that

Mr. Vincent got into some entanglement with her; and that this has been the cause of the quarrel with the aunt. That there has been a quarrel is certain; for your friend Juba told Marriott so. His massa swore, that he would never go to Mrs. Luttridge's again; and this morning he took the decisive measure of sending to request that his dog might be returned. Juba went for his namesake. Miss Annabella Luttridge was the person who delivered up the dog; and she desired the black to tell his master, with her compliments, that Juba's collar was rather too tight; and she begged that he would not fail to take it off as soon as he could. Perhaps, my dear, you are as simple as the poor negro, and suspect no *finesse* in this message. Miss Luttridge, aware that the faithful fellow was too much in your interests, to be either persuaded or bribed to carry a billet-doux from any other lady to his master, did not dare to trust him upon this occasion; but she had the art to make him carry her letter without his knowing it. *Colin maillard*, vulgarly called *blind man's buff*, was, some time ago, a favourite play amongst the Parisian ladies: now *hide and seek* will be brought into fashion, I suppose, by the fair Annabella. Judge of her talents for the game by this instance:—she hid her billet-doux within the lining of Juba's collar. The dog, unconscious of his dignity as an ambassador, or rather as a *chargé d'affaires*, set out on his way home. As he was crossing Berkeley-square he was met by sir Philip Baddely and his dog. The baronet's insolent favourite bit the black's heels. Juba, the dog, resented the injury immediately, and a furious combat ensued.

In the height of the battle Juba's collar fell off. Sir Philip Baddely espied the paper that was sewed to the lining, and seized upon it immediately: the negro caught hold of it at the same instant: the baronet swore; the black struggled: the baronet knocked him down. The great dog left his canine antagonist that moment, flew at your baronet, and would have eaten him up at three mouthfuls, if sir Philip had not made good his retreat to Dangerfield's circulating library. The negro's head was terribly cut by the sharp point of a stone, and his ankle was sprained; but, as he has just told me, he did not feel this till afterward. He started up, and pursued his master's enemy. Sir Philip was actually reading miss Luttridge's billet-doux aloud when the black entered the library. He reclaimed his master's property with great intrepidity; and a gentleman who was present took his part immediately.

“In the mean time, lord Delacour, who had been looking at the battle from our breakfast-room window, determined to go over to Dangerfield's, to see what was the matter, and how all this would end. He entered the library just as the gentleman who had volunteered in favour of poor Juba was disputing with sir Philip. The bleeding negro told my lord, in as plain words as he could, the cause of the dispute; and lord Delacour, who, to do him justice, is a man of honour, joined instantly in his defence. The baronet thought proper at length to submit; and he left the field of battle, without having any thing to say for himself but—“*Damme!*—very extraordinary, damme!”—*or words to that effect.*

“Now, lord Delacour, beside being a man of honour, is also a man of humanity. I know that I cannot oblige you more, my dear Belinda, than by seasoning my discourse with a little conjugal flattery. My lord was concerned to see the poor black writhing in pain; and with the assistance of the gentleman who had joined in his defence, he brought Juba across the square to our house. Guess for what:—to try upon the strained ankle an infallible quack balsam recommended to him by the dowager lady Boucher. I was in the hall when they brought the poor fellow in: Marriott was called. ‘Mrs. Marriott,’ cried my lord, ‘pray let us have lady Boucher’s infallible balsam—this instant!’ Had you but seen the eagerness of face, or heard the emphasis, with which he said ‘*infallible* balsam’—you must let me laugh at the recollection. One human smile must pass, and be forgiven.”

“The smile may be the more readily forgiven,” said Belinda, “since I am sure you are conscious that it reflected almost as much upon yourself as upon lord Delacour.”

“Why, yes; belief in a quack doctor is full as bad as belief in a quack balsam, I allow. Your observation is so malicious, because so just, that to punish you for it, I will not tell you the remainder of my story for a week to come; and I assure you that the best part of it I have left untold. To return to our friend Mr. Vincent:—could you but know what reasons I have, at this instant, for wishing him in Jamaica, you would acknowledge that I am truly candid in confessing that I believe my sus-

picious about E O were unfounded ; and I am truly generous in admitting that you are right to treat him with justice."

This last enigmatical sentence Belinda could not prevail upon lady Delacour to explain.

In the evening Mr. Vincent made his appearance. Lady Delacour immediately attacked him with rail-lery, on the subject of the fair Annabella. He was rejoiced to perceive that her suspicions took this turn, and that nothing relative to the transaction in which Clarence Hervey had been engaged had transpired. Vincent wavered in his resolution to confess the truth to Belinda. Though he had determined upon this in the first moment of joyful enthusiasm, yet the delay of four-and-twenty hours had made a material change in his feelings ; his most virtuous resolves were always rather the effect of sudden impulse than of steady principle. But when the tide of passion had swept away the landmarks, he had no method of ascertaining the boundaries of right and wrong. Upon the present occasion his love for Belinda confounded all his moral calculations : one moment, his feelings as a man of honour forbade him to condescend to the meanness of dissimulation ; but the next instant his feelings as a lover prevailed ; and he satisfied his conscience by the idea that, as his vow must preclude all danger of his return to the gaming-table in future, it would only be creating an unnecessary alarm in Belinda's mind to speak to her of his past imprudence. His generosity at first revolted from the thought of suppressing those praises of Clarence Hervey, which had been so well

deserved ; but his jealousy returned, to combat his first virtuous impulse. He considered that his own inferiority must by comparison appear more striking to his mistress ; and he sophistically persuaded himself that it would be for her happiness to conceal the merits of a rival, to whom she could never be united. In this vacillating state of mind he continued during the greatest part of the evening. About half an hour before he took his leave lady Delacour was called out of the room by Mrs. Marriott. Left alone with Belinda, his embarrassment increased, and the unsuspecting kindness of her manner was to him the most bitter reproach. He stood in silent agony whilst in a playful tone she smiled and said,

“ Where are your thoughts, Mr. Vincent ? If I were of a jealous temper, I should say with the fair Annabella——”

“ You would say wrong, then,” replied Mr. Vincent, in a constrained voice. He was upon the point of telling the truth ; but to gain a reprieve of a few minutes, he entered into a defence of his conduct towards miss Luttridge.

The sudden return of lady Delacour relieved him from his embarrassment, and they conversed only on general subjects during the remainder of the evening ; and he at last departed, secretly rejoicing that he was, as he fancied, under the necessity of postponing his explanation ; he even thought of suppressing the history of his transaction with Mrs. Luttridge. He knew that his secret was safe with Clarence Hervey : Mrs. Luttridge would be silent for her own sake ;

and neither lady Delacour nor Belinda had any connexion with her society.

A few days afterward, Mr. Vincent went to Gray, the jeweller, for some trinkets which he had bespoke. Lord Delacour was there, speaking about the diamond ring, which Gray had promised to dispose of for him. Whilst his lordship and Mr. Vincent were busy about their own affairs, Sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochford came into the shop. Sir Philip and Mr. Vincent had never before met. Lord Delacour, to prevent him from getting into a quarrel about a lady who was so little worth fighting for as miss Annabella Luttridge, had positively refused to tell Mr. Vincent what he knew of the affair, or to let him know the name of the gentleman who was concerned in it.

The shopman addressed Mr. Vincent by his name, and immediately sir Philip whispered to Rochford, that Mr. Vincent was "*the master of the black.*" Vincent, who unluckily overheard him, instantly asked lord Delacour, if that was the gentleman who had behaved so ill to his servant? Lord Delacour told him that it was now of no consequence to inquire. "If," said his lordship, "either of these gentlemen choose to accost you, I shall think you do rightly to retort; but for Heaven's sake do not begin the attack!"

Vincent's impetuosity was not to be restrained; he demanded from sir Philip, whether he was the person who had beaten his servant? Sir Philip readily obliged him with an answer in the affirma-

tive ; and the consequence was the loss of a finger to the baronet, and a wound in the side to Mr. Vincent, which, though it did not endanger his life, yet confined him to his room for several days. The impatience of his mind increased his fever, and retarded his recovery.

When Belinda's first alarm for Mr. Vincent's safety was over, she anxiously questioned lord Delacour as to the particulars of all that had passed between Mr. Vincent and sir Philip, that she might judge of the manner in which her lover had conducted himself. Lord Delacour, who was a man of strict truth, was compelled to confess that Mr. Vincent had shown more spirit than temper, and more courage than prudence. Lady Delacour rejoiced to perceive that this account made Belinda uncommonly serious.

Mr. Vincent now thought himself sufficiently recovered to leave his room ; his physicians, indeed, would have kept him prisoner a few days longer, but he was too impatient of restraint to listen to their counsels.

"Juba, tell the doctor, when he comes, that you could not keep me at home ; and that is all that is necessary to be said."

He had now summoned courage to acknowledge to Belinda all that had happened, and was proceeding, with difficulty, down stairs, when he was suddenly struck by the sound of a voice, which he little expected at this moment ; a voice he had formerly been accustomed to hear with pleasure, but now it smote him to the heart:—it was the voice of

Mr. Percival. For the first time in his life, he wished to deny himself to his friend. The recollection of the E O table, of Mrs. Luttridge, of Mr. Percival as his guardian, and of all the advice he had heard from him as his friend, rushed upon his mind at this instant; conscious and ashamed, he shrunk back, precipitately returned to his own room, and threw himself into a chair, breathless with agitation. He listened, expecting to hear Mr. Percival coming up stairs, and endeavoured to compose himself, that he might not betray, by his own agitation, all that he wished most anxiously to conceal. After waiting for some time, he rang the bell, to make inquiries. The waiter told him that a Mr. Percival had asked for him; but, having been told by his black that he was just gone out, the gentleman being, as he said, much hurried, had left a note; for an answer to which he would call at eight o'clock in the evening. Vincent was glad of this short reprieve. "Alas!" thought he, "how changed am I, when I fear to meet my best friend! To what has this one fatal propensity reduced me!"

He was little aware of the new difficulties that awaited him.

Mr. Percival's note was as follows:

"My dear *friend*!

"Am not I a happy man, to find a friend in my *ci-devant* ward? But I have no time for sentiment; nor does it become the character, in which I am now writing to you—that of a *DUN*. You are so rich, and so prudent, that the word in capital letters

cannot frighten you. Lady Anne's cousin, poor Mr. Carysfort, is dead. I am guardian to his boys; they are but ill provided for. I have fortunately obtained a partnership in a good house for the second son. Ten thousand pounds are wanting to establish him—we cannot raise the money amongst us, without dunning poor Mr. Vincent. Enclosed is your bond for the purchase-money of the little estate you bought from me last summer. I know that you have double the sum we want in ready money—so I make no ceremony. Let me have the ten thousand this evening, if you can, as I wish to leave town as soon as possible.

“Yours most sincerely,
“HENRY PERCIVAL.”

Now Mr. Vincent had lost, and had actually paid to Mrs. Luttridge, the ready money, which had been destined to discharge his debt to Mr. Percival: he expected fresh remittances from the West Indies in the course of a few weeks; but, in the mean time, he must raise this money immediately: this he could only do by having recourse to Jews—a desperate expedient. The Jew, to whom he applied, no sooner discovered that Mr. Vincent was under a necessity of having this sum before eight o'clock in the evening than he became exorbitant in his demands; and the more impatient this unfortunate young man became, the more difficulties he raised. At last, a bargain was concluded between them, in which Vincent knew that he was grossly imposed upon; but to this he submitted, for he had no alternative. The Jew

promised to bring him ten thousand pounds at five o'clock in the evening, but it was half after seven before he made his appearance ; and then he was so dilatory and circumspect, in reading over and signing the bonds, and in completing the formalities of the transaction, that before the money was actually in Vincent's possession, one of the waiters of the hotel knocked at the door to let him know that Mr. Percival was coming up stairs. Vincent hurried the Jew into an adjoining apartment, and bid him wait there, till he should come to finish the business. Though totally unsuspecting, Mr. Percival could not help being struck with the perturbation in which he found his young friend. Vincent immediately began to talk of the duel, and his friend was led to conclude that his anxiety arose from this affair. He endeavoured to put him at ease by changing the conversation. He spoke of the business which brought him to town, and of the young man whom he was going to place with a banker.

"I hope," said he, observing that Vincent grew more embarrassed, "that my *dunning* you for this money is not really inconvenient."

"Not in the least—not in the least. I have the money ready—in a few moments—if you'll be so good as to wait here—I have the money ready in the next room."

At this instant a loud noise was heard—the raised voices of two people quarrelling. It was Juba, the black, and Solomon, the Jew. Mr. Vincent had sent Juba out of the way, on some errand, whilst he had been transacting his affairs with the Jew ; but

the black, having executed the commission on which he had been sent, returned, and went into his master's bedchamber, to read at his leisure a letter which he had just received from his wife. He did not at first see the Jew, and he was spelling out the words of his wife's letter.

“My dear Juba,

“I take this op-por-tu—”

—*nity* he would have said ; but the Jew, who had held his breath in to avoid discovery, till he could hold it no longer, now drew it so loud, that Juba started, looked round, and saw the feet of a man, which appeared beneath the bottom of the window curtain. Where fears of supernatural appearances were out of the question, our negro was a man of courage ; he had no doubt that the man who was concealed behind the curtain was a robber, but the idea of a robber did not unnerve him like that of an Obeah woman. With presence of mind worthy of a greater danger, Juba took down his master's pistol, which hung over the chimney-piece, and marching deliberately up to the enemy, he seized the Jew by the throat, exclaiming—

“You rob my massa?—You dead man, if you rob my massa.”

Terrified at the sight of the pistol, the Jew instantly explained who he was, and producing his large purse, assured Juba that he was come to lend money, and not to take it from his master ; but this appeared highly improbable to Juba, who believed his master to be the richest man in the world ; besides, the Jew's language was scarcely intelligible to

him, and he saw secret terror in Solomon's countenance. Solomon had an antipathy to the sight of a black, and he shrunk from the negro with strong signs of aversion. Juba would not relinquish his hold; each went on talking in his own angry gibberish as loud as he could, till at last the negro fairly dragged the Jew into the presence of his master and Mr. Percival.

It is impossible to describe Mr. Vincent's confusion, or Mr. Percival's astonishment. The Jew's explanation was perfectly intelligible to him; he saw at once all the truth. Vincent, overwhelmed with shame, stood the picture of despair, incapable of uttering a single syllable.

"There is no necessity to borrow this money on my account," said Mr. Percival, calmly; "and if there were, we could probably have it on more reasonable terms than this gentleman proposes."

"I care not on what terms I have it—I care not what becomes of me—I am undone!" cried Vincent.

Mr. Percival coolly dismissed the Jew, made a sign to Juba to leave the room, and then, addressing himself to Vincent, said, "I can borrow the money that I want elsewhere. Fear no reproaches from me—I foresaw all this—you have lost this sum at play: it is well that it was not your whole fortune. I have only one question to ask you, on which depends my esteem—have you informed miss Portman of this affair?"

"I have not yet told her, but I was actually half down stairs in my way to tell her."

"Then, Mr. Vincent, you are still my friend. I

know the difficulty of such an avowal—but it is necessary.”

“Cannot you, dear Mr. Percival, save me the intolerable shame of confessing my own folly? Spare me this mortification! Be yourself the bearer of this intelligence, and the mediator in my favour.”

“I will with pleasure,” said Mr. Percival; “I will go this instant: but I cannot say that I have any hope of persuading Belinda to believe in your being irrevocably reclaimed from the charms of play.”

“Indeed, my excellent friend, she may rely upon me: I feel such horror at the past, such heartfelt resolution against all future temptation, that you may pledge yourself for my total reformation.”

Mr. Percival promised that he would exert all his influence, except by pledging his own honour; to this he could not consent. “If I have any good news for you, I will return as soon as possible; but I will not be the bearer of any painful intelligence,” said he; and he departed, leaving Mr. Vincent in a state of anxiety, which, to his temper, was a punishment sufficient for almost any imprudence he could have committed.

Mr. Percival returned no more that night. The next morning Mr. Vincent received the following letter from Belinda. He guessed his fate: he had scarcely power to read the words.

“I promised you that, whenever my own mind should be decided, I would not hold yours in suspense; yet at this moment I find it difficult to keep my word.

“ Instead of lamenting, as you have often done, that my esteem for your many excellent qualities never rose beyond the bounds of friendship, we have now reason to rejoice at this, since it will save us much useless pain. It spares me the difficulty of conquering a passion that might be fatal to my happiness ; and it will diminish the regret which you may feel at our separation. I am now obliged to say, that circumstances have made me certain we could not add to our mutual felicity by any nearer connexion.

“ The hopes of enjoying domestic happiness with a person whose manners, temper, and tastes suited my own, inclined me to listen to your addresses. But this happiness I could never enjoy with one who has any propensity to the love of play.

“ For my own sake, as well as for yours, I rejoice that your fortune has not been materially injured ; as this relieves me from the fear that my present conduct should be imputed to interested motives. Indeed, such is the generosity of your own temper, that in any situation I should scarcely have reason to apprehend from you such a suspicion.

“ The absolute impossibility of my forming at present a connexion with another will prevent you from imagining that I am secretly influenced by sentiments different from those which I avow ; nor can any weak doubts on this subject expose me to my own reproaches.

“ You perceive, sir, that I am not willing utterly to lose your esteem, even when I renounce, in the most unequivocal manner, all claim upon your af-

fections. If any thing should appear to you harsh in this letter, I beg you to impute it to the real cause—my desire to spare you all painful suspense, by convincing you at once that my determination is irrevocable. With sincere wishes for your happiness, I bid you farewell.

“BELINDA PORTMAN.”

A few hours after Mr. Vincent had read this letter, he threw himself into a post-chaise, and set out for Germany. He saw that all hopes of being united to Belinda were over, and he hurried as far from her as possible. Her letter rather soothed than irritated his temper; her praises of his generosity were highly gratifying, and they had so powerful an effect upon his mind, that he was determined to prove that they were deserved. His conscience reproached him with not having made sufficiently honourable mention of Clarence Hervey's conduct, on the night when he was on the point of destroying himself. Before he left London he wrote a full account of this whole transaction, to be given to miss Portman after his departure.

Belinda was deeply touched by this proof of his generosity. His letter—his farewell letter—she could not read without great emotion. It was written with true feeling, but in a manly style, without one word of vain lamentation.

“What a pity,” thought Belinda, “that with so many good and great qualities, I should be forced to bid him adieu for ever!”

Though she strongly felt the pain of this separa-

tion, yet she could not recede from her decision: nothing could tempt her to connect herself with a man who had the fatal taste for play. Even Mr. Percival, much as he loved his ward, much as he wished for his union with Belinda, dared not pledge his honour for Mr. Vincent on this point.

Lady Anne Percival, in a very kind and sensible letter, expressed the highest approbation of Belinda's conduct; and the most sincere hopes that Belinda would still continue to think of her with affection and esteem, though she had been so rash in her advice, and though her friendship had been apparently so selfish.

CHAPTER XXX.

NEWS.

"Do not expect that I should pretend to be sorry for Mr. Vincent," said lady Delacour. "Let him be as generous and as penitent as he pleases, I am heartily glad that he is on his way to Germany. I dare say he will find in the upper or *lower* circles of the empire some heroine in the Kotzebue taste, who will alternately make him miserable till he is happy, and happy till he is miserable. He is one of those men who require great emotions: fine lovers these make for stage effect—but the worst husbands in the world!

"I hope, Belinda, you give me credit, for having

judged better of Mr. Vincent than lady Anne Percival did?"

"For having judged worse of him, you mean? Lady Anne always judges *as well* as possible of every body."

"I will allow you to play upon words in a friend's defence, but do not be alarmed for the reputation of lady Anne's judgment. If it will be any satisfaction to you, I can with thorough sincerity assure you that I never liked her so well in my life as since I have detected her in a mistake. It saves her, in my imagination, from the odium of being a perfect character."

"And there was something so handsome in her manner of writing to me, when she found out her error," said Belinda.

"Very true, and my friend Mr. Percival behaved handsomely. Where friendships clash, it is not every man who has clearness of head sufficient to know his duty to his neighbour. Mr. Percival said no more than just the thing he ought, for his ward. You have reason to be obliged to him: and as we are returning thanks to all persons concerned in our deliverance from this imminent danger, Juba, the dog, and Juba, the black, and Solomon, the Jew, ought to come in for their share; for without that wrestling match of theirs, the truth might never have been dragged to light, and Mr. Vincent would have been in due course of time your lord and master. But the danger is over; you need not look so terrified: do not be like the man who dropped down dead with terror,

when he was shown by daylight the broken bridge which he had galloped over in the dark."

Lady Delacour was in such high spirits that, without regard to connexion, she ran on from one subject to another.

"You have proved to me, my dear," said she, "that you are not a girl to marry, because the day was fixed, or because *things had gone so far*. I give you infinite credit for your *civil courage*, as Dr. X—— calls it: military courage, as he said to me yesterday—military courage, that seeks the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth, may be had for sixpence a day. But civil courage, such as enabled the princess Parizade, in the Arabian Tales, to go straight up the hill to her object, though the magical multitude of advising and abusive voices continually called to her to turn back, is one of the rarest qualities in man or woman, and not to be had for love, money, or admiration."

"You place admiration not only above money, but above love, in your climax, I perceive," said Belinda, smiling.

"I will give you leave to be as philosophically sarcastic as you please, my dear, if you will only smile, and if you will not look as pale as Seneca's Paulina, whose story we heard—from whom?"

"From Mr. Hervey, I believe."

"His name was ready upon your lips; I hope he was not far from your thoughts?"

"No one could be farther from my thoughts," said Belinda.

"Well, very likely—I believe it, because you say it; and because it is impossible."

"Rally me as much as you please, my dear lady Delacour, I assure you that I speak the simple truth."

"I cannot suspect you of affectation, my dear. Therefore honestly tell me, if Clarence Hervey were at your feet this instant, would you spurn him from you?"

"Spurn him! no—I would neither spurn him, nor *motion him from me*; but without using any of the terms in the heroine's dictionary——"

"You would refuse him?" interrupted lady Delacour, with a look of indignation—"you would refuse him?"

"I did not say so, I *believe*."

"You would accept him?"

"I did not say so, I *am sure*."

"O, you would tell him that you were not *accustomed* to him?"

"Not exactly in those words, perhaps."

"Well, we shall not quarrel about words," said lady Delacour; "I only beg you to remember your own principles; and if ever you are put to the trial, be consistent. The first thing in a philosopher is to be consistent."

"Fortunately, for the credit of my philosophy, there is no immediate danger of its being put to the test."

"Unfortunately, you surely mean; unless you are afraid that it might not stand the test. But I was going, when I spoke of consistency, to remind you

that all your own and Mr. Percival's arguments about *first loves* may now, with equal propriety, be turned against you."

"How *against* me?"

"They are evidently as applicable to second as to first loves, I think."

"Perhaps they are," said Belinda; "but I really and truly am not inclined to think of love at present; particularly as there is no necessity that I should."

Belinda took up a book, and lady Delacour for one half hour abstained from any farther raillery. But longer than half an hour she could not be silent on the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

"If Clarence Hervey," cried she, "were not the most honourable of blockheads, he might be the most happy of men. This Virginia!—O, how I hate her!—I am sure poor Clarence cannot love her."

"Because you hate her—or because you hate her without having ever seen her?" said Belinda.

"O, I know what she must be," replied lady Delacour: "a soft, sighing, dying damsel, who puts bullfinches into her bosom. Smile, smile, my dear; you cannot help it; in spite of all your generosity, I know you must think as I do, and wish as I do, that she were at the bottom of the Black-sea this instant."

Lady Delacour stood for some minutes musing, and then exclaimed, "I will move heaven and earth to break off this absurd match."

"Good Heavens! my dear lady Delacour, what do you mean?"

“Mean! my dear—I mean what I say, which very few people do: no wonder I should surprise you.”

“I conjure you,” cried Belinda, “if you have the least regard for my honour and happiness——”

“I have not the least, but the greatest; and depend upon it, my dear, I will do nothing that shall injure *that dignity of mind and delicacy of character*, which I admire and love, as much as Clarence Hervey did, and does. Trust to me: not lady Anne Percival herself can be more delicate in her notions of propriety than I am for my friends, and, since my reformation, I hope I may add, for myself. Fear nothing.” As she finished these words, she rang for her carriage. “I don’t ask you to go out with me, my dear Belinda; I give you leave to sit in this arm-chair till I come back again, with your feet upon the fender, a book in your hand, and this little table beside you, like lady S.’s picture of Comfort.”

Lady Delacour spent the rest of the morning abroad; and when she returned home, she gave no account of what she had been doing, or of what or whom she had seen. This was so unusual, that Belinda could not avoid taking notice of it. Notwithstanding her ladyship’s eulogium upon her own delicate sense of propriety, miss Portman could not confide, with perfect resignation, in her prudence.

“Your ladyship reproached me once,” said she, in a playful tone, “for my provoking want of curiosity: you have completely cured me of this defect, for never was woman more curious than I am, at this instant, to know the secret scheme that you have in agitation.”

“Have patience a little longer, and the mystery will be unravelled. In the mean time, trust that every thing I do is for the best. However, as you have behaved pretty well, I will give you one leading hint, when you have explained to me what you meant by saying that your heart is not at present inclined to love. Pray, have you quarrelled with love for ever?”

“No; but I can exist without it.”

“Have you a heart?”

“I hope so.”

“And it can exist without love? I now understand what was once said to me by a foolish lordling: —‘Of what use is the sun to the dial?’”*

Company came in, and relieved Belinda from any farther raillery. Lady Boucher and Mrs. Margaret Delacour were, amongst a large party, to dine at lady Delacour’s. At dinner, the dowager seized the first auspicious moment of silence to announce a piece of intelligence, which she flattered herself would fix the eyes of all the world upon her.

“So Mr. Clarence Hervey is married at last!”

“Married!” cried lady Delacour: she had sufficient presence of mind not to look directly at Belinda; but she fixed the dowager’s eyes, by repeating, “Married! Are you sure of it?”

“Positive—positive! He was privately married yesterday at his aunt, lady Almeria’s apartments, at Windsor, to miss Hartley. I told you it was to be, and now it is over; and a very extraordinary match

* A fact.

Mr. Hervey has made of it, after all. Think of his going at last, and marrying a girl who has been his mistress for years! Nobody will visit her, to be sure. Lady Almeria is excessively distressed; she did all she could to prevail on her brother, the bishop, to marry his nephew, but he very properly refused, giving it as a reason, that the girl's character was too well known."

"I thought the bishop was at Spa," interposed a gentleman, whilst the dowager drew breath.

"O dear no, sir; you have been misinformed," resumed she. "The bishop has been returned from Spa this great while, and he has refused to see his nephew, to my certain knowledge. After all, I cannot but pity poor Clarence for being driven into this match. Mr. Hartley has a prodigious fine fortune, to be sure, and he hurried things forward at an amazing rate, to patch up his daughter's reputation. He said, as I am credibly informed, yesterday morning, that if Clarence did not marry the girl before night, he would carry her and her fortune off the next day to the West Indies. Now the fortune was certainly an object."

"My dear lady Boucher," interrupted lord Delacour, "you must be misinformed in that particular: fortune is no object to Clarence Hervey; he is too generous a fellow to marry for fortune. What do you think—what do you say, lady Delacour?"

"I say, and think, and feel, as you do, my lord," said lady Delacour,

"You say, and think, and feel the same as my lord.—Very extraordinary indeed!" said the dowager.

“Then if it were not for the sake of the fortune, pray why did Mr. Hervey marry at all? Can any body guess?”

“I should guess because he was in love,” said lord Delacour; “for I remember that was the reason I married myself.”

“My dear good lord—but when I tell you the girl had been his mistress, till he was tired of her——”

“My lady Boucher,” said Mrs. Margaret Delacour, who had hitherto listened in silence, “my lady Boucher, you have been misinformed; miss Hartley never was Clarence Hervey’s mistress.”

“I’m mighty glad you think so, Mrs. Delacour; but I assure you nobody else is so *charitable*. Those who live in the world hear a great deal more than those who live out of the world. I can promise you, nobody will visit the bride, and that is the thing by which we are to judge.”

Then the dowager and the rest of the company continued to descant upon the folly of the match. Those who wished to pay their court to lady Delacour were the loudest in their astonishment at his throwing himself away in this manner. Her ladyship smiled, and kept them in play by her address, on purpose to withdraw all eyes from miss Portman, whilst, from time to time, she stole a glance at Belinda, to observe how she was affected by what passed: she was provoked by Belinda’s self-possession. At last, when it had been settled that all the Herveys were *odd*, but that this match of Clarence’s was the *oddest* of all the odd things that any of the family had done for many generations, Mrs. Delacour calmly

said, "Are you sure, lady Boucher, that Mr. Hervey is married?"

"Positive! as I said before, positive! Madam, my woman had it from lady Newland's Swiss, who had it from lady Singleton's Frenchwoman, who had it from Longueville, the hair-dresser, who had it from lady Almeria's own woman, who was present at the ceremony, and must know if any body does."

"The report has come to us zigzag as quick as lightning, yet it does not flash conviction upon me," said lady Delacour.

"Nor upon me," said Mrs. Delacour, "for this simple reason. I have seen miss Hartley within these two hours, and I had it from herself that she is not married."

"Not married!" cried the dowager, with terror.

"I rather think not; she is now with her father, at my house at dinner, I believe,* and Clarence Hervey is at lady Almeria's, at Windsor: her ladyship is confined by a fit of the gout, and sent for her nephew yesterday. If people who live out of the world hear less, they sometimes hear more correctly than those who live in it."

"Pray when does Mr. Hervey return from Windsor?" said the incorrigible dowager.

"To-morrow, madam," said Mrs. Delacour. "As your ladyship is going to several parties this evening, I think it but *charitable* to set you right in these particulars, and I hope you will be so *charitable* as to contradict the report of miss Hartley's having been Clarence's mistress."

"Why, as to that, if the young lady is not mar-

ried, we must presume there are good reasons for it," said the dowager. "Pray, on which side was the match broken off?"

"On neither side," answered Mrs. Delacour.

"The thing goes on then; and what day is the marriage to take place?" said lady Boucher.

"On Monday—or Tuesday—or Wednesday—or Thursday—or Friday—or Saturday—or Sunday, I believe," replied Mrs. Delacour, who had the prudent art of giving answers effectually baffling to the curiosity of gossips.

The dowager consoled herself in her utmost need with a full plate of brandy peaches, and spoke not a word more during the second course. When the ladies retired after the dessert, she again commenced hostilities: she dared not come to open war with Mrs. Delacour; but in a by-battle, in a corner, she carried every thing before her; and she triumphantly whispered, "We shall see, ma'am, that it will turn out, as I told you, that miss Rachel, or Virginia, or whatever he pleases to call her, has been what I said; and as I said, nobody will visit her, not a soul: fifty people I can count who have declared to me they've made up their minds; and my own's made up, I candidly confess; and lady Delacour, I am sure by her silence and looks, is of my way of thinking, and has no opinion of the young lady: as to miss Portman, she is, poor thing, of course so wrapped up in her own affairs, no wonder she says nothing. That was a sad business of Mr. Vincent's! I am surprised to see her look even so well as she does after it. Mr. Percival, I am told," said the well-informed

dowager, lowering her voice so much that the lovers of scandal were obliged to close their heads round her—"Mr. Percival, I am informed, refused his consent to his ward (who is not of age) on account of an anonymous letter, and it is supposed Mr. Vincent desired it for an excuse to get off handsomely. Fighting that duel about her with sir Philip Baddely settled his love—so he is gone to Germany, and she is left to wear the willow, which, you see, becomes her as well as every thing else. Did she eat any dinner, ma'am—you sat next her?"

"Yes—more than I did, I am sure."

"Very extraordinary! Then perhaps sir Philip Baddely's *on* again—Lord bless me, what a match would that be for her! Why, Mrs. Stanhope might then, indeed, deserve to be called the match-maker general. The seventh of her nieces this. But look, there's Mrs. Delacour leading miss Portman off into the trictrac cabinet, with a face full of business—her hand in hers—Lord, I did not know they were on that footing! I wonder what's going forward. Suppose old Hartley was to propose for miss Portman—there would be a *dénouement*! and cut his daughter off with a shilling! Nothing's impossible, you know. Did he ever see miss Portman? I must go and find out, positively."

In the mean time, Mrs. Delacour, unconscious of the curiosity she had excited, was speaking to Belinda in the trictrac cabinet.

"My dear miss Portman," said she, "you have a great deal of good-nature, else I should not venture to apply to you on the present occasion. Will you

oblige me, and serve a friend of mine—a gentleman who, as I once imagined, was an admirer of yours?”

“I will do any thing in my power to oblige any friend of yours, madam,” said Belinda; “but of whom are you speaking?”

“Of Mr. Hervey, my dear young lady.”

“Tell me how I can serve him as a friend,” said Belinda, colouring deeply.

“That you shall know immediately,” said Mrs. Delacour, rummaging and rustling for a considerable time amongst a heap of letters, which she had pulled out of the largest pockets that ever woman wore, even in the last century.

“O, here it is,” continued she, opening and looking into them. “May I trouble you just to look over this letter? It is from poor Mr. Hartley; he is, as you will see, excessively fond of his daughter, whom he has so fortunately discovered after his long search: he is dreadfully nervous, and has been terribly annoyed by these idle gossiping stories. You find, by what lady Boucher said at dinner, that they have settled it amongst them that Virginia is not a fit person to be visited; that she has been Clarence’s mistress instead of his pupil. Mr. Hartley, you see by this letter, is almost out of his senses with the apprehension that his daughter’s reputation is ruined. I sent my carriage to Twickenham, the moment I received this letter, for the poor girl and her governante. They came to me this morning; but what can I do? I am only one old woman against a confederacy of veteran gossips; but if I could gain you and lady Delacour for my allies, I should fear no

adversaries. Virginia is to stay with me for some days ; and lady Delacour, I see, has a great mind to come to see her ; but she does not like to come without you, and she says that she does not like to ask you to accompany her. I don't understand her delicacy about the matter—I have none ; believing, as I do, that there is no foundation whatever for these malicious reports, which, *entre nous*, originated, I fancy, with Mrs. Marriott. Now, will you oblige me ? If you and lady Delacour will come and see Virginia to-morrow, all the world would follow your example the next day. It's often cowardice that makes people ill-natured ; have you the courage, my good miss Portman, to be the first to do a benevolent action ? I do assure you," continued Mrs. Delacour with great earnestness, " I do assure you I would as soon put my hand into that fire, this moment, as ask you to do any thing that I thought improper. But forgive me for pressing this point ; I am anxious to have your suffrage in her favour : miss Belinda Portman's character for prudence and propriety stands so high, and is fixed so firmly, that she may venture to let us cling to it ; and I am as well convinced of the poor girl's innocence as I am of yours ; and when you see her, you will be of my opinion."

" I assure you, Mrs. Delacour," said Belinda, " that you have wasted a great deal of eloquence upon this occasion, for——"

" I am sorry for it," interrupted Mrs. Delacour, rising from her seat, with a look of some displeasure. " I meant not to distress or offend you, miss Portman, by *my eloquence* : I am only concerned that I

should have so far mistaken your character as to expose myself to this refusal."

"I have given no refusal," said Belinda, mildly: "you did not let me finish my sentence."

"I beg pardon, that is a foolish old trick of mine."

"Mrs. Delacour, I was going to say, has wasted a great deal of eloquence: for I am entirely of her opinion, and I shall, with the greatest readiness, comply with her request."

"You are a charming, generous girl, and I am a passionate old fool—thank you a thousand times."

"You are not at all obliged to me," said Belinda. "When I first heard this story, I believed it, as lady Boucher now does—but I have had reason to alter my opinion, and perhaps the same means of information would have changed her's; once convinced, it is impossible to relapse into suspicion."

"Impossible to *you*: the most truly virtuous women are always the least suspicious and uncharitable in their opinion of their own sex. Lady Anne Percival inspired me with this belief, and miss Portman confirms it. I admire your courage in daring to come forward in the defence of innocence. I am very rude, alas! for praising you so much."

"I have not a right to your admiration," said Belinda; "for I must honestly confess to you that I should not have this courage if there were any danger in the case. I do not think that in doubtful cases it is the business of a young woman to hazard her own reputation by an attempt to preserve another's: I do not imagine, at least, that I am of sufficient consequence in the world for this purpose ;

therefore I should never attempt it. It is the duty of such women as Mrs. Delacour, whose reputation is beyond the power of scandal, to come forward in the defence of injured innocence ; but this would not be courage in Belinda Portman, it would be presumption and temerity."

"Well, if you will not let me admire your courage, or your generosity, or your prudence," said Mrs. Delacour laughing, "you must positively let me admire *you* altogether, and love you too, for I cannot help it. Farewell."

After the company was gone, lady Delacour was much surprised by the earnestness with which Belinda pressed the request that they might the next morning pay a visit to Virginia.

"My dear," said lady Delacour, "to tell you the truth, I am full of curiosity, and excessively anxious to go. I hesitated merely on your account: I fancied that you would not like the visit, and that if I went without you, it might be taken notice of ; but I am delighted to find that you will come with me : I can only say that you have more generosity than I should have in the same situation."

The next morning they went together to Mrs. Delacour's. In their way thither, Belinda, to divert her own thoughts, and to rouse lady Delacour from the profound and unnatural silence into which she had fallen, petitioned her to finish the history of sir Philip Baddely, the dog, miss Annabella Luttridge, and her billet-doux.

"For some of my high crimes and misdemeanours, you vowed that you would not tell me the remainder

of the story till the whole week had elapsed ; now will you satisfy my curiosity ? You recollect that you left off just where you said that you were come to the best part of the story."

" Was I ? did I ?—Very true, we shall have time enough to finish it by and by, my dear," said lady Delacour ; " at present my poor head is running upon something else, and I have left off being an accomplished actress, or I could talk of one subject and think of another as well as the best of you. Stop the carriage, my dear ; I am afraid they have forgot my orders."

" Did you carry what I desired this morning to Mrs. Delacour ?" said her ladyship to one of the footmen.

" I did, my lady."

" And did you say from me, that it was not to be opened till I came ?"

" Yes, my lady."

" Where did you leave it ?"

" In Mrs. Delacour's dressing-room, my lady :—she desired me to take it up there, and she locked the door, and said no one should go in till you came."

" Very well—go on. Belinda, my dear, I hope that I have worked up your curiosity to the highest pitch."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DENOUEMENT.

CURIOSITY was not, at this instant, the strongest passion in Belinda's mind. When the carriage stopped at Mrs. Delacour's door, her heart almost ceased to beat; but she summoned resolution to go through, with firmness and dignity, the task she had undertaken.

Clarence Hervey was not in the room when they entered, nor was Virginia: Mrs. Ormond said that she had been extremely feverish during the night, and that she had advised her not to get up till late in the day. But Mrs. Delacour immediately went for her, and in a few minutes she made her appearance.

Belinda and lady Delacour exchanged a glance of surprise and admiration. There was a grace and simplicity in her manner, joined to an air of naïveté, that made an irresistible impression in her favour. Lady Delacour, however, after the first surprise was over, seemed to relapse into her former opinion; and the piercing looks which her ladyship from time to time cast upon Virginia as she spoke produced their effect. She was abashed and silent. Belinda endeavoured to engage her in conversation, and to her she talked with ease and even with freedom. Virginia examined miss Portman's countenance with a species of artless curiosity and interest, that was not restrained by factitious politeness. This examination was not peculiarly agreeable to Belinda, yet it was

made with so much apparent simplicity, that she could not be displeased.

On the first pause in the conversation, Mrs. Delacour said, "Pray, my dear lady Delacour, what is this wonderful present that you sent to me this morning, which you desired that no one should see till you came?"

"I cannot satisfy your curiosity yet," replied lady Delacour. "I must wait till Clarence Hervey comes, for the present is intended for him."

An air of solemn mystery in her ladyship's manner, as she pronounced these words, excited general attention. There was a dead silence, which lasted several minutes: some feeble attempts were then made by each of the company to start a fresh subject of conversation; but it would not do—all relapsed into the silence of expectation. At last Clarence Hervey arrived. Belinda rejoiced that the universal curiosity which lady Delacour had inspired prevented any one's observing the sudden change in Mr. Hervey's countenance when he beheld her.

"A pretty set of curious children you are!" cried lady Delacour, laughing. "Do you know, Clarence, that they are all dying with impatience to see *un gage d'amitié* that I have brought for you; and the reason that they are so curious is simply because I had the address to say, in a solemn voice, 'I cannot satisfy your curiosity till Clarence Hervey arrives.' Now follow me, my friends; and if you be disappointed, lay the blame, not on me, but on your own imaginations."

She led the way to Mrs. Delacour's dressing-room, and all the company followed.

"Now, what do you expect to see?" said she, putting the key into the door.

After waiting some moments for a reply, but in vain, she threw open the door, and they saw, hung before the wall opposite to them, a green curtain.

"I thought, my dear Clarence," resumed lady Delacour, "that no present could be more agreeable to you than a companion for your Virginia. Does this figure," continued she, drawing back the curtain, "does this figure give you the idea of Paul?"

"Paul!" said Clarence; "it is a naval officer in full uniform: what can your ladyship mean?"

"Virginia perhaps will know what I mean, if you will only stand out of her way, and let her see the picture."

At these words Clarence made way for Virginia: she turned her eyes upon the picture, uttered a piercing shriek, and fell senseless upon the floor.

"Take it coolly," said lady Delacour, "and she will come to her senses presently. Young ladies must shriek and faint upon certain occasions; but men (looking at Clarence Hervey) need not always be dupes. This is only a *scene*; consider it as such, and admire the actress as I do."

"Actress! O, she is no actress!" cried Mrs. Ormond.

Clarence Hervey raised her from the ground, and Belinda sprinkled water over her face.

"She's dead!—she's dead! O, my sweet child!

she's dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormond, trembling so violently, that she could not sustain Virginia.

"She is no actress, indeed," said Clarence Hervey: "her pulse is gone!"

Lady Delacour looked at Virginia's pale lips, touched her cold hands, and with a look of horror cried out, "Good Heavens! what have I done? What shall we do with her?"

"Give her air—give her air, air, air!" cried Belinda.

"You keep the air from her, Mrs. Ormond," said Mrs. Delacour. "Let us leave her to miss Portman; she has more presence of mind than any of us." And as she spoke she forced Mrs. Ormond away with her out of the room.

"If Mr. Hartley should come, keep him with you, Mrs. Delacour," said Clarence Hervey. "Is her pulse quite gone?"

"No; it beats stronger and stronger," said Belinda.

"Her colour is returning," said lady Delacour. "There! raise her a little, dear Belinda; she is coming to herself."

"Had not you better draw the curtain again before that picture," said miss Portman, "lest she should see it the moment she opens her eyes?"

Virginia came slowly to her recollection, saw lady Delacour drawing the curtain before the picture, then fixed her eyes upon Clarence Hervey, without uttering a word.

"Are you better now?" said he, in a gentle tone

"O, do not speak—do not look so kindly!" cried Virginia. "I am well—quite well—better than I deserve to be;" and she pressed Belinda's hand, as if to thank her for assisting and supporting her.

"We may safely leave her now," whispered Belinda to lady Delacour; "we are strangers, and our presence only distresses her."

They withdrew. But the moment Virginia found herself alone with Mr. Hervey she was seized with a universal tremor; she tried to speak, but could not articulate. At last, she burst into a flood of tears; and when this had in some measure relieved her, she threw herself upon her knees, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed, as she looked up to heaven—

"Oh, if I knew what I ought to do!—if I knew what I ought to say!"

"Shall I tell you, Virginia? And will you believe me?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"You ought to say—the truth, whatever it may be."

"But you will think me the most ungrateful of human beings?"

"How often must I assure you, Virginia, that I make no claim upon your gratitude? Speak to me—I conjure you, as you value your happiness and mine—speak to me without disguise! What is all this mystery? Why should you fear to let me know what passes in your heart? Why did you shriek at the sight of that picture?"

"O, forgive me! forgive me!" cried Virginia:

she would have sunk at his feet, if he had not prevented her.

“I will—I can forgive any thing but deceit. Do not look at me with so much terror, Virginia—I have not deserved it: my wish is to make you happy. I would sacrifice even my own happiness to secure yours; but do not mislead me, or you ruin us both. Cannot you give me a distinct answer to this simple question—Why did you shriek at the sight of that picture?”

“Because—but you will call me ‘*perfidious, ungrateful Virginia!*’—because I have seen that figure—he has knelt to me—he has kissed my hand—and I——”

Clarence Hervey withdrew his arms, which had supported her, and placing her upon a sofa, left her, whilst he walked up and down the room for some minutes in silence.

“And why, Virginia,” said he, stopping short, “was it necessary to conceal all this from me? Why was it necessary to persuade me that I was beloved? Why was it necessary that my happiness should be the sacrifice?”

“It shall not!—it shall not! Your happiness shall not be the sacrifice. Heaven is my witness, that there is no sacrifice I would not make for you. Forgive me that shriek! I could not help fainting, indeed! But I will be yours,—I *ought* to be yours; and I am not perfidious,—I am not ungrateful: do not look upon me as you did in my dream!”

“Do not talk to me of dreams, my dear Virginia ;

this is no time for trifling; I ask no sacrifice from you,—I ask nothing but truth.”

“Truth! Mrs. Ormond knows all the truth: I have concealed nothing from her.”

“But she has concealed every thing from me,” cried Clarence; and, with a sudden impulse of indignation, he was going to summon her, but when his hand was upon the lock of the door he paused, returned to Virginia, and said, “Let me hear the truth from *your* lips: it is all I shall ever ask from you. How—when—where did you see this man?”

“What man?” said Virginia, looking up, with the simple expression of innocence in her countenance.

Clarence pointed to the picture.

“At the village in the New Forest, at Mrs. Smith’s house,” said Virginia, “one evening when I walked with her from my grandmother’s cottage.”

“And your grandmother knew of this?”

“Yes,” said Virginia, blushing, “and she was very much displeased.”

“And Mrs. Ormond knew of this?” pursued Clarence.

“Yes; but she told me that you would not be displeased at it.”

Mr. Hervey made another hasty step toward the door, but restraining his impetuous temper, he again stopped, and leaning over the back of a chair, opposite to Virginia, waited in silence for her to proceed. He waited in vain.

“I do not mean to distress you, miss Hartley,” said he.

She burst into tears. "I knew, I knew," cried she, "that you *would* be displeased; I told Mrs. Ormond so. I knew you would never forgive me."

"In that you were mistaken," said Clarence, mildly; "I forgive you without difficulty, as I hope you may forgive yourself; nor can it be my wish to extort from you any mortifying confessions. But, perhaps, it may yet be in my power to serve you, if you will trust to me. I will myself speak to your father. I will do every thing to secure to you the object of your affections, if you will, in this last moment of our connexion, treat me with sincerity, and suffer me to be your friend."

Virginia sobbed so violently for some time, that she could not speak: at last she said, "You are—you are the most generous of men! You have always been my *best* friend! I am the most ungrateful of human beings! But I am sure I never wished, I never intended to deceive you. Mrs. Ormond told me——"

"Do not speak of her at present, or perhaps I may lose my temper," interrupted Clarence in an altered voice: "only tell me—I conjure you, tell me—in one word, who is this man? and where is he to be found?"

"I do not know. I do not understand you," said Virginia.

"You do not know! You will not trust me. Then I must leave you to—to Mr. Hartley."

"Do not leave me—O, do not leave me in anger!" cried Virginia, clinging to him. "Not trust you!—I!—not trust you! O, what *can* you mean? I have

no confessions to make! Mrs. Ormond knows every thought of my mind, and so shall you, if you will only hear me. I do not know who this man is, I assure you; nor where he is to be found."

"And yet you love him? Can you love a man whom you do not know, Virginia?"

"I only love his figure, I believe," said Virginia.

"His figure!"

"Indeed I am quite bewildered," said Virginia, looking round wildly; "I know not what I feel."

"If you permitted this man to kneel to you, to kiss your hand, surely you must know that you love him, Virginia?"

"But that was only in a dream; and Mrs. Ormond said——"

"Only a dream! But you met him at Mrs. Smith's, in the New Forest?"

"That was only a picture."

"Only a picture!—but you have seen the original?"

"Never—never in my life; and I wish to Heaven I had never, never seen the fatal picture! the image haunts me day and night. When I read of heroes in the day, that figure rises to my view, instead of yours. When I go to sleep at night, I see it, instead of yours, in my dreams; it speaks to me, it kneels to me. I long ago told Mrs. Ormond this, but she laughed at me. I told her of that frightful dream. I saw you weltering in your blood; I tried to save you, but could not. I heard you say, 'Perfidious, ungrateful Virginia! you are the cause of my death!'

Oh, it was the most dreadful night I ever passed ! Still this figure, this picture, was before me ; and he was the knight of the white plumes ; and it was he who stabbed you ; but when I wished him to be victorious, I did not know that he was fighting against you. So Mrs. Ormond told me that I need not blame myself ; and she said that you were not so foolish as to be jealous of a picture ; but I knew you would be displeased—I knew you would think me ungrateful—I knew you would never forgive me.”

Whilst Virigina rapidly uttered all this, Clarence marked the wild animation of her eyes, the sudden changes of her countenance ; he recollected her father’s insanity ; every feeling of his mind gave way to terror and pity ; he approached her with all the calmness that he could assume, took both her hands, and holding them in his, said, in a soothing voice—

“ My dear Virigina, you are not ungrateful. I do not think you so. I am not displeased with you. You have done nothing to displease me. Compose yourself, dear Virginia.”

“ I am quite composed, now you again call me dear Virginia. Only I am afraid, as I always told Mrs. Ormond, that I do not love you *enough* ; but she said that I did, and that my fear was the strongest proof of my affection.”

Virginia now spoke in so consistent a manner that Clarence could not doubt that she was in the clear possession of her understanding. She repeated to him all that she had said to Mrs. Ormond ; and he began to hope that, without any intention to deceive,

Mrs. Ormond's ignorance of the human heart led her into a belief that Virginia was in love with him ; whilst, in fact, her imagination, exalted by solitude and romance, embodied and became enamoured of a phantom.

" I always told Mrs. Ormond that she was mistaken," said Clarence. " I never believed that you loved me, Virginia, till—(he paused and carefully examined her countenance)—till you yourself gave me reason to think so. Was it only a principle of gratitude, then, that dictated your answer to my letter ? "

She looked irresolute : and at last, in a low voice, said, " If I could see, if I could speak to Mrs. Ormond——"

" She cannot tell what are the secret feelings of your heart, Virginia. Consult no Mrs. Ormond. Consult no human creature but yourself."

" But Mrs. Ormond told me that you loved me, and that you had educated me to be your wife."

Mr. Hervey made an involuntary exclamation against Mrs. Ormond's folly.

" How, then, can you be happy," continued Virginia, " if I am so ungrateful as to say I do not love you? That I do not *love* you!—O! *that* I cannot say; for I do love you better than any one living except my father, and with the same sort of affection that I feel for him. You ask me to tell you the secret feelings of my heart: the only secret feeling of which I am conscious is—a wish not to marry, unless I could see in reality such a person as—— But that I knew was only a picture, a dream; and

I thought that I ought at least to sacrifice my foolish imaginations to you, who have done so much for me. I knew that it would be the height of ingratitude to refuse you; and besides, my father told me that you would not accept of my fortune without my hand, so I consented to marry you: forgive me, if these were wrong motives—I thought them right. Only tell me what I can do to make you happy, as I am sure I wish to do; to that wish I would sacrifice every other feeling.”

“Sacrifice nothing, dear Virginia. We may both be happy without making any sacrifice of our feelings,” cried Clarence. And, transported at regaining his own freedom, Virginia’s simplicity never appeared to him so charming as at this moment. “Dearest Virginia, forgive me for suspecting you for one instant of any thing unhandsome. Mrs. Ormond, with the very best intentions possible, has led us both to the brink of misery. But I find you such as I always thought you, ingenuous, affectionate, innocent.”

“And you are not angry with me?” interrupted Virginia, with joyful eagerness; “and you will not think me ungrateful? And you will not be unhappy? And Mrs. Ormond was mistaken? And you do not wish that I should *love* you, that I should be your wife, I mean? O, don’t deceive me, for I cannot help believing whatever you say.”

Clarence Hervey, to give her a convincing proof that Mrs. Ormond had misled her as to his sentiments, immediately avowed his passion for Belinda.

“You have relieved me from all doubt, all fear,

all anxiety," said Virginia, with the sweetest expression of innocent affection in her countenance. "May you be as happy as you deserve to be! May Belinda—is not that her name?—May Belinda——"

At this moment lady Delacour half opened the door, exclaiming—

"Human patience can wait no longer!"

"Will you trust me to explain for you, dear Virginia?" said Clarence.

"Most willingly," said Virginia, retiring as lady Delacour advanced. "Pray leave me here alone, whilst you, who are used to talk before strangers, speak for me."

"Dare you venture, Clarence," said her ladyship, as she closed the door, "to leave her alone with that picture? You are no lover, if you be not jealous."

"I am not jealous," said Clarence, "yet I am a lover—a passionate lover."

"A passionate lover!" cried lady Delacour, stopping short as they were crossing the antechamber:—"then I have done nothing but mischief. In love with Virginia? I will not—cannot believe it."

"In love with Belinda!—Cannot you, will not you believe it?"

"My dear Clarence, I never doubted it for an instant. But are you at liberty to own it to any body but me?"

"I am at liberty to declare it to all the world."

"You transport me with joy! I will not keep you from her a second. But stay—I am sorry to

tell you, that, as she informed me this morning, *her heart is not at present inclined to love*. And here is Mrs. Margaret Delacour, poor wretch, in this room, dying with curiosity. Curiosity is as ardent as love, and has as good a claim to compassion."

As he entered the room, where there were only Mrs. Margaret Delacour and Belinda, Clarence Hervey's first glance, rapid as it was, explained his heart.

Belinda put her arm within lady Delacour's, trembling so that she could scarcely stand. Lady Delacour pressed her hand, and was perfectly silent.

"And what is miss Portman to believe," cried Mrs. Margaret Delacour, "when she has seen you on the very eve of marriage with another lady?"

"The strongest merit I can plead with such a woman as miss Portman is, that I was ready to sacrifice my own happiness to a sense of duty. Now that I am at liberty——"

"Now that you are at liberty," interrupted lady Delacour, "you are in a vast hurry to offer your whole soul to a lady, who has for months seen all your merits with perfect insensibility, and who has been, notwithstanding all my operations, stone blind to your love."

"The struggles of my passion cannot totally have escaped Belinda's penetration," said Clarence; "but I like her a thousand times the better for not having trusted merely to appearances. That love is most to be valued which cannot be easily won. In my opinion, there is a prodigious difference between a warm imagination and a warm heart."

"Well," said lady Delacour, "we have all of us seen *Pamela maritata*—let us now see *Belinda in love*, if that be possible. *If!* forgive me this last stroke, my dear—in spite of all my raillery, I do believe that the prudent Belinda is more capable of feeling real permanent passion than any of the dear sentimental young ladies, whose motto is

'All for love, or the world well lost.'

"That is just my opinion," said Mrs. Margaret Delacour. "But pray, what is become of Mr. Hartley?" looking round: "I do not see him."

"No: for I have hid him," said lady Delacour: "he shall be forthcoming presently."

"Dear Mr. Clarence Hervey, what have you done with my Virginia?" said Mrs. Ormond, coming into the room.

"Dear Mrs. Ormond, what have *you* done with her?" replied Clarence. "By your mistaken kindness, by insisting upon doing us both good against our wills, you were very near making us both miserable for life. But I blame nobody; I have no right to blame any one so much as myself. All this has arisen from my own presumption and imprudence. Nothing could be more absurd than my scheme of educating a woman in solitude to make her fit for society. I might have foreseen what must happen, that Virginia would consider me as her tutor, her father, not as her lover, or her husband; that with the most affectionate of hearts, she could for me feel nothing but *gratitude*."

"Nothing but gratitude!" repeated Mrs. Ormond,

with a degree of amazement in her countenance, which made every body present smile: "I am sure I thought she was dying for love of you."

"My dear Belinda," whispered lady Delacour, "if I might judge of the colour of this cheek, which has been for some moments permanent crimson, I should guess that you were beginning to find out *of what use the sun is to the dial*."

"You will not let me hear what Mr. Hervey is saying," replied Belinda; "I am very curious."

"Curiosity is a stronger passion than love, as I told him just now," said lady Delacour.

In spite of all his explanations, Mrs. Ormond could not be made to comprehend Virginia's feelings. She continually repeated, "But it is impossible for Virginia, or for any body, to be in love with a picture."

"It is not said that she is in love with a picture," replied Mrs. Delacour, "though even for that I could find you a precedent."

"My dear lady Delacour," said Mrs. Ormond, "will you explain to us how that picture came into your possession, and how it came here, and, in short, all that is to be known about it?"

"Ay, explain! explain! my dear lady Delacour," cried Mrs. Delacour: "I am afraid I am grown almost as curious as my lady Boucher. Explain! explain!"

"Most willingly," said lady Delacour. "To Marriott's ruling passion for birds you are all of you indebted for this discovery. Some time ago, whilst we were at Twickenham, as Marriott was waiting

at a stationer's, to bid her last adieus to a bullfinch, a gentleman came into the shop where she and Bobby (as she calls this bird) were coquetting, and the gentleman was struck even more than Marriott with the bullfinch. He went almost distracted on hearing a particular tune, which this bird sang. I suspected, from the symptoms, that the gentleman must be, or must have been, in love with the bullfinch's mistress. Now the bullfinch was traced home to the ci-devant Virginia St. Pierre, the present miss Hartley. I had my reasons for being curious about her loves and lovers, and as soon as I learned the story from Marriott, I determined, if possible, to find out who this stranger, with the strange passion for bullfinches, might be. I questioned and cross-questioned all those people at the stationer's who were present when he fell into ecstasies ; and, from the shopman, who had been bribed to secrecy, I learned that our gentleman returned to the stationer's the day after he met Marriott, and watched till he obtained a sight of Virginia, as she came to her window. Now it was believed by the girl of this shop, who had lived for some time with Mrs. Ormond——Forgive me, Mr. Hervey, for what I am going to say—forgive me, Mrs. Ormond—scandal, like death, is common to all——It was believed that Virginia was Mr. Hervey's mistress. My stranger no sooner learnt this than he swore that he would think of her no more ; and after bestowing a variety of seamen's execrations upon the villain who had seduced this heavenly creature, he departed from Twickenham, and was no more seen or heard of. My inquiries after

him were indefatigable, but for some time unsuccessful: and so they might have continued, and we might have been all making one another unhappy at this moment, if it had not been for Mr. Vincent's great dog Juba—miss Annabella Luttridge's billet-doux—sir Philip Baddely's insolence—my lord Delacour's belief in a quack balsam—and captain Sunderland's humanity.”

“Captain Sunderland! who is captain Sunderland? we never heard of him before,” cried Mrs. Ormond.

“You shall hear of him just as I did, if you please,” said lady Delacour, “and if Belinda will submit to hear me tell the same story twice.”

Here her ladyship repeated the history of the battle of the dogs; and of sir Philip Baddely's knocking down Juba, the man, for struggling in defence of Juba, the dog.

“Now the gentleman, who assisted my lord Delacour in bringing the disabled negro across the square to our house, was captain Sunderland. My lord summoned Marriott to produce lady Boucher's infallible balsam, that it might be tried upon Juba's sprained ankle. Whilst my lord was intent upon the balsam, Marriott was intent upon captain Sunderland. She recollected that she had met him somewhere before, and the moment he spoke, she knew him to be the gentleman who had fallen into ecstasies in the shop at Twickenham, about the bullfinch. Marriott hastened to me with the news; I hastened to my lord, made him introduce captain Sunderland to me, and I never rested till he had

told me all that I wanted to know. Some years ago, just before he went to sea, he paid a visit to his mother, who then lodged with a widow Smith, in the New Forest. Whilst he was there, he heard of the young beauty who lived in the Forest, with a grandmother, who was *not a little particular*; and who would not permit any body to see her.

“My captain’s curiosity was excited; one day, unseen by the duenna, he obtained a distinct view of Virginia, watering her roses and tending her bees. Struck with her uncommon beauty, he approached carefully to the thicket in which the cottage was enclosed, and found a *lair*, where he concealed himself, day after day, and contemplated at leisure the budding charms of the fair wood-nymph. In short, he became so enamoured, that he was determined to gain admittance at the cottage, and declare his passion: but to his honour be it told, that when the history of the poor girl’s mother, and the situation and fears of the old lady, who was her only friend, were known to him, in consideration of the extreme youth of the ward, and the extreme age of her guardian, he determined to defer his addresses till his return from the West-Indies, whither he was shortly to sail, and where he had hopes of making a fortune, that might put him in a situation to render the object of his affections independent. He left a bullfinch with Mrs. Smith, who gave it to Virginia, without telling to whom it had belonged, lest her grandmother might be displeased.

“I really thought that all this showed too nice a moral sense for a young dashing lieutenant in the

navy, and I was persuaded that my gentleman was only keeping his mistress's secret like a man of honour. With this belief, I regretted that Clarence Hervey should throw himself away upon a girl who was unworthy of him."

"I hope," interrupted Clarence, "you are perfectly convinced of your mistake."

"Perfectly! perfectly!—I am convinced that Virginia is only half mad. But let me go on with my story. I was determined to discover whether she had any remains of affection for this captain. It was in vain he assured me that she had never seen him. I prevailed upon him to let me go on my own way. I inquired whether he had ever had his picture drawn. Yes, he had for his mother, just when he first went out to sea. It had been left at the widow Smith's. I begged him to procure it for me. He told me it was impossible. I told him I trampled on impossibilities. In short, he got the picture for me, as you see. 'Now,' thought I, 'if he speaks the truth, Virginia will see this picture without emotion, and it will only seem to be a present for Clarence. But if she had ever seen him before, or had any secret to conceal, she will betray herself on the sudden appearance of this picture.' Things have turned out contrary to all my expectations, and yet better.—And now, Clarence, I must beg you will prevail on miss Hartley to appear; I can go on no farther without her."

Lady Delacour took Virginia by the hand, the moment she entered the room.

"Will you trust yourself with me, miss Hartley?"

said she. "I have made you faint once to-day by the sight of a picture; will you promise me not to faint again, when I produce the original?"

"The original!" said Virginia. "I will trust myself with you, for I am sure you cannot mean to laugh at me, though, perhaps, I deserve to be laughed at."

Lady Delacour threw open the door of another apartment. Mr. Hartley appeared, and with him captain Sunderland.

"My dear daughter," said Mr. Hartley, "give me leave to introduce to you a friend, to whom I owe more obligations than to any man living, except to Mr. Hervey. This gentleman was stationed some years ago at Jamaica, and in a rebellion of the negroes on my plantation he saved my life. Fortune has accidentally thrown my benefactor in my way. To show my sense of my obligations is out of my power."

Virginia's surprise was extreme; her vivid dreams, the fond wishes of her waking fancy, were at once accomplished. For the first moment she gazed as on an animated picture, and all the ideas of love and romance associated with this image rushed upon her mind.

But when the realities by which he was surrounded dispelled the illusion, she suddenly withdrew her eyes, and blushed deeply, with such timid and graceful modesty as charmed every body present.

Captain Sunderland pressed forward; but was stopped by lady Delacour.

“Avaunt, thou real lover!” cried she: “none but the shadow of a man can hope to approach the visionary maid. In vain has Marraton forced his way through the bushes and briars, in vain has he braved the apparition of the lion; there is yet a phantom barrier apparently impassable between him and his Yaratilda, for he is in the world of shadows. Now, mark me, Marraton: hurry not this delicate spirit, or perchance you frighten and lose her for ever; but have patience, and gradually and gracefully she will venture into your world of realities—only give her time.”

“Time! O yes, give me time,” cried Virginia, shrinking back.

“My dear miss Hartley,” continued lady Delacour, “in plain prose, to prevent all difficulties and embarrassments, I must inform you, that captain Sunderland will not insist upon prompt payment of your father’s debt of gratitude: he has but one quarter of an hour to spend with us—he is actually under sailing orders; so that you will have time to compose your mind before his return. Clarence, I advise you to accompany captain Sunderland on this cruise; don’t you, Belinda?”

“And now, my good friends,” continued lady Delacour, “shall I finish the novel for you?”

“If your ladyship pleases; nobody can do it better,” said Clarence Hervey.

“But I hope you will remember, dear lady Delacour,” said Belinda, “that there is nothing in which novellists are so apt to err as in hurrying things toward the conclusion: in not allowing *time* enough

for that change of feeling, which change of situation cannot instantly produce."

"That's right, my dear Belinda; true to your principles to the last gasp. Fear nothing—you shall have *time* enough to become accustomed to Clarence. Would you choose that I should draw out the story to five volumes more? With your advice and assistance, I can with the greatest ease, my dear. A declaration of love, you know, is only the beginning of things; there may be blushes, and sighs, and doubts, and fears, and misunderstandings, and jealousies without end or common sense, to fill up the necessary space, and to gain the necessary *time*; but if I might conclude the business in two lines, I should say,

‘Ye gods, annihilate both space and time,
And make four lovers happy.’”

"O, that would be cutting matters too short," said Mrs. Margaret Delacour. "I am of the old school; and though I could dispense with the description of miss Harriot Byron's worked chairs and fine china, yet I own I like to hear something of the preparation for a marriage, as well as of the mere wedding. I like to hear *how* people become happy in a rational manner, better than to be told in the huddled style of an old fairy tale—and so they were all married, and they lived very happily all the rest of their days."

"We are not in much danger of hearing such an account of modern marriages," said lady Delacour.

"But how shall I please you all?—Some people cry, 'Tell me every thing;' others say, that, *le secret d'ennuyer est celui de tout dire.*"

"*Le secret d'ennuyer est celui de tout dire.*"

"Something must be left to the imagination. Positively I will not describe wedding-dresses, or a procession to church. I have no objection to saying that the happy couples were united by the worthy Mr. Moreton; that Mr. Percival gave Belinda away; and that immediately after the ceremony, he took the whole party down with him to Oakly-park. Will this do?—Or, we may conclude, if you like it better, with a characteristic letter of congratulation from Mrs. Stanhope to her *dearest* niece, Belinda, acknowledging that she was wrong to quarrel with her for refusing sir Philip Baddely, and giving her infinite credit for that admirable *management* of Clarence Hervey, which she hopes will continue through life."

"Well, I have no objection to ending with a letter," said Mrs. Delacour; "for last speeches are always tiresome."

"Yes," said her ladyship; "it is so difficult, as the critic says, to get lovers off upon their knees. Now I think of it, let me place you all in proper attitudes for stage effect. What signifies being happy, unless we appear so?—Captain Sunderland—kneeling with Virginia, if you please, sir, at her father's feet: you in the act of giving them your blessing, Mr. Hartley. Mrs. Ormond clasps her hands with joy—nothing can be better than that, madam—I give you infinite credit for the attitude. Clarence,

you have a right to Belinda's hand, and may kiss it too: nay, miss Portman, it is the rule of the stage. Now, where's my lord Delacour? he should be embracing me, to show that we are reconciled. Ha! here he comes—Enter lord Delacour, with little Helena in his hand—very well! a good start of surprise, my lord—stand still, pray; you cannot be better than you are: Helena, my love, do not let go your father's hand. There! quite pretty and natural! Now, lady Delacour, to show that she is reformed, comes forward to address the audience with a moral—a moral! Yes,

‘Our *tale* contains a *moral*; and, no doubt,
You all have wit enough to find it out.’”

(*Written in 1800.*
Published in 1801.)

