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THE
HISTORY OF A FLIRT

RELATED BY HERSELF.

“Disdain and Scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprizing what they look on ; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak : she cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear’d.”

SHAKSPEARE.

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HISTORY OF A FLIRT.

CHAPTER I.

THE following morning when we met at breakfast one of our party was missing. Charles was off to Bradford at break of day. We had much conversation on the subject, but not one of us could bring to mind an incident or a recollection to prove the existence of an attachment between Charles and Emma. Men were sly and obstinate when events called their passions forth, therefore from Charles we should learn nothing, but the day might elicit something on Emma's part. If an affection existed between them, it would be a miserable affair, for old Brereton was sturdy as the oak, and having once disclosed his mind, no earthly power could induce him to change its determi-

nation. For Charles, therefore, all was hopeless, should he have rashly sought the affection of Emma Brereton, and surely the day could not glide by without something being discovered by four pair of female eyes which should decide our alarms, or set them for ever at rest.

The morning passed heavily enough, Miss Partington and Mary were naturally occupied with thoughts which denied all lively conversation : they looked as though they were preparing for some distant regions, and were never more to behold their country or their friends. Even in my gloomy days, when I contemplated my own existence with Mr. Ellis, I never wore so solemn an expression as their countenances exhibited. My mother's anxious expression I could understand well. She was to be left alone with me, her erring one ! She was to depend in future upon me for amusement and companionship, a thought which might well destroy *her* hope ; but matrimony, which inflicted an agreeable and wealthy baronet upon one party, and Jenkins with the Grange and its pigeon-house upon the other ! To arrive at one's dearest wish, grasp a reality, and yet look so dismal—strange !

The Bradford party drove up before the

dressing-bell had rung, and I absented myself till I concluded the sentimentals were at an end. I hated sentiment and tears beyond expression. When I descended, all was calm except the voice of Charles, which was in full play, and his gibe was at Mary's expense.

“ My dear, I called at the Grange, as a good brother ought, just to inquire how the doctor felt after sleeping upon Captain Bates's song. It had certainly acted as an opiate, for he had slept excellently, and was perfectly free from gouty symptoms. I am seriously of opinion you will have but little to do in the nursing department, and the doctor may be actioned for marrying under false pretences.”

“ How very foolishly you talk, Charles !”

“ Not at all. If a woman takes the doctor under the pleasing idea of nursing him, and being settled for life in one room at the Grange, and then finds she has wedded a stout alert fellow, such as the doctor threatens to be now ; under such cases he has deceived her, and she is entitled to her action to recover her invalid : why, instead of poor Mary finding her tranquillity in that underground room, she will be raced round that Martello tower, and her poor constitution shattered with running after her husband into the row of closets, and up and down the

garden walks. Never mind, Mary, I will see fair play.”

Charles rattled on in despite of serious looks, and turned towards me when other game failed.

“ Louisa, I never saw you look so charmingly ; doubtless the air is perfumed with matrimonial arrangements, and you have taken in large draughts of hope.”

“ It may be so, Charles, take care the perfume does not overcome your own senses, as the powerful effects may not have such a favourable influence upon yourself.”

Charles did not reply. He was evidently embarrassed, and for once in my life I silenced the fearless tongue of my brother: by that token I knew he loved Emma Brereton, for less than some peculiarly strong feeling had not stopped the career of his jokes. Emma was examining a portfolio of engravings, and did not appear to hear our short dialogue. Charles passed on to the window, and contemplated the churchyard, Henry Brereton sat flirting with his wife on the sofa, but I still fancied him vulgarised in his air and manner. Those horrid gray pantaloons, perhaps, or the sit of his hair, which was cut in Bradford, and looked so like a Wesleyan missionary. We all affected an employment, to appear occupied, till the sum-

mons to dinner relieved the tedium, and changed the scene. Emma Brereton was seated by Charles, at the foot of the table, and being at liberty to attend to the movements of others, my attention was bent upon attending to their motions. I saw the look which Charles gave her, when my mother, in the course of conversation, alluded to Mr. Brereton's absence and eventual visit to Bradford, and I saw the paleness which passed over Emma's cheeks at some whispered remarks from Charles. In other respects all was caution, or apparent indifference, and I was never able to give my attention long to any subject in which I had no concern. I felt there was a spell upon the general tone of sprightliness which never before failed our family party, but as the morrow was to remove two favourites from its number, its silence was at once accounted for. Henry Brereton addressed me in his usual style of polite badinage, but I was changed in my tastes, and would not lend my spirits to assist in dispelling the gloom of the evening. I could not banter with a man who had chosen my sister, and was that wearisome creature ycleped a clergyman: besides, my views were enlarged since our Bath days, and I never could endure gray pantaloons. Our evening was, therefore,

as dull as evenings generally appear when they precede great and overpowering events. All the party were glad to retire early: one by one they stole away to their apartments, and I was happy when the great chain affixed to the hall-door gave evidence by its rattling, that the last work was over, and all was closed for the night.

For some time after my withdrawing to rest, I fancied I heard voices murmuring in the parlour, over which I slept. At first I conceived it to be my fancy, but when the clock struck twelve, I became curious to ascertain what restless spirits were yet awake, or whether illness had called any one from their airy dreams. I groped silently to the head of the stairs, and beheld Emma Brereton and Charles issuing from the sitting-room, and pass stealthily to the foot of the staircase upon which I stood. Not a word passed between them in the hall: I saw Charles press his lips fondly upon her hand, and she vainly for some moments endeavoured to disengage it from his grasp. Charles passed on to his own chamber below, and Emma moved lightly towards Mary's apartment. By the light of her candle, which glared once over her face, I saw tears streaming down her cheeks, and her bosom heaved with suppressed sobs. It was

clear there was something wrong, and poor Emma was unhappy; but time must unfold all things, and I retired to my room, resolved to be silent on the events of the night.

The morning was ushered in with all the accompanying agreeables of a wedding-day. The sun rose splendidly, the birds twittered, all was sparkling joyousness. Charles was in mad spirits, and overpowered the brides with his vivacity: he was in a humour which defied all control, and its bolt fell upon Mary. He worried her to death upon the subject of Dr. Drinkwater's foot.

“ If the doctor stumbles at the church door, Mary, by my soul it's your own fault: what with your blushes and white roses, and that killing dress, it's enough to set him prancing, and unless I walk steadily before him with a crutch, to remind him of his ‘ human natur,’ as Mrs. Jones has it, he will be down. Babylon will be fallen, fallen !”

“ My dear Charles, have mercy upon me: I am not equal to bear a jest, and you destroy my little stock of fortitude.”

Mary found absence her only means of preserving calmness, and she withdrew till the summons to church compelled her reappearance. Charles was too affectionate to give pain: he flew to Mary as she was leaving the company,

and they were *tête-à-tête* for some little time in the drawing-room. When Charles returned, he contented himself with general remarks, addressed to Captain Bates, who had arrived with his daughter.

“Is it not odd, captain, that women are never consistent?—is it not wonderful that they spend their time and tears and invention upon a man till they have caught him, and then they sigh, and weep, and talk of fearful changes, and men’s tempers?”

The question was happily put, for Captain Bates had a theory which he fondled and dandled like an infant, and this was the moment to reproduce it.

“Sir, what is happiness? Is any one happy? Does any one ever look happy, or treat one so like a fool as to persuade one they are happy? Women, Sir, must have something to do, and they run after shadows, and think matrimony is happiness because they know nothing about it; but their hearts fail them on the threshold, because it is not in nature to be happy.”

“But is it not odd, Bates, that they are as positive as the devil upon points till they are obtained, and then one has such trouble to keep them in good humour with their own inventions? There’s Mary, who has been three

years resolved to have Drinkwater—she has loved him, and overlooked all his oddities, and fixed her wedding-day; and now I'll be hanged if I think I shall get her into church."

"Poor thing, poor thing," exclaimed the captain, roused and interested at the idea of real sorrowing, "perhaps the longer we delay the ceremony the worse she will be. Since matrimony is to be undertaken, let them be hurried on: they don't know what they undertake. Some of us are rascals, Vansittart, and don't do our duty by these trusting helpless things; but it's no use looking back: if a man looked often into the past, he would commit suicide."

The captain shuddered as he uttered the last words of his apostrophe: some recollections, haply of his own "past," gave birth to his theory of life being a chain of misery; for he was rarely in spirits unless under the influence of society and the wine-cup.

Charles looked at his watch, and glanced round the room.

"Are you all ready, girls? your hour is come, and we must away."

A little bustle succeeded: my mother did not appear till she joined the little band to move towards the church, and the transit was made

in silence. No one spoke to her, or dared to notice the event of the day. It was evident her mind was charged to go through the ceremony with fortitude, but an effort to speak would have disordered the machinery, and unnerved her. Miss Partington was handsomely dressed, but her good taste forbade the white rose and the white pelisse. She was sufficiently ornamented with her gentle manners and sweet expression of countenance. Emma Brereton attended her, and I saw Charles gaze upon her delicate beauty with marked admiration. She, however, avoided his eye. Sir James Langham and the doctor were in the porch: Sir James approached with his usual *nonchalance*, and gave his arm to my mother; but he talked to his bride.

“You see, the better the day the better deed, Anne. You have been rather slow in your movements. We two unfortunate fellows have been here this quarter of an hour, perhaps caught our deaths in this cold porch.”

No one could reply in a playful strain, though Miss Partington's eyes spoke the feelings of her heart. Charles had edged himself close to Emma, and forgot he was to lead the *cortège* to the altar. Dr. Drinkwater was a new creature: there he stood, in a suit fresh from St. James's-street; his feet garnished in brightest boots;

his hands sporting delicate white gloves, and a chain meandering round his neck, and losing itself in the pocket of his flowered waistcoat. There he stood, upright in his manliness; and, to a female eye, soared far above contempt, in point of appearance. His eye sparkled, though his tongue was mute: he looked at Mary and met her approving eye: what a moment was that!

“Kill or cure,” whispered Charles to me as we lingered in the porch: “Drinkwater is arriving at a crisis.”

Old Jones was at the altar awaiting our approach, and Charles, recovering his recollection, advanced towards him leading Miss Partington. Our places were silently adjusted, and in a few minutes Lady Langham was saluted by her friends, and claimed by her husband, as the treasure who was to heighten and brighten his futurity. The bride received the congratulations of her friends with modest satisfaction. Her lot was well drawn: she was winning a prize in the lottery of life; but who envied a woman so beloved? Even I looked on with sincere interest, and spoke the feelings of my heart, when I wished her the happiness she had so often sought to confer on others.

But another pause, and Mary was standing

in Lady Langham's place to give and receive vows—every heart warmed to behold her so lovely, but few could pronounce upon her destiny. She was giving herself to a man whose honour and affection were unquestioned, but her youth must be linked to disease, and her hours devoted to nursing. It was vain to hope the doctor would find a complete panacea in a wife—the mind rejected such a thought—he would find in her society a companion, a wife, and a nurse; but what was her prospect? In my eyes the doctor stood beside her in borrowed plumes, and the gay peacock's feathers only sheltered the daw. Stultz might brace up the frame, and Hoby might restrain the swelling ankle for an hour's ceremony, but the canker was in the system, and Mary's destiny must be a fearful speculation. Such thoughts must have arisen in the mind of all who surrounded her. My mother's deep sighs evinced her fears for Mary's hereafter; and the tears which trickled down the cheeks of Charlotte and Lady Langham as Mary spoke her vow, gave token of the one engrossing feeling respecting her happiness. The ceremony ended, and all was over! Mary did not return home. Charles had arranged with Dr. Drinkwater to depart from the church door, and his argument had been unanswerable.

“I tell you what, my dear fellow, don't think of hobbling down to breakfast with us, or those boots will give you a twinge. You have made a most creditable appearance, and done wonders; now take Mary, and be off the moment you can escape; and the sooner you get those boots off the better.”

Dr. Drinkwater required little counsel when it tallied with his own notions. He had a horror of scenes, and a distaste to society beyond a family circle: to escape a wedding breakfast would be most congenial to his feelings; he should escape a speech, and the annoyance of forgetting people's names: he should escape the confusion, the rating, the talking; he should escape a thousand evils and a thousand alarms, and he most willingly entered into Charles' views if Mary did not mind the arrangement. But poor Mary was a child in their hands: her affectionate regrets at quitting her home overpowered all attempts to place any plan before her judgment. She was powerless and speechless. Brereton took my mother home, and they were followed by Sir James and his bride to keep her in ignorance of Mary's rapid disappearance; Charlotte, Emma, and myself remained to support Mary till the Grange carriage was hurried to the door.

“In, in with you, Mary, and God bless you,” cried Charles, as he almost carried the weeping girl into the chariot. “We are only parting for a few days, and Drinkwater’s boots are pinching him like the devil, I can see.” He turned to the doctor. “Well, my good fellow, pet Mary, and take off those confounded boots. Let us see you in a few days at the Grange, and be happy as I wish you from my heart.”

Dr. Drinkwater soberly followed Mary into the dark-green chariot. At first he looked amazed at finding himself in so novel a situation, but the bridegroom conquered, and he bowed to each of us as we stood round the steps of the carriage. Jenkins was near to assist his master’s volition; the door closed, Jenkins scrambled into the rumble, and Dr. and Mrs. Drinkwater drove steadily through the churchyard gates.

We were in a few minutes busy doing the honours of the breakfast-table. My mother did not appear, but Charles was all sufficient in keeping up the ball of conversation. He applauded himself for the dexterity with which he had contrived to shorten the doctor’s sufferings.

“Ten minutes more, and the doctor would have been a dead man. He could not have

borne his honours another instant, and that I provided against by advising him to exit instantaneously. I advised him, too, not to put gay notions into his wife's head by driving to Gloucester, but recommended him to take an airing, and then both go quietly to dinner at the Grange."

"The doctor will be in better health," observed Brereton; "the mind has so much influence upon the frame—his dull way of life was enough to give disease."

"I hope so," answered Charles, feelingly and seriously; "if his health does not amend, my sister has been sacrificed. Lady Langham, you are making a poor breakfast. Sir James, when do you give us our friend again?"

Sir James was the *beau ideal*, at that moment, of perfect content. He was sitting by his bride, and chatting to his neighbours. Captain Bates declared it was disgusting and unnatural to see any one look so happy the first thing in the morning! When a man had made a good meal, and drank a glass or two of champagne, there was some sense in it; but to chatter away upon an empty stomach, made him think ill of the man who could do it.

Sir James did not long offend. A stylish equipage with four greys dashed up to the door,

and soon lessened our party by withdrawing Sir James and our beloved friend. While the adieus were taking place, and my mother held Lady Langham long to her heart, the gentlemen were surveying the horses, and approving the admirable turn-out. Sir James would not be denied an interview with my mother: he embraced her affectionately.

“You were everything to me, Mrs. Vansittart, in my days of supplication, and I will not forget you in the day of my power. I will bring Anne home the moment I have introduced her to my family.”

“Let it be soon,” replied my mother, struggling for cheerfulness, “I lose two daughters this morning, but I know they will soon be returned to me. God bless you as you make dearest Anne happy!”

“God bless you,” was reiterated, and caught from mouth to mouth; the blessing of each was sincere. None were loved more exclusively by their friends than her who was now on the point of departure.

“Louisa,” she said, as she passed from my embrace, “come freely to me as in times past, and depend upon my friendship.”

I pressed her hand—it was all I could do—her friendship had indeed been tried with me,

and had never failed. I wished her in my heart a happy destiny—at least she deserved it.

Soon after the departure of the Langhams, our party dispersed. Captain Bates walked with his very disagreeable daughter to their solitary home; the Breretons set off to Bradford, and Charles would not be left behind.

“For a few days at least,” he said, “there would be nothing but sighing and moaning, and ladies were better alone; he would return when he knew his sister had reached the Grange.” He therefore departed with them, and my mother’s future comfort was to depend upon my exertions. What a trial for her patience!

I cannot take any merit to myself for my conduct during the week which elapsed before Mary took possession of the Grange. My mother made no complaints, and exacted no attentions. I fancied everything moved on in its usual routine, and I tried to seek pleasure in home pursuits, but without effect. Nothing could interest me—all was so dull and uniform. If Dyneton had lived, I could have entered into a flirtation, or had young Jones been forthcoming, he would have amused the passing hour; but I had no resources within to employ and improve my mind. I could not exist without excitement, and levity or folly awoke me in-

stantly into action. I cannot imagine who I took after. My father was domestic and highly informed. I inherited it not from him; but there are strange forms of character in all families: perhaps had he lived to direct my studies, I had turned out differently; his strong mind might have guided the bent of my character, and raised passions into virtues. It was now too late to hope anything.

Charles returned on the following Thursday: his expression was changed, and his manner I thought less gentle than its usual bearing. He was restless and uncertain in his movements, and his lively tone of conversation became abrupt and sarcastic in comparison with its general flow of good-humoured raillery. We were continually snubbing each other. My temper would not endure irritation, and his nature, labouring under some concealed vexation, became harsh towards myself. We were wretched company to my poor mother; but her self-control enabled her to appear cheerful under our constant bickerings.

Mary's *entrée* to the Grange relieved us all from mental bondage. The Grange was neutral ground, where each could find change of scene, and an affectionate welcome, and as the doctor loved society uncrippled by restraint, the

Grange was a perpetual resort for the weary and idle, where public matters were discussed, and private grievances attended to, by the gentle peace-loving Mary. The Grange became our place of refuge. The doctor sat placidly in his own chair of state, as he had always done in his bachelor days, and was infinitely amused in listening to our *morceaux* of scandal. The "cell," as I had long anticipated, was the favoured sitting-room. I found Mary and the doctor seated there the very day after their return, like two carved images which had never departed from their original place of rest. The "cell" bore some more pleasing specimens of mortality; but it was in sooth a gloomy habitation for Mary. Her taste had placed a basket of flowering shrubs in the window, and her workbox enlivened the general aspect of things by its crimson lining. Its greatest boast was herself, seated smiling near her husband, satisfied with her situation and prospects, and lending a grace to the dismal apartment; but none could descend those steps without imagining a gentle being immured in a living tomb. How my mother wept as we returned from our first visit!

"Mary is happy, and she looks so," she observed to me; "but I cannot endure that room; I feel as if I had buried my child!"

“How did you spend your week at Gloucester, Mary?” I asked, during my first call.

“Very pleasantly. We walked over the cathedral one morning, and we meant to have walked every day, but I think the cold stones rather affected Gideon’s foot, so we contented ourselves with an airing each morning.”

“But where did you drive?”

“Generally on the Cheltenham road. We intended peeping at Cheltenham, but we never got quite so far.”

“Then you saw nothing and no one?”

“I fancied I saw the Walkers in Gloucester, but you know Gideon could not change his pace, and I did not care to leave him, so we did not meet, and I never saw them again; indeed we did not walk afterwards.”

“You had a most agreeable week, Mary.”

“Yes; Gideon was wonderfully well, and has been in good spirits, as he always is you know, when free from pain. I hope it will continue, poor dear man,” and Mary gave such an affectionate look at her husband, as he sat talking to my mother about what’s-his-names!

How differently people think and talk of happiness! Some pursue a phantom, some a reality, some chase a butterfly, and some pursue a beetle: some toil to gain a summit, and some love

to slide downwards. All are seeking happiness, and life passes in the search. I was also seeking it, but not in humble scenes; Mary had acquired it, for she looked happy, and her feelings always shone in her eyes. Her idea of content disgusted me. I spurned a life passed in seclusion, and the infliction of such a husband as the doctor would have driven me into suicide. Which succeeded best in their search after happiness? She was decidedly happy; I was dragging on a useless existence without one pleasing recollection; I was then toiling to gain a summit, and Mary had chosen a happy valley. Her fate was decided, mine was yet on the anvil. I looked for novelty at the hermitage. The Langhams would bring new people round them, and Sir James must have many acquaintance who would import novelty and amusement into our quiet regions. Much did I anticipate in their return to the hermitage; but I little reckoned how deeply it was to affect my destiny.

It seemed fated that we were never more to exist without marked events in our family, and one year had already done much. Charlotte was married, and Mary was a wife, and Miss Partington had done wonders; for she was married into a high station without youth or beauty, and her husband was a man who might have

chosen from the flower of nobility without fear of refusal. I had made myself somewhat notorious, and had done unwisely in throwing from me wealth and high worth; but Charles was now the foreground figure. He made known to my mother his fixed attachment to Emma Brereton, and implored her to use all her influence in gaining her father's consent. My mother was stupified with the intelligence which opened her eyes for the first time to this untoward event, and she was at once aware of its hopelessness.

“ Charles, I was ignorant of this, when I assured Mr. Brereton of the falsity of a report which had reached him on the subject.”

“ It may be so, mother; but I love her and will marry her. If I can get his sanction, well and good; but I will never consent to renounce her.”

“ And how does Emma feel disposed?” asked my mother.

“ She loves me, that is sufficient. She is resolved, she says, not to marry without her father's consent; but if I possess her affections, I hold her will in my own hands.”

“ You are ignorant of Emma's character,” said my mother, composedly.

“ She will be like all young ladies who love,

I dare say," replied my brother, his eyes and manner kindling. "She loves me, and she will not dastardly renounce me to please a ——"

"Charles!" said my mother, solemnly; "speak of a parent with respect. Mr. Brereton's objections, however trifling they appear to you, were spoken openly, and from the first moments of Charlotte's engagement."

"I loved long before Charlotte's engagement. Any one might have seen our attachment."

"We were not aware of it, my dear son, and we have canvassed the subject often. Even Charlotte has not discovered it in her own friend."

"Ah! there it was. I implored Emma not to confide to any one our engagement, as things might arise to forward it, and I would not hear of separation; I wish now I had consulted Charlotte."

Charles walked up and down the room in great agitation. He continued: "As to relinquishing my engagement, that is a proposition I will never listen to. If Emma consents to accept a poor man, no one need interfere in a concern which affects her and me only."

"Does not your wellbeing equally affect others?" asked my mother, as tears silently swept down her cheeks.

Charles was affected: he was an excellent son, and save in this moment of excitement had never spoken a word to give our parent cause for sorrow: he was in a moment at her side.

“Forgive me, mother, if I speak anything offensive to your feelings, but I am miserable, and, what is worse, deeply in love—a love I cannot control, and will not resign. Emma is miserable, and I cannot see her sorrow, without feeling roused to every exertion to soften and compose it.”

“To me,” replied my mother, “Emma is a wife I would gladly seek for my son, if such an event could produce competence.”

“You love her, then!” cried Charles, wild with delight, and seizing her hands. “You love her, mother!”

“She would be dear to me as my own daughters, Charles; but do not hope against hope. Mr. Brereton’s consent will never be given, and I will not authorize deception. Go to him and explain yourself, and bring me the result: if you bring his consent, my heart will spring to your wife; but expect no assistance in defying her father from me. I will never lend myself to any project which can commit one parent with another. Go to Mr. Brereton, Charles.”

“Not yet, not yet; I dare not meet his hor-

rible denial to drive me to extremity yet. Let me have one week more of her society—let me see her one week more in composure, and then for the strife, mother ; but not yet.”

“ You are wrong, Charles, in warding off a blow which must reach you at last. Be a man, my son, and meet your trial as becomes a man.”

“ I will not, cannot relinquish Emma.”

“ This is sad nonsense,” said my mother, whose courage rose in proportion as Charles became weakened ; “ I cannot endure this unmanly strain. I will write to Mr. Brereton. If any observations of mine can soften his resolves, I will leave nothing unsaid or untold ; but if the parent is inexorable, let us meet the storm in patience, my dear son, and do not let me see a woman’s weakness in you.”

“ Feel as I do !” cried Charles, snatching up his hat, “ feel as *I* do, before you talk so calmly of meeting a trial, which distracts me only to contemplate. You women, born to go smoothly down the stream, cannot know a tithe of what *we* feel when our passions are up, and our devotion is wedded to a woman we love ! It is well for you to talk of woman’s weakness, who bend to the blast, and change with every wind of heaven ; but our energies destroy us ! Write to him, mother—write ! he may decide to part

us; but I vow no human being shall tear Emma from me!"

"It is vain contending with you, Charles," replied my mother, gently. "You are of an age to act up to the principles I have instilled into you, therefore I must cease to counsel you. Respect a parent's wishes, and have mercy upon a girl who gives you her heart; poor Miss Brereton will have enough to reproach herself with—do not add your violence to her sorrow."

"What has she to reproach herself with? Who insinuates that she has done wrong? Who infers an impropriety on the part of Emma, in my hearing?"

Charles struck his hat forcibly with his hand. I really thought he was preparing to strike us both, and I had not looked up during the scene to create offence, as far as I was concerned. The hat alone suffered, however, and the movement calmed him.

"I had better go to Bradford again, mother; I am not fit to converse with you yet, and you must make allowance for my temper, which is sorely tried just now. Let me know when you hear from old Brereton, and forgive my impetuosity, dear mother. I will have a few more happy days, and then for what may follow. Shake hands, mother."

My mother did more—she kissed him with tenderness, and the action brought tears into his eyes.

“Well, you are good creatures and steady friends, in spite of my philippic. What should we do without you, your consolation, and your gentleness? It has already soothed me; I wish all men were women. God bless you, mother! perhaps I may find things better than I expect, and then we will have another wedding soon, and you will see us all on our way before you—how mortifying!” And Charles went singing forth to the stable, as if he was charged with Mr. Brereton’s actual assent to the match.

How unstable men generally are! either a whirlwind or a burning sun is in their soul. They may well do us occasional justice, it comes rarely in time to be received agreeably. It is only a burst of conscience, which succeeds a volcanic eruption, and we are not prepared to accept a balm while the wound still smarts—it is a poor compensation for being flurried to death—and I rather imagined we had much annoyance in store, from this display of my brother’s character under Cupid’s banner. There was a germ of my own waywardness apparent in his manner, and perhaps the safest way was to let the torrent expend itself. My

mother was strongly apprehensive of consequences, from the very decided tone of Mr. Brereton's harangue to her upon a mere report, but her part was quickly taken: a letter stating facts was despatched to Mr. Brereton, and how he would view the matter time must prove, for nothing could now be undone, and there must follow decided good, or decided evil.

All was tranquil for a few days, and fear seemed to lull into hope with the lovers. Things began to resume a *couleur de rose* hue, and we all met to dine *en famille* at the Grange, that is, ourselves and the Breretons. Mary was all smiles and kindness, and the doctor almost walked upright. Certainly he had improved by matrimony, and Captain Bates was right when he pronounced gout to be chiefly a mental disease; the doctor's case proved it so: Charles was in high spirits—for Emma was by his side—and he had no concealments: his love was audibly and momentarily expressed by look and in speech—but hers was a suffering countenance. There was suspense and alarm in every line, and her spirits could not reply to her lover's demand upon them. When her countenance was in repose, no marble could be paler than her once blooming cheeks, and the expression of her eye was heavy and hopeless. What a change in a

few weeks! And suspense was destroying that beauty which all had so admired for its joyousness; it was eating into her heart, and poisoning the sources of life! Well might Shakspeare deem it "the worm i' th' bud;" it had consumed her damask cheek, and was preying upon her frame.

Was this picture of love less fearful than the remembrance of Mary Pearson! What might not Emma Brereton endure should her father persist in opposing her affection! Charles snatched the present moments of treacherous security to rivet his chain, heedless of the future; but Emma's face spoke a tale of endurance which must snap if strained beyond her strength. I looked at her with interest—I never gained her love, and even now she avoided me though I could have wept over her, and I was the sister of her lover. It was my principles she doubted, and I had given her no reason to believe them changed.

My mother was disturbed at witnessing the change, but she did not guess the intensity of her sufferings. Her manner towards her was pointedly kind and matronly as to a woman she could have wished for a daughter; but under existing circumstances, she abstained from yielding to all her feelings. Emma's eyes filled with

tears as she addressed her, but Charles gloried in the sight, and rattled on in his highest spirits.

The doctor, who never heard or saw, but through the medium of a third person, was deaf and blind this day to everything around him. Mary did the honours, and the doctor sat watching her, wondering at his own good fortune, and trying to remember every one's name. At our coffee, he was almost playful, and might have been too active, had not the watchful eye of Mary observed his wanderings, and restored him to his chair of state; he was chatty too, and made some remarks, which he was honest enough to confess were not his own: "Mary had said so in the morning."

"Let us hear now, Drinkwater," cried Charles, full of glee, "how you came to be so long bringing a lady here."

The doctor blushed and looked at Mary. She met his appealing eye, and answered its purport like a good wife and true.

"Of course, Charles, because he was waiting for me; don't ask questions, but marry yourself, and avoid such a painful situation."

"Depend upon my obeying your injunction," replied Charles, as he seated himself by Emma on the sofa. "Who would remain single, but ill-tempered men and blue-stocking women?"

Look at Brereton and Charlotte—look at our host and hostess—does not content revel in their eye and play upon their tongue? Does not memory revive its power, and disease retreat under the blue sky of matrimony !”

“ I don’t say, ‘ what’s-his-name,’ so often as I once did,” observed the doctor, modestly.

We all smiled at the matter-of-fact observation, which increased the general harmony. My mother sat in pleased observation at Mary’s perfect enjoyment of herself and friends, and felt assured all her contention would be on the single point of ill health. If the doctor should continue in some degree of improvement, Mary would reign Lady Paramount in all things. Ill health might sour and destroy her present happy position, but now she was the gem of his heart, and her only prayer could be for a continuance of present blessings.

There is something very exhilarating in coffee—its very perfume enlivens and refreshes the spirits. I saw even Emma beginning to raise her drooping head, to reply cheerfully to her lover’s unceasing attentions; she was smiling upon him as he forcibly engaged her notice by repeated lover-like actions—Brereton and the doctor were quietly sipping their coffee, and droning out an occasional remark—my mother

and sisters sat together, deep in some engrossing topic—I lounged in an arm-chair as usual, turning to gone-by scenes—all were happy and idle in their different degrees, when a loud ring discomposed our grouping.

“What ‘what’s-his-name’ can possibly be coming here? Mary,” cried the doctor, it’s very late!”

“I am sure I cannot imagine, Gideon; perhaps a mistake.”

“Some one has run up against your pigeon-house, my dear fellow, and broke his head: you are bound to nurse him gratis,” cried Charles, starting up.

“No, no!” exclaimed Emma; “I hear him, I know his step; it is vain to resist. Mrs. Vansittart, it is so like him—I am sure it is him—listen!”

A moment’s silence, and a heavy step approached the door—the doctor looked petrified at a strange footfall advancing towards his sanctuary which he was totally unprepared to meet. He turned to his wife, as his invulnerable ægis, to seek comfort in her eyes; but the door had opened, and Mr. Brereton stood before us.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was an awful pause. Emma withered under the expression of her father's eye as he approached at once towards her. "Emma, I have been at Bradford; you were not there. I seek you here, and command you to return instantly with me home."

"I will, father," murmured the trembling girl.

"Yet let me speak a word to this good company. Mrs. Vansittart, I thank you for writing to me: you acted honourably by me, madam; but my intentions were never secret, and I never change. I told you I would never bear a second intermarriage with any family, I have known their results, madam, and my orders were from the first peremptory."

Charles hurried forward: "Mr. Brereton, blame only me, I am alone the offender and the sufferer."

“Hold your tongue, sir, my business is with my daughter, and I allow no young man to sting me in thought or deed, and then brave me with jingling words. You knew my objection: did not my daughter inform you of my resolutions, sir?”

“I did, I did,” sobbed Emma, sinking on the sofa, “and God forgive me for forgetting my duty in listening to him!”

“Then, sir, return to your regiment, and try to forget your fault; but my business is not with *you*. I disdain a war of words, when disobedience and selfishness are proved; I am here as an offended father, and I am come for my daughter. Did I not tell you, Emma, to close your heart against Captain Vansittart in earlier days?”

“It is true, father,” Emma uttered with difficulty.

“Did I not trust you, when you expressed a wish to visit your brother, and did I not believe in the faith and honour of my child?”

“Oh, my father, I own it, on my knees I own it,” cried the poor girl, sinking down before him.

“You have disobeyed me,” continued Mr. Brereton with energy. “You have forgotten a child’s duty, and joined with a stranger to

mock your father: it was pleasant perhaps to deceive and defy an old man, and laugh my grey hairs to scorn; but when did a disobedient child ever prosper, or eat the bread of thankfulness when they had struck at a parent's heart?"

Emma writhed under her father's displeasure, and his last words seemed to wither her soul; she fell at his feet as if lightning had struck her there, and for some minutes all assistance was useless in restoring animation. My mother wept over her as she held her cold hands, and watched her unclosing eyes. Mr. Brereton looked sternly on. He turned to my brother, who looked petrified with horror.

"You see now, young man, the consequences of drawing a human being from the path of duty. Your selfish feelings, begun in fancy and ending in determined error, bring this punishment upon yourself. If you have one spark of generosity, leave me now in peace, and cease to persecute my daughter. Let her fault be chastised here, that future pangs may be spared her, and if I know, or even guess, you have dared to address her by word or message, I will drive her before me to the furthest corner of the earth!"

"Fear me not, sir," articulated Charles in accents so thick it scarcely sounded on our ears.

“I fear no one, young man; fear for yourself, sir, and this poor deluded girl, whom you have taught to deceive her father.”

“Hear me!” said Emma, raising her head and stretching forth her cold pale hands, “hear me, my father, and believe your child. Speak not roughly to *him*, for I love him, and it kills me to hear him blamed for what I have done; his words would have been powerless to me, had I not admitted him into my heart, and forgotten my duty. Here, in the face of my friends and in your sacred presence, father, I renounce an error which has cost me my peace of mind for ever, I vow never more to see him or to hear him. He shall be to me no more than the thing you disavow and denounce; but, oh, if I survive this struggle, do not name him with bitterness to me!”

Charles was like a man distracted. He rushed towards Emma, and kneeling before her, clasped his arms around her, heedless of the party who stood gazing in silence at this scene.

“You have vowed to desert me! do you know what it is to desert a man and leave him in the wilderness? do you know what I feel when you vow to look upon me as a loathed object? Dare you say I shall be as nothing to you in future,

after our fond affection, our almost plighted faith? Dare you cast me upon the world a wounded and disappointed man?"

"It is not blessed," replied Emma, faintly, disengaging herself from his embrace. "It has not been a holy affection since I forgot my father's injunction; it could never prosper since you would take disobedience to your bosom. Farewell, Charles, and do not destroy me by your words."

"Never, never!" cried Charles, "I will follow you into the grave, I will follow you through every country in Europe: but leave me you shall never in this world!"

"Oh, cruel, cruel to increase my agony. Listen then, Captain Vansittart, at your peril try to see me again!"

"I will never quit you," exclaimed my brother, growing wilder in his looks and expression. "I will dodge your steps, I will laugh at your words—I defy your scorn—I can love, if you hate; I will follow though you spurn me!"

"Oh! father, take me away," cried Emma, clinging to her father's arm, "have mercy upon my brain, and do with me as you please. I will have no lover, I own no feeling but obedience to you, but save me from this, and stand between me and despair!"

Even old Brereton became agitated, and his brow relaxed its stern frown. "Poor thing!" he muttered, as he looked upon his daughter, "it has begun already to do its work." The old man tried to recover his serenity of look and manner, but the father was busy at his heart, and there was moisture upon his eyelids. He spoke again to his trembling child.

"Emma, you have done wrong, but you have done much in being willing to repair your error. Leave my daughter, sir, and do not insult me by a perseverance which offends me; leave my daughter's feet, sir, and retire while I speak."

Charles rose and mechanically obeyed the command of the parent. How solemn is that voice which even passion instinctively obeys! It is a voice of power, of sacred power, full of awe and deep respect. Next to our duty to our God, is strongly enforced that powerful command: "Honour thy father and thy mother," and the human mind bends to the fearful charge. Mr. Brereton continued:

"I chastise the disobedient, but a father is merciful to a penitent. Emma, you have shown strength of mind, and a heart anxious to return to its duty. I will not quench the burning flax, or crush the bruised reed. I dislike intermarriages; but let me see that a twelvemonth's

absence and total silence do not diminish your affection for each other, and I consent to the match.”

Had a voice from the dead spoken, it could not have produced a greater revulsion of feeling in the parties concerned. Poor Emma felt the reaction in every nerve, and was carried fainting into Mary's dressing-room. Charles vainly endeavoured to speak distinctly, and at last quietly seated himself, content with having made the effort. Mr. Brereton understood his feelings, and shortened the interview so painfully affecting to the whole group.

“ Captain Vansittart, you will see my daughter no more till I summon you: as we are now acquainted, you will give me credit for acting up to my sentiments, and will therefore abstain from seeing or writing to Emma. She returns with me to-night: Henry, tell your wife to give me notice when your sister is recovered, and I will receive her at the door of her room; and send her wardrobe home as soon as you please. I do not again lose sight of her.”

Brereton obeyed his father's mandate, and the old gentleman quietly addressed the doctor.

“ Sir, these are the plagues of matrimony, which in a degree balance its pleasures. I hope it will never be your case, and I beg to apologize.

for having made your house the scene of a parent's distress: it has indeed been a severe trial to me, but I conceive my authority is delegated from above, sir, and when you loosen the rein you are responsible for its consequences."

The doctor bowed, and then bowed again, but he could not attempt a reply. Mary was out of the room, and his ideas had become a perfect ball of indigestible and unrollable material from the excitement of the scene which had taken place. Names, things, and persons lay in one incongruous mass in his mind, which must be unrolled as carefully as the manuscripts at Herculaneum, and the master-hand was absent. Mr. Brereton did not observe "the state of Denmark," his thoughts were occupied by the present subject, so he relieved the doctor by speaking again, partly aloud, and partly *sotto voce*.

"I fear my poor girl will be very ill; her health is not strong enough to bear much sorrow, and I know she will long feel this—but better now than hereafter: Captain Vansittart, you are upon leave, I believe."

"For a short time; my regiment is under orders for Malta—if you are resolved, sir, to—"

"I am quite resolved, captain: I never make resolves, to have them knocked down like nine-

pins, sir. A year hence you shall know my mind, if I hear nothing to prejudice you in my esteem."

"I trust I may deserve your opinion, Mr. Brereton; I have a reward in view which will rouse all my energies."

"So much the better, sir: you will deserve your wife, and she will be a fonder jewel to you, given from her father's hand, than stealing to a man in deceit and folly. You could not esteem each other. And pray, young lady, who are you?" Mr. Brereton turned quickly but politely towards me, as I sat composedly in my lounging attitude unscathed by the storm, and silently witnessing its progress.

"I am a Vansittart, Mr. Brereton, at your service, and too happy in not being a Brereton, if I may be pardoned the roughness of my speech." I was indignant at his severity towards his daughter. Mr. Brereton was not offended.

"Be careful of doing wrong, my dear young lady, and whether your name be Brereton or Vansittart, you will hold it in honour."

Henry entered the room announcing his sister's readiness to attend his father. Charles again rushed forward: "Only once, Mr. Brereton: only one look to say adieu, and bid God

bless her; just to take her to your carriage and say farewell, Emma; only that one blessing, that one privilege, in mercy!"

"Not one step, sir, as you hope to meet her again on earth." Mr. Brereton bowed to the doctor, who returned the courtesy in silence. Charles persevered—it was now or never that the fiat must be lost or won—now was the only moment to contend, or the opportunity was gone for ever.

"By all you value in this world, or in that to come," cried Charles, springing between old Brereton and the door, "by the mercy you expect hereafter, think of me now. I am bound for another country and another climate—I may die—I may lose *her*—let me see her once more to say, adieu, my destined wife! I will not touch her, by all that his sacred, but let me behold her!"

"Did you heed my feelings, sir," replied Mr. Brereton, in raised tones, "when you counselled my daughter to forget she had a father? did you heed *her* feelings, sir, when you prepared to draw down a curse upon her head?—a father's curse, sir, which is registreed in heaven and redeemed upon earth?"

Henry held my brother back to allow his father a free passage to the door. Charles would

have burst from his arms, but the distended nostril and raised complexion of Mr. Brereton assured his son he was now in a frame of mind which would not endure opposition, and he held Charles firmly in his grasp till the door closed upon his excited parent. "Be advised," he cried, to the enraged attempts of my brother to get free—"one word at this moment, and my sister is dead to you for ever. For Heaven's sake be tranquil, and do not push him to extremity. You do not understand my father's character." He locked the door and put the key in his pocket. "Now you are safe, and all will go well: a twelvemonth gives my sister to you; would you provoke a worse fate?"

"It is useless contending with that rough old man, Charles," I said, rising and laying my hand on his shoulder, "it is vain sawing at a stone-wall; let him depart, and I will contrive an intercourse with Emma. She will attend to me when she receives me as your messenger."

"She will scorn any attempt to draw her into fresh error," observed Henry, reddening, and raising himself proudly. "My sister yielded for a season to the strong influence of her attachment, which is the most powerful temptation of human nature; but you little know my sister's principles if you class her with the herd

of common characters who selfishly sacrifice to their own passions. I will never countenance a hope of the slightest intercourse with Emma, even if I was not assured she would despise and reject any private overtures."

Always in the wrong! It was seldom I offered an opinion in my own family, and when I did mean to be useful and important I met a rebuff. Brereton too, throwing his parsonic dust at me, by way of rebuke, when he knew how keenly my soul detested lecturing! I would have resented the injury, but the rolling of Mr. Brereton's carriage-wheels turned our attention to poor Charles, who stood listening with clenched hands and closed teeth, a real object of pity.

"Ay, there he takes her from me, hard-hearted man, and cares not for her broken heart. Did you hear how she entreated him to forbear blaming me—how her blessed spirit chafed under the idea of his naming me with anger, dear, dear Emma!" and Charles, overcome by the train of ideas which painted her love and sorrow, sobbed like a child, and found relief for his overcharged feelings. It was during this pause that Henry readmitted my mother and sisters, and we crowded round the sufferer.

Mary's return unlocked the floodgates of the

doctor's mind, and restored his speech, which Mr. Brereton's sudden entrance had annihilated. He was very much unnerved by it, as he was never before included in such stirring matter; but he thought what's-his-name quite in the right, and admired his firm conduct; he wished he had been able to contend with Jenkins in the same decided way; but it was evident old Mr. what's-his-name had no gout. Altogether the wedding was only to be delayed a year, and what was that in comparison with a total prohibition? We all concurred with the doctor. It was bad, but there might have been a comparative or a superlative state of misery, and every day must diminish the portion of time which was to be endured in absence. Mary remembered a year was only twelve months, which must roll by in spite of happiness or misery. "At any rate, my dear Charles, there is hope to live upon, and Emma to depend upon. You cannot fear her change of sentiment. She told me so as we supported her to the carriage."

"Then you spoke to her, and she really said so, did she?" cried Charles, starting from his mournful position, and seizing Mary's hand.

"She told me how more than kind her father was in sacrificing his strong objections for her happiness, and how limited a period a year ap-

peared, after fearing it was broken up for ever. Oh, she said, we ought to be grateful—we never can be grateful enough! Of course, Emma supposed I should repeat her words; and more, you know, would have been disobeying her father's injunctions. You must hear of her, and, at any rate, you knew you must leave her to join your regiment."

"Hurrah, then!" cried Charles, spinning Mary round like a teetotum. "Since Emma is not to try and forget me—since she is to be my wife in a few months, I will drive away care and be happy. All has happened for the best: it is now an implied engagement, and suspense is over. Hurrah, my pretty wife—my own little angel girl!" Charles always passed from one extreme to the other. He was now more boisterous than ever.

"Come, let us meet to-morrow evening somewhere, and be merry. From henceforth, I am an engaged man, and I have done with soft speeches and flirtation, except to Miss Bates, who starves upon the thistles of man's avoidance: to her alone I dedicate my noviciate. Let us all meet to-morrow at our house."

"Some people contrive to get up their spirits in a wonderfully short space of time," said my mother, smiling.

“ To be sure ; if Captain Bates was here, he would sing,

‘ What’s the use of sighing,
Since time is on the wing ;’

and well for me it is so, as it lessens my burden every hour. But Mary, was she recovered ? did she look ill or seem very weak ?”

“ Yes, she was ill and weak ; but it was the struggles of her mind which had caused it. She will revive now, but not so suddenly perhaps as you have done.”

“ Men and women’s minds are differently constructed, Mistress Drinkwater. We are used to sudden and great changes ; and I tell you, since we are allowed to be together in thought, and a term only allowed to sever us, I will be happy in spite of man or devil. Will you all dine with us to-morrow ? and Bates and my darling Canariana shall meet you. She dotes on her canary, she says ; therefore I am its rival. Doctor, mind you bring Mary.”

The doctor was feeling his instep, and laying his finger tenderly upon his heel. “ I don’t feel quite the thing here, Mary,” he observed, without replying to the invitation.

“ Perhaps a little nervous affection, Gideon ; we have been all affected ; I will double your dose of soda, and a good night’s rest will do us

all good. I really am trembling now at the remembrance of Mr. Brereton's voice."

"Forget it, all of you," said Charles, "I will order the carriage, Brereton, as it will take us home first, and we meet again to-morrow. If ever this dismal evening is alluded to, it must only be to amuse the Langhams when they come amongst us. Who has heard of them?"

"I did, this morning; and they are on their way. Anne says, old Lady Langham received her with great affection, and all his relations are agreeable people. They expect some friends to follow them for the summer."

"What a change it will make in this quiet place, and I know no one who will make it more agreeable than our friend Anne; but how came Sir James to affect Anne, Louisa! What were you at to let him slip through your fingers?"

"I never thought of Sir James."

"The deuce you didn't? Then you were employed on some other scheme; perhaps you never thought of Sir William?"

I was silent, and played with my fire-screen till the carriage drove to the door. I never could manage to be on terms with Charles. Kind and polite to all the world beside, his remarks were dipped in vinegar when applied

to myself. We were everlastingly jarring and saying disagreeable things to each other. What were my sentiments or conduct to him, that he must ever address me in metaphor or satire?

A note from Mary the following morning put an end to our little party. The doctor was in bed with an enormous swelled foot; it was impossible to say when he would be able to quit his room. He had dreamt of Mr. Brereton, and his nerves were quite unstrung. Mr. Brereton was before him all night; his mind had dwelt upon the scene, and there stood Mr. Brereton incessantly, with his sonorous voice and portly figure, declaiming and bending all before him to his wishes. All night the voice sounded, and the doctor started and suffered. In the morning Mr. Brereton was talking on, and the poor doctor was in danger of becoming delirious, had not the nervous excitement flown to the seat of war, and lodged in his foot. At the moment Mary wrote, her husband had fallen into a doze. This was the beginning of the Grange troubles. Charles rode off to Bradford to stop all further proceedings, and there he would most likely remain. My mother and myself went to condole with Mary.

We found Jenkins taking advantage of his master's thrall to carry away the relics of the

pigeon-house, and it was wisely done, for a more unsightly object never disgraced a gentleman's front entrance. Jenkins said his master had walked round it till he ceased to see it, and he would never miss it, or observe its removal, when he got out again, if so be that ever happened.

Mary came down to us rather pale, but full of happy interest about her husband's quiet sleep.

"You cannot think," she said, "how very ill he was at two o'clock this morning; but as the pain settled in his foot, it relieved his head; and when I wrote to you, the pain subsided altogether, and now he is sleeping. I cannot tell you how the recollection of Mr. Brereton pursued him. He was once nearly delirious."

"And you, my child, how are *you*?" said my mother, looking at her with anxious tenderness.

"Oh! always well and busy, you know. I was just going to breakfast as Gideon was resting, and my coffee shall be brought down here that I may have your company. I ordered it to follow me. How good of you to come and see us!"

The breakfast tray was brought in, and my mother took the liberty of advising Mary to rest upon the sofa while she undertook to make the coffee.

“Rest now, my love, and put up your feet while I prepare your breakfast—you have been fasting too long.”

“Thank you, dear mother, I am not yet fatigued, but I will take your advice; there now, I am seated like a sultana, and the coffee smells so refreshing. I shall enjoy it doubly now you have made it, and Drinkwater is sleeping so comfortably.”

Poor Mary! she had raised her cup to her lips, and was smiling with her affectionate face beaming upon my mother, when a bell sounded its little agitated tinkle.

“Ah! he is awake, so I will defer my breakfast a little longer. Stay here till I return; and perhaps, Louisa, you will be kind enough just to put my cup upon the hob to keep warm. I shall tell him you are here.”

Away flew Mary, and we remained in momentary expectation of her returning to us. Half an hour elapsed, an hour rolled on, and Mary was still an absentee. At last she appeared.

“I have kept you a long time, but I was rubbing his poor foot; the pain woke him. I must take my breakfast standing, for I must end it quickly, and resume the friction. He desires his kindest love, and is so sorry this has happened. He quite regrets losing the plea-

sure of dining with you. Well, I must take my flight, but I am so obliged by your coming to us, my dear mother."

"Cannot you be seated, my love, five minutes to take your coffee in peace?"

"Oh! I take it very well so. I am now, you see, on my way as it were; if I sat down, perhaps I should feel rising up again. Just tell me how Charles is?"

"Gone to Bradford."

"What a creature for spirits! Well, I regret to say adieu, but my invalid must not wait."

"You will spoil him."

"Ah, no Louisa; a good kind husband can never be made too much of;" and Mary, snatching a kiss from each, was off to the sick chamber.

Who could regret Mary's marriage, since she herself was happy? It is vain to lay down rules for matrimonial contest. Some women attach themselves to age, some to youth; some connect themselves with wealth, and others smile upon poverty; yet when we look around, we see the young and wealthy forgetting the vows they have taken, and old men and poor men are happy in their quiet homes, ministered to, and apparently loved with sincerity. Is it in them the absence of temptation? Then was

Mary's lot a happy one. The Grange must shelter her from everything but pity, and who could pity her happy look, her eager observance, her sincere attachment? One might look insecurely towards the future, but the present was blessed enough. No girl ever sprung towards her lover with more heart and soul than Mary flew to her gouty lord, leaving her untasted breakfast, and uncomplaining of broken rest.

Our days were heavily passed now. Charles would not remain at H—, since Emma was gone, and he rejoined his regiment shortly after her abrupt departure. He said it was impossible to kill time in Gloucestershire, or be happy where everything reminded him of her—unlike a woman, who cherishes too fondly the sorrow which consumes her. He would try Portsmouth, and rove about till they embarked for Malta; but hang him if he would be unhappy, when a year must close his uncertainties.

When Charles departed, my mother and myself resumed our usual dulness. The Grange was cut off, save a daily visit or bulletin from Mary, to say the doctor thought he was a little easier, or to inform us he was much worse. I now looked with intense anxiety for the Langhams' return. I was certain Sir James would

be too hospitably inclined to live long without a succession of friends, and amongst the number, some one might arrive to infuse an interest. I was not nice. I was ready to flirt with any one who held a certain position in society; and, unmindful of past events, I was quite prepared to resume the mania which urged me to the disreputable folly, and under whose effects I had already so severely smarted. I must have excitement: I could not bear the dull regularity of my native place, or endure the daily walk to the Grange, with the same object in view, and regularly receiving the same uninteresting answer to inquiries. Sometimes we saw Mary, but it was a hurried interview, and her duties so completely chained her to a sick room, we rarely enjoyed her society, and I ceased to seek it. My mother alone persevered, and invariably visited the Grange after her morning routine was discharged. I as invariably sent my love and excuses.

May brought its flowers and warmth to all but myself. I disdained nature inanimate. Other energies might glow under a sunny influence, but I sought only society, and it came under seducing colours. Fires were lighted at the Hermitage; the windows were thrown open; the gardeners were rolling the lawns and gravel

walks, and signs of life gave token of its master's approach. Another week, and my mind was at rest; the Langhams were bestowed at the Hermitage.

Sir James rode over the following morning, and he heard our sorrows from our own lips. "The doctor was quite confined to his own room, and Charles had joined his regiment." We had his condolence and comfort in a breath.

"Very sorry, really. Poor Drinkwater! he will die of Mr. Brereton, but matrimony brings a lot of surprises, and he was too ill not to be hurried by such a splash as old Brereton must have made. I know Anne will say he was right, so I shall reserve my opinion till I hear what she thinks. I have no opinion of my own now—my lady rules, as you will see, for I am charged with her love and invitation to dinner. You are not to stand upon the ceremony of calling. We shall have a nice comfortable evening, and a surprise into the bargain, Miss Vansittart; and I was to say the carriage would be here at four o'clock, that we might chat before dinner as well as after it."

We were very ready to accept the invitation, but my mother declined Sir James's offer of his carriage. She would have post-horses to her own.

“ My dear madam, it can't be; Anne has arranged it so, and I dare not report contumacious conduct. It will attend you at four o'clock. I am just going on to ask Captain Bates and his daughter to join our party. A party is nothing without a song, and his singing is excellent, independent of his being a very gentlemanly man. Miss Bates to be sure—but he sings capital songs, and we shall be very glad to see them both.”

“ But Anne,” said my mother, “ how is Anne herself, with the thoughts of a dinner-party on her mind, the very day after her arrival.”

“ Come and see. She is quite settled and has nothing to do; I left her in her boudoir looking as useless as any fine lady in the land. You will judge for yourself. I wish the Drinkwaters could have joined us! I'll go and ask, however; I know Anne fully expects her dear Mary, and it will be a sad mortification to learn she is shut up in her cage. Perhaps we may get *her* for an hour or two; do you think he will be philanthropic enough to dispense with her company so long?”

“ At any rate the attention will be appreciated.”

“ I am gone, don't be careless at your toilet, Miss Vansittart; Thelwal's motto always was, ‘ Ready, present, fire ! ’ ”

“ And how is Captain Thelwal ?”

“ Quite disengaged, and free from encumbrance. His love affairs are all just now closed, and he is impatient to swain it with some new face, or old acquaintance. I am now going to the Grange, and to the Bateses, so farewell till four o'clock.”

Sir James departed in high spirits; he was a married man now, and he wished to display his wife, and extend his own happy feelings to all around him. He was evidently satisfied with his lot. Everybody appeared satisfied but myself.

I dressed for the Hermitage as I should have dressed for the Grange: a woman vain of her personal charms never dresses ill, and I was allowed to possess great taste in that interesting department. I set off to the Hermitage in the careless simplicity of white muslin; my clustering curls were never degraded by flowers, but dressing for a stupid sort of family party, I did not consult combination, so I entered Lady Langham's drawing-room as “ Ophelia in white muslin.” Judge my consternation in beholding Captain Thelwal and three strangers present.

Sir James was extremely amused by my astonishment.

“ Then you did not understand my hint, Miss

Vansittart ; I thought you looked archly at me too. Let me introduce you to the company, and by that time Anne will have leisure to talk to you : she is now part of Mrs. Vansittart, and Heaven knows when all that is to end. Thelwal, Miss Vansittart recollects you and your guitar.”

Captain Thelwal advanced ; there were the dangerous eyes again, and that insinuating manner, which I had found so attractive in the Isle of Wight : of what events had he not been the author, yet here he was a second time before me ! I had little time for thought. We shook hands, and our eyes met ; a volume was told to each.

Sir James presented me to a highly-dressed, fashionable-looking woman, apparently forty years of age.

“ Allow me, Mrs. Fortescue, Miss Vansittart.”

We bowed.

“ Lord Elford,—Major Sandford.”

We all bowed, and I then turned to Lady Langham, while my mother went through the same forms of introduction.

And this was once the discreet Anne Partington, who stood before me ! I gazed upon her in silence.

“Louisa,” she said, “I am very glad to see you looking even more blooming than ever.”

“Do not expect a reply,” I answered, as I pressed her hands. “I cannot tell you how *you* are changed.”

“Not in heart, Louisa. My friends will find me unchanged in all respects. A warm heart never alters its feelings.”

“I only complain of your person; you will make some of us envious, Lady Langham.”

She coloured and shook her head.

“Middle age never creates envy, Louisa; but I thank you for your well-turned compliment. Be happy in your feelings, and right in your conduct, my dear girl, and you will be independent of age.”

Perhaps that was Lady Langham’s beauty. She was happy in her feelings and conduct, and those feelings gave her eyes brightness, and her cheek its new colouring: true, she had always been excellent, but her complete reward had not been enjoyed. She was now a wife, and a strong attachment called forth her energies. She enjoyed wealth, rank, and the affection of a worthy man, whom she loved. To please his taste and conform to his wishes, she was elegantly dressed, and smiled upon his friends and his remarks. Lady Langham was

a striking woman—Miss Partington had been only very agreeable, and rather good-looking.

Captain Thelwal led me to dinner. Our meal was seasoned with conversation upon the past, and some reference to the future. I was to point out the principal objects worth seeing, and he hoped I was to be included in all parties of pleasure at the Hermitage.

Our chatty dialogue drew the eyes of Lord Elford toward us: he sat nearly opposite. Lord Elford had a heavy, obstinate kind of face, which I did not like, and so I told Captain Thelwal. He was surprised.

“Lord Elford is not considered an object of indifference to ladies. I know no man who has caused more sensation.”

“In what way?”

“Because he is not to be caught. He has just provoked my old flame, Lady Anne O’Brien, by his blindness to her fascination; and laurels are twined round his reputation, by his determination not to surrender. All the female world are wild at his lordship secluding himself in Gloucestershire for a fortnight at least.”

“I keep my own opinion still,” I observed.

“May you do so for ever.”

“Why? what can it signify to you?”

A look spoke the answer. Oh! those looks,

which have so little force in law, but so much in equity! Oh! those looks which lure and deceive, yet can never be brought in evidence to convict the culprit! How a look can persuade and dissuade—how an eyebeam levels prudence, and planes down the strongest resolution!

I changed the subject, and inquired who was Mrs. Fortescue.

“A relative of my friend, Sir James; but I never saw her till we all met before dinner, after arriving *en masse*. She is a widow, and all widows are dangerous ground.”

I looked at Mrs. Fortescue, as she sat between Major Sandford and Captain Bates. Her widow's cap was of a most becoming fashion. Curls here and there were allowed to escape beneath its coquettish shape, as though their exuberance *would* not be confined. Splendid ornaments glittered on her waist, while her tranquil subdued manner attracted a feeling of interest in her fate.

Captain Bates seemed to admire the quiet widow prodigiously, as she upturned her eyes towards him, and answered softly and gently to his attempts at conversation. He was chatting away to her, and looking full of agreeable matter, quite unlike a man who believes he was

“made to mourn.” I never saw Captain Bates so alive.

Major Sandford had large, light-blue eyes, and an immense mouth; the widow could not affect him. Captain Bates was a fine military-looking person, on the contrary, and a woman might pass an amusing hour (if she possessed sufficient sense of the ridiculous) in his society.

Captain Thelwal had named Lady Anne O'Brien; the sound of that name conjured up a host of recollections. I asked where her ladyship was living.

“At Bath at present. She is at this moment pointing her artillery at your old acquaintance, Turner Ellis, in his Bath-chair. If she marries him, it is to secure a settlement; for of course you know he is dying.”

“Not a word,” I exclaimed, feeling a sensation of sickness come over me. “I never heard a word of it.”

“Yes, he is considered quite in a hopeless state. He became ill at Ryde—of course that unfortunate overturn crushed some internal bone or muscle—ah! Miss Vansittart, do you remember our first meeting? Who could have supposed that meeting was to effect such movements? There's Langham now, the happiest

fellow in the world, completely settled, and surrounded by his friends.”

“ But tell me of poor Mr. Ellis ; did you see him yourself? Was he indeed dying?” I cried eagerly, as my blood seemed to ebb from my heart, and my hands felt quite clammy.

“ Yes ; I saw him with my own eyes in his chair, just as he was wheeled from the water-side at Ryde. I could have fancied him stationary ever since. I bowed and hoped he was well : the little man looked horrified at being addressed, but I jogged his memory by reverting to our water-party, and asking after you : however, he appeared in such a distressing state of helplessness I was quite shocked, and thought it better to bow myself away. The poor little man appeared to me speechless.”

I was shocked—I could make no reply.

“ You are insensible to poor Mr. Ellis, and his illness,” pursued Captain Thelwal, “ he does not interest you ; but I was very sorry to see such a lamentable change. God bless me ! How pale you look ! My dear Miss Vansittart—”

“ Hush ! not a word—I am better. Give me a glass of wine, and tell me of other things.”

Captain Thelwal obeyed with the same tact he had displayed in the Isle of Wight. I would

advise my own sex, by my own experience, never to embark in a mystery with any man: it gives them a gentle, gradual, but sure hold upon one's attention, which they never relinquish, while it contributes to their amusement or vanity.

Captain Thelwal's manner assumed a confidential air and tone upon the instant; but I was too annoyed to perceive it then. I was vexed at being reminded of my sins in the illness of Mr. Ellis. Doubtless he would suffer at seeing Captain Thelwal before him—the author of his calamity! I endeavoured to forget Captain Thelwal's description of his situation. I asked a thousand questions—I smiled without meaning, and laughed without inclination. I could not dismiss the vision of Mr. Ellis from my mind; pale, patient, and enduring—doomed to suffer a bitter remainder of life—wounded in feelings—the kind, the innocent dupe of my heartless conduct! In spite of my struggles, the vision gained form and strength, and I could picture him before me, as forcibly as Macbeth beheld the form of Banquo. I could have exclaimed, too,

“ Shake not thy gory locks at me!”

but a little bustle and movement round me

recalled my senses: Lady Langham had risen, and we retired into the drawing-room.

The change of place I am sure saved me from illness; for never did illusion partake so strongly of reality. It must be something of this kind which visits the murderer in his sleep, or in his loneliness; which pursues crime into scenes of gaiety, and whispers despair in the midst of wit and beauty. I was too happy to shake off my wretched feelings by even this short transit.

CHAPTER III.

THE first object we saw on re-entering the drawing-room was Mary. The friends were in each other's arms in an instant.

“ My dearest Mary !”

“ My own, own Anne !”

Mary looked at her friend with surprise and admiration equal to my own ; but the presence of Mrs. Fortescue and Miss Bates rendered it too public for any exhibition of expressed feelings. Mary promised us her society for one hour ; it might extend to two, perhaps ; but she could not resist seeing Anne and her family at their first visit to the Hermitage, otherwise it was cruel to leave her invalid : his fit was severe — he had not recovered Mr. Brereton's extraordinary visit.

“ What very excellent people you all are !” said Mrs. Fortescue, seating herself near me, and

playing carelessly with a ringlet, which strayed unaccountably and spirally down her well-rounded cheek; “it quite refreshes me to observe you so happy to see each other—so delighted to meet again. Your sister, I presume—a married sister?”

“My sister, Mrs. Drinkwater, was married the same day with Lady Langham: they are very old friends.”

“The gentleman, from what I gather, is an invalid.”

“Always in the gout, and always confined to the house,” I replied, in a tone which encouraged Mrs. Fortescue to proceed.

“Of course he is very wealthy—she has insured an excellent settlement, and all that.”

The widow’s tones were softer than the sweet south.

“Yes; Dr. Drinkwater was very liberal, and his fortune is a handsome one.”

“I should be tempted then to put him under the surveillance of a maid-servant, and visit my friends for my own health’s sake.”

“But my sister married for sincere affection, and her settlement had no part in the affair, I assure you, Mrs. Fortescue.”

“Nonsense,” said the widow, slowly, giving

me a look of peculiar expression, and curling her ringlet round her white fingers.

I smiled at her arch expression ; it was full of saucy unbelief, but I persisted in my position.

“ Time will certify all things,” observed my new acquaintance, smiling and bowing. “ I am inclined to differ with you still ; but I shall sit and admire your sister — she is a lovely woman !”

“ And kind as she is fair,” I rejoined ; “ but I have yet another fairer sister married.”

“ Bless Heaven for that !” replied Mrs. Fortescue ; “ two such fair sisters undisposed of are always in one’s way.”

I sighed : I thought of Charlotte and her double interference in my own plans : her innocent conquest of Sir William De Burgh and Brereton.

“ Invalids are worthless speculations,” continued Mrs. Fortescue, falling into a train of thought apparently, yet addressing me. “ When you take an invalid, hope supposes him near his final release, yet disgust perceives him destined to be a weary burden ; and when a final separation arrives, it is often a boon bestowed when its acceptance is no longer valuable. Your sister, perhaps, has another attachment.”

“Another attachment! my dear Mrs. Fortescue! No!”

“You never heard, then, of a woman marrying one man and loving another?”

I was confounded again. Had it not been my own case nearly? Did I not intend to be the wife of Mr. Ellis, while a stronger sentiment existed for Brereton? My expression enlightened and amused the wily widow.

“You are too lovely, Miss Vansittart, to have escaped a thousand perilous situations. You know the feelings I describe; probably we have *both* felt they are horrible. Captain Thelwal is an old acquaintance of yours?”

“I knew him in the Isle of Wight.”

“He is a captivating person, but there is nothing to go upon. He is a younger son.”

“Those sort of people do for amusement,” I thoughtlessly observed.

“My dear Miss Vansittart, we are kindred spirits: I felt, when I was introduced to you first, a presentiment we should draw together in opinions. It is delightful to meet with a woman whose playful conversation flutters beyond the starch ideas of every-day mortals.”

I fancied Mrs. Fortescue glanced her eyes towards Lady Langham, who was enjoying a little *tête-à-tête* with Mary: my mother was en-

deavouring to amuse the obtuse Miss Bates, and the friends were deep in conversation, their eyes beaming esteem and regard for each other's welfare. I must confess Mrs. Fortescue pleased me; I never detected lawless levity, veiled in flattery, and garnished with a polished manner. We were speedily friends. Her very convenient morality never pointed an arrow at my heart, as "Miss Partington" had often done, and I could openly express my sentiments to one who cheered me on, and advocated my actions. Lady Langham was, by circumstances, forced upon me; Lady Anne O'Brien, and Mrs. Fortescue, were my own choice. Lady Anne had lost herself to be sure, but Mrs. Fortescue was safe; *she* had great reverence for public opinion, which Lady Anne professed to scorn. There Lady Anne was wrong, Public opinion *could* do great injury; it decided one's fate and character, by an irreversible decree when once offended, while it was led like a lamb, by a cautious exterior. Private blame lay only among the dunces in a country neighbourhood. All this Mrs. Fortescue confided to me, before the gentlemen joined us, and I felt she was quite right. I had never been half cautious enough.

Nothing could induce Mary to remain after

the entrance of Sir James Langham. I heard her gently rebuking him for trying to lure her from her husband, and a very laughing conversation was taking place with that little group. Sir James respectfully gave way in proper time, and when he returned from seeing her to the carriage, he spoke so highly of her principles, her manners, and wife-like care of her husband's comforts, that my mother's heart proudly swelled in the praise, and tears rushed into her eyes. She could think with matronly pride, that two daughters "had done dutifully."

At Mary's departure, I was in conversation with Lord Elford, I could therefore only shake her hand, *en passant*. I did not like Lord Elford. He looked me in the face so sturdily, and canvassed my opinions so ungallantly, it was painful to keep up any flow of chat with him. It was hateful to be asked for a reason, when a good one was not forthcoming, or to be told seriously one's opinion was unsound, yet Lord Elford was guilty of such a solecism in good manners, and as my eye wandered to Captain Thelwal, I scarcely addressed his lordship, except in measured replies to his pertinacious questions. Our dialogue, of course, soon dwindled into silence, and Captain Bates

took advantage of my disengaged look, to ask a few questions concerning Mrs. Fortescue. He deposited his tall figure on a chair I had mentally designed for Captain Thelwal.

“That’s a devilish pretty woman, who is she?”

I told him all I knew of her relationship to Sir James; her widowhood, and agreeable manners, which had made such an impression upon myself.

“Mighty pretty woman, ma’am; I’ll be hanged if I have seen such an eye these twelve years; even now she is talking to her relation, that eye is enough to distract one. Where does she come from?”

“Oh, never mind where people come from, Captain Bates, if they are agreeable; she will not leave us, I hope, very soon. I am very anxious to attract her amongst us, but I shall never care to know where her abiding place may be.” This was said with all my old impatience, but Captain Bates had been used to me since my infancy.

“The woman will be my death,” continued he, “if she twists about that glossy ringlet that fashion; what a shame to allow a creature like that to be shut up in such a d—d cap; upon my soul, it’s sacrilege—what an eye it is, ma’am!”

“I shall report you to the lady,” I exclaimed laughing.

“I really wish you would, it would save me a great deal of trouble to let her know my sentiments. A widow can manage everything herself when she is *au fait* of one’s admiration. I wish she may fancy me with that languid eye and soft voice, she would come and charm me with its tones, when she knew I loved her.”

“Why you don’t intend falling in love, Captain Bates, at your time of life?”

“It’s to little purpose intending, ma’am, when such an eye as that commands you to fall down and worship her. I am a man, and must feel it like a man; she is a woman, therefore to be wooed!” And Captain Bates quitted me to make insidious approach towards Mrs. Fortescue’s end of the room. Captain Thelwal took his seat.

“I fancied myself cut off from all approach, Miss Vansittart.”

“You were chatting very pleasantly with Miss Bates and Lady Langham, therefore you were in good hands,” I replied, something offended at his not having forced an opportunity to be near me before.

“Miss Bates has been so kind as to inform me she has a canary, which is very interesting

to my feelings ; in other respects, I was not so entertained as you imagine. It is impossible to feel pleasantly situated when one is longing to be elsewhere. *You* have been chatting very animatedly, Miss Vansittart."

"Yes; I chatted to Lord Elford with very great sprightliness, did I not?"

"You are determined not to admire him, but you will change you opinion like the rest of the female world; Lord Elford must cut us all out."

Our eyes again met. Captain Thelwal's eyes were not to be resisted; their expression always disconcerted me. I turned away colouring, and I saw Lord Elford giving me one of his sturdy looks. I was indignant at being watched: what business had Lord Elford to interfere in my flirtations?

Captain Thelwal and myself became silent; the party was too small not to incur observation, and I fancied Lady Langham suspected our very exclusive dialogue, by her affecting not to observe us. She *must* be aware the old leaven was rising in my heart, but I had no longer engagements with Mr. Ellis, and I was not under her charge. She must have enjoyed her release from further concerns with such a turbulent spirit as mine, and it must have been a sight of renewed folly this evening, which, I doubt not,

she turned from in silent disgust, as I never met her eye during my *tête-à-tête* with Captain Thelwal.

I never saw Sir James Langham to so much advantage. He was ever lively and good-humoured, but there were now hospitality, dignity, and happiness so entwined in his manner, so enthroned in his handsome face, it was agreeable to contemplate. His manners towards Lady Langham were peculiarly engaging; he was not uxorious in his attention; on the contrary, I could have supposed them ten years man and wife, from the quiet, calm behaviour of each party; but his instant compliance with her wishes, his pleased expression when she spoke, his very comfortable look as he seated himself near her, and apparently resigned all power into her hands, was delightful, and well might all women desire a destiny as fair as Lady Langham's promised. She also sat calm amid her honours; it was her improved appearance, which betrayed the bloom of her heart, flowering in a happy soil. They were the most comfortable rootedly happy-looking couple I ever beheld.

I had an opportunity in the course of the evening of again addressing Mrs. Fortescue. She was for some time very demurely seated

between Sir James and Lord Elford, but she joined Captain Thelwal and myself as we were deep in a most interesting argument upon love and constancy.

“You look so very like a flirtation,” she said, smiling, “I am come to *chaperone* you: don’t let me disturb you; a *chaperone* knows how to close her ears.”

“I will give you employment for them, Mrs. Fortescue. My friend, Captain Bates, is *au désespoir*, and wishes you to know he is dying to be noticed by you.”

“I treat only with principals, but since you are his agent what more am I to hear?”

“That your eye is extremely this, and your ringlets very much that. He wishes you to be informed, because he opines widows know how to proceed upon intelligence without counsel’s opinion, and if his admiration is satisfactory, you will let him know, he saith.”

“Upon my word, widows are belied,” returned Mrs. Fortescue, with the most innocent air in the world. “If widows are supposed knowing, as they call it, widowers are proved insolent, in the person of your friend, with whom I declare war.”

I suppose the word and blow were dealt together, for whether an eye-glance was re-

ceived by Captain Bates, or he judged from our manner she had received the information placidly enough to offer encouragement, I know not, but in five minutes the old *militaire* was seated by her side, and we made a pretty *partie quarrée* in the game of flirtation.

Sir James was singularly pleased. “ At his very first party two flirtations were taking place, and very properly arranged ones too. Susan Fortescue was holding forth to a sensible elderly man, and Miss Vansittart looking sentimental with Thelwal, her old beau. Nothing could be pleasanter in the country; it made everything interesting, and Thelwal would strum away on the guitar, and be satisfied. To himself, however, flirtation never did any good, for if he liked a woman well enough to flirt with, he wanted to marry her directly: that was the case with him at Ryde, and now he was a married man, thank God, and settled for life.” This view of the party, and his own feelings, was communicated to my mother by Lady Langham.

Certainly we did carry on a most determined flirtation. Mrs. Fortescue was accusing Captain Bates of some fault, which he powerfully repelled, while I was affecting to misunderstand Thelwal’s loving speeches. Lord Elford with-

drew from our neighbourhood, and occupied himself with a book at the further end of the spacious drawing-room. Major Sandford was happily employed moving from one spot to another, catching sounds and ideas from the different fragments of conversation, but conversable himself alone on one subject—horses. He had an anxiety, too, about people's movements, but nothing could equal his intense interest in equestrian pursuits. His mind embraced the whole species, from the winner of the Derby down to a villager's donkey. It of course included a wide field of intellectuality, in ramifications from the main subject, for it took in bridles, saddles, blacksmiths, and veterinary surgeons; shoeing, colt-breaking, and grooms. The subject, like chemistry, offered a never-failing combination of ideas, and when Major Sandford obtained an auditor, his immense mouth brayed forth a cannonade of remark, which nothing could arrest in its career.

I asked Sir James what had induced him to bring Major Sandford among us. "I can understand Lord Elford," said I, "he is dull and gentlemanly and a peer. I admire your cousin, she is fashionable and a flirt, both very useful people in their way, but I see nothing in Major Sandford which your groom does not possess.

Now do tell me why you set Major Sandford before us?"

"Upon my word I don't know. Is he so bad as you say? No—you are very severe upon him, but really I can't say how he got here. I believe he asked himself. I know he wanted to examine my stud."

"Just what I should have supposed. He is running his large nose into Miss Bates's eye at this moment, but his destination is the stable. No drawing-room ought to contain such a nose and mouth."

"Take care, Miss Louisa! Large fortune in expectancy!"

"Has he? Well he may remain in the room then, but he is an odious creature to look at, and I cannot endure him."

"Miss Bates will not be so difficult, perhaps," said Sir James Langham.

It might be so. Miss Bates might appreciate a talent she did not possess herself, and her talent for listening might draw well with his love of talking. If her hair was red, and her figure ungainly, they were balanced by his own defects, if he had sense to perceive them. Major Sandford and Miss Bates came under the common-place designation of "a pretty couple."

“Louisa,” said Lady Langham, joining our party, “who do you think I saw in Bath?”

I feared an allusion to the Ellises, but I might have done more justice to my friend’s delicacy.

“I met Mr. Stanhope.”

“Talking, of course,” I replied, breathing freely again.

“He talked to me of very interesting matter. He is going to turn Benedict: guess with whom.”

“Do you really mean what you say? do you really intend to tell me Mr. Stanhope and Miss Burton are engaged?”

“Precisely. I told you I thought he contemplated it when we left Southampton. He told me the news of Dr. Drinkwater’s marriage urged him to hazard the proposal, and Miss Burton was propitious: Mrs. Burton will live with them.”

“Stanhope and Miss Burton! it never entered my head to speculate upon such a combination.”

“It will do very well, Louisa. Stanhope will always be amused propounding subjects to Mrs. Burton, and his own affairs will be under an able director in Miss Burton. The affair arranges itself.”

“And what had the doctor to do with it?”

“Mr. Stanhope imagined himself the last rose of summer; and, as the doctor must now withdraw into domestic life, he should find Cheltenham less agreeable. He therefore instantly made his application to Miss Burton.”

“And Southampton loses its leader in one department. Well, and when is it to be?”

“At no distant time, I fancy, but he did not confide the day to me.”

Strange things happen every hour, yet I was surprised at this information. I could not fancy Miss Burton and Stanhope, of all people, coming together, yet so it was. I pondered over the intelligence, till Captain Thelwal's voice stole into my ear.

“Miss Vansittart is deep in thought.”

I was roused from my momentary revery, and we were both again deep in the play-game of flirtation. Sir James and Lady Langham had retired towards Lord Elford's section of the apartment, secure of the rest of their party being arranged very satisfactorily. Lady Langham could sit in repose now. All her figures were placed well, and the machinery worked admirably. Captain Bates was likely to be worsted in his engagement: a very *espiègle* expression in the widow's eyes told her amusement in winding round his admiration, but the captain was la-

bouring in earnest to be agreeable. That wicked truant curl, those slow-rolling eyes, were sapping and mining the citadel, while the commandant slept in tranquillity, and saw not the impending ruin. He never calculated the chances of defeat in seeking a close engagement with such fearful odds against him, and Captain Bates was fastening a wallet upon his back which he must carry on in spite of gibes and ridicule. The gay widow willed it so.

Our evening broke up at last, and these *tête-à-têtes* were demolished. Major Sandford had enjoyed his with equal *goût*, for he had discovered an auditor who did not cut him, or ridicule, or reply to him. Miss Bates only listened, and it was imputed to her for admiration. I heard his very disagreeable voice rise, as our tones began to melt away.

“ Yes, I told m’ uncle he was wrong to take up the grey. Give her a month’s rest, I said, and put Bob to her work ; but m’ uncle knows nothing about a horse, or its power. He has fifty useless horses now in the park, and the whole pack are not equal to my Bob, and so I told m’ uncle to his face, which he didn’t half like. Langham has a good stud. I came time enough to look through the stables—very fair turn-out. I told m’ uncle if he chose to have fifty d—n

things in his premises he might ride them, so I brought away Bob—”

Miss Bates looked and listened on in silence.

“ So I brought Bob with me ; you shall see him to-morrow. He kicked up on his road, but I guess he had enough of that, for I galloped him properly as a punishment. If m’ uncle shoed his horses well it would be something, but he persists in sending them to Dodds in the village, instead of Farley at Kingston, and the fellow knows nothing about it.”

Miss Bates sat the image of silence : her silence was ever unbroken till it discharged itself upon Mrs. Jones. The very thing for Major Sandford.

“ You would die if you could see the cut of m’ uncle’s saddles, too. The idea of having a saddle from that fellow Turner ! No more notion of a saddle than I have of laying an egg. The grooms won’t stay out the month with him, they are so disgusted with the state of things. I am glad I got Bob away.”

From this savoury discourse was Miss Bates constrained to depart, by my mother’s movement, which broke up the party. I was cloaked and attended by the ever ready Captain Thelwal ; Miss Bates silently adjusted her own wraps ; for though Major Sandford considered

himself in attendance, he was only talking. Lord Elford heeded no one: he was occupied with his book, and scarcely bowed as we passed him on our way towards the door. He was a very dull-looking man. Mrs. Fortescue had many compliments to proffer, as Captain Bates lingered by her side, and I bowed my good night.

“ My dear Miss Vansittart, we must see more of each other. I believe you are some little distance from me, but I am an excellent walker. Let us often meet.”

“ Can you manage two miles on foot, Mrs. Fortescue ?”

“ With ease. I shall be with you to-morrow, for my stay admits of little ceremony. Shall I find my way ? Shall I dare walk alone ?”

“ Name your hour, and I will come to be your escort,” said Captain Bates.

Mrs. Fortescue glanced one of her peculiar looks at me, as she assented to the arrangement.

“ Very well, Captain Bates, you must take charge of me, I believe ; let me name twelve o'clock ; but I am ashamed to give you this tiresome vocation. You will weary of me.” The widow looked softly in his eyes, and old Bates looked like a simpleton.

“ Try me, ma'am.”

“To-morrow, then, and remember twelve, as Belvidera says.”

Mrs. Fortescue held out her delicate hand, which old Bates seized triumphantly, and there was some little play about restoring the treasure to its owner. At that moment I was led away by Captain Thelwal.

“Shall I be welcome as a visitor, Miss Vansittart?”

“Of course, Captain Thelwal, we shall receive your visit as a pleasure.”

“That is very chilling. I dislike that cold pronoun *we*.”

“What am I to say?”

“That you should be surprised if I was not with you every day.”

“Well, perhaps I might feel so.”

“That is sufficient,” and I was handed into the carriage with a gentle pressure, which seemed to say, “we now belong to each other.”

Sir James was talking to my mother, and assuring her there was to be no interregnum of absence from the Hermitage: he must make it gay for his guests, and he must expect her to furnish her quota of agreeable conversation. Miss Louisa had two gentlemen to choose from, and the rejected one might take Miss Bates. His carriage was our own, and he should consi-

der us almost daily visitors. Susan might talk to Captain Bates; and Sir James bade us an affectionate good night.

And what was I about with Captain Thelwal?

My mind revolved nothing and foresaw nothing but an agreeable flirtation with a very insinuating man; a flirtation most agreeable to my taste at Ryde, and very disagreeably interrupted by offensive events. I could now enjoy his attentions; both were free from all engagements, and I could receive his distinguishing manner without attaching blame to its continuance. As to any meaning,—I did not know what I meant—things would take their own course—it was vain contending with destiny—if I was to marry Thelwal, the marriage would take place in the current of events, as Lady Langham's had done,—it would be beyond my control—but at present I was only receiving Captain Thelwal's attentions, and meaning nothing. I awoke next morning in the same sentiments.

Mrs. Fortescue and her attendant arrived in time to partake of luncheon. Captain Thelwal soon followed.

“How now,” said the widow, “this is a sudden thought, or a long-meditated scheme, for at breakfast I declare I was the only member of

our party openly intending a visit here. Captain Thelwal, how is this?"

"Mrs. Fortescue so decidedly alluded to having made an appointment with a happier man, I did not dare offer myself as her escort."

Mrs. Fortescue smiled.

"You gentlemen are never at a loss for words, and what is lost to sense is gained by compliment. Captain Bates has been complimenting: he vows I have not wearied him, but I know it is his intention never to undertake the charge again. I cannot help it," she added, languidly, "I tried to be pleasant."

Captain Bates stood gazing like Cymon at the vision of Iphigenia, and I did the honours of the luncheon-tray.

"Captain Bates," said the lady, following up her deadly purpose, and turning to the victim, "your miseries are scarcely begun; you must mix me some wine and water, and bring it to me here, for this fine day has really a languid air."

Mrs. Fortescue seated herself in a lounging chair, and the poor captain busied himself in attending to her hundred whims. There was too much air—there was too little—the wine was rather too strong—a very little more water—if he would just be so good as to open the window, and if he would just have the kindness

to put her cloak down. The captain was caught in the web, and the poor fly might struggle, but it was to escape no more: he moved in obedience to her command: he revolved round her chair, as the earth moves round its axis, but he was fairly caught. An old simpleton!

My mother was paying her daily visit to the Grange, therefore our quartette enjoyed a flirtation as profound as it was uninterrupted. To think that Captain Bates should be so infatuated as to become a joint-stock company with "that flirty Miss Vansittart." Oh! it was a curious *mélange*, a most extraordinary waywardness of circumstance! If Major Sandford could only be caught *tête-à-tête* with Miss Bates, it would make the charm grow madder.

Our morning closed with a united walk towards the Hermitage: I considered myself complimenting Mrs. Fortescue by my company: Captain Bates thought he was but doing a polite thing by joining the party to escort me back. We all had our reasons to give, and motives to withhold. We only parted at the lodge, and even there we lingered to chat.

"How very delightful country society is," exclaimed Mrs. Fortescue; "how very agreeably it dispenses with ceremony: here are four of us who never before met, and who I flatter my-

self do not now care to part. There is nothing of this in town."

I expected a little sentiment from Captain Bates: a little something in his old tone, of the misery of being happy; but no—Captain Bates was gazing on the fair speaker, and by some chance her arm was within his.

"Can't we walk every day?" asked Thelwal, in his silver tones. "Is there not an object to visit daily in this lovely scenery? Captain Bates, surely you can point out to us strangers some of your pleasantest points of view."

To be sure! we planned a stroll for each morning, and parted to meet the following day at a rendezvous midway between it and the Hermitage. We would meet at Hartley stile, and diverge into new paths from thence. All were pleased; the party on no account to be enlarged: five was a wretched party, for one must walk alone, and more in number became a noisy multitude. We were exactly enough. Captain Bates and myself walked slowly and silently homewards.

It was amusing to behold Captain Bates in his new situation: it was amusing to see how stealthily he stole to me at the hour my mother invariably went to the Grange, and sat musing while I made ready to accompany him towards

Hartley stile! Our walks became regular, and their effects soon apparent. By intuition, we all avoided the subject of walking, when we met at either house, and I never named the matter to my mother, lest she should advise me to avoid them. The widow and the widower led the way to folly and deception, and I was too happy to plead their example and lull my conscience.

We were seated one morning on a bank beneath Hartley stile: the sun shone gloriously, the butterflies sported gaily, June was in her last days, green and delicious in flowers, and there we lingered in sentimental conversation. Captain Thelwal was changing his tones of compliment, for low and earnest anxiety to ascertain my real sentiments. I withheld them, and flirted on. Mrs. Fortescue of course found amusement in her companion, since she endured his attendance. We were, however, together and deep in close argument on the sunny bank, when steps drew near, and a voice was heard approaching the stile.

“ If m’ uncle had given me his grey, I should have fired her, and she would have got tolerably sound; but he was so obstinate, though even Dodds gave it in my favour. Bob is worth the whole fifty put together, and I wouldn’t sell him for a hundred.”

This must of course be Major Sandford uttering a soliloquy, for there was no reply.

“ I’ll play m’ uncle a trick some day, and cut his girths, so he will run to earth, and there will be an end of his pestilent saddle, for he is soon frightened out of his measures, though he won’t be reasoned with.”

Major Sandford bounded over the stile as he uttered this sentence, and who should follow in his wake but silent demure Miss Bates.

It seemed destined that every one now was to hunt in couples. The major, however, advanced, and appeared glad to join the party. Miss Bates looked confused.

“ What are you doing here, Polly ?” exclaimed Captain Bates, in accents of displeasure, which arose at being caught by his daughter in his lover-like attitude.

“ Taking a walk, father,” coolly replied Polly.

Captain Bates had nothing to say: he was disturbed by the *rencontre*, and vexed at his own situation. We could only invite Miss Bates to be seated, and let everything pass as a matter of accident: such things are disagreeable, but they occurred too often to astonish. We were all playing the same game, and therefore bound to be discreet and polite.

Miss Bates seated herself in silence near us,

after as silently returning our salutations; and, taking advantage of the momentary confusion, Major Sandford took the lead and kept it.

“ I have been looking for you everywhere, and Sir James desired I would see you myself, so I called at all the places I could think of. I called at Captain Bates’s house, and very lucky it was, for Miss Bates’s canary had got out of its cage, and there was the deuce to pay to catch it again. I nearly murdered a nasty black cat which sprung after it, and that turned out to be a pet too. The bird’s leg got broke, so I mended it as well as I could with a bit of stick and some rag. I could have shoed a horse in less time, and saddled him besides; for I know no more about setting birds’ legs, than I do about laying eggs.”

“ But what does Sir James wish?” asked Mrs. Fortescue, “ since he so earnestly desired you to find us.”

“ I have brought a note for Miss Vansittart, which is to explain everything, I believe; but not finding you, I told Miss Bates she might as well come to the Hermitage and represent her father, and I would show her Bob, and explain the different modes of shoeing.”

“ But the note, the note,” said Mrs. Fortescue, with unusual energy of manner.

Major Sandford delivered up the note, and then talked on about his stupid mania. The note was as follows:

“Come to us to luncheon, my dear Louisa, and bring Captain Bates and his daughter in your train. We have a plan to propose. Captain Thelwal and Mrs. Fortescue are absent, but they will be returned by two o'clock. It is Sir James's plan, as you may conclude.

“Yours truly,

“A. LANGHAM.”

Nothing could have turned out more *à propos*: here we all were at Hartley stile, and we could proceed to the Hermitage in a group. The plan in contemplation was discussed. Of course, it was a dinner party, or a morning party somewhere, or a *déjeuné à la fourchette*; whichever it was nothing could be more agreeable at this time, and afford better opportunities for our frequently meeting. We advanced, therefore, towards the Hermitage, but our line had got out of order. I found myself walking with Captain Bates; Mrs. Fortescue was in advance with the major, and Captain Thelwal mused by the side of dull Miss Bates. No one seemed at ease but my companion, who was in good spirits, and talked of Mrs. Fortescue.

“I am glad to have you for a few minutes to

myself. What a fascinating woman that widow is ; but do you think she is sincere ?”

“ I know very little of Mrs. Fortescue, Captain Bates : I hope she is so, for your sake.”

“ One can't make out what the deuce a widow is at. They are knowing folks, ma'am, and one can't get a plain answer from them. They look innocent and sincere, but they whiffle about like a weathercock when you want a matter-of-fact answer to a plain question. A single woman's face is her reply, and you may guess her feelings from its emotion ; but a widow, madam, knows exactly what you mean to say,—and much more sometimes.”

“ You must be cautious, Captain Bates, and not surrender too easily.”

“ How is a man to help himself ma'am, when a widow bothers him with looks and surprises of all kinds ?”

“ What surprises, Captain Bates ?”

“ Never mind, you wouldn't know what I meant if I told you ; but they know what they are about, and act very dishonestly by one sometimes.”

“ Then why attend to Mrs. Fortescue ?”

“ My God, ma'am ! have you seen her roll those beautiful eyes of hers, that would drive any one mad : have you noticed her smile,

enough to turn a man's head into jelly—have you heard the tone of her voice when she speaks with feeling?"

"I must leave you then to fight your own battle, I can give no assistance; but the victory I see is not to you: Mrs. Fortescue has won it upon your own confession."

"The deuce is in the women," muttered Captain Bates, "they are eternally at some plan which we cannot see, or avoid if we do see. They are plagues born to make a man miserable if he wishes to be quiet, and this woman is worse than all put together if she is insincere."

"But surely you may ascertain in a short time whether Mrs. Fortescue receives your attentions with satisfaction, by her own manners."

"You can ascertain nothing from widows, I tell you, but that they are playing the devil."

"I am sorry for you, but I must refer you to the lady: you seem to anticipate the worst, and you are of course prepared to meet your inflictions. I am sorry you took such pains to place yourself in this dilemma."

We proceeded in silence. Captain Bates's spirits fled: he was now as dull as he had before been gay and agreeable. Mrs. Fortescue endeavoured to curtail her conversation with the major by sundry attempts to halt and give her

attention to the views around her ; but her companion was never to be shaken off by gentle means. He persevered in his strictures upon his uncle, and the merits of Bob. At the lodge, however, we again resumed the original situation of things, and appeared before the Langhams with restored smiles. Lady Langham was seated at her worsted-frame in the breakfast-room, listening to her husband, who was snugly established near her, reading aloud. Lord Elford was very quietly looking over a box of fishing-tackle. Mrs. Fortescue was spokeswoman.

“ Well, cousin, here we are after strange vicissitudes and extraordinary events. Major Sandford found us at last, and we are dying to know your plan ; but first I must get rid of this encumbrance,” and she slowly gave her cloak into Captain Bates’s care.

“ How late you are ; luncheon is in the dining-room still, but we have deserted it an hour ago,” said Sir James, rising to receive us in his usual friendly manner. “ Captain Bates, you are a gallant man : what would the ladies do without you ?”

“ But the plan, cousin, the plan you have in idea—you do not know the suspense we are enduring ! Is it a plan for a Sunday-school, or a railway, or a party of pleasure ?—we are conjec-

turing in vain. Lady Langham, have mercy on your sex, and in one word name your intentions !”

“ Well, we are proposing a little party to Malvern for a few days, and we are hoping for the assent and company of all friends present. Louisa, you are ours, I see by your look, and Captain and Miss Bates will give us great pleasure if they may be prevailed upon to join us.”

Captain Bates hesitated, and endeavoured to look pre-engaged. The widow would not woo him by a look, but she alarmed him by her movement. She walked towards Lord Elford, and was asking his lordship questions upon fishing-tackle, and ridiculing her own ignorance. Captain Bates could not maintain his dignified uncertainty : he had no engagement, he believed—he was indeed quite sure—he would be happy to accept Lady Langham’s invitation for himself and daughter.

The party then was formed, but when to go, and how ? Sir James was in his element. “ Allow me to act ; you shall see how I have arranged it, if it meets your approbation. How many of us are there ?—nine I believe. Well, there is the barouche, two curricles, and a cab. I trust my wife with no one ; these are unprincipled times, therefore I drive Lady Langham

in my own curricule. The barouche is at your service, ladies and gentlemen, unless each lady prefers—”

Lord Elford at this moment approached the round table where we all sat holding council together. “ I shall be very happy to take charge of a lady in my curricule, if it is any accommodation.

We all looked at each other, no one seemed to contend for that distinguished honour, as unexpectedly offered as it was ill appreciated.

Sir James was at fault : he wished every one to be happily arranged, but this a little interfered with a satisfactory adjustment. Mrs. Fortescue, bending over the table of fishing-apparatus, affected not to hear his lordship’s polite remark. Miss Bates looked stupid : I felt obliged to reply.

“ Your lordship is very polite ; but perhaps we can arrange something less troublesome—something more—” I hesitated and stammered : why had not Captain Thelwal come forward ? his cabriolet was at his own disposal, why not have secured a companion before slow Lord Elford could commit the politeness ?

Lord Elford bowed. “ I cannot fancy driving a lady a troublesome office. I shall have pleasure in driving you to Malvern, Miss Vansittart.”

Not a word from Thelwal. I glanced towards him, and he was, or seemed to be, attending to Mrs. Fortescue's movements, as she examined Lord Elford's boxes of fishing flies. I was indignant and offended: pique made me instantly accept Lord Elford's courtesy.

"I shall be happy to accompany you, my lord."

My lord bowed, and retreated to his fishing-tackle. That then was a settled point; but how to dispose of the others was a consideration. Mrs. Fortescue came up to us.

"Two of you are provided for: cousin, suppose your barouche should contain the remaining party, would there be any harm?"

"Don't think of me," cried Major Sandford, "for I shall ride Bob."

"Then we can manage it very well," replied Sir James. "Anne, I think we can manage it, four inside, and two in the rumble, my love."

"Let it be so, with pleasure," said Lady Langham; "decide among yourselves, and I am pleased with any plan you like to arrange."

"I think I can improve upon this," observed Captain Thelwal. "I will take my curricule, and perhaps Mrs. Fortescue will allow me to be her charioteer."

"Confound the man," thought I, "can anything be more provoking."

“ I am alarmed in those little carriages, Captain Thelwal ; I feel very much obliged to you, but I will drive with Lady Langham, with whom I shall have no fears.”

“ I will drive your own pace, Mrs. Fortescue.”

“ Thank you,” but I release you from such a coward as I should prove. Perhaps Miss Bates—”

“ Ah ! Captain Bates,” cried Thelwal, hurriedly, “ you will do me the honour, I know. I consider myself engaged to you—we will drive together.”

Captain Bates bowed his thanks, and silence was taken for consent. The whole thing was arranged, and every one smiled, though few were pleased in their own minds. I hated driving with Lord Elford. Captain Bates must hate being driven by Thelwal ; and Thelwal must equally dislike driving Captain Bates. It was altogether a *contresens*, but it could not be avoided now ; we must all drive sulkily to Malvern, and hope for a different arrangement in returning. The widow was the only lady who really looked satisfied—was she revelling in poor Captain Bates’s dismay ?

The day was yet to be fixed. This was Thursday, and on Monday we were to depart. Lady Langham pleaded for so much delay.

She hoped the Drinkwaters might be able to join the party. It was a faint hope, but it was eagerly nourished; for Mary's society would be such happiness to her while we were climbing the hills, and it might be, that the doctor would find benefit from the air and water—Lady Langham was determined to propose the scheme to them, and she hoped all things, so did Sir James, who always echoed his lady's thoughts and wishes.

Lady Langham was to drive to the Grange immediately to hand in her proposals, and give the doctor time to find out how he really was.

“If any one is tired,” she added, “let me invite them to take a drive with me.”

“Do you go alone, Anne?” asked Mrs. Fortescue.

“Not if you will favour me with your company.”

“No, thank you—I am quite fatigued. I mean to read quietly in your boudoir.”

“Louisa,” said Lady Langham, “Miss Bates, I am at your service.”

“Thank you,” I answered slowly and evasively; but no look or remark from Captain Thelwal assisted me in escaping.

Captain Bates rose, I thought abruptly, and said he would walk home with his daughter :

who rose silently to obey the call. He declined Lady Langham's offer to put them down on her road: he declined remaining any longer, and declined bowing to Mrs. Fortescue, who gave me one of her pointed glances as he left the Hermitage, considerably out of temper and spirits.

"I told Miss Bates I would show her Bob," cried Major Sandford, peevishly, "but the old gentleman has carried her off; now she won't see him before Monday."

"You were not gallant," said Sir James; "you might have driven Miss Bates to Malvern, and shown off your horse to advantage. Why were you so backward?"

"Upon my honour, I never drove a lady in my life; and besides, I never tried Bob in harness. Do you think she would go with me—I could put him into a cart, and try, you know."

"I dare say she would, Sandford."

"I'll try Bob a little every day in a cart; you can ask if she will go with me when you see her next, Sir James."

"No, no, Sandford—apply for yourself."

The major mused a little. "Well, I go there to-morrow to put a new stick to the canary's leg, so I'll ask her then."

"It's all over with you, Sandford," cried

Captain Thelwal; “no man ties up canaries’ legs without being interested in the mistress—you are done, Sandford.”

“Upon my honour, I don’t know what you mean—I don’t see any harm mending the bird’s leg, poor devil; and I think Miss Bates a very pleasant woman—she knows a horse’s points very tolerably—and, what I like is, she never asks me for explanations.”

Poor Major Sandford! he never observed the suppressed mirth his speech caused. He quitted the room very innocent of ridicule to try Bob in a cart, and when Lady Langham’s carriage drove up, I was constrained to depart with her. Captain Thelwal never addressed me or led me to the door: Lord Elford rose and bowed; but I fell to the lot of Sir James. I never felt so perfectly indignant. A pretty business Malvern would turn out! here was heartburning and annoyance already!

CHAPTER IV.

“THERE is something quite wrong, Louisa,” said Lady Langham, as we drove towards the Grange; “can *you* solve this morning’s enigma?”

“I have not the second sight, my dear Lady Langham; but certainly something is wrong with me, and that will discover itself, for I never could conceal a feeling in my life.”

“Struggle to obtain the mastery over such unruly servants,” replied my friend, in that gentle tone, which alone had influence with me.

“Alas! I cannot—and Captain Thelwal has roused them all.”

“But what has given Captain Thelwal such power over you, Louisa? That you see him every day, I suspect; but I have yet to learn your affection for him.”

“I don’t know anything about my affection; yes, I suppose I like him, since he can vex me

so; but I think his allowing Lord Elford to appropriate me on the journey is unpardonable!"

"Never mind; Lord Elford is a very intelligent companion, and will compensate for, perhaps, a little mortified vanity; is it not so?"

"I don't like Lord Elford: his opinions are so sturdy, and his eyes so unrelenting. One cannot make a fool of him."

"Is that to be a fault? well, I cannot advocate Lord Elford; but what is the matter with Captain Bates?"

"Captain Bates, I fancy, was huffed at being engaged to Thelwal, when he intended flirting with Mrs. Fortescue."

Lady Langham laughed: "I must leave these misfortunes to unroll in their own way. Sir James is anxious to make everything pleasant to his friends, and we must hope his intentions will ultimately succeed."

"Oh, I have quite resolved to accompany Lord Elford, so that engagement is decided: I only hope it will plague Thelwal half as much as it plagues myself, *that* would secure him a miserable expedition."

"My dear Louisa, do not talk so. What pleasure can there be in torturing a fellow-creature, when you are writhing under vexation yourself? Be influenced by your own feelings,

and do not wish to extend them to others, since they are so horrible.”

“Revenge is sweet, Lady Langham.”

“Revenge belongs to another hand, Louisa. In our weak hands the instrument too often falls upon the head of the inflictor. Be gentle with Captain Thelwal, he may have a complaint to make against yourself.”

I was not to be persuaded by Lady Langham’s reasoning: my anger was unappeasable towards Captain Thelwal, and I resented these things in my heart.

The subject dropped between us. No two people saw things in such directly opposite lights as myself and Lady Langham, therefore, we could rarely keep up conversation, and the Grange was now in sight. By reason of the downfall of the long-established pigeon-house, the house now stood looking one honestly in the face.

The doctor was re-established in the “cell,” no pain, only weakness left; “considerable weakness,” as Mary told us, but good nights, and a tolerable appetite, were restoring his nerves and strength.

“A little change of air, perhaps, only Gideon does not like the idea of moving.”

My mother was knitting very comfortably on

the doctor's dexter side. She smiled when I appeared with Lady Langham.

“ You are come to reproach me, Louisa, and I believe I deserve it. I have staid far beyond my usual time to-day—the doctor was so comfortable, I quite enjoyed a little chat.”

The doctor did look comfortable; how could he do otherwise? Mary was glued on one side his chair, and my mother a fixture at the other side; two females gilding the scene which never before contained a woman's form—how could the doctor be otherwise than comfortable!

Lady Langham, with true woman's tact, congratulated all parties on their present position. She expressed her admiration of the Grange, which looked so nobly from the road; she thought Mary looking well, but pale; a little change of air would be very serviceable to both. “ Sir James was inventing a little freak to Malvern, for a few days, would they think it over, and drive there in such good company?”

Mary was delighted: she entered into the idea with her whole heart, and of course the doctor could bring forward no objection.

“ My dear, it will just perfect your recovery: Malvern water is a pure water, and considered the finest stomachic; it will strengthen your stomach and foot, and do your spirits good.”

“ I am very well in spirits, Mary, thanks to yourself.”

“ Well, I know you are, but it will be beneficial in a thousand ways. Yes, my dear Anne, we will be of your party ; but when ?”

“ On Monday, if that is not too far distant.”

“ Oh no ! we shall be quite ready. You know *you* have luckily nothing to do with the matter,” and Mary turned to her husband affectionately, “ you are no longer a dismal bachelor, therefore the preparation belongs to the poor woman. You will only be required to step into your carriage on Monday morning.”

“ I hope Mrs. Vansittart will be of our party,” said the doctor ; “ she will like to climb the what’s-his-name hills.”

“ Nay, doctor, my climbing days are over, and my days of touring also. I must decline the Malvern expedition : I shall have great pleasure in looking after your affairs when absent, and your comforts when returned ; but excuse me accompanying you.”

Lady Langham arranged everything with Mary, while the doctor modestly withdrew, clattering his crutches and letting the door slam behind him. He was adventuring a little walk, he said, to give the ladies time to adjust their grievances.

“Gideon has no mercy upon the doors, or upon our nerves,” observed Mary; “but I fancy all gentlemen are alike in some things. Now let us think over everything.”

Everything was talked over and over—we were to remain till Thursday or Friday; but as we should be at the Crown, only clothes for the time were requisite. Mary had more to think of than the rest; there were Drinkwater’s crutches, and Drinkwater’s bandages, and Drinkwater’s great wrapping-gown — there was the great soda-jar, for bottle it could not be called, the stomach tincture, the foot-cushion, and a large bottle of something which the doctor always called “what’s-his-name” — all these things were to be remembered, and packed into the carriage; and from Mary’s enumeration I expected the Grange equipage would soon take the name of the “Drinkwater van,” it would be so loaded inside and out.

As soon as Mary had made an estimate of her Malvern treasures, she turned to me.

“You have been an absentee, Louisa; but I am glad you have been full of gaiety. Tell me who you like best at the Hermitage?”

“I don’t like Major Sandford, and I don’t like Lord Elford; everyone else is very agreeable.”

“ But why ?”

“ One is ugly and the other stupid.”

“ Is that quite true, Anne? Is Louisa correct ?”

“ Major Sandford is very plain, I acknowledge,” said Lady Langham; “ but he is good-natured, and a very old acquaintance of Sir James, therefore he must be a pet of *mine*; but I totally deny Louisa’s charge of dulness brought against Lord Elford. He is a very well-read personage, and a gentleman in the very best acceptation of the word. It is impossible to prove dulness upon Lord Elford.”

“ He has been dull to me; I only tell you what he appears to me, Mary; Lady Langham and myself never could agree about any one’s character. Lord Elford was peculiarly disagreeable in asking me to take a place in his curricule, when I wished him and it a thousand miles off.”

“ Poor Louisa,” said Mary, smiling, “ I shall judge for myself on Monday, for I don’t think you have drawn a sound conclusion! I hope Gideon will continue improving; it would do us such good to be together, Anne. It will be enough for me to sit and enjoy the sight of your happiness. I told you my opinion of Sir James from the first, did I not, and has it not proved a true one ?”

“As far as human judgment can discern, Mary,” replied her friend, “I am grateful and happy.”

I thought sentiment was the order of the day now, therefore I tripped to the window and beheld the doctor standing on the site of the pigeon-house, which was transformed into a very respectable bed of American plants: Jenkins was near him. I thought of my Uncle Toby and the corporal consulting on the bowling-green. The doctor was following the direction of his servant's finger with his eyes as Jenkins held forth with volubility. The scene was inviting, and I joined them. Doctor Drinkwater was giving orders to have a weathercock fixed up in a tree opposite the “cell” window: Jenkins pleaded his better taste. “However, sir, if we put up the tin fish somewhere where it can't be seen, won't it be better?”

“Then how can I see it, you fool!”

“However, sir, it will be such a thing sticking up just behind these American plants, perhaps mistress mayn't fancy it up in the tulip tree, sir.”

“You're a d— fool, Jenkins; you want your own way, and so quote your mistress. You and your mistress must settle it then; but how am I to see it in front, if it's put at the back of the house?”

“However, sir, a window just broke into the sitting-room on the north side would give a nice view of the weathercock, and be a pleasant look out, sir.”

The doctor paused: “I have nothing to do with alterations, you must talk to your mistress about them. I’ve been worried enough about the pigeon-house.”

The doctor was only aware of my approach at this moment, and Jenkins retired as I drew close to his master. Poor Dr. Drinkwater had never been guilty of so many forcible expressions before a lady, and he hardly knew how to recover his serenity. “I have been quite disturbed, Miss Vansittart, but it’s all that fool Jenkins.”

“What is the matter with Jenkins?”

“He is so pig-headed, I can’t get a thing done my own way; I wish he had Mr. Brereton over him to sharpen his wits a little; the man is such a fool.”

Doctor Drinkwater pronounced the word “fool” with peculiar emphasis, he drew it out to double its length of sound. Either the last fit had somewhat irritated his temper, or the doctor had some sparks of humanity which had never developed themselves to common observation.

“Your pigeon-house is down at last, doctor.”

“ Yes, that was all that fool Jenkins, leaving one exposed to the high road !”

“ Oh, I think the change an immense improvement.”

“ Do you really ? I fancied it laid the house so open to the road.”

“ No, it looks now a place of importance ; before, it put one in mind of a coquette peeping behind her fan. We were admiring it as we drove up.”

“ Well then, I shall get reconciled to it ; but I don't like the exchange at all.”

“ These are beautiful plants, and will look a noble bed in a year or two ; they want a little water, I think.”

“ To be sure they do ; it's that fool Jenkins, he forgets every thing he ought to do. I don't know why I keep him, he is of no use.”

I fancied the only chance of getting Mary's company to Malvern was in removing her husband from thoughts which disturbed his peace, and depositing him safely at her side again ; I therefore drew the doctor into the house, where his ideas became gradually tranquil, and the sight of his wife brought a smile upon lips which never framed an uncouth word before her. My company had been unexpected and at an unpropitious moment, or even I might have been

still ignorant that the doctor could exert himself.

We were not long at the Grange. Lady Langham had ordered her carriage as the doctor and myself re-entered, and I and my mother were put down at our own door.

I began to consider now, how I stood with regard to Captain Thelwal. I certainly liked him. I liked flirting with him, and I was extremely offended at his neglect that morning. He was flattering in his manners, handsome, and chatty—sentimental would be the better word—and I was becoming anxious for his society, and hurt at any appearance of indifference: yes, I certainly was in love, or near it, and Thelwal had little beside his pay to offer me. Must I understand the purport of his speeches? Did honour oblige me to comprehend his attentions? Could I not enjoy the present, and leave the future to its fate?

I had yet to revenge his conduct in the affair of the journey, and I should see how he bore retaliation; nothing could be easier than reasoning in favour of one's own delusions; my mind was convinced it was better for a season not to understand Captain Thelwal.

Captain Bates called as usual the following morning; he was ill, and annoyed like myself.

There had been nothing said the previous day about walking, and he supposed every body was too ill-tempered to meet at Hartley stile, as usual. I was equally ignorant of the general understanding, but I did smile internally at Captain Bates and myself being involved in an affair which drew us together by the powerful bond of sympathy, and must in future bind him to my interest. His voice at least would be silent whenever my name was pronounced in dishonour, and I must be perforce the confidante in his progress with the widow. We can never foresee the train of events which lead to such extraordinary results; but to engage in folly is a serpentine path; it will inevitably lead a man in a direction he never contemplated at setting forth; and Captain Bates did not even whisper to himself, that at his age an arm-chair, with society adapted to his years, had been far better than his present degraded situation, the half-enslaved follower of Mrs. Fortescue.

I was very willing to aid a fellow-sufferer, since it included my own pleasure, and I advised taking a walk in the direction of Hartley stile. If our party should happen to be there, so much the better; if not, we were taking the air, and locomotion was better than solitude to each. Captain Bates was of my opinion, and we

proceeded accordingly. No doubt our regularly setting forth at a certain hour caused much discussion as we slowly paced up the broad street of our village.

Captain Bates was far from standing well in his own opinion; he gave two or three groans, which I passed by in silence. At last the fire kindled.

“I think I am a great fool.”

“Are you really of that opinion?—but why do you suppose it?”

“I don’t believe that woman means a word she says.”

“I am astonished at you. Why don’t you decide your own plans, and insist upon her assent or refusal?—surely that would place you beyond suspense.”

“Ay, there’s the thing! one does not dare meet the struggle. There’s something flattering in her manner, which pleases and persuades one into visions; but she might be dishonest, and I have a suspicion she is so.”—(Another groan.)—“I think I am a fool for my pains; I think I am too old in my feelings and habits to follow that coquettish step; I ought never to have looked at her eyes, or thought about her ringlets—I dare say it’s a wig.”

“Probably.”

“Women who have turned forty dress up with such care, there’s no knowing what they really are. You may depend upon it she wears a wig, ma’am, and one’s not sure of her teeth being her own.”

“So many loopholes for your heart to escape through, Captain Bates.”

“I don’t know; one talks largely sometimes, and yet finds it vanity and vexation in the hour of need. I am not a wise man when the widow Fortescue is present; she rolls her eyes so softly, and says such entrapping things.”

On such airy nothings we discoursed, till Hartley stile appeared before us, and there stood Mrs. Fortescue and Captain Thelwal, faithful to their implied engagements. All was *couleur de rose* again; the wig and false teeth faded from the mind of Captain Bates, when he found a soft hand extended to greet him. Captain Thelwal’s crime was expiated when I saw him dart forwards to welcome me with looks of extravagant pleasure. We walked onwards to the little hamlet of Hartley; for a short time we kept together, conversing upon general topics; but the widow and Captain Bates gradually fell back, till we no longer belonged to each other. The moment Captain Thelwal discovered we were sufficiently with-

drawn from our companions, his manner changed, and he suddenly turned from the subject we were discussing.

“Miss Vansittart, we were all wrong yesterday; this Malvern arrangement might have been so much better contrived.”

“I do not see how,” I replied, certain recollections calling up disagreeable feelings. “Every one appeared very well satisfied with the plan chalked out for them.”

“But you so readily accepted Lord Elford’s offer.” Captain Thelwal looked earnestly at me.

“No one else interfered to prevent the offer, Captain Thelwal, and his lordship’s politeness required a prompt reply—it deserved one.”

“I am aware I was dilatory, Miss Vansittart; but consciousness prevented my uttering at that moment. I would have given worlds to have secured you, yet for those worlds I could not give expression to my wish. I felt tonguetied, it was all planned so quickly; but you would have pitied me had you known what I suffered when I heard you accept Lord Elford for your companion.”

“Your sufferings would not destroy you, Captain Thelwal; you are used to that delightful variety of sensation.”

“Tell me what you mean.”

“Oh, that such a very determined flirt as yourself only exists upon excitations.”

“Can you prove me a flirt, Miss Vansittart?”

“Yes, I think I can. I think you were one in the—I am sure it does not signify proving the case. Report says so.”

“If, by report, you mean Langham’s laughing remarks, he would, I know, absolve me, if seriously applied to, and you yourself have no right to condemn me.”

“You were paying your addresses to some lady there,” I exclaimed quickly.

“To a lady—where?” asked Captain Thelwal, stopping suddenly, and facing me.

“Do not stand in that warlike attitude, creating observation ; you were addressing some lady in the Isle of Wight ; let us move on.”

“I did not address any lady there, upon my honour, Miss Vansittart.”

“Your were guitaring some one, Captain Thelwal.”

“I have no doubt I guitared many ladies, but I never addressed one, upon my honour.”

“Well, don’t be so very earnest ; there is no harm addressing a lady.”

“But you named it as a reproach, and insisted upon my being a flirt, and disbelieved

my assurances of having felt your acceptance of Lord Elford !”

“ I have not accepted him for life : it is only a few hours’ journey, and I could not have done otherwise.”

“ It was my own folly, indeed ; but how uncomfortably we are walking—you are half a mile off in the dust—take my arm, it will steady you in the path.”

‘ Captain Thelwal offered his arm ; I took it silently : he bent forward to meet the expression of my eye, and he detected no coldness, no want of encouragement in its glance as our eyes met, for he pressed my arm gently to his side, and proceeded in livelier tones, and with a livelier step.

“ No, I am not a flirt, in the proper acceptance of the word. I *can* flirt if ladies are willing, and I confess I have done so ; but I never was serious in manner, and light in thought ; I never tried to attract a woman to give her pain ; *that* villany I detest as much as you can do. Had you spoken to Langham in sober seriousness, and asked him to prove the character, he would have found difficulty in doing so. He always called me a flirting fellow to my face, because I chatted to all women alike, but I will tell you my opinion of a flirt—a real flirt.”

I did not wish to hear his definition of a flirt.

“Well, you stand clear in my estimation, Captain Thelwal, you shall be a flirt no more. I believe you—but did you not guitar some lady every evening?—think.”

“I guitared a lady many times for Simpson, and we were caught, and flew for our lives; but I never played at any lady’s casement on my own behalf, in *England*.”

“Only for the dark-haired Italian girls.”

“That was Langham’s nonsense.”

“Did Sir James know you played for Simpson when you left the Isle of Wight?”

“No, not then, but I told him afterwards—why do you inquire?”

“Nothing—curiosity, I believe.”

“You must have been aware I admired yourself—you must have been quite aware of the impression you made, but you were gone when I returned to Ryde.”

“I could not suppose or be aware of any such nonsense.”

“I do not care, I have found you again; but this wretched drive to Malvern, can it not be contrived differently?”

“Not now, Lord Elford would be offended.”

“Promise to return with me.”

“Well, you must manage it; I cannot ap-

pear a party in getting rid of stupid Lord Elford.”

“I don’t like your driving with Lord Elford.”

“Nonsense, what is that to you?”

“It is, and must be a great deal—it may be of the highest importance to me. He is rich, and I am poor: a rich man, and a peer of the realm, must have many attractions.”

“When I discover those attractions I will tell you fairly. Lord Elford is incorrigibly dull; but that he cannot help, therefore I will give you my unbiassed opinion upon his horses and his style of driving.”

“I would rather you would not think about him at all.”

“If you force the man forward, Captain Thelwal, how can I help it? It cannot be a pleasing drive to myself, because I don’t like Lord Elford, and where I don’t like, I never try to be either civil or happy.”

This speech was not in the spirit of Christianity, nor did it contain one drop of the milk of human kindness, but it suited the feelings of a jealous lover, for such Thelwal was decidedly announcing himself to be. He was comforted by its unfeminine tone, and another pressure sealed and stamped our understanding; for I

did perceive his meaning, and I did not check his hope.

By this time we had wandered into Hartley, and were standing before the porch of its little church. Mrs. Fortescue and Captain Bates joined us, and we again resumed general chat; and affected carelessness of place and person. For a few minutes we rested on a broad tombstone, but one only of the party had a taste for church-yard contemplations: Captain Bates could not endure them—"it always made him sick when he found himself walking upon skulls and bones, and looking at nettles and grave-stones."

"And yet," said Mrs. Fortescue, "it is worth reflecting that once upon a time the bones beneath us had life and warmth as we have now: those bones united, in symmetrical proportion, once walked as we have done, and there was youth and beauty and affection and suffering, such as we know of; and all is over, and they rest from their labour: our fate is to struggle on awhile."

"Don't let us talk of such things, ma'am," exclaimed Captain Bates; "it has an effect upon one's spirits."

"They have loved and endured and died," continued Mrs. Fortescue, heedless of the re-

mark, and gazing upon three graves which lay in our front, thickly overgrown with nettles, and apparently of long formation; they are gone to peace, and their existence may have been as full of struggles, as full of restlessness, as full of effort, as many of us are doomed to endure who follow them. I wonder if we shall really forget for ever in our grave—if it is indeed silence and rest and oblivion?”

“Who doubts it?” answered Captain Thelwal. “Does it not say in the holy writing, here the wicked cease from troubling, and here the weary are at rest?”

“I should like to be laid by the side of those peaceful graves,” continued Mrs. Fortescue, with an earnestness of look and manner which struck me as very peculiar: “they lie so calm, and the nettles grow over them so luxuriantly, and they are so deeply tranquil.”

“Let us walk away from such places,” Captain Bates said, and he rose to depart: “it makes me as sick as a cat to talk of death, and sit looking upon crossbones: my spirits wont recover these horrible thoughts.”

Captain Thelwal mechanically rose with Captain Bates, and they slowly preceded us towards the little entrance-gate. Mrs. Fortescue held my hand to prevent my retreating with them.

“Stay a moment ; I seldom get an enjoying half-hour like this, when I can look upon the dead solemnly and quietly as I do now, and lose all recollection of myself and my disquietude.”

I was somewhat alarmed ; Mrs. Fortescue had once or twice, if I may so express myself, burst the cerements of her usual gentle slowness, and emerged into absolute energy ; but the causes had been so trifling, and the effect so speedily quenched, that I had not before given the matter my attention. I remembered her eager manner with Major Sandford, when she required him to produce the note, which was of little importance, and was scarcely worth eliciting emotion of any kind, her manner *might* be studied, to produce a certain effect—to bring out what Lady Anne used to call light and shade—but at this moment her soliloquy was from the heart : her face was pale, her eyes dim, and a restlessness was visible in every movement that was totally distinct from her usual extraordinary quietness. I was certainly alarmed, but I reseated myself as she caught my hand.

“Do you really believe,” she repeated, “there is rest and oblivion in the grave ?”

“We are told so,” I replied : “but ask a better and wiser person than myself ; ask Lady Langham.”

“ Will *she* tell me there is peace ?”

“ She will tell you all she knows, Mrs. Fortescue, and all she says is good and true : I say, who have often plagued and drawn upon her kind nature heavy drafts of patience.”

“ I was never before in a country churchyard,” said Mrs. Fortescue ; “ I had no idea of it but as it formed a scene to bring forth Gray’s *Elegy* : I never contemplated a resting-spot like this.

‘ Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire.’

Ay, no doubt it burned with fire celestial, or terrestrial, and there was nothing to quench it but death ; I wonder if Lady Langham will tell *me* so.”

“ Our friends are impatient, my dear Mrs. Fortescue, while we are moralizing : Captain Bates looks daggers over the gate at our long pause.”

“ Never mind Captain Bates.”

“ I never did, but I considered *you*.”

Mrs. Fortescue laughed, and her countenance resumed something of its former serenity. “ You have brought me upon earth again by naming Captain Bates : why do you destroy my chain of ideas by appealing to the old gentleman ?”

“ Because,” I said, “ you are his companion,

and his attraction, and he cannot endure your absence; so he would tell you if he dared re-enter the churchyard.”

“Is it so?” asked the widow; “then he shall remember Hartley churchyard.” A gleam of humour lighted up her eyes as she discovered an old bone which had lain undisturbed for years in a mouldering state, and took possession of the relic: “Now, Miss Vansittart, let us join our escort; I am quite recovered from my dismals, and ready to charm Captain Bates again—Captain Bates, we have been moralizing over this bone. Miss Vansittart thinks it is the breastbone of a Saxon, I maintain it to be the ankle of a Roman: I mean to take it to Lord Elford for elucidation; but it crumbles so, how shall I carry it?”

Captain Bates’s disgust could not be concealed; he shuddered as she held it up to his notice.

“For Heaven’s sake, ma’am, throw down that disgusting thing, and let us get away.”

“Not for the world—to Lord Elford it must go; he is an antiquarian, though not so conversable or dirty as Monkbarnes, but he will decide the controversy: stay, I cannot hold it; my dear Captain Bates, I believe you must receive this immortal bone.”

In spite of "my dear Captain Bates," which would have waked him from his last sleep at any other time, the countenance of the *preux chevalier* was piteous: disgust and horror struggled with Cupid for mastery. Cupid fell and arose: he went down again before his mighty opponents, and Mrs. Fortescue watched the strife with a laughing saucy eye. Again Cupid arose, and Captain Bates half put forth his hand to receive the Roman ankle. I pitied and relieved his feelings by resigning my opinion. "Mrs. Fortescue, I perceive it *is* an ankle and not a Saxon breastbone, therefore commit the disputed article to its own earth. It is exactly what you determine it to be."

"Then I resign it," said the widow, "unless Captain Bates would like to ascertain its identity:" and she threw it playfully towards him with a treacherous smile. Captain Bates was at sea, and could not trim his vessel among such shoals as now beset him. The horror subsided as the bone rolled along the path, but the smile remained, and the expression "my dear Captain Bates" was still in his ears; that one mellifluous tone, how it told upon his heart, and how he dwelt upon its augury!

We retraced our steps to the stile, which was sacred now to our hearts, for it was the alpha

and omega of our daily pleasure ; there we met and there we parted, and this day we lingered longer than usual to anticipate the pleasures of Malvern. Everything about it was to be delightful except the drive : it was voted bad taste for two gentlemen to be imprisoned together in a curricule, when two ladies, disengaged ladies, were to be carried off by Sir James : his lady was surely enough for him, why was he to monopolize the fair ? Everything was canvassed, but no one could offer a better arrangement : Mrs. Fortescue's alarms made her persist in keeping her seat in the barouche, and unless Lord Elford could have a convenient fit of illness, or a call to town, I must be his portion. Captain Thelwal was content to drive Captain Bates, since both would be suffering under the same infliction—it was, after all, only a few hours' annoyance, and things must be better managed as we returned. Major Sandford luckily was in the way of no one. He would open the gates, look to the horses, superintend the grooms, and shew off Bob. We should only have our own affairs to manage, and it was hoped everybody would be rather more alert in forwarding their views. The last portion of the remark was Thelwal's, and an expressive look pointed the meaning. Slowly and unwillingly

we separated at Hartley stile : the shake of the hand was now a lingering pressure, and the “farewell” had changed into a silent protracted gaze on all sides. The walk had decided many points, and ascertained many feelings. I felt that I was dear to Thelwal, that he had received encouragement from me, and that a final avowal and acceptance would be the consequence of that morning’s conversation. Thelwal’s anxiety to disprove his character as a flirt proved his intentions were honourable and sincere, and I was equally bound in honour to consider myself waiting for a formal disclosure, which his manners had warranted, and mine had virtually accepted. I did not feel alarmed at my own feelings as I retraced my way home with Captain Bates : they were all in favour of Thelwal : his looks, his warmth of expression, his personal recommendations—all were highly flattering to my vanity, and I pictured myself as the future bride of Thelwal, with pride and satisfaction. Lady Langham must have suspected what was going on, and since her friendly voice of caution had not reached me through any channel, direct or indirectly, I felt my path was at last clearly defined.

Not so my unfortunate companion. His walk had been sweet, but his reflections were bitter,

and I must listen to his sorrow since I had embarked with him in an ocean of trouble: his breast was labouring with thoughts, each of which concealed a thorn that lacerated his heart, and he turned to me for consolation.

“It’s all over with me now, however, and I am in a pretty mess: that widow has wound herself about me like a boa constrictor, ma’am.”

“Well, and what did you say to her, Captain Bates?”

“Say to her, ma’am! I said nothing to her, and never shall say anything: do you think she does not know what she is doing?—do you think she is not perfectly aware how miserable she is making me? I see she is laughing at me, and yet I am a fool in her hands.”

“You have ascertained nothing, Captain Bates. Mrs. Fortescue is very fascinating and agreeable, and you are afraid of putting an end to your pleasant communication, by speaking about your feelings. If she means nothing, the sooner you are aware of it the better.”

“I cannot speak, ma’am, I should faint under it. I know the woman is laughing at me: I’ll be hanged if I go to Malvern with her.”

“It would be discreet to retreat in time, if that is your opinion, Captain Bates.”

“Retreat is all stuff, ma’am—I can’t retreat

—I must enjoy her society : what did she come down here for?—were there not simpletons enough in London to laugh at, but she must come here like the plague?”

“She may be amusing herself with your admiration till you speak : Mrs. Fortescue cannot make a proposal to *you*.”

“She be hanged ! I tell you she is laughing at me, and I’ll go to Malvern to shew her I don’t care for her. She is a very abandoned woman, and all widows are the same, ma’am.”

“I thank you in my mother’s name, Captain Bates.”

“I did not mean that,” continued Captain Bates, smiling at his own impetuosity : “but I consider all women behave in a very scandalous manner who look one thing and say another, and you will always find widows at that game?” Captain Bates’s voice sunk from *in alt.* down to the dolorous as he proceeded : “besides, what have I to offer ? I am poor and old and cold and secluded and bedevilled ; how could I offer myself to her consideration ?”

“Not in those terms, I grant you ; suppose you keep that catalogue of miseries in the background, and advance boldly with a compliment and a song.”

“Is the widow musical?” This was said in a very *adagio* tone.

“Every lady is musical, and a song upon the hills may do wonders.”

“We shall see, but I don’t look forward to the party with any pleasure. I am not happy, ma’am—I have no pleasant thoughts, and a great many suspicions—I have a kind of presentiment of evil.”

“The remains of the churchyard, Captain Bates.”

“I am glad we got out of it without that d—d bone,” exclaimed the old captain, shuddering at its remembrance; “what good ever comes of a woman who makes a fuss about a Roman centurion’s leg? I don’t consider it decent, and sitting upon tombstones and dank grass is unwholesome and irreligious.”

I did not quite see the affair in that strong light; but if it lessened Mrs. Fortescue in her loveliness, so much the better for his heart, but I doubted its success. Captain Bates was caught, and he might gnaw at the net which confined him in vain—there was no chance of escape. As to Mrs. Fortescue, I could not make her out. If she was laughing at Captain Bates, why care to devote her mornings to the society

of a man who did not interest her? She was capable of feeling seriously, witness her emotion in the churchyard; and she loved a little humour, for that displayed itself constantly in her conversations with Captain Bates; I could not make her out—time must develope Mrs. Fortescue.

When I returned home, and could think in peace of all that had been said and done, I was troubled in mind. One of my strongest objections had been overlooked by an increasing attachment—had been borne down by the irresistible force of a growing inclination—it was poverty. Mrs. Fortescue, in her remarks upon Captain Thelwal, had said there was nothing to go upon, for he was a younger son; yet, I was on the brink of a deliberate engagement with him, and we were both heedless of consequences. But then to range with Thelwal over the world, see him admired, and sit listening to his voice and guitar! oh! that vision was blessed, and contented minds, with health and a sufficiency, was all in all to hearts which really loved! How had I chafed under my engagement with Mr. Ellis, because my heart was not in the matter! How had I turned from Brereton, whom I once certainly loved, because my heart rejected him in gaiters and grey pantaloons! Here was

a man, courted in the world, admired, accomplished, a man of birth, of connexion, and in a dragoon regiment!—how very different must my sentiments and feelings be!

I did not speak my thoughts to any one. My mother would have been gentle and kind; but she had been so used to my vacillations, my present confession would have availed little: she would have give me excellent advice, and believed me incapable of acting upon it; besides, confidence was destroyed between us. My affair with Mr. Ellis, my even *then* flirtation with Thelwal, had been a sealed book in my family, and once opened, where would the investigation end, but to my discredit? No, I could not meet my mother's eye, and hear her mild rebukes?

I dared not turn to Mary: I could fancy her affectionate heart anxious about my well-doing, and fearful for my own mistakes. I could see her looking earnestly in my face, and hear her soft voice uttering, "Are you sure, Louisa, you understand your own feelings?" She would never allude to the past, but the very silence would disconcert me, and Dr. Drinkwater would be chamber-counsel in my affairs, which I could not endure. Charlotte was at a distance; I could not see *her* before our journey took place, and all would be concluded before we met again.

Under such circumstances, all things must remain as they were; if my fate gave me to Thelwal, nothing could arrest the event, and opposition would be useless. I therefore kept silence, and determined to abide the issue of our Malvern expedition.

The following day was wet and windy, and there was not a chance of meeting at Hartley stile. I gave myself up to thoughts of the future, and those bright thoughts always embodied it in pictorial ornaments. I could only see Thelwal as my lover, never weary of paying gallant attentions; we were well dressed, happy, and in constant scenes of amusement. I saw no wretched drawbacks; no diorama of events succeeding each other, a family poverty, dress neglected, countenances of discontent, reproaches, separation. It was all smiling abundance, love, and full dress.

Sunday was all loveliness, and it brought the whole of the Hermitage party to church. It was an established custom after service to congregate at our house, and take refreshment, and on this morning the party assembled with particular feelings of interest. Captain Bates, who considered himself as one of our integral number, actually returned from church with his bright particular star, Mrs. Fortescue! and Miss

Bates volunteered her company under the noisy conduct of Major Sandford. This was something new: Miss Bates always lunched at the vicarage, and there must be a spell upon her to break through her settled habit. It must be Major Sandford's fascinating conversation about Bob, or gratitude warming into a livelier sentiment for the deliverer of her canary. Lord Elford, whose eyes rarely lifted themselves from his prayer-book, in church, walked in, this morning, and looked as dignified as dulness would allow, but my eye rested not on *him*; he had unwittingly, but certainly, stepped in between me and my rest, and I would not bandy civilities with the man who was to separate me from my lover the whole of the following morning. Thelwal seemed to understand and be grateful for my negligence towards his lordship; it was certainly a compliment, though not intended as such, for it emanated from my own single, selfish disappointment, but Lord Elford neither saw, nor felt the sting of my manner; he had acted politely in offering his carriage, and the transaction had passed from his mind. There was one, and only one opportunity for escaping my destined drive, which I certainly seized and acted upon, but it came to nothing. Major Sandford was extolling the weather, and laying up a treasure of enjoyment in the idea of a can-

ter upon Bob, and perhaps a match to trot against Lord Elford's curricle, "for he cared very little what sort of thing he matched with Bob." I was in an instant by Lord Elford's side. "If," I said, "your lordship will like to produce a little excitement, by taking Major Sandford's bet, I should enjoy the diversion very much; only I will change places with some lady or gentleman, if they have no objection."

My Lord Elford bowed. "I consider myself engaged to you, Miss Vansittart, to-morrow. I decline Major Sandford's wish of betting; I never open my betting-book on a sabbath-day."

There was nothing more to be said. I returned, vexed and angry, to my seat, and the conversation returned to its old channel; I could only give a look of sorrow to Thelwal, which was returned with interest, and both at heart vowed vengeance upon the stupid, precise puritan, Lord Elford.

"Well then," said Sir James, "we know what we are about. My lord will call for you, Miss Vansittart, at ten to-morrow morning; we shall drive on to wait for the Grange carriage, at Hipplesley gate, and by that time you will be up with us. We shall take refreshment and rest at Tewkesbury, and get a late dinner at Malvern. Has any one heard of the doctor this morning?"

Oh, yes, Mary had been heard of; the doctor was quite free from pain, and so comfortable, he indulged hopes of enjoying his little journey. Mary would be at church in the evening, but she remained to read prayers to her husband. Sir James never wearied in praising Mary. He descanted upon her excellence, her high principles, her freedom from selfishness, and he pronounced the doctor the happiest man in the world, after himself; "he should always place himself on the list first, but the doctor was the next; he had chosen well, and was rewarded in her careful and faithful management." Lady Langham and my mother devoured his words; their eyes beamed concurrence and satisfaction as the eulogy proceeded, and Lady Langham's happy look, as her husband spoke of his own lot, was not lost upon Lord Elford. I saw him turn to contemplate the mother and the wife with equal pleasure and respect. Major Sandford pursed up his huge mouth, and Captain Bates groaned. But how looked the lover at this eloquent harangue upon a *sister's* virtues? I know not. My eyes were chained in another direction; I could not turn to meet a look which I knew was fixed upon me; I was all nerve. How different to my feelings in the Isle of Wight, where I watched each movement that could gratify my

vanity, and watched moments in which I might converse with Thelwal, to forget I was engaged to another ! How strangely fate ordered events ! We had but one moment in which Thelwal could speak undisturbed to me ; it was at the moment of departure, and he drew near me amid the bustle of a general move.

“ You will not be very gay, I hope, to-morrow, but yet I wish you to be happy.”

“ With me gaiety and happiness are synonymous ; if I am unhappy, I shall be dull and uncivil, but Lord Elford must blame himself.”

“ I shall be miserable till we arrive at Malvern ; what could possess you to accept a seat with Lord Elford ?”

“ Your own conduct, Captain Thelwal.”

“ Don't say so, I am ready to hang myself for a folly I was sure to suffer by.”

“ It can't be helped now ; be more guarded another time.”

Sir James came smiling up to me. “ You should have seen Sandford trying to coax Bob into a curricule yesterday ; he did tolerably well in a cart, it seemed his vocation ; but the instant he felt curricule-harness upon him, he kicked off his finery and fled. Upon my word, it was a sight ! Anne and myself watched the whole process, did we not, Anne ?”

“ It was Mrs. Fortescue and you, Langham,”

retorted the major. "Lady Langham would have been less cruel."

"Was it you and me, Susan? I thought it was Anne—how came Anne not to be with me! Anne, how came I to be laughing, and you not near me yesterday?"

"I was hovering round you," replied Lady Langham, smiling at her husband's question. "I saw the whole affair, and considered Major Sandford ill-treated."

"There!" cried the major, his immense lips swelling with triumph. "Lady Langham advocates me!"

"Then we were certainly wrong, Susan. If Anne says we were wrong, we had better ask forgiveness at once; we are done for. Where is my tyrant? Oh, there she is." And Sir James drew her arm affectionately through his. "We must end our visitation, for the servants to attend evening service."

Happiest of beings! how brightly his handsome face beamed with good humour, as he escorted his lady to the carriage, and was followed by us all to the door! This was just what he had always coveted. "A wife of his own," as he termed it, and a circle of friends to cheer and be cheered by. Mrs. Fortescue was handed by Captain Bates, who vanished after

he had consigned his fair charge to the carriage, and Captain Thelwal was charioteer. Sir James had something sprightly to say upon that subject.

“Miss Vansittart, I am giving our friend lessons in the art of managing the reins. One horse is nothing, but when he drives double, you know, a little more practice is desirable. Where is the major?”

Major Sandford had escorted Miss Bates up the churchyard.

“Cannot get my guests together, Mrs. Vansittart; if one is in another is out. Elford is the only person I can depend upon. As to Thelwal—”

Captain Thelwal prevented further remark by driving on; Sir James nodded and smiled through the carriage-window; but what was withheld now, would surely transpire sooner or later. Sir James would not be many hours silent, unless a look from Lady Langham instructed him to stop, which he always did so very suddenly, that it made things worse, and the inquiring look he cast upon his wife regularly betrayed her being a party in the business.

But they were gone, and now what would be the events of the morrow!

CHAPTER V.

HAD I been the destined companion of Captain Thelwal, I should have watched the weatherglass, and studied the clouds, in hopes of ascertaining a promise of fine weather for the ensuing morning; but as my fate gave me to Lord Elford's care, I could only anticipate showers as an escape from bondage. I should then be transferred to the carriage, and four ladies inside, with the glasses up, was a more agreeable speculation to me, than a long drive with the puritanical peer, whose conversation would only be of that high-dried flavour my mind never relished, and whose very straitlaced notions of the sabbath already offended my modish principles. When Mary, after evening service, came in to give us a very good account of her husband's feelings, she was astonished to find me indifferent and heedless of the intended

pleasure. It was something quite new to find me, of all people, so cool about a pleasant party! She enjoyed it very much in idea, and quite looked forward to its being a restorative for Drinkwater.

“ Yes, Mary,” I replied, half peevishly ; “ but I have no Drinkwaters to take care of, and you know I hate Lord Elford.”

“ So you say, but I cannot find out what is the poor lord’s crime, to make the thoughts of a drive with him so very distasteful.”

“ It’s enough that one *does* dislike a person, I think, without poking into its cause. Likes and dislikes are unaccountable things, and the less one inquires into the reasons the better.”

“ Perhaps, for your own sake, Louisa, but such a search might benefit my lord ; now let me catechise you. Is Lord Elford ungentlemanly ?”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Is he plain ?”

“ I can’t tell, I never looked at him.”

“ Is he offensive in any way in manner or speech ?”

“ I never conversed with him but once—no, perhaps not that, exactly.”

“ He has but one fault then, Louisa, and I have discovered the error ; he has indeed committed himself.”

“ I am glad you are so quicksighted ; he must have some annoyance about him, since I dislike him, but I cannot take the trouble to examine my feelings.”

“ Shall I explain them for you ?”

“ Pray do.”

“ You are angry with Lord Elford, because he interferes with your plan or wish of being driven by Captain Thelwal.”

I coloured violently, but I stoutly denied the charge. Mary affected to believe me, or perhaps she really did credit my earnest asseveration, that Captain Thelwal had nothing to do with my distaste towards Lord Elford. She ceased to pursue the subject as I grew warmer and more earnest, and we insensibly dropped into a topic more interesting to herself. She told us of Dr. Drinkwater's symptoms, and a certain irritability of nerves, which she thought his last attack had supervened—she laid much at Mr. Brereton's door—he had given her poor husband a fearful attack of nerves, and in his state of health there was no saying what the results might be. She hoped everything from the Malvern waters.

Malvern water might do something towards strengthening the doctor's foot, and it might invigorate his system for a time at least ; but

would it cleanse his bosom of “its perilous stuff,” or minister to an irritable temper? I had heard enough of the dialogue between him and Jenkins, to suspect the doctor was not composed of the very dulcet materials for which we had ever given him credit. His feelings were not the sackbut, dulcimer, and all sorts of music. He had sounded the “loud timbrel” on the Grange lawn, and I was sure Mary had yet to discover her husband’s real disposition—a disposition which illness and confinement would render still more acid. It was extraordinary. All the world talked of, and felt for, “that good, quiet, suffering, dear doctor,” and perhaps Mary might be the only being who would really understand and suffer from its effects. I really began to feel for her future happiness; but Mary left us that evening so innocent of evil, so trusting, so hoping her dear Gideon might be “another man” from his journey, that I hoped in spirit with her. It was, perhaps, just possible her influence might be unbounded over him, and preserve her from witnessing his ebullitions: they might be sacred to Jenkins for some long season, and never extend to herself—one could not tell—I had only discovered such things by accident; at any rate I had many woes of my own to attend to, and I

turned from the subject as from a thing over which I had no control. I could only hope with Mary, the Malvern water would make him “another man.”

The next morning was fine: not a hope of a shower to aid me in escaping from Lord Elford. My mother expatiated on the beauty of the morning, and prophesied a delightful drive as we sat at breakfast. I certainly did not feel with her, but Captain Thelwal would be near, and as vexed as myself, which was consolation to my soul. I had also the pleasure of believing everyone equally misplaced and disappointed.

I was ready when the curricule drove to the door. Lord Elford paid his respects politely to my mother: he only bowed to me—perhaps the box destined for his curricule-seat did not hit his fancy. I made no apology for its appearance. I only ordered its admittance; I rather hoped it would annoy him, though he very politely descended to assist its progress.

My mother entreated his lordship to consign me to Lady Langham if a cloud should arise from the west, which was the rainy quarter. I was rather abrupt myself in following up her admonition. “I shall consider myself belonging to Lady Langham upon the least sign of rain, or even dust; therefore your lordship has a most

uncertain companion." My lord only bowed to both parties: the man was invincibly vain or indifferent—we were seated in the curricie, and away we drove.

At Hipplesley gate the *cortège* were to draw up in line. The Hermitage barouche, with its four greys and smart outriders, were already in waiting. I saw Miss Bates's very dull face looking heavily from a green bonnet, and Mrs. Fortescue, bright, soft, and glittering like the dew. Sir James was chatting by the side of his happy wife, and pointing her attention to the Grange chariot, which was seen in the distance working its way slowly up a lane. Captains Bates and Thelwal were seated in disconsolate attitudes in the curricie of the latter, and Major Sandford was eulogising his friend Bob to the party in general, but looking for an audience towards Miss Bates. As we drove up, I met the speaking eye of Thelwal, but our thoughts could only be revealed to each other by that telegraphic signal, for Lord Elford drew up to the side of the barouche.

"Well, you are good people," cried Sir James; "not an instant behind your time. Miss Vansittart, you look armed for conquest, and will distract the hill-country with those eyes and curls. I thought Susan was loaded with grape-

shot, but your artillery will carry further. How delightful to be a Benedict cased in armour impervious to such enemies !”

Mrs. Fortescue did look very handsome ; there was great taste displayed in her slight widow’s attire, and a languid expression of pleasure in her face which riveted one’s eyes upon her : I had never thought her so lovely as she appeared to me this morning. Miss Bates’s red hair perhaps acted as a foil, as she sat by the widow’s side, and a favourable position heightens the effect of beauty as much as it will affect sound. If my eyes sparkled, they did not represent my feelings, for I was extremely offended, and had not exchanged a word with my companion since his first address at setting out, when he hoped I was arranged comfortably, and I assured him I was as comfortable as the case would admit : all the rest of the way had been performed in utter silence.

We all exchanged a few short sentences at Hipplesley gate before the Grange carriage came up ; a few smiles of recognition, and some tell-tale expression of looks, but the road prevented the two gentlemen drawing near enough to converse : I could chat with the barouche party only, and hear Major Sandford’s remarks upon the appearance of the horses. Lord Elford’s

turn-out, he said, "was well done, quite worth looking at, and did a man good to see it; but Thelwal's curricule was a splashy, yellow-looking affair, and his horses ten to one inferior to Bob." The major was spiteful about something.

At last, Mary's sweet face was smiling at us behind the doctor's crutches, as their carriage drew steadily and heavily up with us. A couple of stout post-horses were deemed preferable to their own quiet dowagers, who would have declined drawing more than their usual freight. Jenkins was rear-guard in the rumble, seated at ease, and his face was the index of his master's state of health, quite as apparent to my eye, and as broadly observable, as the tin fish in the tulip-tree could be to the doctor in pointing fair weather. Jenkins's broad red face was placid in its expression as the carriage stopped beside us, and I was happy in feeling assured his master was comfortably packed in body and mind for the nonce. We had a few more trifles to settle; the Grange carriage could never keep up with our fleet steeds, so where was to be the rendezvous? Mary had it all prepared beforehand.

"Go on, Anne," issued from her soft voice, as if from the catacombs, "go on, and we shall be with you in time for dinner; but do not

think of us till then. We shall drive slowly and enjoy the views; but we shall meet at six o'clock at the Crown: now don't let us interrupt the plan of the day. How do you all do?"

Major Sandford wheeled Bob round, and took a survey of the apparatus contained in the doctor's carriage. He told Thelwal in confidence, the carriage appeared to his eye like a huckster's shop, full of every sort of contrivance, and he would be sure to be in the way to watch the turning out of the goods and chattels. The doctor himself looked very comfortable; but he might have been drawn and mistaken for a parent, supported by a blooming daughter.

On we went at last, through Hipplesley gate and away, scarcely touching the earth, the step of so many horses sounding spiriting and martial upon the ear, and the frame feeling refreshed and braced by the tramp and volition through rapidly. I looked back once as we rapidly pressed forwards, and I saw the Grange chariot with Jenkins behind it, fading from my view in a cloud of dust, the horses straining every nerve to drag their burden with credit, and the post-boy literally spurring and whipping to appear above the jibes of Major Sandford, who rode Bob for some time by their side, and whose coarse turn of mind urged him to be amused by

the unequal appearance of post-horses among a lordly stud, and in attacking the post-boy with, "Come, Johnny, give them time, don't be hard, lad, you don't know what you've got to carry : gently with the cocktail there."

On we went rapidly ; and the very action of passing through the air, perfumed with bean-blossom, gave me a more contented mind and a better spirit. I began to converse with Lord Elford, and even to ask a few questions, which I fancied gratified his lordship, for he became gradually unbent ; and altogether, I could mentally confess, he was *not* the very disagreeable person I had imagined him to be. I found myself at last talking nonsense to him in my own peculiar way, and yet he was not displeased ; he was absolutely laughing and enjoying my flights of fancy, which were somewhat new to him : he could not help noticing the change in my manner.

"You are better acquainted with me, Miss Vansittart, and you are liking me better."

"Not so, my lord, I do not like you better, indeed ; I am only on better terms with myself, and therefore more agreeable to you. It is impossible to be vexed such a lovely morning."

"But why were you vexed ?"

"Because I was obliged to drive with you, my lord ; but you must not be offended."

“I am not, Miss Vansittart. I never object to a lady telling the truth, however unpalatable it may be: I knew you did not wish it.”

“You knew it, and yet persisted—well, that was not good-natured. My lord, I dislike you worse than ever.”

I smiled to soften the asperity of my tone, but I was very angry.

“You betrayed no wish of driving with any gentleman,” continued Lord Elford, “or I should have relinquished this honour; you only expressed a design of joining the ladies in the carriage, therefore I was somewhat piqued into being determined to drive you if possible. I am very sorry you do not fancy me yet, but every hour now must increase my merits with you.”

“You have an extraordinary idea of your merits, my lord, since you suppose they must have such influence; but my *penchants* and distastes are always powerful.”

Lord Elford smiled at my persevering steadiness in hating people without a reason: he begged me to offer one which possessed a show of rationality upon which to build up my theory of first impressions. Had he not been polite?

“No: by your own confession you have compelled me to be here, instead of in Lady Langham’s carriage.”

“Was I not always civil and quiet, Miss Vansittart?”

“I never could endure civil, quiet people, Lord Elford, they are so nearly akin to being very dull.”

“Have I not been chatty, and anxious to please, ever since we left Hipposley gate?”

“Chatty, certainly, considering all things; but if you are anxious to please you are not progressing very fast—yes, I like you rather better than I did two minutes ago.”

“I am content, you will end by liking me extremely.”

This was too much; I laughed heartily at the vain surmise, in which Lord Elford joined with much good-humour: one remark brought forward another, rejoinder provoked rejoinder, and I was chatting in high spirits with my companion, as we entered Tewkesbury.

We rested an hour at the Swan, and partook of some refreshment: I was again by the side of Thelwal, and my spirits raised by the drive; the novelty of Lord Elford’s manner, and my neighbourhood to my lover, gave me an exuberance of gaiety. I amused myself with

puzzling Thelwal upon my opinion of his lordship, and gloried in being able to cloud his handsome countenance with the first pangs of a growing jealousy.

“How can you,” he said to me in a low voice,—“how can you find pleasure in trying to give me pain? If I was withholding sentiments which you were too anxious to elicit, I could understand your motive, but to inflict pain for the amusement of seeing me suffer—is it just and honourable?”

I sported on, and Captain Thelwal endured his situation with a manliness of determination which made me feel ashamed of playing the tyrant. I gradually softened my raillery, and became more subdued, as I observed his forbearance, and before we thought of resuming our journey we had both become silent, and to all appearance calm.

The Grange chariot drove up, as we were preparing to move again, and we had a little chat with Mary and the doctor, who alighted to give his poor legs “a stretch.” He bore his transit very well, and spoke very pleasingly of his feelings, which had felt the influence of change, even in this early part of his tour. Mary looked radiant: what with the happy certainty of being obliged to nurse her husband

for the period of one life at least—the pleasure of having Lady Langham's company for so many days—her own hopes—and kindly wishes for others, she was a blooming rose beside a gnarled and stricken oak.

It was a strange thing to contemplate, something almost too unnatural to believe, but interesting and anxious to beholders: all respected the heart which was devoted to the comfort and happiness of the man she loved, though his lot was cast in sickness and suffering—and all loved her pure and undisguised mind, which heeded not the allurements of gaiety, but turned to minister to *his* wants, who must in future depend upon her care and affection.

We were obliged again to leave them behind us. The next long stage must be undertaken gently by our party, but they would now overtake us, for they must change horses at Upton, and we should change our rapid pace into a quieter movement, which must enable them almost to reach Malvern at the same time with ourselves.

In spite of our all being together at a luncheon-table, at an inn, I never was more completely aware of Captain Thelwal's sentiments, or resigned myself more completely to my own increasing attachment. It seemed as if

the confusion of an inn-room allowed a freer current for lovers' thoughts than the comparative silence and solitude of Hartley stile walks. Perhaps the little snatches of enjoyable moments caught amid confusion give the heart courage to explain its movements, and the eye a less timid expression. So it was—when I re-entered Lord Elford's curricule my head and heart were filled with Thelwal's image, and no declaration of love could have been more plainly offered and accepted than that which the language of our eyes spoke to each other in the bustle of the inn at Tewkesbury. What a week of happiness was before me!

Deeply musing over the past, and enjoying the present, I was silent for some miles of our subsequent drive. My companion appeared equally wrapped in contemplation and unwilling to enter into conversation: my mind flew back to Ryde and Turner Ellis. Could he see me at this moment mentally engaged to his rival, looking forward with eager anxiety to the one sentence which must engage me to him for ever, how would his poor spirit suffer! how had he suffered! Did I deserve to win such a man as Thelwal, after breaking the heart of a being who adored me, so coldly and carelessly? I turned from such a disagreeable question. I saw the bold outline of the Malvern Hills be-

fore me: there I shall be, and there I shall linger with Thelwal to-morrow, for hours—for days—I shall hear him speaking to me; listening to him, I shall forget thoughts which disturb me. He will dry my tears, and hear my confessions: it was for him I trespassed, and he will forgive the transgression.

Such were my thoughts when Lord Elford broke the deep silence.

“You were very absent just now, Miss Vansittart, when I addressed you, perhaps you are now more at liberty.”

“Did you speak, my lord? Believe me, I never heard your voice. I have been deep in thought.”

“And were they pleasant or melancholy thoughts?”

“What can my thoughts be to you, Lord Elford? but you have been equally meditative, so tell me the colour of your reflections!”

“I will not retort your own answer; my thoughts were partly pleasing, partly alarming—would you like to know their purport?”

“Yes, my lord, I will listen with pleasure, if they are not dull thoughts, or disagreeable thoughts, or horrid thoughts.”

“Will you tell me your thoughts when I have expressed my own?”

“No, indeed, my lord. If it can be any

pleasure to embitter your own thoughts, pray speak, and if they are amusing, I shall be excellent audience, but I shall keep my own thoughts to myself. I wonder you feel inclined to talk with such a splendid view before you."

"It is that very view which incites me: it gives me lofty aspirations."

"You are going to be poetical, and I hear the curricule behind us, and the captains in full debate: allow them also the benefit of your awakened genius."

"Not a word, Miss Vansittart: neither of those gentlemen shall hear one syllable of my aspirations. Shall I tell you my history first, or begin at the end, with my aspirations?"

"I have a constitutional horror of long stories, Lord Elford, so pray begin at the end."

"Well, then, don't be alarmed, but these aspirations are—to induce you to become Lady Elford."

I looked full in Lord Elford's face. It was a deadly and overpowering surprise. He saw it was so, for my paleness alarmed him: he asked if I could wish to have the curricule stopped. I waved him onwards. I could not speak.

"You are pale, you are surprised," continued his lordship, addressing me, "and I cannot mistake the expression of your countenance. I

worship that speaking look of astonishment, it is different, so different to what I have ever met with; let me explain myself to you, Miss Vansittart.”

A heavy sigh relieved my heart: I was saved by it from fainting. Lord Elford continued:—

“ I have been so much an object of attraction to mothers and brothers from my worldly advantages; so much sought after for that paltry coronet I wear, that my heart has been closed to all attentions and fascinations from women in high station. I fancied the smiles of a lovely woman had reference to a handsome settlement, and the anxious desire I always felt to settle and be happy was defeated by the suspicions I endured of being taken in, and made the victim of some woman whose views might be answered in bearing my name and enjoying my wealth. This horrid suspicion has followed me through every event of my life; and to avoid the blandishments of avaricious beauty, I left town, to repose in peace at the Hermitage. There I saw *you*, Miss Vansittart, and though your youth and beauty demanded homage, I beheld you indifferent to wealth and station, and content to chat agreeably and indifferently with other gentlemen.”

I pressed my hand upon my heart: it was beating audibly, still I listened.

“ I watched you more eagerly than you could be aware of: I saw you smile upon a younger son, and neglect an earl’s coronet: this excited my admiration. Your abrupt manner to me only evinced your scorn of mercenary motives, and your evident disinclination to drive with me, fixed me at your feet. I had found in you a woman who disdained riches for their own sake, and in Mrs. Vansittart’s manners I admired the artless unpretending politeness which betrayed no manœuvring tricks, no matronly sagacity for her daughter’s establishment. I greatly admired the conduct of your sister Drinkwater: what a wife, what a treasure! A blossom yet remained ungathered; can you be surprised at my wish to possess it? I have stated my feelings and wishes: they are sincere, and I have uttered them the instant I felt aware they were not transient in their nature. I require but one assurance—”

“ Stay, Lord Elford, stay,” I cried; “ I am bewildered—have mercy upon me for one moment.”

“ I will not hurry you, Miss Vansittart: I have spoken hastily, perhaps, but not too soon. You have known me in a new character so sud-

denly, I cannot expect an immediate reply to my words."

I breathed a little more freely.

"But," continued his lordship, "when you have deliberately pondered over your feelings, I am assured you are too just, too generous, to keep me in suspense. You will tell me as soon as you *can* relieve me from such a state, whether my attentions may be allowed, or must be dispensed with: remember, what is comparatively easy now, may become painful hereafter, therefore I implore you to shorten my hours of uncertainty. I believe you disengaged—I think I am right, am I not?"

Lord Elford gave me one of his sturdy looks, from which there was no escape by evasion. I bowed.

"That is one very material point ascertained," replied his lordship, smiling. "I confess that has taken a heavy weight from my spirits: I can now work cheerfully for my prize, and there is hope to gild my prospect. But I do not mean to shut myself out from conversation, and you will give me your smiles as long as I deserve them, wont you? You have not bestowed many upon me, and one, just one, to say 'I am not angry,' I *may* ask for."

Lord Elford waited with a suppliant look for

my smile : alas, I had none to give. My blood had rushed back into my heart, and my lips vainly essayed to part. A struggle of some moments at length gave me power to utter—

“Not now. I cannot smile or think—give me time—say nothing now.”

“I will not,” said his lordship, considerably turning from me, “I will not allude to the subject till you allow me to do so: you have behaved most kindly—most delicately—let us sink into our first silence:” and Lord Elford resumed the attitude of meditation he had so suddenly quitted.

Here was a coil! What on earth was to become of me? A nobleman at my feet, wealth again asking my acceptance—the offer, an open proposal from the only man whom I had never suspected of a feeling towards me, and to whom I had been invariably abrupt and discourteous! An offer from Lord Elford, whom I had denounced because I could not make a fool of him!

I was plunged into a sea of trouble. How could I bow acquiescence when Lord Elford expressed his belief in my being disengaged? How could I look either gentleman in the face, when I stood precisely in the same situation with each. I was not committed to either, but

each had received equal encouragement, for each believed me disengaged, and to each I had given hope. I must be guilty of very unwomanly conduct—I must be a traitor to one party, but which? My Lord Elford? Oh no, no, *there* was all my heart had ever coveted; *there* was offered all my vanity had grasped at in Turner Ellis, but not all it had rejected in him also. I could not, would not, throw fortune from me a second time.

After all it was very foolish to fancy Thelwal: it was folly to expect happiness in poverty—to look for peace of mind in the transitory nature of love. Lady Elford, with her equipage, her command of wealth, her immediate translation into fashionable life, was some one of importance even *in* that station; but humble Mrs. Thelwal, standing in the doorway, might assist in filling a friend's rooms, but was a cipher for ever in society, perhaps a discontented hanger-on to some insolent half-modish baron's lady, or a new-made aristocrat from the "Reform" oven's last batch. No, I was not equal to relinquish such an enchanting prospect for lowliness and uncertain honour. I should have struggled with Thelwal, struggles with my own heart, but never more would I close the door upon such an establishment as I had lost in Mr. Ellis

—as I was now being offered by Lord Elford.

My thoughts roved in many directions: they were like the waves of the troubled sea. I must have been strangely agitated, for an exclamation escaped me unconsciously which attracted Lord Elford's attention. He turned towards me quickly, "You spoke to me, I think?"

"I spoke to myself, I believe, my lord, for I was in deep consultation with my own mind; but I am quite equal now to refer to the subject which—" I hesitated.

"Tell me all you think, my dearest Miss Vansittart, and do not fear giving me pain if you cannot give me hope. It is merciful to be candid, and I will bear my disappointment like a man." I thought Lord Elford looked almost handsome.

"I am not going to give you pain, Lord Elford. I wish only to tell you how I am situated. You have surprised me into such profound astonishment, I am even now stupified by its effects. I was so unprepared for this!"

"Every other lady would have anticipated it," said Lord Elford. "It is my delight that to you, at least, an avowal from me was unexpected and nnwished."

"I was uncourteous, I know," proceeded I;

“but you were equally indifferent in your manner.”

“I loved you for it,” replied his lordship; “and so that you love me in future I will forget the past. Tell me now what you were going to say about your situation.”

“I meant to say I am so bewildered, that if you please I would rather not recur to this subject till our return from Malvern. I wish no one to be acquainted with your having spoken till—” I could not exactly explain my meaning—I stammered.

“I understand you, till you have communicated with Mrs. Vansittart—I honour you. I will be silent till we return into Gloucestershire. Believe me always alive to those delicate points which so distinguish and exalt a woman in my estimation.”

I might have stammered on. In Lord Elford’s mind, my ignorance of his intention was so rootedly placed in juxtaposition with indifference to the offer, that every pause would only have elicited fresh bursts of approbation. The idea of my surprise, the sight of my unfeigned emotion riveted his affection and blinded him to their causes. The one dominant passion of his soul—the desire to be loved for himself, was on the eve of being accomplished. He had

certainly met a woman who received his proposals with surprise and apparent indifference; but, had Lord Elford paused to consider the cause of the emotion, he would have ascertained other motives and another reason for its exhibition. He would have traced the wild strife of contending passions in my heart, and he would have seen fearful alarms of discovery expressed in my eye; he would have started at my cold calculations, and fled for ever from a vain, unprincipled coquette.

I lost all pleasure from the moment of Lord Elford's proposal, in the scenery and expectations of Malvern. Whatever castles my imagination had raised of walks and whispers with Thelwal, *they* were levelled to the ground. Whatever resolutions I had silently formed of being the affectionate wife, the companion in humble life,

“Contented wi' little, and cannie with mair,—”

they were for ever dispelled. My thoughts were now of jewels, of a coronet, of treasures of gold, and treasures of silver: my anxiety was to break quietly and surely with Thelwal. This would not be an easy task: I loved him as sincerely as my nature *could* love, and there would be moments when ambition slept, and love would

demand his own: those were the moments I dared not contemplate in my visions of the future.

Altogether, I was very ill when we arrived at Malvern. We had managed to keep as nearly together as possible, and the two curricles drove up to the Crown about an hour after Lady Langham's arrival. I was more dead than alive when I entered the inn, and was supported into the sitting-room by Lord Elford and Captain Thelwal. The sparkling eyes which Sir James had eulogised were half closed with pains in my head and heart; my cheeks were pale with inward contention, and my spirits were jaded and depressed. I was quite unfit to mix among the free and happy hearts around me. Lady Langham, conceiving me fatigued with the long drive, insisted upon my lying upon the sofa for half-an-hour in silence. The view and the cheerful scene she was sure would work my recovery—it was sitting so long in one position and perhaps talking in the air which had overpowered me. Mrs. Fortescue gave me a look of intelligence which said, “You are only weary of your companion.” Alas! neither lady had touched the spring of my malady; but their ignorance was my only comfort. I smiled feebly in return to the widow's glance, and sunk in utter helpless-

ness upon the seat they had kindly prepared for me. The magnificent view from the windows of the inn can only be understood by those who have visited and enjoyed Malvern. It has a powerful effect upon the mind which has been accustomed to dwell among the cultivated but confined scenery of England; and the almost boundless view around, contrasted with its own village scenery,—its fine, cathedral-looking church, and bold background of hills, struck me forcibly with admiration and surprise. Had my mind been at ease, I could have wondered and enjoyed, as my companions did. They crowded to the windows to feast their eye and mind on the beautiful tranquil valley before them, and even Major Sandford paused to admire before he joined in the labours of the stable. He told Miss Bates it was an uncommonly fine thing, and worth coming to see every three years: he daresayed the stabling was a complete thing too, as so many families drove over, so he would just go and see how the men got on.

Lord Elford kept his word with me. He politely inquired from time to time how I felt, and regretted having perhaps driven too rapidly; but his attentions were open and too commonplace to attract attention. Not so Captain Thelwal. His anxiety was manifest, and I

scarcely knew how to repel the restlessness which brought him constantly to the sofa. "Can I bring anything to refresh you?" was his constant question. "Let me run up the hill for a glass of the famous water; do let me be busy in making you comfortable." I dared not look at him—I dared not speak to him—I answered in monosyllables, and struggled to attain composure in pleading weakness.

Captain Bates and Mrs. Fortescue were the liveliest of the party. Mrs. Fortescue meant to kill more time in moving about: "Since dress and ceremony are to be dispensed with, let us enjoy every instant; I am going up to the well, who will go with me? You can't, my poor fatigued one; but will *you* go, will *you* go?" addressing each person.

Captain Bates was at her side in an instant, and Miss Bates put on her shawl again, which, being interpreted, meant she was also joining the walking-party. Lord Elford was quietly affecting to read somewhere in my vicinity, and made no reply to the invitation. The Langhams would wait for the Grange party, and Captain Thelwal declined without stating his reasons. Mrs. Fortescue departed with her little train, and if the major could be caught on his way from the stables, the ramble might answer to both parties.

My own situation was becoming alarmingly awkward. Captain Thelwal, innocent of the events of the last two hours, was proffering all those little nameless attentions which a hoping affection warrants, and which is so winning, so powerful, in the effect upon woman. Lord Elford was near—so near, I could distinctly hear him turning over the pages of his book, and I was well aware his eye and ear would be on the watch for my movements, though his lips were to be closed for a season: in such a dilemma how was I to escape the observation of one party, or the reproaches of the other? Lord Elford considering me almost affianced to himself—considering my consent depending upon a mother's approbation only,—might well become suspicious of Captain Thelwal's sentiments, nay, jealous of his attentions; and would watch my looks and actions with keen anxiety. I had lost Mr. Ellis by the unguarded conduct of a few hours; let me not again forget the object I had in view, or throw this last chance from me in stupid folly; let me not waste moments of importance in playing with the bauble of Cupid, when so heavy a stake was upon the cast of the die: away with the bow and arrows of poetic fancy, when Fortune's wheel was rolling rapidly towards my feet. Spurn it not away, Louisa Vansittart, spurn it not away!

Fears and fancies came thickly upon me. When Sir James Langham approached with kindly hopes and offers of assistance, I feared his sprightly allusions, and I quailed under the mild eye of his lady, lest her acuteness should detect my real position. Whichever way I turned, I saw hands and eyes besetting me; salts, fans, and essences were silently deposited beside me, and those eyes were fixed upon me—those dangerously-fascinating eyes, whose expression I had never—*could* never calmly meet. I was beginning to feel it impossible to conceal my agitation, when the Drinkwaters arrived, and called off the general attention. Lord Elford did not move, when the gentlemen went out to receive Mary. Lady Langham followed them outside the door, to have the first view of her friend: and during that very short period we were alone together. I perceived his lordship bending over the sofa towards me.

“My dear Miss Vansittart,” he said, in a hurried low tone of voice, “I cannot forgive myself for all this; I beseech you to retire and go to rest. Do not try your powers too much, or give me the agony of seeing you struggle for composure—will you retire?”

“I will go the instant I have seen my sister—I am not equal to more effort.”

Lord Elford gently took my hand, and pressed

it to his lips; in another moment Mary was escorted into our presence, and his lordship was again intent upon his book. Dr. Drinkwater followed in style, supported by his crutches, and flanked by Jenkins, who held the foot-cushion, and the "what's-his-name." The doctor looked full of pleasant anticipations, though he denied the "soft impeachment," and affected to visit the place as an amusement, but without the most distant idea of receiving benefit. Mary was certain the air had done him service already.

I lingered one quarter of an hour with Lady Langham and Mary, and then I took refuge in my own room. The house was full of company, therefore we had not much choice of apartments; mine, however, was a small but clean domicile, opening into a second equally confined bedchamber, intended for Mrs. Fortescue. Lady Langham and Mary attended me, and did not retire till I was laid at rest, and the dinner had been announced. I was then left to my reflections.

I found a change effected in my character and feelings from the quick succession of events which had taken place in little more than twelve months. I had suffered and gained a world of experience. My heart was the same, but I was

learning to conceal many of its emotions, and I was becoming more deeply versed in its wanderings. The shock of having burst the bonds of affection, even in a man I loved not—the loss of Mr. Ellis had taught me *some* discretion, and the cards which I now held, the game so intricate in its nature, to be now played—threw me upon my own resources, and checked the impetuosity of my nature. I was better acquainted with my own views at this moment, and less incautious in displaying them. The artless exhibition of my feelings, however vehement and improper, was now being exchanged for caution and more regard for that public opinion upon which Mrs. Fortescue had laid so much stress, and her sentiments and conversation were operating insensibly upon my conduct. Perhaps this one great stake—this view of boundless enjoyment opened to my mind by Lord Elford's proposal, had worked a revolution—or the emergencies of my present situation had called my powers into action?—I know not—I felt that I was “deeper and deeper still” plunged into difficulty and error, and I must be ready-witted to manœuvre my escape unscathed from my perilous position.

I could not sleep, but I had rest in body and, comparatively speaking, in mind likewise,

for I was free from any immediate collision with Captain Thelwal. How I should manage with him I feared to contemplate; I feared his power—I feared the fluctuations of my own heart. I would not however look back to the past: I must now grapple with the future, and forget all but my coronet in expectancy—a coronet which must gild my visions with a thousand hopes, and sit lightly on my eager brow.

My thoughts again recurred to the party below stairs. I was in bed ill and low, in consequence of my own actions. Malvern was to have been the scene of my gay triumph; but I had made it a bed of thorns. Miss Bates was probably a far happier woman—happy in her stupidity and dividing Major Sandford's cares with Bob. What was Thelwal doing? Lord Elford might be coldly dignified in his newly-acquired hopes, but Thelwal would be restlessly impatient till we met again. How I dreaded that moment!

Mrs. Fortescue came to my bedside early in the evening. I did not expect the attention from *her* hands, but she said her mission was on two accounts. She had volunteered her company to please herself in the first instance, and she was obliged to get away in self-defence, the party was so little to her taste. Such an

extraordinary termination of the day we had all looked to with such interest! Everybody was misplaced, everything went wrong — she could not understand it.

“ But where is Captain Bates ?” I asked.

“ I think you are wild after that man,” replied my companion as she quietly seated herself in an old arm-chair :—“ but I am going to tell you the situation I am in, and you must judge if anything can be done for me. In the first place that silly old man has made open love to me: *that* I suppose was the Malvern water; we were descending the hill when the matter was broached, and I was led to expect something extraordinary in their effects.”

“ But, Mrs. Fortescue, did you not expect such a trinket, after all your coquetting ?”

“ My dear, yes — but not returning down a steep zigzag, after drinking Malvern water. I was shaken to death and extremely cross. Men have no tact.”

“ And what did you say to him ?”

“ I told him I was blind and deaf, and begged he would lead the way in silence. The gentleman obeyed in a huff, and we have not spoken since. I was *au désespoir* when I found you were ill, but I was advised to allow you rest, so I did not visit you before dinner. I sat

between Lord Elford and your friend, but not a word did they utter. My lord was immensely stupid, but Thelwal was unpardonably dull, and so I hinted to him. Captain Bates sat opposite to me in a mood which was not desirable, very angry, very doleful, and very illbred. The liveliest person in company was your brother-in-law; your sister and Lady Langham are exceptions to all rules, for they only of all the people I know, look truly happy."

"Nay, Mrs. Fortescue, add Sir James to the list."

"Major Sandford talked on to Miss Bates," continued Mrs. Fortescue, "and she made no reply, which increases his admiration and gratitude every hour—but tell me now what is really the matter with you, are you seriously fatigued? Lord Elford should not ask young ladies to drive with him, he is sure to inflict *tic douloureux*."

"Lord Elford was pleasant enough."

"Then he must have offered *himself*, my dear, for he is seldom quoted as a pleasant companion, and what could he have tendered as agreeable matter but his purse and coronet?"

I looked at Mrs. Fortescue; she was evidently talking at random, for she glided into other subjects, and again spoke of Captain Bates:

“ I have much to say to you, Miss Vansittart, but I hear the light step of your friends in the passage: shall I ‘curl’ with you to-night?”

“ Pray do.”

Lady Langham and Mary were sorry to find me still tired and low: it was something so unexpected, so unlike my general strength, they were at a loss to account for it: was it possible a few hours’ drive could have created such fatigue? — Ay, so it was — I passed my malady slightly over, for it concerned none but myself — they could not physic my mind, and there lay the plague-spot — they might well conjecture what could cause the voluntary retiring of one who loved ever to be foremost — even Lady Langham could not surmise the truth, or conceive that I was acting another unprincipled part, ashamed of my own turpitude, and alarmed for its consequences, but resolved to proceed in the thorny path. Who says vice is easy, or who dares contend that the way of sin is broad and pleasant though it leads to death? I tell you no. — It is from the very beginning unsatisfactory, startling, and appalling.

The morning was to effect wonders. I promised to be in excellent health at breakfast, and equal to all future demands upon my spirits: the two friends, satisfied with my own report,

consented to quit me, but Mrs. Fortescue decided to remain the evening in attendance. "Do not look politely distressed, my dear Miss Vansittart: I am happy in having a pretext for hiding myself, and it is merciful in you to keep me. This is a sorry beginning of pleasure, but since you are ill and I am puzzled, we are very well arranged up here, and the gentlemen may be in their right senses to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

“ BUT what will you do with Captain Bates ?” I asked, as we placed ourselves for a long conversation—Mrs. Fortescue in the arm-chair, and myself supported by pillows. “ You must do something with Captain Bates.”

“ Do as all women act by old men—laugh at him !”

“ Adieu then to our sweet lingering walks—adieu, poor Captain Bates, to Hartley stile—ah, Mrs. Fortescue !”

“ I am tired of those walks, Miss Vansittart : to me they were sickly, suffering hours. I must get away from all this : I have sought for good and found evil, and there is nothing but evil on earth.”

I echoed her sentiment, but Mrs. Fortescue appeared not to listen to me : she was busy with her own thoughts.

“Some people,” continued she, “are born to sorrow, and wander where they will there is no rest for their mind. Some happier mortals again swallow long draughts from the cup of joy, but I have never yet raised it to my lips!”

I was astonished at this assertion. To me Mrs. Fortescue looked like a person who had quaffed happiness from her birth: her beauty so little touched by time—her figure still bearing the impress of rounded youth—her smile of gaiety—all gave token of a life passed among its flowers: I could scarcely credit the words which had escaped her lips, and I told her my incredulity. She looked fixedly at me.

“If I could only *forget* one half I have incurred, Miss Vansittart, I should believe myself a happy woman. It is drawing a chain after one through life, which wears the feelings into madness. It is that wretched effort at composure which weighs down the weary spirit, for each day the struggle is renewed, and the night is the most dreadful suffering of all!” I gazed at Mrs. Fortescue. Her countenance was strongly agitated: I saw it exhibit the same deep emotion in Hartley churchyard. I was alarmed at its extraordinary change. “If I could but give you comfort, Mrs. Fortescue!” I exclaimed.

“No, no, comfort is not to be doled out, as

you would give hartshorn-drops to a fainting wretch; but you can listen to me, and that relieves me: it is blessed to unburden one's mind to a fellow-creature, when it is bursting with concealed grief. But, Miss Vansittart, you can give me assistance in one way—here I will not stay!”

“ Good heavens! what is the matter? Oh, Mrs. Fortescue, speak to Lady Langham, she is so equal to everything, and so kind!”

“ I dare say she is,” replied Mrs. Fortescue, slowly and thoughtfully. “ I hope she is so for *his* sake. She would be kind to *me* doubtless, for she has laid a heavy weight upon me.”

“ Who? Lady Langham! My dear Mrs. Fortescue, you must be in error: she never laid a weight upon mortal—but she has borne one, as I can witness!”

“ You are speaking in ignorance. I will tell you the burden she has laid upon me—oh, yes, it hangs heavily—wearily! listen.”—Again Mrs. Fortescue's features became distorted, and her naturally slow utterance grew rapid and earnest. “ I do not say it was ill done, for she could not guess my feelings; but it was irreparably done when she married the man for whom I had suffered, waited, hoped, and loved in vain. Is it a slight thing to feel indifferent—to look

indifferent—to tutor one's looks and thoughts, and hold them chained down, when the heart is panting to express its affection? Is it a slight thing to see another chosen, when I would have died a thousand deaths, ay, and lived in penury and obscurity without a murmur, to have purchased the heart he gave to a stranger? Oh, Langham, the months, the years of misery you have given me!"

I sat amazed and speechless.

Mrs. Fortescue threw herself on her knees by the bedside, and clasped her hands tightly.

"In one hour this storm has broken over me, and I am unable to contend—there may be many woes—many acute sufferings—many fearful reflections to imbitter life, but the arrow is only mortal, when it brings the pangs of unrequited love. Oh, gods! to see the eye we worship beaming on another—to hear the voice we adore bestowing endearing terms on another!—all is bearable but that one deadly drop!—no, I will not stay to bear this."

Mrs. Fortescue's agony became uncontrollable—alas, I felt for the pangs I had endured so keenly myself when first I discovered Brereton's attachment to my sister—I instinctively put forth my hand towards her, and a flood of tears gushed from my eyes. "Have *you* then," I

cried, “undergone this trial; have you endured what I have also borne?” My words startled Mrs. Fortescue: she raised her head and met my streaming eyes. We wept together: I had ceased to love Brereton—I even loved another—but memory at this moment retraced the sharp pangs I *had* endured—the horrible disappointment I *had* suffered, when I found my feelings had been given to one who valued them not, heeded them not—knew them not. I remembered my long illness, my impatience—the sickness of heart which followed the blow till wounded vanity shook off the disquiet and sought atonement in ambition. My soul shuddered at my sister’s husband, but it had loved Brereton:—his presence caused a strange combination of distaste and respect in my heart *now*, but it had sorely smarted under infliction then, and the sight of Mrs. Fortescue’s distress for a moment renewed my own. But it passed away quickly: too many recent events gave me little leisure to ponder over earlier times, and I was interested in the case of suffering before me. Mrs. Fortescue struggled for composure: I saw the twitches of mental conflict in her features, as she calmed gradually in manner, and ceased to weep: we were for some time silent, but our actions and words committed each, and there

would be unreserved confidence between us eventually : Mrs. Fortescue first spoke.

“ Did you say, Miss Vansittart, you felt with me as well as for me ? Did I hear you say you knew from your own experience what I felt ? ”

“ I have passed through the strife, but it has ended in peace. My feelings are violent, but I believe transient in their nature, and the sight of your grief awoke some recollections which have subsided.”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Fortescue, “ how differently we are constructed. I am calm and quiet by nature, and I dread the effect of these whirlwinds which I strive to subdue, and which rarely overtake me. How I wish my feelings would subside, how I wish my heart was transient in its affections !—Miss Vansittart, you have witnessed my misery and felt for me—now hear me in patience and judge for me. Do not once speak to me—let me say what I have to say before I go hence and be no more seen.”

I pressed her hand in silence. Another long and severe struggle, and Mrs. Fortescue proceeded, but the twitches in every feature almost approached a stroke of paralysis.

“ From my infancy I was brought up in the constant society of my cousin Langham : our amusements, our tasks were enjoyed and under-

taken together, for what was labour to me when my cousin James was at hand to spirit me on? My young life wore smoothly and merrily on till James was of an age to enter at Oxford. Till then a tutor at home had kept us undivided, and our intimacy had received no check—but the agony I endured at parting might have awakened me to the fact that something beyond relationship was stirring at my heart. I was his senior, it is true, and he loved me as his elder sister and playfellow, but he was woven round my very existence. He was then as he is at this moment, noble-hearted, generous, unsuspecting—oh, happy, happy Anne, to have gained the heart I could not reach!—equal to myself in age—less gifted by nature—but it is not *that*—affection is a wayward thing, a fantastic uncontrollable thing.

“Perhaps had my feelings been made known to him, pity—gratitude—a thousand kind regrets and sensibilities might have drawn his heart towards me, but I was long ascertaining the real state of my heart, and when I did detect it, the secret never transpired: I strove in vain to master a passion which had grown with my growth, and was a part of myself, but I could conceal it. In silence and gravity I concealed my attachment, and my cousin believed me

only less agreeable and less affectionate than his old playfellow, Susan Langham. Surely I was wrong in this! love is not produced by cold and cheerless manners: it will never warm its object under a cloudy and frigid aspect, and I might have honourably and innocently displayed a sincere and true affection; but some women's natures shrink like the sensitive plant, and will not endure the touch. Such was mine: the more deeply I loved my cousin, the more instinctively I turned from his approach and fled from his society. His kindness never failed me: in any moment of need—in the hours of my distempered fancy when all seemed bleak and wretched—my cousin was unceasing in efforts to assist and amuse me—no, none could be gentler or kinder, or more forgiving to my abrupt and chilling manner; and no man on earth was adored as he was—privately and intensely adored by the very woman he believed must have learned to dislike him. My cousin brought many young friends to spend the vacations with him, and as an orphan under Lady Langham's charge, I saw and was distinguished by some of his more chosen associates. Among the number, I admired and chatted with young Fortescue. He was Langham's most intimate friend, and to

me his conversation had charms because he spoke of my cousin, and because with him, everything had reference to my cousin. My cheerful manners with Fortescue soon became remarked, and I even fancied I saw surprise in my cousin's countenance when Fortescue succeeded in rousing me from my settled tranquillity of manner which his own attention had ever increased. Fortescue made his proposals, and my cousin advocated and pleaded in his favour. This was bitterness in its very essence. How my heart rose and swelled no one can ever guess! I felt it bursting from its prison-house and longing to be free! I turned in indignation from his words and scorned his interference—hot tears disfigured my cheeks, and I laboured with strong and impetuous emotion. Such emotion was too powerful for me. I remained some weeks too ill to be seen. What was life to me since hope was gone! Hope, that eternal spring within us, was to me a stagnant pool. It seemed as if all things must in future be a horrid blank, uncheered by one ray of her light, which shone on the destiny of others. What did it signify idly wasting the hours in grief which might intervene between the present moment and my long rest? I was not loved by him I worshipped!—it was vain

to look for peace in stillness, for that was the stillness of death without its repose. I must be up and doing. I married young Fortescue, and for some years we remained on the Continent."

Mrs. Fortescue drew a deep and heavy sigh. I did not interrupt her, and she again proceeded.

"I was not happy, but I was amused. Fortescue did not observe my listless vacuity of mind, and never suspected he was not loved. On the Continent, matrimonial happiness moves on tranquilly: the gentle current is seldom disturbed by impediments which muddy the stream at home. Constant amusement, perpetual excitement, and the demands of a brilliant society, kept Fortescue in a round of employment suited to his taste, and I have the satisfaction of feeling conscious no duty on my part was left unperformed. Langham once or twice paid us a visit, and my tranquillity fled when I meditated that happy ingenuous face which for long years had held me captive; but I never forgot I was a matron. Such an hour of misery as I have this evening endured, again restored me to self-possession, and quiet endurance, and my cousin's departure left all in its usual heavy stillness.

“Fortescue died suddenly while we were in Florence, and I was a widow, an affluent widow, still young enough to please, and my cousin yet unmarried! What my private thoughts *would* image, I need not say, what my heart felt and hoped it is superfluous to repeat, but this I compelled myself to do. I remained six months abroad in almost solitary retirement, before I wrote to my aunt and cousin of my intended return to England. My letter was answered by Langham in person. Oh, how my heart flew towards him, and how the delight of meeting him in freedom caused the tears I wept upon his shoulder! He was come to escort me back! ‘Oh, James,’ I cried, again pressing myself to his bosom, ‘how very, very kind!’

“‘Not the least,’ was his reply, ‘surely your only cousin could not do less?’

“What a blight came over my soul! How a loving spirit sinks under common compliment, and disdains a sentiment less warm than its own! Yet we were both free, and hope once more twined her consolations round my heart. I would *not* be chilling: Langham should see me as I had ever felt towards him, and perhaps I might even now——! Vain thought, it was too late! The widow of Fortescue was no

longer Susan Langham, and though I might be his affectionate cousin, I saw he did not consider me in any other light, could not behold me in a dearer point of view; but I loved on and trusted to time. Langham quitted Bath, where I was on a visit to my aunt, for the Isle of Wight; and he was accompanied by Captain Thelwal, who still pertinaciously persevered in seeking my society. I had refused him before I married Fortescue.

It was now my turn to be indignant. “Thelwal,” I cried, “you refused Thelwal! he told me he was not acquainted with you till you met at the Hermitage!”

Mrs. Fortescue waved her hand. “It little signifies what he said, he is a dangerous man and heartless, I firmly believe; but I have no time to bestow on him, let me go on while I have time and strength. I was still lingering with my aunt Langham, when my cousin returned, and openly announced his engagement to Miss Partington, a lady he had known a few weeks only—who herself objected to the short period of their acquaintance—who could never love him as I had done, never devote herself as I had been devoted! It is vain to describe what I felt!” Mrs. Fortescue clenched her hands as if striving to subdue some fearful

recollection, and the twitchings of her face alarmed me. "It is in vain," continued she, with energy, "to *think* even of what I endured! May Heaven forgive him for causing me such misery. He married; and I was introduced to Anne, my cousin Anne. No one can look upon her without respecting her excellence, but it was impossible we could ever be friends. My cousin's wife was a person it would have been treachery to be intimate with, and she viewed with suspicion the forced levity of my manners: no, we could never be friends. I never, however, received coldness at her hands; most kind and polite has she ever been to me. Once I almost fancied I could implore her confidence, but I was restrained—how could I tell her I loved her husband?

"I was asked to join their party here. I did so—in trembling I confess—but I hoped the fact of the marriage, the accustomed sight of my cousin as a married man, might strengthen my resolution, and shame me into tranquillity. I did all I could to appear the thing I was not—I affected levity—I hid my festering wound under a gay exterior. I became the apparently gay flirt of Captain Bates; but all would not do. I saw Langham as a married man, but I felt the true extent of my loss at the same

time, therefore my purpose was not effected; I saw him devotedly attached to his wife, the wife I ought to have been! I was the silent observer of her happiness, a happiness I hope she will long enjoy. I do not wish to see her otherwise than happy. May they both continue so; but I say it with a broken heart. This day's drive has determined me in my plans. I have tried to bear up, but you see it overcame me. I have behaved ungenerously to that poor old man, who could imagine his grey hair was fit to match with comparative youth: it *was* ungenerous, but I have done wrong altogether in visiting the Hermitage. Thelwal is playing a foolish game, he too may suffer; but can they suffer the long, long pangs I have endured? Never. Talk on, talk for ever; but you cannot know the pang of unrequited love, which has not grown upon fancy, but has twined itself round your heartstrings from your very youth. Hear me now, Miss Vansittart, I thank you for your patience and consideration, for I needed some one to whom I might unburden my mind. I see my error now, and will not continue in it a moment longer. To-morrow at daylight I set off to town, and when you are all at breakfast, pray

Heaven I may be many stages on my road from this dangerous spot !”

I remonstrated with Mrs. Fortescue on her very sudden resolve. I entreated her to wait one more day, and try if her nerves would regain their composure, but she was firm.

“ Not an hour longer after daylight — my heart knows its weakness, but as yet it has not become sinful. Such scenes as I have struggled through destroy me. I will beg you to give Anne a letter for me, and I will see you tomorrow before I depart, but now I will go into my own room, and if any one asks for me say I am alone, if you please, by my own desire.”

“ One moment only, Mrs. Fortescue : as you hope to find peace, tell me, before you go from me, what you mean by saying Thelwal is playing a foolish game? I beseech you to answer me, why is he heartless, and with whom, Mrs. Fortescue ?”

“ He is heartless in every relation,” answered Mrs. Fortescue. “ His offer to myself originally was heartless — his resumption of it was under heartless circumstances — his conduct at this moment is heartless. He is a dangerous character among women. I have appeared heartless too,” she continued, “ but I was trying to

brave a great danger, and overlooked lesser evils which will leave a stain on my memory. Langham will think of me as his flighty, flirting widow-cousin. I was a poor example to *you*, but now I may be a warning.—Those foolish walks, Miss Vansittart! How often I joined you with a poor worn-out spirit, and how much I suffered in Hartley churchyard! I believe you thought me wild, and I felt so more than once.”

“ And Thelwal has played me false !” I exclaimed, “ he has dared to deceive me then !” My very eyes struck fire as I pronounced the sentence.

“ Deception is his boast,” replied Mrs. Fortescue: “ but surely *you* are not in danger from Captain Thelwal! I heard my cousins say, you were already acquainted with his character,”

Too true. I did once believe him heartless, but vanity had repaired that breach in his reputation, and the truth was again pulling down my work. I was fairly outwitted. I needed not fear an interview between Lord Elford and Thelwal: the latter was but amusing himself, like a butterfly among the flowers, and I richly deserved to be offended. Pray, what was I about to do myself? If Thelwal really loved

me, what misery had I not prepared for *him*? I was silenced. As far as principle was concerned, we might have shaken hands cordially. We could not reproach each other.

“You do not *love* Captain Thelwal!” said Mrs. Fortescue, looking earnestly at me.

“I despise him from my heart,” I returned, with indignation.

“I am glad of it; I have not *that* to answer for, otherwise I might have reproached myself with much thoughtlessness towards yourself. I have talked very recklessly before you, and as an older woman I must have degraded age in your respect, Miss Vansittart. Alas! I was not myself, and I acted from mere impulse in matters that might have worked out mischief to others. Let me shew you now how I *can* act when I see my way, and let not my errors be remembered. Good night—may you rest: *I shall not close my eyes.*” Mrs. Fortescue passed on to her chamber, and I heard her bell ring; she was doubtless giving orders for her journey.

How I pondered over the communication I had just heard! what a restless night it gave me! I could take no refreshment, I could scarcely reply to the inquiries of Lady Langham and Mary, who visited me on their retiring to

rest. They were anxious to pass to Mrs. Fortescue's room, and offer kind assistance, when I simply mentioned her being unwell, but I urged her wish to be alone, and they were politely acquiescent. Mary told me the flight of two of the party had strangely discomposed the rest: the gentlemen were melancholy, and Malvern threatened to become the grave instead of the cradle of pleasure.

It did indeed appear so. When Mary and Lady Langham left me, I was again plunged in wonder, and meditated on the powerful effect of attachment upon different characters: the love which struck at the reason of Mary Pearson wore a gentler aspect to Emma Brereton, and produced fearful contention in the bolder mind of Mrs. Fortescue. These women loved. They never changed the object or lost their purity of feeling: they suffered all its pangs, some in silence, one in erring action, but each in constancy and severity of virtue. How did I look with disgust upon my own senseless unprincipled conduct! True to none—ambitious, and impetuous—I had no guide, None in a religious point of view—for I had not then kneeled to my Maker to implore a right spirit.—Not in a moral point of view—for I had no code by which to regulate my actions.

I was the creature of impulse, and impulse is selfishness. Conflicting thoughts wearied me at last, and I fell into a stupid kind of doze, from which I started by a cold touch and a movement near me. It was Mrs. Fortescue. She was bending over me, and her swollen eyes testified she had prophesied truly in saying there would be no rest for her. She was dressed for her journey.

“ You are resolved to go, Mrs. Fortescue ?” I said, rising and pressing the cold hand she had placed in mine.

“ I am going, Miss Vansittart: I come to beg you will deliver this letter to Anne with your own hands, and to bid you farewell. I am resolved to depart, but many words will weaken me.—Farewell—when you think of me, it will be in pity. I wish much undone, but my flight ends further mischief.” Mrs. Fortescue saluted me affectionately — she lingered a moment at the door.

“ Miss Vansittart, tell all you know to Anne before you put my letter in her hands. Her heart will understand mine.”— I promised to do so. Mrs. Fortescue still lingered.

“ Can I do anything else for you, can you bring anything to mind which you may wish said or done, Mrs. Fortescue ?”

“No, no, I have nothing to detain me but my poor weak nature, which is loath to quit this place.”—Her words became choked with emotion, and she waved me another adieu in silence. In five minutes after the door closed, I heard a carriage drive from the inn: Mrs. Fortescue was departed: she *had* courage to resist and fly from temptation—what a lesson for me!

I sent to request Lady Langham's presence as soon as I believed her preparing to leave her room. She came to me instantly. I begged her to be seated as I had much to communicate, and then I recapitulated the scene of the previous evening. Lady Langham was forcibly struck: “I see it all now,” she exclaimed. “Poor Susan! she endured much; but, Louisa, see the consequences of a mind too trusting in its own upright intentions. To conceal an attachment not dishonourable in its origin, Mrs. Fortescue has suffered the delicacy of her character to be tarnished: her struggle was heroic—and *I* can bless her for it—but there was no occasion to display the sentiments of a worldly-minded woman, and appear a fluttering insect of fashion. All effort doubled her misery, and laid waste her fair reputation, when there was an altar at which she might have knelt and found strength; when there was a

home for all to reach, who seek in humble prayer its blessed portals. Poor Susan!"

Lady Langham was affected by the contents of the letter which I now delivered to her. Mrs. Fortescue frankly confessed her errors, and sorrowed over them.

"I did you wrong, Anne, in every action, I should not have visited Gloucestershire, but I firmly believed the bar which for ever closed my hopes, would teach me submission. It might have done so, had his been a common character, but the sight of your mutual felicity only added to my sorrow. I perceived the extent of my loss, and I admired my cousin if possible with a deeper attachment; but it had grown up with me, Anne—I did not love your husband—it was my own cousin, my playmate, my companion whom I loved, long before you knew such a being existed. I acted wrong with Captain Bates: what amusement could I find in the admiration of a foolish old man? but nothing could save me from myself. Oh, that drive! it opened my eyes to the precipice upon which I stood, and his affectionate manner, so like the manners of our youthful days before my behaviour chilled him, made me forget he was the husband of another. I walked upon the hill after our arrival, to breathe freely and

tutor my thoughts into subjection. I only changed their nature by flirting with Captain Bates. The old man spoke of love—love to *me*, Anne! My mind was indignant: at any other time I might have been civil, perhaps confidential to a man I had led into an error, but then—at that time—with a thousand emotions ready to burst forth, I turned from him with indignation, and scorned him into silence. All was wrong. Say what you like for me, and of me, Anne. Miss Vansittart says you are good, and I believe her. Say to my cousin what you please: your word is a law to him, but I beseech you do not, for my sake—nay, for your own sake—let him know my weakness. Do not trust any living man with the knowledge that a woman lives and loves him, though he belongs to another, farewell, Anne—farewell Langham, the long-loved, only object of my existence—I shall never see you more in this world!”

Lady Langham mingled her tears with mine; we both wept over the letter. “Poor Susan,” she repeated, “what a fate she has carved out for herself! If she would but think this world, even now, a passage to a higher glory, how would her trial be softened! If she had but in her younger days met her sorrow with faithful dependence upon an unfailing mercy, she would

have found consolation! Now she is driven like a vessel among the rocks, with none to steer her safely into the deep water, and as the evening of her days draws on, darkness and clouds must increase her dangerous position."

"She has behaved with noble heroism," I remarked.

"Her heart," rejoined Lady Langham, "and her principles disdained infamy, but a religious mind would have subdued and sanctified her trials. This constant and severe wrestling of spirit had not been allowed to embitter her days, had poor Susan rested her burden upon a merciful Providence, and prayed for peace. What a fine creature has been self-doomed to misery! Louisa, pray for a better fate—pray that a similar suffering may never be yours, and that your prime of days may never know a powerful and apprehensive grief!"

How I wish I had confided my own annoyances to Lady Langham at this time! How I wish I had spoken my vexations to this excellent and gentle friend, whose words of balm would have ministered a calm to any soul but mine! But I shrunk from her firm guidance—I could not own I was inferior to Mrs. Fortescue, far beneath her in rectitude of principle; and without her apology for a folly I shamed to con-

fess. Lady Langham talked much and deeply of the efficacy of prayer—I could not endure to fly for shelter into the arms of methodism, and seek peace in homilies and tracts. I was regular in my church attendance, and if that produced no fruit to my soul, I could not turn to long Philpot for consolation. How weak, how wicked! With these prepossessions against the only light which burns into eternal life, I suffered this opportunity to pass by, and I did not enter with Lady Langham into my own misdeeds. This interview closed without confidence, and I remained in my errors to reap a full harvest of repentance. I thought my companion looked earnestly at me, as though she read anxiety in my countenance, but I persevered in silence respecting myself, and Lady Langham well knew the inflexibility of my nature. I talked of Captain Bates, how was he to be informed of Mrs. Fortescue's flight? Lady Langham advised perfect openness of remark. "Susan is gone, and the mere fact of her departure must be soon known to all; her reasons of course are sacred to herself, and the mystery attached to her departure will fade away as all mystery eventually fades, in new scenes and fresh events."

I entreated her to announce and comment upon the event, and allow *me* to be silent upon

the subject. I could never undertake to answer half the questions Captain Bates would propound, or listen to half he would utter in his indignation; therefore perfect silence suited my temper and situation, and silent I was resolved to be to the uttermost. Lady Langham undertook the whole arrangement of the affair.

My appearance at the breakfast-table created much interest. Lord Elford said little, but his heavy countenance expressed as much satisfaction as such a face could convey in meaning looks of silent pleasure. Thelwal advanced in his usual insinuating manner, and I forgot for a time his speciousness and crafty character. There was something seducing in the gentle approach, the anxious inquiry, the speaking eye—how could I remember his passages with Mrs. Fortescue? and when I heard that impressive tone, when I saw the flash of his glance, how could I believe all was hollow and unmeaning? Say what they might of Thelwal's insincerity to others, to *me* his feelings could not be mistaken, and *I* doubted not his attachment. This morning his assiduity was marked, his anxiety about my health manifest. I felt it at my heart, but Lord Elford was present, and those feelings were no longer warrantable. I dared not meet his eye, and I could scarcely trust my voice in

replying to his anxious questions. I knew, I *felt* Lord Elford was observing me.

Captain Bates preserved unbroken silence ; Mrs. Fortescue's rejection had burst his air-bubble, and consigned him to discomfiture. His inward man was troubled, and he sought refuge in perfect stillness. Poor man ! now his hour was come, I pitied him. At his age, feelings were nearly exhausted, and time had chilled the current of his blood, but he could feel indignant and offended at being made the sport of a woman's whim. I was sorry to see him, buttering a roll, with his long, pale, melancholy face, aiming at appearing disengaged, and suppressing some groans of vexation. We assembled in silence, and breakfast for some little time appeared the business of our existence. Mary's voice alone was heard for some moments, gently urging her husband to abstain from eggs and buttered toast, till Sir James Langham, glancing his eyes round the breakfast-table, exclaimed, " Where is Mrs. Fortescue ? "

Lady Langham expected the question : its very expectation had caused her silence, but she replied without hesitation. " Mrs. Fortescue quitted Malvern at six o'clock this morning for town. "

I looked round to examine the countenances

of all whom her departure might concern. Captain Bates fixed a pair of most lack-lustre eyes upon his buttered roll. Captain Thelwal looked perfectly unconcerned; Lord Elford smiled. Sir James alone expressed unfeigned astonishment.

“ Susan gone to town ! My dear Anne, did you know her intention ? ”

“ I was made acquainted with it this morning only, but her reasons were excellent : I could not contravene them. ”

“ If you admitted her reasons, Anne, ” replied Sir James, “ I am quite satisfied everything is right : ” and he gave his wife such a look of confidence and affection ! If poor Mrs. Fortescue had seen that look ! but she had endured enough, and was travelling in loneliness and regrets. Sir James turned towards the doctor.

“ Drinkwater, I don't know what your ideas are upon the subject, but I think women very extraordinary creatures. ”

The doctor looked consequential at having an opinion to give upon such a subject. He looked up from his egg, and spoke kindly and truly.

“ When we do get a kind creature to our heart and home, Langham, we cannot value them enough. They try to make one happy so naturally, and are so patient. ” This was most properly said, and quite enough—but the doctor

warmed in his eulogium—doubtless the egg and toast had cheered him. “We must all think matrimony far preferable to the miserable, tiresome, dull life of a bachelor, and one’s home feels so pleasant—” the doctor hesitated; he found himself in the middle of a speech, and listened to by a considerable audience. He lost the clue of his discourse, and his thoughts waxed confused—he recovered in some degree, and resumed: “One’s home feels so pleasant, with a what’s-his-name at the head of it.”

Mary smiled, and coloured; but we were almost a family party, and the doctor’s forgetfulness was well known now to each individual. I remember when Mary would have smiled without colouring; but matrimony, unfortunately, opens the eyes just when they should close for ever. Sir James relieved her slight embarrassment.

“Still I profess, Drinkwater, they are extraordinary creatures; Susan had no reasons last night, and this morning she had plenty, it appears. You looked at me, Anne; have I said anything wrong my love?”

“If I observed you,” said Lady Langham, laughingly, “it was to hear what pretty thing you would advance to second Dr. Drinkwater’s polite compliment.”

“Was that all! but I am sure, my love, you looked at me with meaning.”

“My dear Langham!”

“Well, then, I suppose I am wrong—but I was going to say something rather clever, which your awful eye has suppressed for ever. What is to be the order of the day?”

No one could quite tell how the morning arrangements were to be regulated. Major Sandford had quite set his mind upon driving the Worcester coach a stage, which he said would give him a fine view of the country. The Drinkwaters' plans depended upon the doctor's feelings after luncheon. I resolved to meditate an hour in the churchyard, and as I spoke my intention openly, it allowed Captain Thelwal, if he wished for one, an opportunity to seek me alone. It was a determined vanity which led me to adopt such a rash step; what did it signify entrapping Thelwal, or promoting a meeting which must end in reproach to one party? If Captain Thelwal really loved me, I was engaged to Lord Elford, therefore, what could I gain by the interview? Sickly miserable vanity it was, and proved me unworthy of Mrs. Fortescue's example, or my own education. I persevered in my meditation, however, and very soon after the general move, I was on my way

to the church, and seated on a tomb-stone in its holy precincts. My meditation, alas! was of this world—I meditated solely upon Thelwal, and, surrounded by objects of a most sacred character, I thought only of receiving a declaration from lips I loved—from a man whom I had resolved to love no more, but sacrifice for wealth and station. How my heart beat as I heard steps approach me! Oh, they were Thelwal's steps, and I knew well their stealing measure; but terror seized me at my perilous position, as his step drew nearer. I stood on the very verge of a terrific precipice—I might fail in my purpose—all my vain hope was realized; and now I longed to fly from his voice which would beguile me, and make me weaker than an infant. I rose in agony to escape, and almost a cry of joy burst from me at seeing Lord Elford only before me. It was my better angel watching over me—this time I was saved.

“I fancied I might follow your steps,” said Lord Elford, seating himself near me. “Major Sandford and Miss Bates were just gone to the Well; Captain Thelwal was taking a solitary walk in the gardens, and I could see no reason why I might not join you.”

“I am very happy to see you, my lord, and as I have your escort, perhaps our walk may extend itself.”

Lord Elford was happy in having achieved a *tête-à-tête* with me so quietly, and he was still more complimented by my expressed wish of lengthening it by a walk. Most alertly did he comply with my desire, and we were soon lost amid the glades and woody scenery which surrounded that beautiful village.

Captain Thelwal in the gardens! Captain Thelwal taking a solitary walk in the Crown Inn gardens, when I had publicly named my intention of being alone in the churchyard. Could anything cut me more deeply!—a solitary walk, too! Was it to muse upon Mrs. Fortescue, or upon my own folly, in being so easily duped by a winning address? I cannot forget the revulsion of my soul upon that intelligence! From that moment my future plan was as fully matured, as though I had given it an age of reasoning; from that moment I resolved to be no more alone with him, or give his vanity one triumph over my feelings. I would be cold, quiet, and dignified, and I would glory in displaying my power over Lord Elford, to convince the traitor I had chains for other hearts, though his own refused allegiance. It was with these sentiments, and with this resolution rapidly and powerfully acting upon my mind, which led me to reply in hurried terms to Lord Elford's salutation, and it was angry

and revengeful thoughts which lighted up my eyes, and gave energy to my manner, when I heard a second avowal from Lord Elford, and consented to become his wife as soon as propriety would sanction the event.

“You assure me you are totally disengaged, Louisa?” asked his lordship, again and again.

“Do you doubt me, Lord Elford, that you repeat the question so often?”

“Oh, no; your word is all-sufficient, but yet I never tire of its repetition. I love to hear you assert so forcibly that no one divides that heart with me. I am very jealous of my prize, and shall watch it with a miser’s anxiety.”

“Do not watch me: my spirit never could bear suspicion.”

“I never suspect,” said his lordship, rather proudly. “I would not address a woman I suspected. The first suspicion would be my last. I should break off all connexion instantly, for my peace of mind’s sake.” His lordship’s voice again softened. “I should only watch my jewel with care while I wore it, but a lover delights in hearing that he is the one beloved.”

“Tell me, Lord Elford,” I said, as he seized the hand which rested on his arm, “tell me why you smiled this morning when Mrs. Fortescue’s departure was proclaimed?”

“Were you looking at me, then, Louisa?” Lord Elford’s heavy countenance became inspired in its expression.

“Yes, I saw you smile, and now I must know the reason of that smile?”

“I smiled to think of Thelwal’s annoyance, but I know it was cruel to be amused at a lover’s pangs. I should not laugh again.”

“What was Thelwal’s annoyance, my lord?” and I felt, as I spoke, my lips tightening and my heart swelling.

“Only his chagrin at Mrs. Fortescue’s flight. I believe it was on his account she left Malvern, for he was her shadow at the Hermitage, and I heard her rebuke him seriously once, for his disagreeable perseverance. I was reading in a corner, and they did not see me for some time.”

I was greedy of intelligence. I panted for more proofs of Thelwal’s contumacy—I gasped for further particulars. What a game we had both been playing! I meant to burst my bonds and marry Lord Elford, but my heart was the forfeit in the bold measure. Thelwal suffered nothing. He came freely to the moves, and could quit the board in heedless glee, for he had no stake! It was a return match to the game I had played with Mr. Ellis. There is retribution upon earth; and if ever I felt that

powerful conviction it was at this moment, when it came withering to my heart without a softening thought, hurled by my own hand, and felt by myself alone.

“And what else? tell me something else.” I exclaimed so energetically, it made Lord Elford smile.

“You like to hear all these little things!—Well, I have no more to add, for their voices dropped when they became aware of my neighbourhood. I heard her positively decline driving with him in his curricule, the evening our arrangement for this place was concluded, but I did not, could not attend to their affairs—I was beginning to fall in love with yourself.”

I was maddened at the remembrance of so much by-play and would bear no more. Thelwal was ten times worse than myself—how I longed to irritate his vain heart by my indifferent and careless manners, and how I longed for his being acquainted with my engagement to Lord Elford! When a woman is slighted, what will she not do, when principle has no resting place? I was now impatient to return to luncheon.

“I may then speak confidentially to Sir James?” softly whispered Lord Elford, as we walked from the churchyard up to the inn.

“You may, of course, do so, since I stand pledged to you, my lord.”

“Will you drive with me this afternoon?”

“Certainly.”

And Lord Elford and myself reached the Crown arm-in-arm. Thelwal was standing at the window.

CHAPTER VII.

THE party were assembled at luncheon when I entered the sitting-room attended by my new lover. I meant to queen it over Captain Thelwal's vanity, but the creature was versed in every art, and my best efforts could not throw him off his guard. I was vexed at my own mortification, and still more vexed at an increasing suspicion which arose in my mind, that he detected and enjoyed my mortified feelings.

“You cannot be aware, Miss Vansittart”—and Thelwal smiled maliciously I thought as he spoke—“you cannot be aware how much two figures, and such figures—on that tombstone, gave effect to our view from these windows. If I had but the pencil of an artist you should have become immortal; the scene should have been lithographed.”

“Why did you not acquire such an accom-

plishment, Captain Thelwal?" I replied, affecting nonchalance.

"He was too busy learning the guitar," cried Sir James Langham, "and, by-the-bye, we have brought the guitar with us. Thelwal, we will have music to-night by the light of the moon, to compose our spirits after my cousin's freak."

I glanced at Thelwal upon this allusion to Mrs. Fortescue—the deuce was in the man, he looked most provokingly indifferent—he looked as though the mention of her name was a strange and uninteresting sound.

"I will pronounce a monody to her memory, Langham.—But, Miss Vansittart, you do not eat: your drive of yesterday has not agreed so well as it should have done."

I was becoming offended very rapidly, but I did contrive to command my temper externally.

"I am sure it made me very ill," I replied, calmly.

"Perhaps another drive might revive you, Miss Vansittart."

"I look forward to it, Captain Thelwal, for I feel certain it will refresh me very much."

"May I offer myself as your companion *this* day?" This was said softly and winningly.

"I should be honoured; but thank you, no. I have made an engagement I believe tacitly to——"

“ Tacit engagements are only meant to be broken,” he interrupted, with a look which at any other time would have persuaded me to become forsworn.

“ I believe you are right, Captain Thelwal, one is very apt to take a poet’s licence with them, but in this instance I am not willing to treat *mine* lightly.”

“ Who is the happy person you are to honour?”

“ Lord Elford,” I coolly answered.

“ Lord Elford! he is most enviable—I wish he would relinquish his engagement for one day to me! I am very unselfish, I only ask for one day. Shall I ask his lordship to forget his engagement till to-morrow?”

Oh, that I had possessed power to destroy with a look!—that one glance of mine would have withered that cold heart as mine felt withering!—I had courage, however, to appear calm: a certain degree of despair produces calmness, and I was able to smile as I shook my head playfully to his demand. “ No, not for worlds!”

He bowed. “ What an ocean of pleasure must be imaged in a mind which ‘ worlds’ cannot balance! Yet our language is not so susceptible of enthusiasm and compliment as many others.

The Spaniard is the most lofty — his common expressions are hyperbole.”

I turned from Captain Thelwal and addressed Sir James Langham.—Provoking devil!—this was my insinuating, attached, watchful lover.—This was the man who was to extract the sting from poverty, and guitar me through matrimony in my visions! What would I give to plague his soul, as he was torturing mine! There was nothing in our dialogue to attract notice; the sting was secretly conveyed, but our manners were free from bitterness, and the short colloquy did not interfere with the general conversation. When I spoke to Sir James Langham, the party had just decided to remain at Malvern and wander over the hills. Captain Thelwal heard the fiat pronounced, and again he spoke in those low insinuating tones which the serpent must have whispered into the ear of Eve, when she consented to transgress.

“Since the driving plan exists no longer, will you accept my assistance upon the hills, Miss Vansittart?”

“My engagement is equally binding if we walk, Captain Thelwal.”

“Through what prism are you now beholding Lord Elford, that my words are becoming a true prophecy? Is it a beam from

his intellects, or the glare of a coronet? I told you he must win all hearts in time. A woman's heart is made of very frail materials; it cannot resist golden threads, or golden wires, if such compose the gaudy cage hung out to allure it."

"If you infer that the cage must be of thread which so soon snaps, or wire which rusts, by all means let the fabric be of gold."

"Do not let us talk in metaphor, Miss Vansittart,—will you indulge me with your society this morning?"

"I am engaged during my stay here to walk and drive with Lord Elford," I replied, with a feeling of triumph, and a hope I had wounded mortally his profound vanity—but I discovered nothing by his manners.

"You are really engaged! I must submit. I wonder if Miss Bates will allow me to persuade her, Major Sandford is not more agreeable than I can be as her escort. I must try my powers: how shall I begin? Shall I ask after her canary?"

I made no reply. I rose and joined Mary who had returned to her work in the window: she was netting indefatigably. Lord Elford came to us shortly after my removal, and requested to be allowed the pleasure of con-

sidering our engagement as still existing; though the party might decline a morning drive, that need not effect *his* happiness.—I was very willing to be of his lordship's opinion: and I offered no obstacle to hinder its completion. Such an event taking place would do away with our mutual intention of keeping our engagement secret most completely, for it was impossible to avoid the construction that must arise in every mind when Lord Elford and myself separated from the party and were seen driving together—but I was just arrived at that climax of contending anger and mortification, when a discovery of our existing relations with each other was necessary to my tranquillity: the private feelings of Thelwal must be elicited by their knowledge, and I should be freed from suspense upon the nature of those feelings. It was of little importance to my future actions, for I was by promise the bride of Elford: yet I would fain discover whether a lurking regret did not mingle in the current of his thoughts, at loosing a victim so immediately within his grasp; mortified vanity would surely shrink under the first discovery of my being the property of another! surely his heart must suffer some annoyance—not in its affections, but in its folly! Let me only feel

sure I was not enduring alone—that some part of my pain was shared by him—I should submit to my fate in patience.

Mary smiled at our appointment, and a glance of pleasure beamed from her eye. I also smiled.

“Mary, I know your thoughts, you need not speak them.”

“Are they guessing the truth in this instance, Louisa?”

“Think what you will, Mary, think what would most give you pleasure, and I will confess it is indeed true.”

“Then,” said Mary, as Lord Elford quitted the room with Sir James Langham, “I choose to think you are making a selection worthy of yourself, and throwing aside gaudy weeds for less showy but more durable plants. Am I right?”

“I told you every thought of yours should be true, Mary.”

“It must give us the highest satisfaction, and none will rejoice more sincerely than Drink-water!” Mary beckoned to the doctor.

“For Heaven’s sake, Mary, do not drop all your fancies into the doctor’s mind,”

“It will give him so much pleasure,” said the affectionate wife, smiling upon him as he approached.

I returned to the table: Captain Bates was still seated there meditating over a gooseberry tart. His eyes were misty and dull: his person heavily and listlessly resting against his chairback: he was a disastrous object among so many seemingly gay friends, and I ought to have condoled with him, and tried to soften his regrets, but our situations were too sympathetic. I allowed him to remain a study for an artist who wished to contemplate and depict despair: I was myself chasing recollection, and I turned from woes which so nearly resembled my own, to observe his daughter and Major Sandford. Miss Bates was seated in profound silence, receiving the major's communications, her still countenance unsunned by a smile, and unadorned by the slightest expression of intelligence: yet poor Miss Bates might be learning a lesson in love in her own dull way, and the major might have attractions in some peculiar way suited to her taste, which escaped my remark. Their loves would not be interesting, but those hearts were happiest who escaped the cold world's sarcastic notice. Captain Thelwal was apparently absorbed in contemplating the map of Worcestershire which decorated the room, and did not vouchsafe to reply when I asked him the nature of his meditations. I was

strangely gratified by this display of temper, for temper it must be which could hurry the polite Thelwal into forgetfulness of his usual graceful attention to a lady's voice. Temper it must be, and my conduct had caused it:—he had seen Lord Elford's address to me at the window, and witnessed Mary's look of pleased expression,—all things combined to assure him I was not yet his own prize; that I had yet power enough to throw off his shackles, and defy his insinuating arts. I believed these thoughts were darkening his mind, and I was in that belief comparatively happy.

Lord Elford rejoined me. The curricule was preparing, and I had to make some little alteration in my dress: this was soon effected. I reappeared in smiles which might well be mistaken for happy thoughts; they were at least exciting in their nature, for I hoped I had given pain, and I was triumphantly enjoying the unchristianlike belief of success.

Sir James Langham was particularly respectful and silent in his deportment, at my entrance—not a word or look implied the good-humoured joke which generally rose to his lips when I was flirting with Captain Thelwal; Lady Langham alone wore an expression of uncertain meaning in her amiable face. If she observed

my new flirtation, her knowledge of my character would only lead her to surmise I was embarked in some dangerous game of speculation which might end in mortification and evil, as all my actions had heretofore ended. She could not hope I was proceeding upon right principles even by accident.

Captain Thelwal was alert in offering me his hand to lead me to the door. He was most offensively playful.

“ I must lead you to your carriage,”—there was a slight stress upon the word *your*—“ allow me the pleasure of seeing you comfortably arranged, and exalted as you ought to be—as you *are* in every one’s heart. Lord Elford, I am running away with Miss Vansittart.”

His lordship bowed with smiling dignity, and replied with promptness.

“ Miss Vansittart does run away with our hearts, Captain Thelwal ; but she will not run away from her own, which is a treasure to be coveted.”

I felt like Iphigenia, when Cymon spoke of love.

“ Amazed she listens, nor can trace from whence
The seeming clod has thus derived his sense !”

Lord Elford looked again inspired ; was this only love, or was Lady Langham correct in

saying he was a well-informed intelligent personage? I thought him at this moment a man any woman might love enthusiastically, if her heart was free—mine, I feared, was gone past hope, but I could discharge all my duties without disgust, I was not marrying Turner Ellis.

Captain Thelwal destroyed my hope and my temper with a provoking liveliness of manner, which amply retorted upon myself the vexation I had hoped to have created in him. He placed me carefully in the curricle, offered all the little attentions which a vain woman so dearly loves, and then coolly resigned me to Lord Elford.

“Miss Vansittart, are you quite *comme il faut*? Have you any wishes which I can effect for you? Parasol—oh, yes, I see it. How you will enjoy your drive—I think I wish I was a lady, to be driven about and attended to, it must be such a queenlike situation, but you are a queen. Is not Miss Vansittart queen of hearts?”

“I wish I did hold such sovereignty,” I exclaimed rather pettishly; “I would punish some recreant subjects most heartily.”

“You would be infinitely gentle, I am sure—all sweetness—there, you are arranged—Lord Elford, your bays are perfection. I shall exchange mine for bays, they look so dressy; do they not, Miss Vansittart?”

My colour was mounting ; I held tightly the reins of my speech which would have spoken words that could never be recalled. I was able to command that organ, but my eyes were sufficiently expressive ; they would denote indignation and give him a powerful victory, for he would read their purport and glory in his power. I was on the point of hating a man who had caused such whirlwinds in my heart. I wished him to have been my sacrifice, but my fate denied it to me. I was doomed to suffer for him, and hatred must be my refuge. Captain Thelwal was too cunning an artificer not to behold his own work. A malicious smile discovered his thoughts to me, and woman's pride was up. He may *fancy* I love and writhe under his torturing manners, but he shall never enjoy the assurance of it ! He may believe me unhappy, but he shall never know it ! Such were my determinations when Lord Elford, who had enjoyed our dialogue, shook the reins, and we set off at a rapid pace.

“ You are a little bitter with Captain Thelwal, in spite of your spirited conversations,” observed Lord Elford, as he slackened our speed to chat with greater comfort.

“ I cannot endure him : I believe him to be a heartless villain.”

“ He delights in the admiration of wo-

men, but I think their attentions have spoiled him."

"I cannot allow for such overweening vanity; don't advocate him, Lord Elford."

"I do not. I am sorry to find it exist in men or women, for it must lead to nonsense and even to evil. I am most happy in seeing you scorn such ungenerous feelings, and I must consider myself the happiest man in existence in the hope of possessing a woman like yourself, so free from calculating vanity, and vulgar anxiety for admiration."

Every word was a dagger in my heart, I was ashamed to endure the praise which I did not deserve; but my poor vacillating mind was to be a sealed book to Lord Elford, and I must smile under encomiums which depressed me.

"Allow me, my dear Louisa, for by that dear name I may address you now, allow me to give you my ideas upon a woman's conduct, not to tell you my wishes, but to assure you I prize the lot I have drawn. In giving you my thoughts I am describing yourself, however your modesty may disclaim the portrait."

"I will not disclaim it," I said, sighing deeply, "I will admire your portrait, and silently copy it if I can."

"My notion of a woman's attractions, Louisa,

is her gentle behaviour, her warmth of affection, her faithful heart, a heart too pure to admit passions which disfigure its beauty, and too religious to allow its dependence upon its Maker to be sullied by an inclination for evil. I should depend upon my wife's honour as faithfully as I hope to guard her from the evils of this life, and I should confide in her affection and esteem, with a sure feeling that she would never deceive me. Am I not right?"

I was embarrassed. I had not prepared a speech like a royal personage, who is informed of the subject about to be delivered, and is fitted with an appropriate reply. I had not the simple dictates of a loving, trusting, innocent heart to spread forth before the man I vowed to love and honour! I must fly to evasion, to the silence which is so often mistaken for timidity by a lover, and to the resources of a mind fertile in invention. These resources availed me in the present instance; Lord Elford did not doubt me, and if I hesitated in delivering my sentiments, it was accepted with the blessing of one who believes and loves. Lord Elford told me Sir James Langham had congratulated him with great warmth of feeling. He had spoken very highly of me, and considered any lady having had the advantage of his lady's company

and counsel as I had enjoyed, must be a valuable woman to any man. Sir James," continued his lordship, "gave me every hope that Mrs. Vansittart would accept me as her son, and I may now fairly conclude you my own as far as human foresight can judge. When we return to our quiet habits, I hope I may not long consider myself a single man."

"You and my mother will arrange all these things," I replied. "Matrimony alarms me, and I will not think of the chain which is to bind me."

"You will not find it a galling one, my love. I will never interfere with your pleasures, or weary you with matrimonial exordiums. My wife will be everything to me or nothing. Everything while she dignifies her situation, and nothing, worse than nothing, when she forgets her high calling."

Lord Elford's tones became changed—the gentleness of their usual harmony merged in a sort of dry sarcastic intonation, which I had observed once before, when he rebutted my idea of being suspected. His lordship was evidently nice on the subject of matrimony. Lady Elford must conduct herself with singular tact to avoid disturbing his very keen sense of a wife's duty, or her situation would cease to be enviable. How I should thread the maze with propriety,

I dreaded to contemplate. I changed the subject which appeared to affect him. I knew Lady Anne O'Brien had tried to attract him, and I flew to her as neutral ground where we could meet agreeably.

“Do not be angry with me, Lord Elford, I was only playful, but now I am going to be serious, I wish to ask after my friend Lady Anne O'Brien.”

“Lady Anne O'Brien *your* friend!” exclaimed his lordship, with a look I shall never forget. It was horror and vexation combined. I was wrong again—I was always wrong.

“I met Lady Anne in Bath,” I replied, evasively.

“That does not constitute friendship, certainly, meeting a dashing widow in a public place—you alarmed me—the last woman on earth I would wish to be an associate of my wife's.” Lord Elford's tones resumed their flexibility.—“Did you meet her often?”

“Everybody meets in Bath; I met her once at old Lady Langham's.”

“I am glad you met her in such good company. Lady Anne must not, however, be known to Lady Elford.”

Lady Elford! how well it sounded from his lips. Lady Elford would be a creature set apart

from the herd, but I began to suspect she would be consigned to the straitlaced and dull ones of the earth. I gently touched the matter to try how his mind was attuned.

“ One cannot always be on the watch—sometimes a character creeps into a crowd which we cannot detect till it is too late.”

“ It is never too late to dash poison from one’s lips,” quickly replied Lord Elford; “ it is never too late to break an improper acquaintance; a woman is not aware of opinion, when she is seen with the dissolute and heartless; her character becomes suspected, for we know how soon contamination takes place, and she ranks low in our estimation. She becomes the prey of the designing, and is avoided by men who wish to marry.”

Was not this a repetition of Charles’s lecture to myself, when he first made me acquainted with Sir William De Burgh’s departure? Did all men really fear such women? Why then did they surround them in public, to mislead me—why did they appear to admire if they secretly disapproved?”

I told Lord Elford my perplexed thoughts—he smiled.

“ I do not speak of the great majority who act upon no principles, Louisa. They are selfish,

and will admire all which conduces to their vanity. Though in the choice of a wife they appear to hesitate, that hesitation is selfish alarm—they fear to trust one of their own order, because they are aware of the consequences—they do not admire virtue, but it is necessary in a wife, whose honour must preserve them from the world's ridicule. *I speak of the minority—the few who appreciate worth, and distinguish women for their delicacy of mind, their excellence, and the effect they produce upon society. I can imagine nothing more beautiful than the retiring virtues of an amiable wife, happy in her own worth, forming the delight of her home, and giving her example to society. How does your friend Lady Langham reflect honour upon her husband, and how beautiful is the conduct of Mrs. Drinkwater! They are examples to imitate and love. Lady Anne one shudders to behold—vice imperious in action, and disgusting in conversation.*”

It was true, most true. Lord Elford was profoundly right, but we did not view things through the same glass, and we could not coincide in opinion. I withheld my dissent, and listened in silence. My very silence flattered my companion: he believed me gathering a harvest of sentiments which would fix my

standard of right, and impress upon my ductile mind his own forms of thinking. I was quite aware of his sensitive feelings on one or two points, and it was for my future happiness necessary to conform, or conceal my trespass from his knowledge. Lord Elford would never descend to altercation; he would expect obedience or enforce separation—I must make some radical change in my conduct, or peace would desert me; I should be scorned and avoided by all I really valued; and Lady Langham would start from me as if a viper crossed her path. If I had only never known Thelwal my thorny path would have been a path of roses!

Our drive began and terminated agreeably; the more I saw of Lord Elford, the more I must respect his opinions and dislikes, which never extended the bounds of politeness. I must esteem a man whose principles were so firm and so religious in their nature, though they appeared puritanical; and I must be gratified with the respectful behaviour of one who was so sincere in his attachment, and so superior to myself in goodness. Grandeur of mind, upright in its views and actions, must draw after it the reverence of lesser minds, and smarting as I did under Thelwal's heartless

attentions and sudden coldness, I turned to Lord Elford with every sentiment but love. I could not bestow *that* boon on a heart which panted for a real affection: I had given it originally to Brereton, and the remains of its intensity which I had gathered up and saved from the wreck were wasted upon Thelwal.

When we returned, dinner had waited for us some hours. We were to have returned by four o'clock; but it was six when we arrived at Malvern. The delay had caused some speculation and a few hints, which I would not understand: I left Lord Elford to combat that kind of thing. Captain Bates was in the very position I left him in when I drove out—the poor man was pining visibly. Sir James Langham said, “Thelwal had been strumming all the afternoon, so we might look for something extraordinary in the musical way that evening in the still moonlight.” He was strumming away in his own room at that moment. They had all been roaming up the hill, but the heat was too powerful, so they had taken refuge on the benches under the shady trees, waiting our arrival. This was the history of their sunny hours. We had as little to remark upon our own excursion; we had driven some miles, but in what direction it was difficult to say, for in

truth neither of us had noticed the scenery, or attended to our whereabouts. Lord Elford referred sometimes to myself, when he was at a loss under his severe cross-examination, but I made things worse: we blundered and contradicted each other. Sir James was considerably amused, the doctor delighted, by our discrepancies, which enlivened the party during dinner, and amused the ladies on our retiring. Mary said her husband had been quite roused by the very sprightly dialogue.

“Louisa,” said Lady Langham, “I am told I may congratulate you on having accepted one of our real ornaments, a good and excellent nobleman.”

“I have accepted Lord Elford,” I replied with some hesitation.

“Do not be afraid to name it. I was sure you would do Lord Elford justice in time. His distinguishing you is very complimentary. May you be happy, which cannot fail to be your portion, if you value such a man as he really deserves.”

Lady Langham gave me a look full of meaning: my eye fell under hers; I read a volume of the past in her expression, and fear for the future. Her day of guardianship had expired, therefore I heard no lecture; she delicately considered my feelings and proceeded.

“ It is a match which must give unfeigned satisfaction, and we all congratulate you most sincerely upon your excellent choice ; Sir James was very much pleased with my lord’s confession, and his manly sentiments, which resembled his own.”

“ No, that I deny, Lady Langham ; no confession ever suited my taste like Sir James Langham’s—no one can ever imitate his agreeable manner. Lord Elford, I believe equally sincere, but he can never be so agreeable. I remember I was very envious.”

“ And you are making me jealous, Louisa.”

“ I have no fears for your peace of mind—but what events have transpired in the two days which have elapsed since we left home ! I am engaged, Mrs. Fortescue flown—”

Tears came into Lady Langham’s eyes.

“ Has Sir James,” I asked, “ no suspicion of the truth—had he no vanity that he could not divine her feelings ?”

“ He has not alluded to the subject, but I judge not, from his sentiments. You know he is not quicksighted with regard to our sex, and whatever occurs to perplex, he contents himself with setting down as unaccountable.”

“ Just like my dear Drinkwater,” said Mary.

Lady Langham reverted to my engagement in her gentlest manner, and with delicate tact

she expatiated upon my good fortune, and set before me a picture of brilliant colouring—it was a portrait of myself, possessing every blessing upon earth, existing for another's happiness—a wife—a mother—a Christian woman. She set forth the approving conscience of a well-doer: one who bore with humility a high station and believed it her cross; who resisted temptations of wealth, considering it a trial deeply implicating her salvation; charity—patience—all was set before me with so much true kindness, such felicity of expression, it forced tears from eyes which had never wept but under selfish privations.—I wept freely and softly—not the burst of angry passion, but the softening tears of a touched heart. Lady Langham had unbounded influence over my mind: her words fell like a refreshing dew upon my soul, and their power was in their gentleness. Mary caught the infection, and she too wept with me, as her friend, taking advantage of my softened spirit, persevered in her eloquent picture of virtue. She probably thought that bread cast upon the waters might return after many days—that the good seed sown on the heart might spring up and bloom for future good. Most excellent of women!

When the gentlemen joined us, Sir James

Langham accused us with looking dolorous, and being moonstruck : no wonder if it was so, for the brightest, mildest orb was then rising in the heavens, and casting her beams upon the broad landscape. It was unanimously agreed that only an English taste could endure the glare of candles and the gloom of curtains that beautiful night, and all enjoyed the luxurious idea of watching the pale moonbeams from the hill. We set forth instantly : Mary and her husband deposited themselves on the lowest seat, and watched our movements in the higher regions. — We seated ourselves on the bank approaching the well-house, and Thelwal, who had taken his guitar, made delicious accompaniments to his snatches of Italian song. I was seated by Lord Elford. We talked of foreign scenery and society, its hot sun and cooling fruits ; Lord Elford promised me a sight of all these things before we became fixed in Hertfordshire, and my imagination was raised in contemplating the pleasures and variety of our future expedition. I looked up to him as the fountain from which all luxury was to flow, and some feelings of gratitude, mingled with the satisfaction I felt in looking forward to new scenes and other countries. Sir James Langham called upon Captain Bates for a song.

Captain Bates declined the call—he said he felt all to pieces, and was not harmonious—he was very far from well, and felt as if he should never be better. Captain Bates was overruled, and desired to put off his illness till a more convenient opportunity, for his singing was indispensable under such a brilliant moon. He sung, with Captain Thelwal, “Time has not thinned,” in excellent style. At first his tone was something lachrymose, but music was his principle of existence, and in proceeding, he warmed to the subject, his eye lighted up with its wonted fire, and his full voice resumed its energy. It was encored again and again—the gentlemen were called upon to resume their harmonious combination of voice, and each time did Captain Bates lift up his voice and gladden the listening powers of his little audience. Our music was not sacred to ourselves—the sounds were distinctly heard in the village below, and the windows opened in succession to admit the melody. We could see the lights gradually appear as the curtains were withdrawn, and the peaceful spot resembled an illumination, or a group of giant glowworms lying in the deep shadow of the hills.

Captain Thelwal sung alone ! I dreaded to hear his voice in its own single richness ; I re-

membered its effect upon me at Ryde, and I did not wish to be disturbed from my calm contemplations at the present moment. I could not quit my seat without remark, or I would have withdrawn from the group; Thelwal would have suspected his power, which I could not bear even in idea—I therefore listened, and felt the poison conveyed in every line.

I may not breathe a wish to see
 The only form I loved ;
 I may not tell the misery
 My heart has deeply proved.
 But I can suffer—and in silence mourn
 The hours of joy which never can return.
 I loved her—but I never told
 The secret of my breast ;
 Timidity dared not unfold
 The pang that broke my rest.
 I could not bear to cloud that sunny face
 Which joy had chosen for its resting-place.

She would not smile, tho' in my eyes
 She read wild agony ;
 She heard the breathing of my sighs,
 Yet coldly turn'd from me.
 Where is oblivion's cup to chase away
 The hateful visions of each coming day ?—
 My heart is dead, yet none shall know
 The bitterness I feel,
 Or see my struggle with a woe
 Which time can never heal.
 No, I will suffer, and in silence mourn
 Those hours of joy which never may return.

Did Thelwal mean to goad me to the uttermost? Did he make choice of these words to convey to my mind an ardent and timid attachment? I believed no longer in that fairy dream, I was convinced his heart was hollow and altogether faithless, but I loved—and the effect of the song, though transient, was keenly oppressive at the moment. I rose hastily, and waving away Lord Elford's offered support, I hurried past the well-house to that projecting point which commands so extensive and such a lovely prospect. I gazed on the broad valley before me with aching eyes, and watched its calm tranquillity. Was nature so still, and only mortals so restless? Was it our mortal passions which tarnished the serenity of a lovely world created for our enjoyment?—which disturbed our bosoms, and deadened the vital principle of hope within? Truly, yes—my own ambitious anxieties had poisoned the chalice, and I must drink to the dregs: I must drink of that draught which would wither my youth, and fix sorrow in my heart for its perpetual abiding-place. I had been brought up among the good, therefore my rebellious spirit must be ever struggling with my wishes, for my education left me no excuse for practising evil. I could not say I was innocent of harm. Thelwal had wrecked my happi-

ness, but I was the promoter of my own regrets, and was only worsted in the ungenerous conflict. In the midst of my revery, Thelwal stood beside me. His voice was harmony, as it always was when he wished to seduce and please.

“Miss Vansittart is musing; may I enter into her thoughts, and hope they extended to myself?”

“To yourself!” I replied, disdainfully, “I have better claims upon them.”

“I am unhappily aware of it,” he returned sorrowfully, “and I must bear my destiny as I may. You are happy smiling on the man you love; I have none to smile upon me.”

“No!” I retorted, hastily. “Mrs. Fortescue despised you as I despise you from my heart!”

I thought Captain Thelwal started at my energy, or it might be the name of Mrs. Fortescue which affected him—that thought roused all my dormant feelings of angry jealousy.

“Yes, Mrs. Fortescue despised you, Captain Thelwal, but not half so energetically as I do.”

“My dear Miss Vansittart, do not add fuel to the flame which already consumes me. Is it not enough to love and be deceived—to find the heart I prized given to another, that you must trample upon me with disdain? Must you add

scoffs to an ill-requited attachment, and crush the worm you have already bruised?"

"Heartless villain!" I cried, half bewildered with emotion, "have you not tried every art to win me, and spoken words which should not have been uttered, since they were meant to deceive me!"

"Heaven is my witness, Miss Vansittart, how truly I loved you. That I adored, you cannot doubt, since all my actions revealed my secret, and you yourself allude to it. No, you have trifled with my peace, and mocked my anxiety! It suited you to prefer the rich man, and cast away one who had only a true heart to offer you."

I laughed in disdain, and would have quitted the spot: he detained me by trying to place his arm round my waist: I spurned him from me. "Have you no idea, Captain Thelwal, that the coil of a serpent would be more grateful to me than your abhorred touch? Do you not see that I loathe a creature so contemptible—so lost to one generous feeling?" Again I left him to rejoin my party, but the tempter spoke once more.

"Louisa, listen to me, hear me! by Heaven I will not offend you by word or deed, but hear me before you go to him who is now all I should have been!"

“Call me by my title, sir,” I replied, indignant at the familiar appellation. “I am Miss Vansittart, till I exchange that name for Elford—I am no man’s Louisa, nor dare any one presume to name it without respect!”

“I was wrong,” ejaculated Thelwal in a sorrowing tone, “I was wrong, forgive me—one word and I am gone—you have accepted my attentions, you knew I loved you—by that lovely form, by that eye of light say truly, do you not believe I love you?”

I hesitated for an instant, but a rush of bitter truths came over my recollection and increased my irritation of nerves.

“By the form which spurns you, and the eye of fire which disdains you, I believe you incapable of one holy or upright feeling. Do not talk to me, do not walk by me, for I choose to be alone.”

“I am gone,” said the wily hypocrite, “since you reject me, but remember your words have banished me; your own conduct drives me from you!—true, womanlike, you spurn me since another can offer a higher premium for a truckling heart!”

“Dare you call it barter?” I asked, provoked beyond endurance. “What do you call your own heartless conduct? What name have you for the man who woos two women and vows

the same cold-blooded faith to both. If you loved *me*, what part had Mrs. Fortescue in the transaction?"

"Miss Vansittart, what can your words imply?" cried Thelwal, in affected, well-acted wonder.

"My words only imply contempt, Captain Thelwal: I have only profound contempt for your accomplished villany—had one grain of real affection greeted my sight, I might have been unhappy, but I laugh at your professions and am rejoiced to behold you unmasked. No wonder Mrs. Fortescue eschewed a heart so hollow, and which turned from her refusal to trifle with a new victim."

"Victim—oh, that you *were* my victim," softly responded Thelwal, "how I would guard my treasure!"

"Do not insult me further, Captain Thelwal," I replied; "once more I beg you to leave me, our conversation can only increase our mutual distaste, and I am weary of you."

"Are you indeed so weary?" he asked, taking my hand forcibly and speaking rapidly. "No, no, Louisa, you are *not* weary of me: we have each played our stake, and I have been sacrificed to the highest bidder—you don't go from me yet—I am sacrificed, but you are lost for ever. Go to Lord Elford, and tell him you are

his—smile upon him—deceive him, and in your loneliness give all your thoughts to *me*, the one beloved. Do not struggle from me yet—you love me fondly, Louisa, and I shall cling to your remembrance when you would fain forget me. Farewell, false one, we shall not esteem each other, but we shall love on.” My hand became released, and Thelwal had passed on before me. In a few moments I recovered sufficient composure to follow him towards my party; he was already seated, and as I drew near, he was singing a lively air to his guitar,

Here's to her who long hath waked the poet's sigh,
The girl who gave to love what gold could never buy.

This was the gentle insinuating Thelwal, the adoring lover who won the long-haired Italian girls, and who had read my character as truly as Lady Langham had unfolded his own in Ryde!

We met as if no interview had taken place: his manner wore the same unreserve, and he continued gaily touching his instrument to sprightly airs. I endeavoured to forget his words, but they would not be dispelled; I still heard the sentence pronounced in ringing tones, “We shall not esteem each other, but we shall love on;” and I reseated myself in silence by Lord Elford.

“Very well,” said Sir James Langham, “we

have had a famous concert, and I dare say the Drinkwaters have enjoyed it. We may never again have such a warm night to enjoy the moonlight in. Miss Vansittart, your white dress looked very picturesque on the opposite side the way, particularly picturesque—no one paints here to make a moonlight transparency—Anne, you draw a little, my love?”

“No, Langham.”

“You told me so once, but that was of course to take me in. Elford, whenever you wisely decide upon matrimony, insist upon a written catalogue of accomplishments, and call them over before you put your neck in the collar.”

“I should only require that my bride loved and valued Lady Langham,” replied the earl, bowing, “to be secure of her excellence in all that best becomes a woman.”

Sir James was gratified by the compliment, and acknowledged it by his look of pride and silent pressure of his hand upon his heart. Major Sandford grinned acquiescence, and confessed matrimony would become fashionable if every gentleman could choose as discreetly as his friend Langham.

“One finds so much trickery in ladies,” he observed, pursing up his enormous mouth, “that it is as difficult to choose a wife as it is to buy

a horse; you are sure to be taken in at last."

"I think there are some unerring rules to judge by, if the reason is willing to be convinced," said Lord Elford.

"Which are they?" asked Captain Thelwal, drily, as he screwed up the pegs of his guitar.

"I would judge of a lady by the society she moved in. If her mind is pure, her society will be necessarily well chosen, for every spirit seeks its kindred soul, and good cannot amalgamate with bad. I would choose a wife from the family I respected, and believe she could not be very faulty whose education was formed on good principles."

Thelwal struck a few chords in a minor key, but made no reply.

Major Sandford was obtuse. He insisted upon it, parents trained up their daughters to exhibit showy talents and secure establishments—if the ladies had nothing to say, the vessel must be tolerably empty, for every woman loved talking, and if they had a few ideas, they never rested till they had set their whole stock before a customer; so between such extremes it was hard to judge. You could walk a horse before you paid his price, and judge something of its paces, but ladies were such touch-me-nots, it was a hopeless case.

Major Sandford's speech did not flatter Miss Bates, but the moonlight discovered no blush on her cheek, and she probably neither heard nor felt his remark.

Captain Bates had not delivered his mite in the argument; he was silent for many minutes, but Major Sandford appealed to him for his opinion. Captain Bates raised himself from his lounging attitude, and spoke very solemnly.

“A man, sir, may study a woman for years, and know no more of the matter then, than he did at first. How can one understand what a woman means, when they never know themselves?”

Thelwal smiled. “I will hear nothing advanced against the beings who enliven our existence. I will not believe the ascetic; I will not hear the vexed bachelor—Captain Bates, let us sing the merry song,

‘ Let the toast pass, every lass
I warrant will prove an excuse for the glass.’ ”

The gentlemen burst into the gay harmony with spirit and effect, and our moonlight sederunt ended with its dying strains. Mary said the voices had sounded like ethereal music, and Drinkwater had enjoyed it till the bats flew against his hat, and warned him to return into the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN THELWAL'S presence always restrained my manner towards Lord Elford: I never could be playful or serious with his lordship, but a malicious eyeglance rested upon me, and seemed to sneer at my words. I could read an expression in these speaking orbs which clearly said, "How you are cheating yourself and him, and trying to deceive me!" I felt as if a vampire had fastened upon me, and was drawing away my energies of body and mind, so completely had I quailed under the wretched influence of a bold bad man. It appeared to me I was never free from his presence: his eye met mine constantly, though I turned from him and sought to avoid him. My spirits suffered from a sort of mental nightmare, which pressed them down, and destroyed their natural sportiveness; I was only really happy during my

drives with Lord Elford ; then, and then only, I was free ; for he had not detected my weaknesses, and I escaped the searching looks of Thelwal, whom I feared, and hated. Yes, I hated him ! Fear will not abide with love, and I feared his artful attacks, and alternately soft and piercing glances.

The morning following our moonlight expedition, we were to belong exclusively to Malvern. It was finally decided to enjoy the two days which remained of our visit, in exploring and admiring the scenery of Malvern, instead of constantly driving away from it. We were content to do so : I only stipulated for an evening drive—I wished to drive out to enjoy a novel pleasure—it was no longer a dull disgusting *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Ellis, but a pleasant drive with a man who could amuse, and whom I was rather proud to display as my future lord. My wish was a compliment too flattering to be resisted ; we would walk all the morning, and drive out in the cool of the evening.

We visited the beautiful environs of Malvern, and rested wherever we found a convenient bank, or shady clump. The Drinkwaters remained stationed in the well-house, where the doctor quaffed large draughts of water, and found his system benefited by its pure quality, or more likely, perhaps, he was amused and drawn into

exercise, which his large frame required. However that might be, Mary was banished from her companions. This day they were seated nearly in the heavens above us, and the night before they were almost under the earth below our party. We never got together. The doctor's feelings being poor Mary's thermometer, she was guided by their variations, and while we were now conversing on the cool grass, in the valley, Mary was netting in the well-house, upon a hard bench, watching the doctor's stated number of tumblers, and asking her usual question, "And now, dear, how do you feel?"

Everybody felt Mrs. Fortescue's loss, her easy manners and lively conversation must materially affect the party she had quitted, and in two instances the loss was irreparable: Captain Thelwal must lament her departure, since I was determined to contribute nothing *voluntarily* to his insatiate vanity. Love of admiration belongs to us by right; it is our vocation, but in a man the feeling is insufferable. Captain Bates mourned her absence with his whole soul; her conversation had been everything to him for many days, her lively attentions and beauty had roused him from his dull monotonous existence, and he must now feel severely the action of being thrown back upon himself, and upon his dull, listless daughter's society. He did suffer

much ; he wandered silently from us, and his mind was evidently labouring with uneasy thoughts, which preyed upon his spirits. Lord Elford observed a change in the usual flow of his spirits, and remarked it to me.

“ How is it that your friend, who is so roused by company, should suddenly seek solitude, and appear so dejected ? Is he unwell ? ”

“ A little lovesick I believe,” was my reply.

“ Ah, but who is the lady ? ”

“ Mrs. Fortescue took his heart by storm, or he surrendered without terms ; but Captain Bates is mourning her departure.”

“ Mrs. Fortescue is a dangerous woman ; but I should imagine your friend’s age would have guarded him from any warm sentiment.”

“ I do not understand the precise period when man or woman cease to be foolish ; what is the supposed moment for retiring into nothingness ?—when am I to expect you will love me no more, Lord Elford ? ”

“ Let us only talk of Captain Bates for an instant ; I will not allow you to jest upon a subject which is now too sacred to bear the touch of ridicule. When we have despatched Captain Bates, I will talk of yourself ; but it must be of yourself only, and I have much to say and to ask, Louisa.”

I was alarmed: what was there to ask about—surely he has not heard of Mr. Ellis, or suspected my feelings for Thelwal! What an odious thing is conscience!

Lord Elford gave his own reading of my alarmed looks, which did not escape his eye. He smiled as he gazed upon me, and Captain Bates was forgotten.

“ I love that fearful expression, that modest alarm, Louisa! The first time I beheld you I admired your turning from me so ingenuously to inquire of your old friends from Captain Thelwal. You did not try to fix my attention by studied arts, or endeavour to grasp at my heart as others have done. Even now that we are pledged to each other, you cannot affect that varying colour which is so becoming, so very lovely; but I cannot speak to you now, surrounded as we are by our party. You must give me your attention this evening as we drive out, and prepare to answer all my questions in the affirmative. Will you promise me, Louisa?”

“ Let me hear them first. I promise to give you my attention, but I will not answer for complying with all your demands; do not be exorbitant.”

“ I must be sincerely answered on one or two

points, and I will insist upon your concurrence. You blush, Louisa !”

“ How can I help it ? I blush for *you*, Lord Elford.”

“ Blush for me ! a lovely woman blushing at me or for me is an exquisite thought ; but why do you blush for me ?”

“ I blush at your tyrannical temper ; I have scarcely been two days promised to you, when you put on the husband, and resolve to be obeyed implicitly.”

Lord Elford did not reply, but his earnest gaze was upon me. I felt its intensity, and turned away from its power. I met the eyes of Thelwal full of softness and sorrow watching our *tête-à-tête*. Traitor ! could I forget those words which were written upon my heart ? did he dare tell me he did not esteem me !—dare to confess his opinion of my character—turn upon myself the odium of ambitious thoughts, and appear the ill-used one ! How could I heed his looks framed to deceive and betray, or prevent a shudder of disgust which crept over me at the recollection of his last speech. Lord Elford feared I was unwell.

“ No, not unwell, but I was contemplating a disagreeable subject !”

“ Tell me its nature, and let me reason it away. Was I concerned in the subject ?”

“No, indeed, you were not then in my thoughts.”

Lord Elford looked disappointed and displeased: I soon dispelled the gloom. “It is not likely you would be connected in my mind with disagreeables; you may chase them away, but you cannot create them—at least I think not.”

“I hope not, fervently,” he exclaimed, “but tell me what you *did* meditate upon when I spoke.”

“Don’t ask me! it has passed away, and I never recall unpleasant thoughts.”

“You increase my curiosity: surely you have no thoughts to conceal from me now?”

“Indeed, I have many.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” replied his lordship, gravely, and we were both silent for some moments.

I had a difficult person to manage in my husband elect. He could assume a manner of extreme hauteur when he was dissatisfied with me, and without any feelings of love, I had a constant fear of displeasing him. His observation, once fixed upon me, disconcerted all my manœuvres, and defied my powers of evasion. Those “sturdy looks” were very confusing; they spoke to my very soul; for they seemed to say, there was no expectation of subterfuge,

and no palliation for its meanness, if discovered. I felt sure all would be sunshine with a lover who had invested his object with rays from his own imagination, but in the husband I dreaded an offended mind which would resent injury heavily, and scorn a companion who tampered with the severity of virtue and truth. I stood in a perilous position. Such a gentle character as Lady Langham might lead me forward, as a patient groom pats and soothes a fiery steed ; but a husband's commands and reproaches were new matter for consideration. I had never borne my brother's lively lectures in patience ; how should I endure the dignified anger of my Lord Elford, when applied seriously to my faults ?

Lord Elford's silence vexed me. It was provoking to be watched by Captain Thelwal, whose quick perception would detect the slightest jarring in the chords of courtship : I must do away with the annoyance I had caused. Lord Elford's hand rested on the bank by my side ; his attention was given to Sir James, who was explaining something very forcibly to Major Sandford. I placed my ungloved hand within his, and gently pressed it. The action brought him back to me instantaneously, his face glowing with delighted agitation.

“ Am I forgiven ? ” I asked, smilingly.

“Will you forgive *me*?” was his reply, “for fancying you could mean to offend. Oh, Louisa, your power is terrific over my heart: do not pain in wantonness of that power. You know I cannot endure the idea of being trifled with—never attempt to trifle with me.”

“I could not suppose you were so easily wounded.”

“Yes, you could, wicked girl—you know you hoped to plague me, but I will speak as openly to you, as I wish to be treated in return. My mind loves; and it loves in that intensity which demands—which *will* demand an equal return. My wife must have no secrets from me—there must be no feelings apart from each other—I require what I give myself in sincerity, a full confiding affection. I cannot be satisfied without it. I would rather endure the horrors of suffering a separation *now*, than awake hereafter to the knowledge that my wife withheld her confidence from me. I may be blind to my own faults, and conceal a jealous nature in my heart, but it lies exposed to your view, such as it is; you know best whether you will meet my feelings.”

I still held his hand, and I still smiled. He pressed it with a lover’s impetuosity.

“I cannot look in that face and doubt—yes,

you love me, dearest, and I give you what few men can offer, a heart untouched and sacred to yourself."

"You never really and truly loved before?" I exclaimed, greatly gratified by an avowal so flattering to my vanity.

"Never," he replied, firmly; and I believed his assertion, for he never condescended to speak a falsity.

"I have given you my first affection to keep for ever," he continued; "can you say as much to me?"

I coloured crimson to the tips of my fingers, but I dared not hesitate.

"In the country, Lord Elford, there is little variety; a woman's heart is easily untouched, when there is no one to inquire after it, but you have seen so much beauty, I can hardly imagine you have escaped with freedom."

"Beauty is delightful to contemplate!" returned his lordship, smiling, "but my weak point was to find a faithful affectionate heart, and the beauties of St. James's had not that to bestow. They might give me words and fair white-ringed fingers, but there was no heart. My good angel led me to visit the Hermitage, and there—but I will not increase those blushes—they tell everything I wish, and I am content, but do not try to plague me again, Louisa."

“I will be very good, fear me not.”

Peace was established between us again, and if my enemy looked on, he must have felt the pangs which disturbed the Tempter as he contemplated our first parents in Paradise; I did not encounter his eye, but I knew my apparently engrossed attention would gall a vanity which had only met a rebuff from Mrs. Fortescue.

Major Sandford rose from his lair, and effected a movement towards our spot: he quitted Miss Bates and Thelwal to throw himself on the ground by Lord Elford's side. This was extraordinary from the major, whom we considered exclusively Miss Bates's property, but he explained the reason of his removal in a few words.

“I think you are the only people who seem alive here; I am dead and buried!”

“Why so?” asked Lord Elford, who smiled at the observation, though he regretted the interruption.

“I get no answer from any one. Captain Thelwal is silent—Captain Bates is bedevilled; and as to his daughter, I don't think she ever had an idea of her own.”

“Why, Major Sandford, excuse my wondering at your last remark. It was not long ago you complimented the quiet manner of Miss Bates, and spoke particularly in favour of her silence.”

“Very true, Miss Vansittart; but I did not mean her to remain like a signpost. When one has anything to say, it is a pleasure to find some who will listen, but now I really feel a little chatty, she is as dumb as m’uncle’s old grey pony. I am not by any means a talking person, and when a little liveliness comes over one, it’s so stupid to meet a fixed look and no reply; however, I have escaped now, and it’s refreshing to see you two sitting here, and doing nothing but talk.”

“Captain Thelwal has taken your place, major,” said Lord Elford; “are you not fearful of being superseded?”

“I am a deserter,” replied the major, “and do not fear worse evils than I have endured: now Miss Vansittart looks alive, and whenever one sees her she is chatting away in capital style.”

“I certainly did not think chatting constituted a virtue or a grace in your eyes, Major Sandford.”

“Yes, it is a grace—what are women if they have nothing to say for themselves? Must they be in extremes, though? I hate a woman incessantly talking when you want her to listen, but, upon my soul, Miss Bates is deaf and dumb: she give me an illness. I’m sorry for her poor

devil of a canary, and I'm glad I mended its leg, poor dumb animal, but I'll keep out of that business for the future. Upon my soul, Miss Vansittart, she stood by and never said a word while the poor animal was cocking up its broken leg, and lying spreading out its wings on the table !”

I was amused by Major Sandford's late discovery. He had only just found out poor Miss Bates's dulness !

“I think we've had enough of Malvern, don't you? It's a very pretty place, but I don't think we have had altogether a very lively time of it. I wonder what was the matter with Mrs. Fortescue? She was a nice chatty woman—then your sister, Miss Vansittart, is never to be found; no disparagement to the doctor, though—he is a very good fellow, but rather too complaining to marry that fine young creature; in short, I think we shall all be glad to get home again.”

It was impossible to hope for private conversation while Major Sandford remained near us: Lord Elford therefore quietly resigned himself to the deluge of remark poured in by the “deserter,” who enjoyed his change of place, and never once looked back upon Miss Bates. There she sat, however, apparently quite un-

concerned at his departure. Never surely was there such a leaden soul in woman's form.

When we all rose to return home, Major Sandford kept pertinaciously at my side: he offered me his arm. I declined the honour.

“You ladies never care to take the arm of two gentlemen, I perceive; but you will talk to me, which Miss Bates never did, though she always took my arm. There are several pretty turns-out in Malvern—one carriage and pair a perfect picture—Lady Beauchamp's, the ostler told me. They live somewhere about here.”

“Do they?”

“So the ostler told me. I have had two sums offered me in a roundabout way for Bob—beyond the animal's worth, I think, but I had not the heart to part with my old friend. He may be ill-treated among grooms, poor fellow, so I declined parting with him.”

Lord Elford was pleased with this trait in Major Sandford—he told me afterwards the major's kind feeling towards his horse had redeemed him in his opinion. He did not think him polished or particularly agreeable, but he shewed a manly heart, and Langham had told him of many kind actions which did infinite credit to the major's character. The very action

of mending the poor canary's leg spoke in his favour.

"Perhaps he had a reason for his surgical aid," I insinuated.

"In Miss Bates, you think? I am not of your opinion. Miss Bates has no attractions."

"Gentlemen are not always extremely nice," I observed.

"Granted, but there must be a something which fascinates in manner—something which takes effect upon their peculiar taste—a flattering attention, an animated look, a devoted manner—Miss Bates possesses and offers nothing to win the senses."

Mary was at her post when we returned to the Crown. The doctor had not suffered the slightest twinge, and his wife was watching his nap after the exertion of his walk from the well. She was delighted with the waters, and though she thought Gideon wrong in sleeping, which must be so feeding to his constitution, it was a great point gained to lose actual pain. The doctor roused himself from the sofa, and sat with half-open eyes during Mary's remark.

"Have I slept long, Mary?"

"An hour, my dear; but you look so well I cannot complain of its effects this time. I have been reading."

Lord Elford looked with great respect at Mary as she watched her husband's countenance recover from its trance. He seated himself by her.

“I hope my wife will honour me, as you, Mrs. Drinkwater, honour your husband, and yourself in all our eyes for so doing.”

Mary smiled and coloured.

“Your lordship is speaking to a happy wife—perhaps that is the secret of my cares.”

“You are putting things in a new light, Mrs. Drinkwater, but it may be as true as it really is complimentary to the doctor.”

“I wish sincerely, Lord Elford, you may enjoy all happiness when you do marry: be kind and indulgent, and let me prophesy you a felicitous lot.”

The earl bowed, I thought gracefully, to Mary's prophecy, and his eye caught mine. I read its expression at once. It said as clearly as words could speak,—“I am happy, for this admirable wife has promised for you.” I took refuge in my own room.

I amused myself after dinner for half an hour wandering about the garden. There was a seat at the upper end closely covered with laurel, and there I sat musing upon my extraordinary fate till the hour for driving should

require me to return into the house. I was not many moments seated when Major Sandford advanced up the walk. He was surprised at seeing me alone.

“ Miss Vansittart, what are you doing ?” he cried, stopping suddenly.

“ I must reply by asking another question—pray, Major Sandford, where are you going ?”

“ Upon my soul I can’t answer you ; but I believe I was going up to the well if I had not found you here. I will remain where I am now, because you are chatty and will amuse me.”

When Major Sandford talked of chatting, he only meant to have the whole discourse in his own hands unless he asked positive questions.

“ I came out for a little air : the dining-room was dull, no one spoke after you ladies retired. I can’t think what has possessed Captain Bates—you know he was generally dull enough—full of queer ideas—but now he is quite stupid—caught it of his daughter at last, I fancy.”

“ Oh.”

“ Thelwal had nothing to say for himself either, except admiring a pretty girl at the vicarage window opposite. Lord Elford was in close conversation with Langham, and the doctor was sleeping again : there’s a pretty party for you !”

“ Nothing,” ejaculated the lady, her bosom heaving with emotion.

“ What did I ever do to you, Miss Bates?”

“ Nothing,” sighed the weeping Polly, “ but you could squeeze Miss Louisa Vansittart’s hand !”

“ What have I been guilty of then, Miss Bates, that you attack me so suddenly ? What have I said or done to make you suppose me ——” the major stammered : he could not complete the sentence.

“ You looked !” replied Miss Bates, bursting into fresh sorrow.

“ The devil I did !” cried the major : “ then I’ll never be such a fool as to look at a woman again. I beg pardon for using a strong expression, but it’s d—d hard to be called to account for looking a lady in the face when one speaks to her.”

“ You have used me very ill, but it would never have come to this, if Miss Louisa Vansittart had let you alone.”

I became very indignant, and walked with a stately step from the scene of action. I left Miss Bates to complain, and Major Sandford to defend his conduct without witnesses ; but before I could reach the steps of the Crown gallery, I was overtaken by the major in breathless haste.

“ Upon my soul, that was not fair of you. How could you leave me in such a situation ?”

“ I really could not remain to hear Miss Bates’s allegations : I thought you quite equal to be your own counsel.”

“ But I ran for it, Miss Vansittart : upon my honour, I had nearly been caught after you left me, the poor thing cried so ; but I vow to God I never looked at her in any way, I don’t like red hair well enough : however, I am off by the coach, or a chaise or something, to Cheltenham, to-night—it wont do to stay *here*. I shall whisper my reasons to Langham and start off instantly. For God’s sake, don’t tell her where I am gone !” The major turned an alarmed look towards the garden.

“ I will not betray you, rest assured.”

“ Good bye, then, Miss Vansittart. I’ll never talk to a silent woman again, and it’s not often I’m in a chatty mood either, so it’s hard to get into such a scrape. She need not have called me unfeeling — a man’s a scoundrel to be unfeeling to a woman, but as to simply looking,— ‘ a cat may look at a king’—and no man looks at a plain woman with red hair. I wish you well, Miss Vansittart, but I’ve done with Malvern for ever — now there’s two of us gone.” The major bowed as he again shook hands, and he returned into the dining-room.

Major Sandford left Malvern that evening for Cheltenham, but he could not prevail upon himself to leave Bob behind. Bob was smuggled out of the stable, that Miss Bates might not detect the movement in view, and before she had returned from her lonely musing in the bower, the major and Bob were on their travels. Miss Bates returned to her silence and reserve, and never renewed the conversation with me, or alluded to the major's departure: in this part of her character she resembled her father.

Love had taken Proteus forms since our arrival at Malvern, and I was in each an actor or spectator. Two of our party had flown from its effects, which might not have happened had we remained soberly in Gloucestershire, walking daily to Hartley stile. It was the journey, the grouping, the locomotion, which produced such sudden results, or rather which hurried on effects from long established causes. The drive had given poor Mrs. Fortescue her strife of heart — the bower-scene had hurried Miss Bates into her unfortunate declaration, and my engagement to Lord Elford had humbled Captain Thelwal into a suitor, when he would fain have led me at the chariot-wheels of his vanity. My own engagement had taken place partly through the goading influence of pique. Such

is the condition of half the world. Marriages are decided upon in pique or from anger—mortification — or from calculation, and when all is sacrificed to the baser passions, we sit down to rail at matrimony, and revile its respectable estate.

My drive with Lord Elford was not altogether what I could have desired. Captain Thelwal led me again into the curricle. It was now all pantomime with him and myself: he was always near me to excite my attention by looks, and in action, but his lips appeared closed by a vow of eternal silence, and I never felt inclined to address him: his last conversation terrified me, and I would often have flown from his presence to escape a spell which seemed laid upon me, but one sitting-room brought us constantly into contact, and I could not complain of a silence which relieved me from defending my own indefensible conduct. Captain Thelwal placed me as usual in the carriage, and took the same care in arranging my cloak, but it was in silence: when all was completed, and Lord Elford had taken his seat, Captain Thelwal bowed, but spoke not. I returned his salutation with a low inclination of the head. It was a striking contrast to our very loquacious meetings, and Lord Elford commented upon it.

“ What is the matter with Captain Thelwal, Louisa, and yourself, that your communications are now telegraphic ?”

“ I don't like him, and I think he knows it.”

“ But you always talked easily and pleasantly to him, I remember ; why are you now only on bowing terms ?”

“ I really cannot answer your question.”

“ He has been making love to you, and you have refused him of course, that is a conclusion I draw from your manners, but why not treat him with open ease and indifference ?”

“ How can I be easy, when his own manners are so frigid ?” I asked, passing by his lordship's inference.

“ My dear Louisa, it is girlish to treat a lover with coolness — treat him only with indifference.”

“ How can you separate the feelings, Lord Elford ?”

“ Do not call me Lord Elford ; I have a less distant title : surely you are not going to call me Lord Elford for ever !”

“ Well, Edmund, then, if I can bring myself to utter it.”

“ Speak it again, Louisa.”

“ Edmund, Edmund, Edmund,” I repeated, smiling at the absurdity.

“ I know I am foolish, but you cannot imagine my feelings when I hear you pronounce my name in that deliciously familiar way ; what were we talking about ? ”

“ Nothing of consequence, dear Edmund : there—I have spoken it of my own accord.”

Lord Elford was silent for some time, but he roused himself with an effort from his reverie.

“ I must not allow myself to think too much about you, Louisa, or I shall cease to be a rational creature, and you must not wind yourself round my thoughts by those sweet smiles, or I shall be a fond foolish lover, which I do not wish to be.”

“ All love exhibits itself in folly, does it not ? ”

“ Passion for a season is unreasonable, and most ladies, I suspect, do not credit a love which is clothed in dignity, but it wears better.”

“ I have no objection to rational attachment,” I replied, “ but my heart does repel a jealous one.”

“ What is your definition of jealousy, Louisa ? ” and Lord Elford fixed a “ sturdy look ” upon me.

“ Why, jealousy of other men’s attentions—worrying a woman about nothing—fancying they are neglected for other men—being cross about nothing—that is my idea of jealousy.”

“ You must now explain the word ‘ nothing ;’ what does the ‘ nothing’ mean which so often imbitters domestic comfort ?”

“ I am a sad hand at definition, don’t ask me for explanations.”

“ But how can you substantiate a theory or a rule, my love, if you will not understand your own propositions? Shall I try to unravel your meaning of the word ?”

“ Oh, yes, yes !”

“ You mean, then, a woman accepts the conversation of a more chatty man than her husband, and yet she is doing ‘ nothing’ to give umbrage. She prefers a party from home to her husband’s society at home. This too is among the ‘ nothings.’ Expense, flirtation, dress, silence, and defiance, rank among the ‘ nothings,’ do they not ?”

“ What a list of evils you are enumerating. I did not consider half of them.”

“ It is that want of consideration which leads to so much misery in marriage. I will not be a jealous husband, Louisa—a term I detest—but you know my very serious ideas upon the subject, and perhaps no man has a heart more eager to be happy than I possess, or one more keenly alive to the dignity of a husband’s feelings. I will be indulgent in every respect, but

my wife is my own property, and she belongs exclusively to myself. Her manners, her conversation, I require to be easy and polite to all as becomes a highly-bred woman; but her looks and her thoughts must be given to none save myself."

"You positively frighten me with your remarks and nicety of feeling, Lord Elford, for I am now too alarmed to call you Edmund."

"Why so, my love? Why do *you* fear?—Continue to me the affection you have bestowed so kindly, and I am not apprehensive of our future happiness."

"But I might smile, or look in some way to give offence when I least expected it."

"Not after this conversation, my dearest, surely. I have opened my heart to you freely; I tell you I will bear no change from what you are now, and you are no stranger to my sentiments upon a subject so near my heart. Can you feel alarmed, Louisa, at my fond dependence upon your society? Would you wish for less attention, less devotion from your husband?"

I had a difficult task to lull some rising flippancies, which would have destroyed my power. Lord Elford; the highly-prized of many women, was not a husband for such a wayward, impe-

animated our entrance: in short, Malvern would be remembered as an extraordinary dream by some, and as a fearful reality by others. The doctor alone regretted retracing his steps towards the felicities of the Grange, for the bright sparkling water had braced his system, and the quiet arm-chair by the window, relieved by gay equipages passing and repassing, amused his mind, and carried it out of the routine of aches and pains. Mary enjoyed it exceedingly—to her Malvern would prove the dream, for Drinkwater had not suffered a twinge, or thought of Mr. Brereton. He had been sunny in his ideas, and cheerful in conversation.

I had a little converse with Captain Bates towards the close of the evening; I beckoned him to my side to prevent Captain Thelwal from taking possession of a vacant seat. He came with measured steps, and slow, but he would not touch upon the subject of Mrs. Fortescue's departure.

“Do not let us speak of what has happened, ma'am; my suspicions were right, and there's an end of the matter.”

I was glad to be relieved from the weight of his confidential woe; men are taciturn by nature; they do not feel more in their silence than we do in our voluble expression of wrongs

ceived, but they are less inclined to talk: Captain Bates was surprised at Major Sandford's movement.

“ I think the people are mad; I never knew such freaks in my life. One goes off, another flies away, and now we are on the wing, yet not one person brings forward a reason, or appears surprised at their neighbours.”

“ Particular reasons, I fancy, Captain Bates.”

“ Particular fiddlesticks, ma'am; what particular reasons drove away two people in two days?”

Miss Bates had resumed her leaden expression. The effort of reproaching Major Sandford was over, and her excited feelings had returned into their usual course of stillness. Quiet people always astonish their neighbours with violent and sudden springs of character, when you have disposed of them in your mind as insufferably dull and unfeeling. Miss Bates had softened under the very questionable attentions of Major Sandford, and her heart was eating away its own peace under a heavy and stolid exterior, as rapidly as a youthful beauty could fade under the neglect of some Magnus Apollo. Unfortunately, hearts are constructed of the same malleable material; the ill-favoured are only ridiculed, beauty becomes the pitied one of

public sympathy; yet the one suffers as intensely over her sorrow as though her features were moulded in symmetry; she has equally loved and wept her delusion. Miss Bates might have had many fearful struggles before she forgot her womanly dignity and descended into reproach, which effects nothing in our favour, particularly when it is accompanied by red hair and homely features.

A last evening is never lively. "We know what we are, but we know not what we may be," is a true saying; and even when we are weary and pining for change, we seem to part unwillingly with the last ebbing minutes of present certainty. We were all restless. I walked for the last time on the hills after tea, to contemplate another moonlight. All the gentlemen attended me. There was more air, and many clouds intercepted and scudded over her broad disk.

"We have not this in Italy," observed Captain Thelwal, who stood near me as I leaned on Lord Elford's arm; "no sharp air meets the shivering form as you gaze on the glorious sky—no clouds are driven forward by the strong currents of air above, to obscure the bright silvery heavens—all is so peacefully, brightly still."

“Corinna’s moon,” I said, turning towards him, scarcely aware of the action.

“Yes, Corinna’s moon,” he replied, advancing, “but the sentiment attached to that moon is in her deep attachment, her unshaken constancy, and in her *génie flétrie*, as she pathetically named it. You cannot image an Italian moonlight now, without adding the extended figure of Corinna, as she lay pointing to the orb, half hid by its fleecy cloud, which so resembled her own destiny.”

“It was darkened by the unkindness of a fellow-creature,” I observed.

“She had taught Nelvil to love,” replied Thelwal, “without being aware of the character of her lover. His northern prejudices could not meet the devoted love of a passionate Italian woman’s heart. The love of such a creature, so brilliant, so engrossing public attention, must enthral the senses, but could not occupy long the mind of an Englishman, who requires a calm existence, and loves domestic quiet. To be the husband of a woman so gifted as Corinna, required the love of display which would have charmed an Italian Prince Castel Forte, but an Englishman is not calculated to endure it. Cannot you fancy Corinna declaiming to a dozen English ladies over the tea-table,

or improvising to her husband, quietly smoking his cigar ?”

“ Our ladies are better suited to our homes,” said Sir James Langham. “ Their gentle modesty is more conformable to our character, more adapted to our taste, than exhibitions of talents. I confess, a woman of powerful talent requiring a public stage for display, would distract my ideas of the happy indolence we northerns covet.”

“ I wonder what men feel,” quoth Captain Bates, “ who have married actresses.”

“ Repentance,” replied Sir James.

“ I am afraid that belongs to matrimony,” observed Captain Thelwal.

“ You are not speaking from your heart, surely ?” asked Lord Elford.

“ I am. Italian women, however little calculated for an English home, give you their whole heart. An English girl traffics with her affections: the one, you know, is sacrificing every interest to her love; the other you are sure is calculating the matter the moment she discovers your intention.”

“ I can agree with you,” replied Lord Elford, “ as to the many; but both our experience, I venture to say, has been drawn from imperfect models. London is a wretched specimen of

human nature; we must not judge of our countrywomen from the doubtful specimens which float upon the surface there."

"Yet all who float there, my lord, were born and educated in the country: their sentiments were fostered among green trees, and under the sweet influence of glades and bowers: how then did they imbibe the general mania? I fear the heart is the seat of evil."

"Yon speak feelingly," said my lord.

"I have seen much, and the eyes of a fair lady sporting in the gaieties of town never flashed more coquettishly than I have observed lurking in the retiring and demure looks of a country girl: it is a speculation throughout. A woman in society in London says 'I am,' the country girl insinuates 'I will be;' which is the better bargain?" Lord Elford appealed to me. I disclaimed Captain Thelwal's assertions with faint arguments.

"You do not agree with me, Miss Vansittart; you will not believe hearts are sold, and feelings bought up as commercially in the shades of the country, as in the glare of town! You do not know of such things as those who relinquish an attachment of the heart to grasp at a golden coronet!"

"My acquaintance has been limited, Captain

Thelwal; yours, of course, must be extensive. On both sides, however, there may be subject of complaint: we hear of men who value their affections at a very low estimate, since they are offered in succession to all who attract their notice."

"You have never known a lady, Miss Vansittart, resign herself to the allurements of wealth, and endure the sting of conscience and the reflection of happier hours for ever gone, rather than forego the vanities of station and a jewelled brow?"

"I have heard of perjured men, Captain Thelwal; I have heard of men who try to win a woman's heart for the mere pleasure of throwing it aside, and treat their deceived and trusting feeling with derision, but I have not met with the character you describe.—Do you not fancy it growing chilly, Lord Elford?"

"You would like to return, Louisa, you are cold, I fear, standing here:" and his lordship enveloped me in the cashmere presented by Mr. Ellis, which I had allowed him to bring in case of its proving a chilly night. The coincidence smote my heart. Lord Elford was arranging its folds, and Thelwal looked on. Again I was certainly trafficking my affections, and the shawl presented by one victim, and now being placed

around me by another, gave me a feeling of horror at my own misdeeds. "When will retribution come to overwhelm me with repentance?" I unconsciously exclaimed in thought. My heart answered the question; "Is it not gnawing at me already; what else produces the constant alarm, the restless mind, the fear of the future? There is no rest, no hope, for her who tramples upon the holiest of feelings, and trifles with sacred things. The worm has already fixed itself."

My last evening at Malvern was embittered with reflections which would intrude; and if I became victorious in quelling the enemy for a moment, Captain Thelwal renewed the attack with coldblooded delight. His own mortified vanity sought revenge, and enjoyed the irritation of mind he never failed to produce upon me. A disappointed vanity is a dangerous enemy; it never wearies in seeking its poisonous food, and coiling its serpent folds round the object which has scotched it.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERY body smiled the morning of our departure, and every one, save the doctor, felt delighted at the idea of quitting Malvern. He, poor man, dreaded the Grange, as the village delinquent dreaded the beadle of old; the idea was fraught with miserable anticipations. He beheld his implacable enemy, the gout, standing on the threshold, armed with restless pains and torturing spasms, ready to receive him with stripes, and plunge him into new torments. He had been so free from pain, so cheerfully well, it grieved his soul to leave the healthful stream which ministered to his comfort, and there was a nervous shakiness in his hand which betrayed itself, in breaking the shell of his egg, and caught Mary's anxious eye, as she sat beside him at breakfast. She was very much inclined to ner-

suade him to remain at the Crown for some days longer, and a council was held to determine the matter. Sir James strongly advocated their doing so. Could the doctor be better than well! and since Malvern air agreed with him, why not stay and enjoy its salubrity.

“ My dear sir, by all means remain here a few weeks, and we will visit you occasionally ; give the waters a fair trial, and drown the gout beyond recovery.—Mrs. Drinkwater, exert your influence, and convince your husband it is wiser to remain here.”

The doctor sat in a state of blessed uncertainty, listening to our different arguments in favour of Malvern. He was evidently unwilling to move from his present situation, yet he feared he should not find equal amusement when our party was gone, whose movements and remarks entertained him ; he was sure it would be a very different thing when we were gone.

There was a great deal of argument employed to induce the doctor to be well and happy. Why could not he watch the people drive past the windows as usual, and make his daily pilgrimage to St. Ann's Well?—No, everything would be

very different when we were not with him—he should miss our chat, and the constant variety of our movements—the more he considered the matter, the more firmly he resolved to accompany us home, “Mary would be dull.”

“My dear, I am never dull with you; but if you fancy returning, pray do not stay here to feel a regret which may bring on uncomfortable fancies. You would certainly fancy you had the gout.”

“Mrs. Drinkwater is quite right,” observed Lord Elford, who began to mix himself up in our family arrangements: “it must be a matter of feeling, and before we are finally set forth, the doctor’s mind may have arrived at some decision.”

Our preparations proceeded, and the carriages were announced—still the doctor was balancing the matter, and Mary was patiently going over the old ground of argument, and summoning up the advantages of either side of his decision. I did think an elderly invalid a dreadful nuisance for a young woman to deal with; the patient, affectionate Mary did not yet discover the mistake she had made; she never would own it

probably—but sooner or later it would come home to her mind, and she must lament her error in supposing herself happily mated with ill health and advanced age—that is to say, in comparison with herself. Jenkins was called in to assist at the deliberation. Mary's recent power over the doctor's heart could not equal his mind's devotion to the long-established control of his servant; it was a rooted habit which would not easily be eradicated—certainly not under Mary's gentle administration. Jenkins stood burley and big in the doorway to converse with his master.

“Jenkins,” said the doctor, with a faltering voice, “your mistress thinks I had better remain here some time longer.”

“However, sir, it's a very pretty place.”

“I have not quite made up my mind; if I do stay here I shall want you to fetch my things from home.”

Jenkins bowed.

“You could tell what's-his-name about the wood, and that other fellow about the things there.”

“Yes, sir.”

“ Then what’s-that-fellow’s-name could attend to the workmen, and get on with that thing.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Very well; but I’m not at all sure I shall stay. Those rascals, I suppose, will be idle now you are not with them.”

“ However, sir, they think they need not hurry when the master’s out.”

“ Ay, there’s no leaving home in peace—Mary, we had better return home, or there will be rascally work going on.”

“ Very well, my dear.—Jenkins, you will see, if you please, to everything being packed up of your master’s.”

So the Drinkwaters were to return to the Grange, and Mary could not regret a determination which gave her back my mother’s society, and placed her among those she loved, instead of fixing her for weeks in the loneliness of a gay place, where she knew no one to relieve the tedium of nursing. When the doctor was free from pain he could enjoy his fits of agreeable dozing; when he suffered he was cross. Either way Mary would feel happier at the Grange; my mother’s time and attention were given

almost exclusively to them, and the doctor, equally with Mary, felt the pleasure of her daily visit and the blessing of her kind attention; it operated on the doctor's mind in his wish to return more than he was aware of, for he was now accustomed to see Mary at his side, and my mother knitting before him, and he was the creature of habit from his long dependent confinement. As soon as the affair was finally disposed of, and Jenkins had departed, our carriages drove to the door, and we were again *en route*.

Lord Elford spoke much of himself during our drive, and entreated me not to allow an apparently short acquaintance to stand between ourselves and the completion of his hopes. If Mrs. Vansittart had no objections, he argued—he should consider everything decided, and employ himself exclusively upon arrangements for his marriage. Abbot's Court was in perfect order: if I pleased, we would proceed there to spend the first months of our union, and then if I wished to visit the Continent, he would accompany me with pleasure, though he dreaded the taint of foreign society, and feared the effect of foreign manners.

I had a long argument with his prejudices, which I had not power to meet and combat with effective strength; I could only laugh at his serious objections to continental customs, which failed to produce conviction, and my thoughtless admiration of everything connected with the word "foreign," caused a grave rebuke from his lordship.

"I fear, my dear Louisa, we do not think alike upon this subject, but your fearlessness arises from your own strict principles and ignorance of the force of example. I cannot approve of Englishwomen being placed for any length of time amidst the contamination of foreign principles, both in a religious as well as a domestic point of view, and I shall not allow my wife to copy the follies which strike so directly at domestic quiet."

"I think, my lord, you are unwilling to trust me there, and your scruples betray no very complimentary dependence upon my firmness of character."

"My distrust is in human nature," replied Lord Elford. "I have witnessed too many conjugal scenes abroad—too many disturbed

pictures of matrimonial quiet, not to dread its poisonous effect upon a young mind: there is something insidious in the stealing approaches of that liberty of action which reigns abroad, and its gradual hold upon the affections soon glosses over the imperfection of its tendency. An Englishwoman *must* lose her modest feelings before she can endure to enjoy Parisian society, and I never saw that precious and delicate jewel restored.”

“Do not be disturbed, Edmund; I shall never wish to remove from England.”

“You have not yet suffered the persecutions of friends, added to your own wish to see other countries, my love. Let me hear Lady Elford as calmly decline travelling a year hence, as Louisa Vansittart rejects the idea at this moment, and I shall glory in my wife.”

“You doubt my ability to resist temptation, Lord Elford.”

“Do not be hurt. You are always hurt when you call me Lord Elford, and I would not for worlds annoy you. You are yet a novice in the arts of pouring temptation into the heart of woman through the medium of her own sex.”

“ Still a person is innocent till they are proved guilty.”

“ The law is to suppose them so ; I can suppose you guileless as an angel, for I believe you to be so, therefore I will say no more till your trial comes on.”

“ Tell me, then, who are to be my ‘ Lady Langhams’ in your walk in life, Edmund, when I quit the rural scenes of it? Who is to initiate me into the mysteries of the great and gay world ?”

“ Myself.” Lord Elford spoke the word in his loftiest manner. I stated, I never could bear that tone.

“ You are alarmed at my decided tone of speech, Louisa, but fear not, my dearest girl, that tyranny lurks under it. I am concealing nothing from your observation ; I am going to tell you my intentions, and you can easily and honestly tell me whether you decline the engagement you have entered into. I will be a fond and indulgent husband : I will never deny you a wish that I can safely and properly grant : I will give you all my worldly goods and a sin-

cerely attached heart, but there is one thing my wife must never demand !”

“ Stop, let me guess it. I must not ask for a box at the Opera ?”

“ You shall have two, if they will make you happy.”

“ I must not require a separate equipage, perhaps ?”

“ You shall choose your own, my love.”

“ Then I have it—I must not ask to remain in town beyond a certain period.”

“ You shall live there, if you prefer it.”

“ I cannot guess further, but I am very curious : tell me what I am never to demand.”

“ I will never allow a female friend,” said his lordship, with emphasis.

“ The elixir of life, Lord Elford. What ! not a friend to cheer me ! not a friend to soothe one’s cares and help me out of scrapes !”

“ I will be your friend, Louisa.” Lord Elford took my hand, and looked kindly at me. “ I will be your friend and companion—and if you ever get into a scrape, to whom would you fly for refuge sooner than to your husband ?”

“I am so used to Lady Langham, Edmund ; I could never confess to you. How in the world can a woman confess her sins to her husband, the very person she wishes to keep in ignorance of them.”

“That is a foolish error. Keep your husband in ignorance of nothing, and you will have no alarm to drive the colour from your cheek and the blood from your heart, at his questionings. I detest secrets in matrimony.”

I was silent.

“You cannot make choice of a more excellent confidante than Lady Langham,” continued Lord Elford. “Yes, consult her and your sisters, and let your home be their home whenever you wish it so ; to them I can have no sentiment but approbation and respect ; *beyond* them, I have objections which cannot be overruled.”

“Let me now speak my opinions,” I exclaimed, reddening with a feeling nearly approaching anger. “Let me say what *I* think.”

“Do so,” replied Lord Elford, in a dry decided manner which alarmed me. I fancied, in spite of his lordship’s pleaded love, that a

malapert sentiment of mine might lose him for ever. I enjoyed my conquest in such fear and trembling, that it was impossible to give way to my habit of tyrannizing over the hearts I won, or thought were yielding to my influence—I had to deal with a man who would never overlook a lawless sentiment, or marry a woman of whose heart he was not assured. I felt *that* fearful truth, and by the tone in which Lord Elford uttered those two words, I knew he was prepared to defend and act up to his intentions. I paused while these thoughts passed rapidly through my mind.

Lord Elford waited my reply: I became nervous, and feared my own impetuosity. What a triumph for Charles if he could have witnessed my hesitation!

“You are differing with me in your heart, Louisa,” he continued, as I remained silent; “let me know that heart, and understand its feelings. I would rather meet your anger than your silence: tell me why you are angry, and don’t turn away your head. You must not turn away in anger.”

“I cannot think you act fairly;” I spoke, as I

felt, indignantly, "I cannot allow a man to cavil at his wife's friends, and point out her narrow path, when his own road is the wide world, and his own wishes a law to himself. I cannot allow such a marked line of demarcation to be drawn between us—I will not sit pouting in my cage while my husband takes his flight freely. I could not endure it!"

Lord Elford was not offended: he met my indignation with great gentleness.

"My dearest girl, I would not for worlds trammel your agreeable spirit, or offend that little swelling heart, but you are as yet ignorant of the order to which you will very shortly belong, and I do but prevent miseries which no art could remove when the poison has circulated. You must have no intimate friends beyond your sisters and Lady Langham, but surely that need not alarm you, dearest. Let me lay a stress upon my firm determination which is openly expressed, and now turn your face to me and smile acquiescence."

We were at a walking pace during this conversation. Lord Elford put his arm round me

and compelled obedience : I did not affect to resist ; I turned towards him and smiled.

“ I smile, Edmund, but I think you very tyrannical.”

“ Thank you, my love, for that half-pleasing half-naughty smile ; it proves you free from a sulkiness of disposition which I should have sorrowed over : we shall soon agree in opinion.”

“ No, never. A woman never agrees to being treated like a slave.”

“ Don't use such an expression, Louisa.”

“ Yes, I do. What is slavery but dictation carried to excess. If a woman is only to see, and think, and feel with her husband's approbation, can you call *that* freedom ? If a woman must have no opinion apart from his own, do you consider *that* a state of independence ?”

“ A wife is not an independent being, my dear Louisa. She belongs to her husband. She vows to honour and obey him, and she must do so to be happy. Can she be more respectable in the eyes of the world than at her husband's side ? Can she be more estimable in the eyes of her acquaintance than shining a

contented and happy being, giving pleasure to her husband and her home?"

"You certainly paint a picture of decided merit."

"I will give you all I can bestow, my love. I will watch over you with affection and indulgence, and I will never be cross: do you believe me?"

I did believe him: there was truth in that eye which beamed fondly upon me, and sought a corresponding feeling in my heart. There was an energy in his look which I had never before seen, or deemed it capable of wearing: I looked at him with astonishment, ay, and even with admiration.

"You are becoming quite eloquent, Edmund, but I believe you firmly, and I must submit to my cage. I hope I shall not fancy any Lady Sarah or Lady Anne, after your lectures."

"Fancy whom you please, my love, and enjoy their society; I only contend against a confidential intimacy. Am I rightly understood, and do you feel you can oblige me without effort?"

“Understand you? yes—without effort?—not yet.”

“Do not sigh so heavily; you make me unhappy.”

“Let me draw breath; it is something so new to be commanded to do what I do not like, so extraordinary to me to hear a lover contending for his own opinion, that I am bewildered.”

“We shall have closed our dissensions at the altar, Louisa, whereas most couples begin them in matrimony. Our way will be smoothly prepared, because we have not deceived each other.”

“I hope so.”

“I have seen fearful accidents occur to sever people who were destined to be happy together,” observed Lord Elford; “I have witnessed much misery, and heard bitter reproaches, yet they all and each originated in a female friend. So few choose wisely—so few can discern pure gold from a baser metal.”

This was a hard case, but it was useless to contend *now*. When I was *bonâ fide* a wife, I

might contest the point with a perseverance which must persuade or compel my husband to give way, but at this moment it was worse than useless to argue; I should lose him for ever.

In every other respect and on every other subject, Lord Elford was a truly adoring lover. I could not complain of too much dignity in his general deportment, for no one better accorded with my ideas of love's follies. He smiled at my flights of fancy, delighted in my spirits, and became grave when I absented myself. It was on the sensitive point of being loved singly and devotedly, that Lord Elford chafed; and surely a woman could not, would not pain a heart which only asked a return for his own powerful affection!

Before our journey ended, I heard his account of his own family. "Tell me," I asked, "of your relations, of those near relations with whom I must be associated: at present, I know only yourself."

There were some high names among the list, but none whose portraiture particularly struck my fancy, except that of his only sister, Lady

Mary Duncomb. Her character interested me. I was sure I should love her if the fates ever granted us a meeting, and that meeting, unfortunately, Lord Elford most deprecated!

She had given her affections very much against her own wishes to a young clergyman in her own county: he was poor and content, Lady Mary was fashionable and could not exist in seclusion, and comparative poverty. She had struggled hard to subdue her predilection, but she had failed in her endeavours. She became engaged to Mr. Conyngham, and finally broke the engagement to marry the rich Mr. Duncomb. Such was Lady Mary's outline of history, but the filling up was appalling. Her conscience perpetually wounded, her love still given to Conyngham, her heart detesting Mr. Duncomb, she became the restless victim of fashion, and was then in Italy seeking health and peace. Lord Elford drew tears from my eyes as he described her breaking heart and altered appearance at her setting forth to seek in distant countries a balm for a diseased mind, self-inflicted and unpitied. He spoke in terms of horror of his sister's defalcation, and turned

with contempt from a contemplation which he said dishonoured the name of a woman. I felt for Lady Mary; Lord Elford would not allow me to advocate her.

“Do not give a false colouring to a shameless deed, my dear girl. A woman who marries as my sister married—who dissolved her engagement with such a fine fellow as my friend Conyngham, to enjoy Duncomb’s wealth—such a woman has no delicacy, no propriety in her thoughts, and she too was urged on by a friend—don’t again allude to Lady Mary, Louisa. I cannot bear the subject.” Lord Elford’s eyes flashed with indignation, and again I found my eyes fixed upon his strongly expressive face. Since when had Lord Elford become so energetic? He saw my surprised and fixed look.

“You are astonished at my indignant manner, Louisa—but I am deeply hurt when I allude to Lady Mary Duncomb.”

“I was not at that moment thinking of your manner, Edmund, I was admiring your expression!”

“Admiring *me*, my love?” and his eyes sud-

denly changed their flashing looks and bent themselves upon me so fondly !

“ Yes, I cannot make you out. I fancied you, at first, very dull, and afterwards very high, and after that, very extraordinary, but suddenly you are become extremely eloquent, and extremely agreeable, and—extremely—”

“ Extremely what?” and Lord Elford looked into my very heart.

“ Handsome, I was going to say, I believe, only you stop one with such searching looks.”

Men never resist a compliment addressed to their person. Women, however handsome, are more tenderly alive to a compliment bestowed upon their mental qualifications: a little flattery adroitly praising our judgment, blinds it for ever, but men require less effort: a dose of admiration is quite enough to bewilder them into instant surrender. Lord Elford looked a thousand unutterable things at my remark, but did not speak for some moments: he appeared engrossed with pleasing thoughts which forbade immediate expression. I proceeded:

“ I cannot forget how very much annoyed I

was at being your companion in our expedition. I was prepared for a silent and distasteful drive : how could I ever imagine such a termination as this ?”

“ Who had you selected for your escort ?” asked his lordship, smilingly. “ Who was the favourite of your fancy ?”

“ I would probably have taken a seat in Lady Langham’s carriage,—I can’t quite tell—but I certainly did not intend to be your guest : there is a fate in these things.”

“ Captain Thelwal your friend of old, perhaps, appropriated you in his thoughts, if Mrs. Fortescue was firm in her refusal.”

That name conjured up a host of disagreeable feelings—I thought of our walks in which I had acted as a cover to Thelwal’s sentiments,—our conversations, which had been too exclusive to be honourable on either side—our mutual conduct at Tewkesbury—and subsequent interview upon the hill. All proved our equal want of heart, and I was sure we were enemies for life. I could not overlook his indifference to my engagement with Lord Elford, and he would not easily forgive my escape from the net he had

spread for me. Each was foiled, and angry at the failure of the most ungenerous and heartless intentions. We should always have a sort of angry disagreeable interest in each other, which would display itself in covert attacks.

My sudden silence and reverie was placed to another and more pleasing account by Lord Elford, and the last few miles were performed in silence. At Tewkesbury our party halted for a couple of hours: luncheon occupied some time, and to divert the remaining hour we agreed to visit the cathedral. Miss Bates had no longer Major Sandford to beguile her dull moments: her father no longer listened to the agreeable vivacity of Mrs. Fortescue, and I no longer was excited by Captain Thelwal's dubious manners; we were therefore disposed to proceed to the sacred building in rather solemn silence. Sir James Langham was the principal speaker: he had always a fund of happy thoughts which made him extremely attractive as a bachelor, and of great importance as a Benedict, for we called upon his good nature at all moments, and he freely answered our demands. It was by one of those uncommon

chances so rarely met with in this world, that Sir James had matched with a kindred spirit, and, under all circumstances, he turned to his wife's gentle smile for approbation. She was, indeed, rewarded in marriage for her sufferings with myself: they must have been manifold and severe, yet the infliction of my society was necessary in producing this result: had I not been her guest, her very unwilling and particularly disagreeable guest, she had not visited the Isle of Wight, and Sir James Langham had not existed for her. While we suffer and complain of circumstances distasteful to our feelings, those very circumstances are hastening on events which constitute our happiness; and too often while we enjoy the blessed delights of a keen but transient pleasure, that happiness is ushering in sorrow and interminable regret. How feebly we mortals reason, and how imperfectly we argue upon events!

The organ was pealing its deep voice as we entered the cathedral: they were chanting the afternoon service, and the sacred music stole upon my ear as I walked up the noble aisle between Lord Elford and Captain Thelwal,

who persevered in silent attentions and attendance. We drew near the choir and could distinctly hear the service performed. The loud tone expired as I reached the curtained entrance, and the diapason allowed the voices to speak audibly the verses of the psalm.

“Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that shall bring a man peace at the last.

“As for the transgressors, they shall perish together: and the end of the ungodly is, they shall be rooted out at the last.”

Again the organ swelled as the voices exclaimed,

“But the salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord: who is also their strength in the time of trouble.”

I felt strongly affected by the words and music, which seemed to float in the air, like reproaches from spirits of the just made perfect, transmitted to the erring ones upon earth. I felt ill and hysterical. I turned to Lord Elford with tears streaming from my eyes, and begged him to take me away: we departed silently, and I fancied I still heard the words repeating, “take

heed unto the thing that is right," till I regained the open air. My imagination pictured Mr. Ellis sinking into disease, young Dyneton laid in his grave, and Alfred Jones in a foreign land, had I taken "heed unto the thing that was right," I should not have deep regrets such as I must now endure whenever sacred music or sacred things softened my soul, and conjured up remembrance of its wickedness. I felt that I had already tampered with human life and human hopes. The thief who perishes on the scaffold to appease the cry of justice, had not done so wickedly as I had done in wanton sport; and a deep repentance would scarcely close the wounds which opened at every touch of conscience. What would I not have given to exchange hearts with Lady Langham!—her humble innocent heart rejoiced in the assurance of possessing peace at the last—her mild eyes beamed in sacred hope and faith as the holy promise was chanted, "but the salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord." I fled from the terror it conveyed.

I returned to the inn with Lord Elford, who strove to relieve me by affectionate solicitude,

but at this moment his love added to my distress. In vain he held me in his arms and gently laid my head on his shoulder, speaking words of endearment which must have tranquillized the spirit of any woman who loved, and was innocent of intentional wrong ; I was sensibly touched by his affection, but there was too much bitterness within to receive it as a balm. I felt I was deceiving him also. I was not heeding the thing that was right in giving him a wife whose conduct had been evil, and whose charm to himself consisted in believing me innocent and ingenuous. I was entering into a wilderness of misery without the power of asking consolation from my affianced husband—my confessions would cast me from him, and my future days would be passed in continual fear of detection. Either way I saw, I felt no hope, and the arms which embraced me tightened the cords of affliction. Lord Elford became alarmed at my increasing agitation ; he pressed me to his bosom.

“ My only love, tell me what has distressed you, and what I can do to relieve you ? You have been over fatigued, and I have walked and

driven you to death? I have been very selfish: I wish you were safely under your mother's care, after she has reproached me for killing you."

"No, *you* have not killed me," I answered, trying to repress my sobs; "no one has given me cause to complain: I am very wretched, but it will go off in time.—I suppose I *am* fatigued."

"But why wretched, my love?—what can cause wretchedness to such a being as yourself, so helpless and innocent!"—again I felt myself pressed to his heart. I felt suffocating. "Water—water—" I exclaimed.

"There was water fortunately on the sideboard, and Lord Elford poured out a large tumblerful. Its coldness refreshed me; I drank copiously, and felt relieved. Lord Elford watched me with eager attention, and my mind struggled to recover its strength: I succeeded in regaining composure, and endeavoured to talk away my lover's fears, but they were not so easily allayed. He pressed me upon the expression which had escaped my lips. "I see your colour returned, and your eyes recovering their brightness, there-

fore I am satisfied you are better, Louisa; but now tell me what made you wretched—you said you were ‘wretched,’ with peculiar emphasis: tell me what caused that wretchedness.”

“It is past, do not recal it,” I said, hastily.

Lord Elford looked gravely at me. “Then there is a secret between us: I thought we had no concealed thoughts, Louisa?”

“Some things,” I said, “are not worth divulging.”

“Then they cannot be worth emotion,” drily observed my lover.

“Don’t be angry, Edmund,” and I held out my hand,—“don’t make me ill again, and I will tell you anything you like.”

“Heaven forbid I should cause you one moment’s pain,” returned his lordship, at once casting aside his offended manner, and wrapping his arms round my waist. “Heaven forbid I should increase your illness, but surely the sympathy of my feelings might soften yours: it must be pleasing to be soothed by those we love, is it not, my love?”

He looked tenderly in my face: I bent it gently towards him, and the lover forgot to ask

questions. That kiss, that first voluntary kiss, buried all fears in temporary oblivion. We were chatting again rather rationally, when the party returned from the cathedral.

“ Oh, here they are in excellent health!” cried Sir James Langham, on their entrance. “ I told you, my dear Anne, you need not follow Miss Vansittart; I was sure my friend Elford was all-sufficient in such a case, and now you will own me a prophet. Miss Vansittart never looked better.”

Lady Langham smiled at her husband's prophecy. She *said* the aisles of the cathedral struck very cold to her feet, and I was right in quitting its precincts—what her real thoughts were I knew not, but her acuteness might surmise the truth. Captain Bates never underwent mental conflicts when he could avoid them: the old bone in Hartley churchyard had spoken enough of mortality, and the vaulted roof of a cathedral with its dread mementoes of universal dissolution, did not “cotton” with lively ideas: he had taken refuge in a small shop, and was eating gingerbread when they passed the spot which sheltered him. Captain Thelwal was all

things to all men; he was as sentimental among the tombs as he was always in the society of ladies, and Sir James Langham insinuated his sincerity was as little to be doubted in one case as the other. Captain Thelwal expressed his fears that my sudden indisposition was in consequence of great fatigue. “You are not equal to *this* drive,” he gently observed. I was perfectly convinced the drive was beneficial, and our next stage would recover my tone of spirits. He shook his head provokingly.

“I doubt it—I fear it will increase the disorder.”

“I believe every one is the best judge of their own feelings, Captain Thelwal,” I replied, with some little asperity.

“Not altogether, my dear Miss Vansittart; I think we sometimes miscalculate our strength, and are anxious to fancy we are better than others give us credit for.—Do you not think so, Lord Elford? Are you not of opinion Miss Vansittart makes too much effort?”

“I hope not,” said his lordship; “but you give my selfishness a fair and just rebuke. I will beg Lady Langham to take charge of you,

Louisa, in her carriage : I cannot endure the thought of exhausting your strength and spirits."

"No, Edmund, I will go with you, and only you," I replied, energetically, indignant at Thelwal's implied insinuation ; "I will not be got rid of so easily ; if you repeat your words I shall imagine you are tired of me." I smiled with playful expression, which was intended to disconcert Thelwal : the bait succeeded, and he withdrew with a look of mingled anger and mortified vanity.

"Do not distress that unfortunate man," said my lord, with feeling.

"He has no heart to reach, Edmund ; do not think about him."

"Perhaps not, since his interregnums are so short ; but his fancy is touched for the present, and have mercy till the fit has passed by, or till Mrs. Fortescue appears again."

"I cannot endure him."

"But do not treat him abruptly : you do not know how soon some men are converted into an enemy by a woman's expressed scorn, particularly a vain man."

“ Well, I will smile then when he next addresses me, shall I ?”

“ No, I don't exactly recommend that kindness : speak gently to him, but keep your arch smiles for me.”

The badinage of lovers may safely be left to the imagination : Lord Elford played his part most agreeably, and I was quite content with my conquest ; and my hatred for Thelwal, who piqued me in every possible way, and kept my spirit busy inventing retorts, and seeking occasions for revenge. I could not bear his irritating allusions couched under polite inquiries ; they fretted my soul and roused my temper, while I was fain to appear calm and pass the joke unheeded, while every fibre smarted under its application. I began to detest his very name, and I sought refuge in exclusive conversation with Lord Elford.

Our last stage renewed the almost-forgotten subject of my distress in the cathedral. Lord Elford recurred to it with renewed anxiety, and implored an explanation of its cause. My hesitation increased his curiosity. I never had con-

descended to adopt a falsity before I became acquainted with his lordship : not from principle, I am sorry to say, but a certain fearlessness of disposition which prompted me to defend and insist upon my own opinions. The highly-cast sentiments of Lord Elford—his offered love—his disdain of subterfuge, and strict notions of female delicacy, caused me to admire and fear him ; I dared not exhibit myself in my own colours, or undeceive him in the erroneous judgment he had formed of my character ; that very fear sealed my lips and carried me through every stage of evasion to the confines of truth. I knew some passages in my life would dash from my lips the cup I was hoping to enjoy in long and flowing draughts : he would despise a woman who acted as I had done towards Mr. Ellis : he would scorn a heart which accepted his love while it vibrated to the touch of Thelwal : he would leave me and depart, for Lord Elford's nature could not love a being he disesteemed, and my conduct was meanly hateful. How was I in this inquiry to shape my defence ? His sturdy looks were upon me, and I must speak., I confessed I had suffered a short but

severe attack of nervousness in Tewkesbury cathedral, owing to a painful recollection attached to the Isle of Wight, where I had declined a gentleman whose health had suffered in consequence of his disappointed attachment—the music had affected me—sacred music which was so overpowering—and I had given way to tears—that was all.

“Such an occurrence might affect you, Louisa,” observed Lord Elford, “but would not cause such extreme emotion, or such complete silence on your part when I probed you about the state of your heart some days ago.”

“Am I doubted then?” I asked with an hauteur which stood in lieu of a simple and effective contradiction.

“You have disturbed the delicious repose of my heart,” said his lordship, mournfully.

I was angry with myself for having given way to folly, and angry with Lord Elford for seeking its cause. I was silent to an exclamation which proved how seriously he felt my manner, but which might have been soothed by one mild expression from my lips. I dreaded the continuation of his catechism, and the tempest of

my own temper roused by well-deserved suspicion. If I were only married, he must forgive discrepancies which could not be rectified; but now any discovery would awaken the sleeping lion of his nature, and I must inevitably fall a sacrifice to my own disgraceful evasions. I was in strange perplexity. Lord Elford was offended, for he drove in silence, and with his character suspicion was not to be easily checked. He would require proof before he committed himself, but his resolves would be final. I saw the spire of our village church peeping through the distant trees: it was incumbent upon me to speak to Lord Elford ere he reached my home, and not allow him to depart in bitterness. I must condescend not only to a falsity, but to coax, which grated most disagreeably on my feelings; but I could not confess the truth, and how else might I reach his heart? I took a deep inspiration and began a gentle attack.

“ I am sorry, Lord Elford, you are so soon angry with me; do you not repent being so silent?” and I looked lovely with all my might. “ Are you not sorry to make me feel unhappy and uncomfortable?”

“ I give that which I have received in a two-fold degree,” replied his lordship gravely, “ and which a word from yourself might have dissipated, if you had generously offered it.”

“ I was angry at your suspicion, Edmund, but that is over—I will say anything you wish now, only don’t look so very grave ; shew me how readily you forgive.”

He shook his head, but a smile lurked at the corner of his mouth : it told my power, and gave me confidence to proceed.

“ You have behaved very ill to me, and sulked nearly an hour.”

“ Oh, no, my love, not sulked ; I was extremely hurt by your answer to me, and I confess I am even now.”

“ Confess nothing,” I said, “ but your contrition, and I will forgive you, and love you again : ‘ naughty boy ! will you never do so again ? ’ as nurses say to spoiled children.”

“ I will not, I will not, if I am wrong, which I trust may be the case ; but if the boy was naughty, was not the girl teasing ? ”

“ Perhaps she might be, but we will quarrel no more, and talk of gayer things. Will you

stay at my mother's this evening, or must you proceed to the Hermitage to dinner?"

"That depends entirely on yourself: do you ask me to stay?"

"I do."

"Then I accept the invitation. The groom shall leave his horse, and drive the carriage home with a note. Will Mrs. Vansittart receive me in this way with a welcome?"

"You must try your own powers of persuasion: you have persuaded me to accept you, and it will be less venturous to induce my mother to sanction the gift: the worst is over."

"I don't know that: while your presence influences me, I am happy; but the worst is to come, I fear, when I shall be alone and thinking over some of the occurrences of to-day. I am silenced but not convinced, my dear Louisa, upon one point."

"Don't be suspicious—I believe firmly every thing *you* say."

"And so will I implicitly credit your assertions when you make them; at present you have not been generous enough to do so."

"Nonsense! I will vow all kinds of things

to-morrow—we are near home now, and I should have no time to protest.”

Lord Elford was obliged to rest contented with my promises of future confession, and we drove to my mother's door just as she was preparing to take her solitary meal. She received us gladly and seconded my request to detain my lord.

“I did not expect you till to-morrow,” she said, “therefore you are doubly welcome, and will prove a most relishing accompaniment to my roast fowl.”

My mother was too well bred to offer an apology for her scanty fare, and Lord Elford was too much in love to notice it; my invitation was all-sufficient, and we seated ourselves pleasantly and laughingly at table. Lord Elford amused my mother with a detail of our adventures, and gave her lively sketches of our party in their different groupings. I had never seen him to so much advantage, or so really entertaining. His description of the doctor's irresolution was in excellent taste and truly comic. Mrs. Fortescue's departure, and Major Sandford's sudden flight were equally well described;

and Lord Elford's dignity had subsided into almost Mathews's power of imitation as he put forth his agreeable talents to please and amuse my mother. Before the evening closed, he had made her acquainted with his hopes and wishes, and what objection could be raised?—it was a match far surpassing a mother's expectation who resided at a secluded village in Gloucestershire, and there could only be a few well-bred compliments expressed on either side to intimate their mutual hopes and honour. Lord Elford was of course to be to us in future, what the doctor had been for years, a constant attendant and inmate. Sir James Langham was to transfer his lordship's society to ourselves, and the following day he promised himself the happiness of being our guest for at least a fortnight. We parted late, and Lord Elford complained of the necessity.

“I have been so accustomed, Louisa, to see your bright face at the breakfast-table lately, I shall not bear to lose that pleasure. What am I to do to-morrow morning when I shall neither hear or see you?”

“You know where to find me, Edmund, therefore your misery will be of short duration : if you cannot sip your tea without me, you must rise early and join our breakfast-party.”

“I believe that will be the end of it, after all.”

My mother uttered many polite things, and I looked them as cordially : these flattering attentions increased Lord Elford’s unwillingness to part, but he did quit us at last. He pressed my hand with fervour.

“I shall dream of you and Mrs. Vansittart, and be with you early.”

“Do so ; we shall expect you—good night—” and Lord Elford mounted his horse to “love and ride away.”

The most disagreeable half-hour yet remained for me : I was doomed to more lectures. My mother, in forcible terms, called earnestly upon me not to tarnish my future prospects with the follies which had disturbed my peace and her own. Once more she would address herself to my principles, to my honour, not to trifle with Lord Elford, or raise obstacles to my marriage

by giving way to flirtation with Captain Thelwal. I was on the eve of marriage with a nobleman of high character, and might yet become happy and estimable, but I must throw from me the ruthless vanity which delighted in admiration, and sought its gratification under all risks. She had witnessed much that was wrong in my conduct with Captain Thelwal: how I had escaped with him she would not inquire now. I was engaged to Lord Elford, and if levity dissolved the engagement, I must prepare to meet the disgust of my friends, and her own unequivocal displeasure.

I began to chafe as I always did under maternal strictures; my mother calmly bade me reflect and judge for myself, by looking back upon certain events.

“ I do not wish, my child, to hurt your feelings by recalling unhappy circumstances; my desire is to amend them. Your mother has her duty to perform in admonishing, and you must be aware that mother has never used that duty severely or idly. Think what you have undertaken to perform, and let me not see

you fall from the esteem of the wise and good.”

“ I am going to marry Lord Elford, my dear mother, very peaceably, if people will let me alone: pray do not rake up old grievances. What have I done now to deserve a lecture?”

“ You were ever impatient under control,” replied my mother, in her mildest accents. “ You were ever hasty in rejecting counsel, therefore I must hope everything, but expect nothing from your repentance of the past. You have my earnest desire to begin seriously to reflect upon the duties you have even now entered upon, and my prayers shall be for your well-doing—yet with a parent’s anxiety I warn you of the perilous ground upon which you stand—I mean you to avoid wayward and unwomanly misunderstandings with Lord Elford, and beyond all I warn you of Captain Thelwal’s character.”

“ Captain Thelwal is of no importance to me; I detest him too much to speak of him.”

“ Since when?” quickly asked my mother,—
“ since what hour have you changed your sen-

timents with respect to Captain Thelwal? When you left home, you were indignant at Lord Elford's interference, and offended with Captain Thelwal for some supposed slight. Take care, Louisa, that pique has no part in your actions: I dare not question you, but I have a pain at my heart which forbodes ill. All is not right—tell me the state of your heart, my dear child—confide in an indulgent mother, and disclose a secret which I see by your countenance exists in some shape.” My mother laid her hand upon mine. Why did I not throw myself in her arms and confess my weaknesses? Why did my proud heart reject the idea of pleading guilty to her charge? A mother such as mine would have wept over and concealed her child's errors; would have watched over and softened them, and I should have risen from the confession free in thought, and happy in casting my burden upon her matronly care. Such was not my destiny—I persisted in concealment.

“I have no secrets, my dear mother, to unfold, and I cannot invent anything to astonish

you. I would rather sleep away my fatigue, if you will renounce all fears about me."

My mother silently lighted her candle and said no more upon the subject. Our "good night" passed in the usual form, and we separated mutually dissatisfied.



