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## DILEMMAS OF PRIDE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF FIRST LOVE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

BULL AND CHURTON, HOLLES STREET.

1833.

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### Table of Contents

Contents generated for HTML

Chapter I	<a href="#">1</a>
Chapter II	<a href="#">14</a>
Chapter III	<a href="#">26</a>
Chapter IV	<a href="#">45</a>
Chapter V	<a href="#">66</a>
Chapter VI	<a href="#">83</a>
Chapter VII	<a href="#">89</a>
Chapter VIII	<a href="#">104</a>
Chapter IX	<a href="#">116</a>
Chapter X	<a href="#">128</a>
Chapter XI	<a href="#">142</a>
Chapter XII	<a href="#">149</a>
Chapter XIII	<a href="#">173</a>
Chapter XIV	<a href="#">180</a>
Chapter XV	<a href="#">187</a>
Chapter XVI	<a href="#">202</a>
Chapter XVII	<a href="#">218</a>
Chapter XVIII	<a href="#">230</a>
Chapter XIX	<a href="#">244</a>
Chapter XX	<a href="#">255</a>
Chapter XXI	<a href="#">265</a>
Chapter XXII	<a href="#">276</a>
Chapter XXIII	<a href="#">287</a>

# DILEMMAS OF PRIDE.

## CHAPTER I.

The immense extent and beautiful irregularity of the grounds, the unfathomable depth of the woods, the picturesque ramifications of some of the most conspicuously situated of the very old trees, the hour, for it was almost midnight, the numerous bonfires scattered in all directions, the innumerable tenantry gathered round them, the crowd of moving forms extending as far as the eye could penetrate into the darkness; and, quite in the fore-ground, the figure of a blind old man who had been born in the family, and grown grey in its service, playing, with the most extravagant demonstrations of delight, on a rude harp, that instrument so surrounded with poetic associations; seated too beneath a spreading cedar, the trunk and undermost branches of which, together with his countenance and white hair, were strongly illuminated by an adjacent heap of blazing pine,—all gave to Arden Park a demesne of such unlimited magnificence, that it formed in itself a sort of sylvan empire, a powerful resemblance, at the moment of which we speak, to what our imaginations are prone to figure of the feasts of *Shells*, as described by that poet of ancient bards and burning oaks, the venerable Ossian.

[Pg 2]

On an abrupt and rocky eminence, at some distance, but still within the park, stood the picturesque remains of Arden Castle, once the residence of the ancestors of the family. Its round towers of different dimensions, some still perfect, its perpendicular site, the trees and turn of the river at its base, were all rendered conspicuous by the clear light of the moon now about to set behind the ruins.

[Pg 3]

In all the ancient deeds the landed property derived its designation from this castle, and it was still customary for the heir to take formal possession of the roofless walls, ere he was considered true Lord of the Manor; a ceremony which had in the course of the day just passed, been duly performed.

A little removed from the old castle, emerging from the trees, appeared the square turret of another ruin, called the Grey Friary, once the residence of monks, to whom at that time a portion of the lands appertained, while along the verge of the horizon, the spires of several churches were just visible, breaking the dark line formed by seemingly interminable woods.

[Pg 4]

The modern house, a magnificent structure, standing on a commanding eminence, the approach to which was gradual in the midst of a park and woodlands comprising above thirty thousand acres, now poured from every door and window streams of cheerful light.

Figures were discernible within, some moving in the merry dance, others thronging to and from halls dedicated to hospitable cheer.

We have already said it was near midnight: the day had been spent in festivities, held to celebrate the coming of age of Sir Willoughby Arden, now (his father having been sometime dead,) the head of the ancient family to whom the property belonged.

The rejoicings, not only those going forward beneath the sheltering roof of the mansion but those also out of doors, were kept up thus late in compliment to Alfred Arden, the twin brother of the heir. The elder twin had been born about nine in the evening, the younger not till after twelve at night. To unite, therefore, the two distinct birth-days in the one festival, and thus preserve unsevered the more than brotherly tie, it had been resolved that no guest, of whatever denomination, should depart till the hour of midnight had been ushered in with every possible demonstration of joy.

[Pg 5]

The county-town, though not above a quarter of a mile removed, was quite planted out: the spires already noticed, and which were highly ornamental to the landscape, being all pertaining of city scenery, which was visible over the tops of the trees.

The clocks of some of the churches now began to strike. A spell at the instant seemed to fall upon all: the music ceased, the voices of revelry were hushed, and that peculiar stillness prevailed which seemed to indicate that every individual in the crowd was occupied in counting the solemn chimes. The nearest and loudest bell took the lead, and was quite distinct from the rest, while the others followed, like answering echoes, in the distance. A second after the number twelve was completed, one universal shout rent the air! The health of Alfred Arden was drank within the mansion, and arms might be seen waving above the heads of the guests: after which, Sir Willoughby, leading his brother forward, issued from the open door, and stood on the centre of the steps.

[Pg 6]

Servants held up lighted flambeaux on either side, and the old butler, with hair as white as the harper's, presented a goblet of wine. Sir Willoughby announced his brother with enthusiasm, and then drank to the health of Alfred Arden. A simultaneous movement among the groups around the bonfires indicated that they were following his good example, and the next moment three times three resounded from the crowd.

[Pg 7]

In about an hour after this all was still, save the solitary voice of a distant waterfall. Every light was quenched, and dying embers, which from time to time as they fell together flashed for an instant, were all that remained of the scattered bonfires. The merry crowd had sought their respective homes, and the inhabitants of the mansion had retired to rest, with the exception of Lady Arden, who sat at an open window, taking leave as it were of familiar scenes which, when the light of morning next dawned upon them, would no longer be her home.

[Pg 8]

In marrying the late Sir Alfred, the then head of the family, in obedience to the wishes of her parents, she had sacrificed an early attachment to his youngest brother.

Sir Alfred had, however, proved a very polite husband, and she had for years been the mistress, nay, the very princess of a princely mansion, a splendid establishment, and a magnificent demesne; she had possessed every luxury that art and wealth could procure, and at the same time had been surrounded by all the beauties of nature on the most extensive scale.

All had now passed away! It was to her son, 'tis true, and he was dutiful and affectionate, and would always, she had no doubt, make her welcome, but of course as a visitor; and whenever her son should marry (which she certainly wished him to do), a stranger would be mistress of all; and to the courtesy of that stranger she must owe permission to cross the threshold of her long accustomed home.

[Pg 9]

She did not mean absolutely to murmur; but there was something pensive, at least, if not melancholy in such thoughts.

While her son was a minor, Arden Park had still been hers, at least the right of living there; but to-morrow she was to set out for town; she was to take her daughters from under the shelter of their father's roof, to become wanderers as it were, on the world's wide wilderness. She would have a house in town, 'tis true: a short season of each year would be spent there, and the remainder in temporary and probably agreeable homes in the various watering-places. But she felt a painful consciousness, that, of the adventitious rank which the mere *prejudices* of society bestow, herself and daughters would now lose many steps; and that the latter must, whenever she should die, if they were not married, lose many more; nay, be probably reduced, at last, by the insufficiency of their portions as younger children, to the state of poor aunt Dorothea, whom she had herself often held up to them as a warning of the miseries attendant on remaining single.

[Pg 10]

Aunt Dorothea's afflictions were not always of the tragic order, and the remembrance of some of them called up, at the moment, despite her solemn reflections, a faint smile on the countenance of Lady Arden; followed, however, by a sigh, for the subject now came home to her feelings in a manner it had never done before.

So absorbing had been her reflections, that she had not noticed the gathering clouds which had gradually extinguished every star, and darkened the heavens, till all on which she still looked out had become one black and formless mass. At the instant, a vivid flash of lightning gave to her view, with the most minute distinctness of outline, not only the grand features of the landscape generally, but, prominent above all, the ruins of the castle, the rocky eminence on which they stood, the river at its foot, and the trees that surrounded its base. Thunder and violent rain followed, and the wind rose to a hurricane. There existed a superstitious belief among the country people that a tremendous tempest always preceded or accompanied any event fatal to a member of the Arden family. A remembrance of this crossed the mind of Lady Arden at the moment, but was of course rejected as silly to a degree. Besides, she added mentally, if an idea so absurd required refutation, the present occasion being one of rejoicing, would be quite sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind. She retired to rest, however, with saddened feelings, while the castle, crowning its rocky site, as already described, floated before her eyes, even after their lids were closed; and when she slept, the vision still blended with her dreams, as did the forms of the Baron and his two sons, described in the legend of the castle, and all strangely mixed up with the festivities of the previous day, and the forms of her own happy blooming family.

[Pg 11]

[Pg 12]

The legend alluded to, and which had given rise to the superstition we have mentioned, ran thus.

Some centuries ago, the Baron had two sons, who, when boys, had climbed, one day, during a fearful thunder storm to the topmost turret of the castle, which was at the time enveloped in clouds.

When, however, the storm was over, their bodies were found, locked in each other's arms, laying in the river at the foot of the rock on which the castle stands. The old Baron died of grief, and the property went to a distant relative, who, it was vaguely hinted, had followed the youths unseen, and while they stood gazing at the storm, had treacherously drawn the coping-stone from beneath their feet; others maintained the only grounds for this foul suspicion to be, that the said stone was certainly found on the inner side the parapet, while the bodies of the youths lay below.

[Pg 13]

[Pg 14]

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## CHAPTER II.

When Lady Arden arose in the morning all was calm and sunshine.

The storm of the night might have seemed a dream but for the still visible traces of its ravages.

The river was greatly swollen, and several of the largest and finest of a range of magnificent old trees which had grown on the brow of a sloping bank, forming a beautiful feature in the landscape, now lay on the ground, literally uprooted by the violence of the tempest. Their fate, however, was soon forgotten in that of two young oaks, which had been planted beside each other on the lawn, on the joint birth-day of her two sons. The lightning had shattered both: Lady Arden viewed them for the moment with a shuddering sensation of superstitious dread, the influence of which it required all her good sense to resist.

[Pg 15]

Geoffery Arden, the only nephew of the late Sir Alfred, was standing on the grass, with his arms folded, and looking rather askance than directly at the remains of the blasted trees, while his eyebrows were drawn up contemptuously, and a somewhat scornful smile curled his lip, as he marked blind Lewin the Harper, his countenance full of woe, feeling, with visibly trembling hands, each shattered branch of the uprooted oaks, while the large tears were falling from his sightless eyes.

The brothers Willoughby and Alfred, and their three sisters, all seemingly attracted by the same object, issued one by one, from the open glass door of the breakfast room, and gathered round the spot; each looked playfully dismal for a moment, and the next uttered some laughing remark. They were soon joined by their mother; and the group would have formed a striking family picture. Lady Arden was still a very fine woman: from her mild temper the sweetness of her countenance was yet unimpaired, while the expression of maternal tenderness,—and this from the late tenor of her thoughts was unconsciously mingled with something of solicitude,—with which she viewed her children, her sons now especially, and Alfred in particular, her favourite son, gave additional interest to her appearance.

[Pg 16]

Alfred's sparkling eye and blooming cheek did not, however, seem to justify much anxiety on his account; his brother too, though he had always been more delicate, seemed at present in excellent health and spirits, while the three sisters were young, handsome, and happy looking. Geoffery Arden still stood apart, as though there were but little fellowship of feeling between him and the rest of the group.

[Pg 17]

He was a lad of eighteen or nineteen before the marriage of his uncle, the late Sir Alfred; and from a child had been in the habit of hearing his father and mother, and such of their particular friends as sought to flatter their secret wishes, speculate on the possibility of his uncle's never marrying, and his being consequently heir to the Arden estates, which were strictly entailed in the male line. Nay, his very nursemaid's usual threat was, that if he cried when his face was being washed, he should never be Sir Geoffery. At school, all the boys at play hours had somehow or other acquired the habit of calling him Sir Geoffery; and at college his companions, particularly those who wished to flatter him into idle extravagance, constantly joked and complimented him about his great *expectations*. Thus had those expectations, unjustly founded as they were, grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength; till, when his uncle did marry, he could scarcely help thinking himself an injured, robbed, and very ill-treated person. Hope however revived a little, on the first three children chancing to be daughters, and his mother began again to say, he might have the Arden estates yet:—stranger things had happened. "And you might marry one of the girls, you know, Geoffery," she would continue,—"it would be some compensation to poor Sir Alfred for having no son."

[Pg 18]

"Indeed I should do no such thing," he would reply. "I should just please myself. It's not to oblige me, I suppose, that my uncle has no son."

[Pg 19]

The birth of the twin brothers, immediately after this, put an end to all further speculations on the subject; except, indeed, that Mrs. Arden could not help observing that, "after all, the lives of two weakly infants, as twins of course must be, with the measles, hooping-cough, and all other infantile diseases before them, were not worth much."

Geoffery became sulky under his disappointment, and said very little; but silently he hated the twins for having been born. Of what use were they, he thought; for what purpose had they been brought into the world, except indeed to ruin his prospects.

Had they never been born, they would not have wanted the property, and he might have enjoyed it. Now he must go and drudge at a profession, the very idea of which, after his imagination had been so long dazzled by false hopes, he absolutely loathed.

[Pg 20]

He had been educated for the Bar, but had neglected his studies. He had been dissipated without gaiety of heart, and a gambler from avarice. His hopes had made him proud, while his fears had made him gloomy. In short, he had contrived to extract the evil from every thing, while he had avoided all that was good. As to his legal studies, he had never read any portion with interest or attention but the law of male entail.

He was a bachelor, and likely to remain such: for he could not afford to marry, unless he obtained a much larger fortune than he was entitled to expect.

There was nothing he could exactly dare to do to injure his cousins; but he hated them both, and kept an evil eye upon them. As for his female cousins, he did not take the trouble of actively hating them, he merely despised them as beings shut out from all possibility of inheriting the property. Beautiful and high born as they were, he would not have accepted the hand of any one of them had it been offered to him.

[Pg 21]

Sir Willoughby was goodnaturedly weak, and very vain;—his was a vanity however which, when it

happened to be gratified, made him extremely happy, by keeping him in the highest good humour with himself. From him Geoffery won large sums at billiards, by flattering him on his play, 'till he induced him to give him, habitually, such odds as amounted, in point of fact, to giving him the game, or, in other words, the sum staked upon it.

[Pg 22]

Lady Arden often endeavoured to dissuade her son from acquiring so bad a habit as that of gambling, but in vain; for Willoughby, like all weak men, was obstinate to excess: he had besides a marvellous respect for the salique law, and that jealousy of being guided, which unhappily always forms a leading feature in the characters of those who stand most in need of guidance. Yet he was fondly attached to his mother; his greatest delight was to devise something for her pleasure or her accommodation; he was always ready to make her munificent presents; in short, he would do any thing to oblige her, with the exception of following her suggestions.

Not that he always ungraciously refused requests that contained in them nothing prohibitory; he had no particular objection sometimes to do a thing he was asked to do; but a thing he was asked not to do, he was always sure to do! And if it happened to be a thing which Geoffery Arden wished should be done, he could always decide the point, by artfully complimenting his cousin on the *firmness* of his character.

[Pg 23]

Of Alfred, Geoffery could make nothing. He was frank, kind, and open-hearted; yet clear-seeing and decided. With him his mother's slightest wish but guessed at was a law: his sisters, too, could always coax him out of any plan of pleasure of his own, and get him to go with them. Not so those for whom he had no particular affection; he had never yet been known, in any one instance, to sacrifice his opinion of what was right, respectable, or amiable, to the persuasions of idle companions; so that he was already respected as well as regarded by thinking and discerning men much older than himself; some of them too, men who had bought their experience dearly enough and who were surprised into involuntary admiration of so young a person, who seemed to have his intuitively.

[Pg 24]

His brother loved him in the most enthusiastic manner; more than he did his mother, or any one else in the world; yet, strange to say, such was Willoughby's dread of being governed, that even the brother whom he loved so much, had not the slightest influence over him; nay, Alfred was afraid to use persuasion of any kind, lest it should have a contrary effect; and yet, if he ever let it appear that he was in the slightest degree hurt or offended by this unmeaning and dogged obstinacy on the part of his brother, Willoughby's despair would sometimes, though but for a moment or two, manifest itself in a way perfectly terrifying; he would rush towards a window, or a river side, and threaten to fling himself out or in; so that Alfred, though he knew himself to be his brother's sole confidant, and the first object of his affections, was obliged, with great pain of course, to see him led away by designing people, especially his cousin Geoffery, into many practices far from prudent, yet not interfere; and even be thankful, when by refraining from so doing, he could avoid the recurrence of the distressing scenes alluded to. Willoughby had received a blow on the head when a child, which had not then exhibited any serious consequences; whether this circumstance had any connection with the occasional strangeness of his temper or not, it was impossible to say, but Alfred sometimes secretly feared it had. It was a thought, however, which he did not communicate even to his mother. Such was the family, which on the morning we have described, quitted Arden Park for London.

[Pg 25]

[Pg 26]

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### CHAPTER III.

While the Arden family are on their way to town, we shall take a peep at the High-street in Cheltenham. Strings of carriages were driving backward and forward, from turnpike to turnpike, while the open barouches, filled with bonnets of every colour in the rainbow, flaunting and waving to and fro, looked like so many moving beds of full blown tulips. Foot-passengers too of all classes thronged the flag-ways.

Among these was distinguishable a tall, large, and still handsome woman, apparently upwards of fifty. There was something aristocratic about both her countenance and carriage, although she was closely followed by a trollopy looking maid-servant, who carried a handbox under each arm, a dressing-box in one hand, and a work-box in the other.

[Pg 27]

Mistress and maid entered the private door or *genteel* separate ingress, appropriated to lodgers, of a music-shop; and having the door at the further end of the passage opened, for the purpose of throwing light on the subject, stumbled up a still dark and very narrow staircase, at the top of which they turned abruptly into a small sunny drawing-room, furnished with chintz hangings, lined and draperied with faded pink calico. The carpet was a stamped cloth, of a showy pattern. It was a recent purchase, and therefore not yet faded; so that it secured to these lodgings, as being *superiorly* furnished, a great preference over their competitors. In the centre of the room stood a table covered with a very dingy green baize, and round the walls were ranged some half dozen small mock rosewood chairs, accommodated with little square inclined planes, covered with pink calico, and called cushions. Either for want of strings at the back, or in consequence of such strings being out of repair, these said inclined planes, whenever you attempted to help yourself or any one else to a chair, flew off, either into the middle of the floor, or if it was the fire you had wished to approach, perchance under the grate. Over the mantelpiece was placed what the landlady considered a *very handsome* chimney-glass, a *foot and half* high, and about three wide;

[Pg 28]

its gilt frame carefully covered with transparent yellow gauze. On the mantelpiece stood two bronze chimney lights, with cutglass drops, only it must be confessed there were but three of the drops remaining on one, and the other wanted two. The woman of the house, however, had promised faithfully to find the rest of the drops, and so restore to these embellishers of her establishment the whole of their pendant honours.

[Pg 29]

"I wouldn't give much for their promises," answered Sarah, the maid, when, in reply to a comment of hers on the subject, she was told so by Mrs. Dorothea Arden, her mistress.

"And here's no sofa, ma'am," she continued; "how are you to be sitting, the length of an evening, stuck upright on one of these here *ricketty* bits of chairs, I'd be glad to know."

"Why, it will not be very comfortable, to be sure," answered Mrs. Dorothea, "so long as it lasts; but she has promised faithfully, that as soon as the sick lady goes away, which will be in about a week, she will let me have the sofa out of the next drawing-room."

[Pg 30]

"A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush!" replied Sarah. "I dare say if the truth was known, they're not worth a sofa; or, if they are, they'll keep it in the next room, when it is vacant, to be a decoy-duck to another lodger. They're not going to let you have it, I promise you, now that they have got you fast for a month certain."

"Well, if they don't, I can't help it," said Mrs. Dorothea; "one can't have every thing you know; and the new carpet certainly gives the room a very respectable appearance. And then there is a chiffonier; that's a great comfort to put one's groceries in; or a few biskets; or a bottle of wine, if one should be obliged to open one. The doors, to be sure, are lined with blue and they should have been pink."

[Pg 31]

"And here's no key," said Sarah, examining the chiffonier; "and I declare if the lock *ante* broke."

"That is provoking," said Mrs. Dorothea, "she must get me a lock."

Sarah was now dispatched with her handboxes, and ordered to hurry the dinner and unpack the things.

In about half an hour, Aunt Dorothea becoming hungry and impatient, rang her bell. Sarah reappeared, with a countenance of the utmost discontent, declaring she was never in such a place in her life; that there was no getting any thing done, and that as to unpacking, there was no use in attempting it, in a place where they should never be able to stop. When the dinner was asked for, she replied, that she believed it had been done some time, but that she supposed there was no one to bring it up, for all they had engaged to do the waiting. "But there's sixteen of themselves, shop boys and all; and they *gets* their own tea the while your dinner's a cooking it seems."

[Pg 32]

When the dinner did come up, it was cold, and consisted of mutton-chops, which had evidently been upset into the ashes. Poor Aunt Dorothea consequently made but a slender repast.

The next day, while engaged in the labours of the toilet, she thus addressed Sarah; for people who live quite alone, are too apt to get into a way of gossiping with their servants.

"It's a very long time since the Salters have called; is it not, Sarah?"

[Pg 33]

"A very long time indeed ma'am," replied the abigail, "they was a saying to their own maid the other day (they don't know I suppose as she is a friend of mine), for they was a saying, as I said, that they didn't think as they should call any more; for that nobody never knew where to find you, as you was always a changing your lodgings; and that as to your having a sister that was a lady, they didn't believe a word of it; for though you was always a talking of Lady Arden coming, she never come."

"What impertinence! Well, Lady Arden will be here this season to a certainty. She is to come direct from London; and I'll take care they shall not be introduced to her. Was there ever such ingratitude! People that had not a creature to speak to, till I introduced them to every one they know. I even made so particular a request of my friends that they would call on them, that I quite laid myself under obligations to people. They could find out my lodgings fast enough, when they were coming to my little sociable parties five nights out of the seven; declaring they did not know what was to become of them, were it not for my kindness; and that the more they saw how differently others behaved to them, the more were they obliged to me; and then making such a vulgar noise about the number of invitations they were in my debt and their grief at not having it in their power as yet to make any return."

[Pg 34]

"Then I can tell you ma'am," said Sarah, "they are to have a grand party this very night at the rooms, and never had the manners to ask you."

[Pg 35]

"I know their cards have been out for some time. And who are they to have, did you hear?"

"Oh, titles without end, they say; and generals and baronets, and all sorts of fine people. Mrs. Johnson *sais*, as the young ladies should say, they were determined as their party should *exist* entirely of *excuses*."

"Exclusives you mean, I suppose; but did you hear any of the names?"

"Why yes ma'am; they are to have Sir Matthias and Lady Whaleworthy."

"Sir Matthias indeed!" repeated Mrs. Dorothea, "an alderman cheesemonger, knighted only the other day; and as for his poor goodnatured, vulgar wife, she has been fattened on whey, I suppose, till no reasonable door can admit her."

[Pg 36]

"Well to be sure!" exclaimed the abigail, "and then they are to have Sir Henry and Lady Shawbridge."

"Sir Henry, poor man," said Mrs. Dorothea, "was only knighted by mistake. I don't know what he was himself, but they say he had just married his cook-maid; and her ladyship certainly has all the fiery-faced fierceness of that order about her."

"A cook-maid, ma'am! why I am a step above that myself. And let me see, who else—oh, there's to be Lady Flamborough."

"She is a woman of rank certainly, or rather the widow of a man of rank; for she is of very low birth herself; and what is much worse, she is a woman of bad character, which of course prevents her being visited, so that she is glad to go any where. And who else pray?"

[Pg 37]

"Sir William Orm, that Mrs. Johnson *sais* is such a fine gentleman."

"Sir William Orm," repeated Mrs. Dorothea, "he is a known black-leg; a man shut out from all good society; he may do very well for the Salters, however, if he can endure their vulgarity."

"There is another title," said Sarah, "let me see—Sir—Sir—Sir Francis Beerton, or Brierton, I think."

"Poor little man," said Mrs. Dorothea, "there is no particular harm in him; but his wife is so sanctified, that she will neither go any where, nor see any one at home; so that he is glad of any thing for variety. Strange notions some people have of duty! in my opinion, if a woman will not make a man's home comfortable and agreeable to him, she becomes accountable for all the sins he may commit abroad, although she should be praying for his conversion the whole time. Well, who comes next on your list?"

[Pg 38]

"I don't think as I remember any more, excepting General Powel."

"He, poor old man, is mere lumber; neither useful nor ornamental, nobody will be troubled with him who can get anybody else to fill up their rooms; so that I should suppose he is not incumbered with many invitations."

"Well who would a thought of their being such a *despisable* set; and so many titles among them too; why to have heard Mrs. Johnson talk o' them, you'd supposed they had been so many kings and queens."

"It was a set I should not have joined certainly; but quite good enough for the Salters, whom I should never have visited, had the friend who wrote to me about them been sufficiently explicit as to who and what they were. The daughters, I suppose, would be excessively indignant if they thought it was known that their father had made his fortune somewhere in Devonshire, by a contract for supplying the navy with beef."

[Pg 39]

"Supplying beef, ma'am! Why isn't that all as one as being a butcher?"

"Not unlike it, certainly," replied Mrs. Dorothea.

"Well, who would have thought, and they so proud: but it's always them there upstartish sort that's the impudentst and most unbearable."

"It is in general the way those sort of people betray themselves. If they behaved in a modest unpretending manner, very possible no questions might be asked. After their ingratitude and impertinence to me, I for one shall make no secret of the circumstance. And the very young men that eat Mr. Salter's roast beef now, washed down too with his champaign and his claret, will not be the less ready to jeer at the time he sold the same commodity raw. When my sister, Lady Arden, comes, and her three beautiful daughters, they will of course have all the young men in Cheltenham about them; so that I shall be acquainted with them all; and I shall take care they shall not be in the dark about the Misses Salter, who shall find that I am not to be insulted with impunity."

[Pg 40]

"And I shall have some fun with our butcher about it," said Sarah; "I shall tell him to be particular what sort of meat he sends to such a good judge as Mr. Salter. Perhaps you could spare me for a couple of hours this evening, ma'am?" she added, when her mistress was attired.

[Pg 41]

"What for, Sarah? you are always asking leave to go out. I must say you are very idly inclined. How are my summer things ever to be ready at this rate. This mulberry silk has been looking quite out of season, ever since the sunny weather came in."

"I am sure, ma'am, there is not a young person in Cheltenham sits as close to their needle as what I do; but this evening Mrs. Johnson has, of course, the privilege of the music-gallery, and she has offered me a place. I thought you might like, perhaps, to hear how the party went off?"

"Oh, certainly I should!" replied Mrs. Dorothea. "Well, Sarah, you may go, and mind you have all your eyes about you, and bring me a full account of every thing. And notice if there is any body there that I know—and how the people are dressed—and how often the refreshment trays come in—and whether they attempt a supper—and who begins the dancing. The Miss Salters will get

[Pg 42]

partners for once in their lives, I suppose! And I dare say they will contrive to have a tolerably full room; for I hear they have been getting all their acquaintance to give away cards, right and left; Lady Matthias alone boasts that she has disposed of three dozen."

Sarah promised strict compliance with all the directions she had received, and disappeared in great haste, to pin new bows in her bonnet, and slip stiffeners into the large sleeves of her best silk dress; determining to complete her costume for the occasion, by lending herself her mistress's pea-green china crape shawl and black lace veil.

[Pg 43]

Mrs. Dorothea Arden, as soon as she was alone, sighed unconsciously; for visions of her early days presented themselves suddenly and unbidden, forming a violent contrast with the whole class of petty and degrading thoughts and interests, to which circumstances had gradually habituated, at least, if not reconciled her.

Ere she had quitted the pedestal of her youthful pride, beneath the shelter of her father's roof, with what appalling horror would she have thought of the chance-collected mob, about whose movements she was now capable of feeling an idle curiosity.

Vague recollections, too, passed with the quickness of a momentary glance, through her mind, of eligible establishments rejected with scorn, of comfort and respectability cast away, for dreams of ambition it had never been her fate to realize.

[Pg 44]

She paused, and some seconds were given to a remembrance apart from every other, which, though now but faintly seen amid the haze of distance, still seemed a little illumined speck, on which a sun-beam, piercing some aperture in a cloudy sky had chanced to fall.

But it was too late, quite too late for such thoughts, so she went out to pay some morning visits, to send in a veal cutlet for her dinner, and find out, more particularly, who were to be at the Salter's party.

[Pg 45]

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## CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Salter and his two daughters, the former equipped in a new wig, the latter in two new dresses, expressly for the occasion, were parading up and down the yet vacant public ballroom.

The lights were burning, the waiters in attendance, and the orchestra playing; while, peeping over the shoulder of the double bass, appeared a particularly smart bonnet, decorated with numerous bows of quite new ribbon, and further graced by a very handsome black lace veil.

[Pg 46]

"What can all the people be thinking of?" said Mr. Salter at last; "I have a mind to order the lights to be put out, and go away home to my bed. It would be just a proper punishment for them all. And pray," he added, looking at his daughters' dresses, "what are these gig-meries to cost?" At this crisis resounded the welcome sounds, "Sir Matthias and Lady Whaleworthy:" with quickened steps and delighted countenances, our trio hastened towards the bottom of the room, to receive their guests, now, as by magic, flowing in altogether.

Introductions were endless; every leading bird was followed by a flock, which neither host nor hostess had ever seen before; while, from time to time, the promised titles, those stars which were to give brilliancy to the night, made their appearance, sprinkling the common herd with consequence. Lady Flamborough! Sir William Orm! Sir Henry and Lady Shawbridge! Next appeared poor old General Powel and half blind Sir Francis Brierton, poking his little sharp nose into everybody's face, and smirking his recognition, when by so doing he had discovered who they were; and though last not least, Sir James Lindsey; least in consequence we mean, for he was a very little, very ugly man, the express image of the knave of spades. He was, however, a vastly important personage, a bachelor baronet, with fifteen thousand a-year, and a man of good family too, so that there was no objection whatever to him, except that he was a fool, and that when he danced he so capered and kicked up behind, and rounded his elbows, and, in short, made himself so completely the butt and laughing-stock of the whole room, it was with difficulty that even his fifteen thousand per annum could procure him a partner.

[Pg 47]

[Pg 48]

We rather suspect, however, that there were ladies who, though they shrank from sharing with Sir James the unprofitable ridicule of the hour, would have had no objection to share with him for life his fifteen thousand a-year, for, in that case, they could afford to be laughed at.

Sir James had a brother, a very fine young man, remarkably handsome and equally clever; perhaps a little too hot-headed, but warm-hearted withal; an enthusiast in beauty, painting, music, scenery, every thing in short at which a glowing imagination takes fire; the very material for a frantic lover, yet condemned by his circumstances, either to lead a single life, or possibly at least contract a marriage with the purse of some old rich widow, fitter to be his mother than his wife. For Henry Lindsey was one of the many living sacrifices hourly immolated on the altars of *pride*, and how many a holocaust has been offered up upon those altars!

[Pg 49]

How often have we heard persons, who could argue rationally enough on other subjects, gravely assert, in reply to every argument which good feeling or justice could urge, "A family must have a head."



In this particular instance the head, or *pride* of the family, had proved its disgrace, yet standing laws and previously made settlements could not be altered. Fifteen thousand per annum, therefore, must be melted down, to make a golden image of poor little silly Sir James, while Henry, with the pittance which as a younger child was his portion, was obliged to purchase the privilege of being shot at; for the younger brother of an old baronet *could not disgrace his family* by doing any thing likely to provide *comfortably for himself*.

[Pg 50]

Thus do the *prejudices* of society seem to have been invented for the express purpose of hunting down and crushing those whom its laws have robbed and oppressed.

Children of the same parents must be defrauded of the birthright, by natural justice theirs, to heap all on one brother! And for what purpose? That he may keep alive, by being its living representative, that *pride*, that *curse*, which forbids to those so defrauded, the use of honest means for earning honest bread!

If, instead of this, all property which had been a father's, were, at his death, equally divided among his offspring, without revolution or confiscation, extravagant disparity of station would gradually disappear, and with it *pride*, that destroys the happiness, with its whole array of *prejudices*, waging eternal warfare against rational contentment.

[Pg 51]

How many are there who might still, even as the world now is, dwell within a very garden of Eden, of peaceful and natural delights, and yet who virtually turn themselves out of the same; and, at the mere mandate of some *prejudice* of society—some *by-law* of *pride*, become wanderers through the thistle-grown wildernesses of discontent, or weary pilgrims amid the thorny paths of petty mortification.

But to return to our ball: by this time so fair a proportion of the company had arrived, that it was thought advisable to commence dancing. For this purpose Mr. Salter, with a feeling of exultation which made him forget, for the time, what the whole entertainment was likely to cost, led Lady Flamborough to the head of the room. Her ladyship had evidently been pretty in her youth; but though the remains of a fine woman may sometimes be viewed with a blending of admiration with our veneration, mere prettiness seldom grows old gracefully. In Lady Flamborough's case it certainly did not. Her once nicely rounded little figure had now outgrown all bounds, not excepting those of the drapery which ought to have concealed its exuberance. Her once infantine features were now nearly lost in the midst of a countenance disproportionally increased in its general dimensions; while in manner she still played off numberless once becoming, but now disgusting, airs of artless innocence; languishing, lisping, and rolling her eyes; and childishly twisting her fingers through the ringlets of her hair, while looking up in her partner's face, and saying silly things.

[Pg 52]

[Pg 53]

Had it been possible to have checked coquetry in Lady Flamborough, the sight of the senseless bloated countenance on which she was thus casting away those interesting appeals of her visual orbs, one would have thought might have done so.

Mr. Salter's head was in shape something like a sugar loaf: the region denominated fore-head, and appropriated by phrenologists to the intellectual faculties, being so confined, that it nearly came to a point, while the descent widened as it approached the organs of gustativeness, and all that called itself face, concluded without any distinct line of demarcation, in a jole, much resembling that of a cod-fish.

[Pg 54]

The eyes were colourless, and owed all the brilliancy they possessed to an inflammation of the lids, which never forsook them. The efforts of their owner, on the present occasion, to give them a languishing roll, that should correspond with that of her ladyship's, was truly ludicrous. As to his mouth, it bisected his countenance from ear to ear, which rendered his endeavours to spread it wider by that bland movement designated a smile, nearly abortive.

A few additional lines of circular or spherical trigonometry were conspicuously marked upon cheeks that yielded in carnation hue to nought save the nose; while this rallying point of the vital powers, like certain well-known altars of the ancients, never allowed the flame to go out.

[Pg 55]

Mr. Salter was exceedingly proud of his legs, (not that he had seen them himself for the last ten years), and though short for his body, which by-the-by had precisely the appearance of a Brobdingnag melon on castors, the legs themselves, when you were distant enough to have a view of them beneath the inflated balloon that otherwise concealed them, were certainly formed according to the rules of beauty; that is to say, they had very large calves, and very small ankles.

We suppose it must have been the combined effect of the personal charms and the elevated rank of his partner, which raised Mr. Salter's spirits to so inconvenient a degree, as to produce in his mind a most frisky longing to behold, once more, this long remembered attraction of his own—his said handsome legs. Accordingly, while setting to the lady, he made several kicks out in front, with accompanying jerks forward of the head, in the vain hope of catching a glimpse; but, alas, in one unfortunate effort more strenuous than the rest, he lost his balance; out flew his feet, and down he came on his back, so much to the amusement of the whole room that no one for a time had the presence of mind to pick him up: while there he lay, sprawling and puffing, his own endeavours to rise being quite as fruitless as those of a beetle usually are, when placed in the same reversed position by a mischievous school-boy. Neither was the evening by any means one of unmixed delight to the Misses Salter. It was but too evident that even on the present occasion, when, if ever compliment was due to them, that the gentlemen evinced any thing but impatience to secure the felicity of being their partners. On the contrary, it was generally when a quadrille

[Pg 56]

[Pg 57]

was nearly made up, and the last added couple were in great distress for a *vis-à-vis*, that some one who had previously made up his mind not to dance, was pressed into the service, and given a hint that one of the Miss Salters was sitting down.

Even Sir James, though he did dance a set with each sister, did not do so till he had been shaken off by nearly every other woman in the room.

The Scotch proverb says, "It's a lucky lass that's like her father."

But we must confess, we never could discover that it was any advantage to Miss Salter to be so strikingly like her father as she certainly was. Miss Grace Salter was altogether of a different style; she was under-sized, pitifully thin, and extremely dark, with an expression of countenance as if she had just swallowed something unseasonably bitter, and was making a face at its disagreeable flavour. The set with Sir James could not much sooth the vanity of either sister, for no sooner did he commence operations, than a ring was immediately formed for the avowed purpose of laughing at him; while he, mistaking the general attention he drew for admiration, seemed gratefully determined to spare no pains to give the greatest possible satisfaction to his numerous spectators.

[Pg 58]

The Misses Salter had also another source of uneasiness this evening. At all times their greatest earthly apprehension, next to that of not getting husbands themselves, was, lest their father should marry, and cut them out of a small sum, which not having been swallowed up in the purchase of the estate for John, he had promised to divide between them unless indeed he married again. His doing so seemed this evening more probable than ever it had done before. The roll of his eye, while looking at Lady Flamborough, had become quite ominous, while her ladyship's air of condescension was truly alarming.

[Pg 59]

"Now it would be too bad, would it not?" said Miss Salter to Miss Grace Salter, as they were undressing, "if after all, this ball that we have been so long teasing at my father to give, and that he thinks so much about the expense of, should turn out to be our own ruin in the end."

"Why, I am afraid, to be sure," replied her sister, "if he marries he won't leave us the money, or else it would be a grand connection! wouldn't it? We'd be sure to be visited by every body then."

[Pg 60]

"That we should, no doubt," said Miss Salter, "but what of that, we shouldn't have a shilling in the world, comparatively speaking, when my father dies—and as for John—"

"He wouldn't give us a shilling if we were starving!" observed Miss Grace.

By John, they meant their brother. And, by-the-by, one of the reasons, in addition to their want of beauty, why these ladies were paid so little attention to by the gentlemen, was, that it was well known, Mr. Salter had a cub of a son, on whom he meant, in imitation of his betters, to heap the earnings and savings of his life, for the purpose, as he himself expressed it, of making a family: and, for that matter he didn't see why a man mightn't be prouder of being the first of his name to do so, than if he was come of a family ready made to his hand a thousand years ago! for sure, they must all have had a beginning one time or other.

[Pg 61]

But as to being the first of his name to have a rise in the world, he was not so clear of that neither: he had often heard talk of a Lord Salter or Salisbury, or something beginning with an S; and he might become a lord, one time or other, for any thing he knew to the contrary.

But be that as it may, "he wasn't going to have his money, that he had been a lifetime scraping together, squandered by idle fellows that were nothing at all akin to him, but would just come and marry his daughters to get hold of the cash."

[Pg 62]

"But supposing, Sir, we shouldn't get married at all," said Miss Salter one day.

"Nothing more likely," replied her father. "As for Grace, she is certainly as plain a girl as I'd desire to see any day. And I don't know how it is, you're not very handsome neither, tho' you're thought so like me."

These observations of Mr. Salter's about being the first of his family were, by the particular desire of his daughters, strictly confined to his own fireside. There was no occasion, they argued, to make any such confession in a place like Cheltenham, where nobody knew anything about people, but what they choose to say of themselves. Accordingly, they made family their constant theme; and inquired with the most consequential airs about the connections of every one they heard named; always winding up their harangue by observing, that of course it was very natural for a man like their father, of such an ancient and highly respectable family, to be very particular about who they visited, particularly in those sorts of places where people of every description congregated.

[Pg 63]

"It's no harm, you know," said Miss Salter to her sister, "to have the name of being particular, it makes people of consequence; at the same time I'd have us get acquainted with every creature we can, and go everywhere; there's no knowing where one might find one's luck."

"Talking of luck," answered Grace, "I read in one of the new novels the other day, that 'luck knocks once at every one's door;' I wish it would knock once at mine, I know, and it shouldn't have to knock again."

[Pg 64]

"And, by-the-by, was it quite prudent of us, on your plan, to cut Mrs. Dorothea Arden as we have done?"

"Oh, yes; what's the use of an old maid, she can have no sons, you know; besides, we didn't cut her till Lady Whaleworthy, and Lady Flamborough, and Lady Shawbridge, and all of them, had called; and then I thought we could spare such old lumber as Mrs. Dorothea."

"Why, to be sure, as you say, she can have no sons; indeed I never even heard her speak of a brother or a nephew; and as to her expecting this Lady Arden that she is always talking about, I am sure its nothing but a boast."

"Nothing more you may be certain! And then I was afraid my father would have taken a fancy to her at last, for he was always saying, she was a fine woman for her years." [Pg 65]

"She was very useful however at first," said Grace.

"Oh yes she was, certainly," replied Miss Salter, "but now you know we don't want her." [Pg 66]

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## CHAPTER V.

Lady Arden, leaning on her son Alfred, her eldest daughter on the other side, her two younger following, had just entered the ballroom at Almacks.

The sisters, we have already said, were beautiful. They were all above the middle height, and finely formed; remarkably fair, with brilliant complexions, and very beautiful light brown hair.

Jane, the eldest, had her mother's amiable, mild, regular features, and soft, modest, hazel eyes. [Pg 67]

Louisa, the second, much resembled her sister in the form of her features, except that her mouth was a very little larger, the lips fuller, and of a more vivid red, and the smile more conscious. Her eyes were of a grey colour, clear and sparkling; but in their expression there was too much of triumph, while her very blush had something in it of the same character; you felt, you knew not why, that it did not arise altogether from timidity.

Her beauty, however, was perfectly exquisite; there was a rich luxuriance, a beaming lustre about her whole appearance, which seemed to gain by contrast with others, whom, while viewed separately, you had thought as handsome. It was like the undefinable distinction between the brilliant and its best imitations, most clearly seen when subjected to the ordeal of comparison. [Pg 68]

Madeline, the youngest, had a rounder face than her sisters, the features not quite so fine, yet lovely in their own perfectly innocent joyousness; while beautifying dimples accompanied her smiles, and fairy cupids danced in her laughing eyes.

The sisters always dressed alike: on the present occasion, they all wore white lace over white satin; the lighter or outer drapery looped up on one side with a bunch of white roses, mixed with lilies of the valley: and a few of the same flowers in the hair on the contrary side. A set of diamonds each, unusually costly for girls, but which, by a whim of their maternal grandfather, they happened to possess, were their only ornaments. [Pg 69]

Lady Arden had never, since her widowhood, returned to colours; her invariable costume was black velvet; her diamonds, however, yielded in magnificence to those of royalty only. So that, what with the faces being quite new, and the appearance of the group altogether, not forgetting the handsome Alfred, was such as to excite considerable attention, even amid an assembly like the present, where youth, beauty, fashion, and splendour, habitually congregate.

Willoughby was too important a personage to form one of the family picture. He was in the room, however, having just arrived in attendance on a party with whom he had dined.

A young lady of remarkable beauty was leaning on his arm. He addressed her from time to time with great animation; while she appeared to listen with the most languid indifference. Young Lord Nelthorpe, one of their nearest neighbours at Arden, now approached our party. Jane had noticed him for some time, and, on first doing so, had coloured deeply. They had not met before since their arrival in town. He came up to our party, was very polite, and even friendly, but not quite as cordial as might have been expected. He conversed with Lady Arden for a little time. Music commenced, he made a slight bow, and moving quickly towards a lady at a little distance, led her to the quadrille. Jane had been so perfectly certain that he intended to dance with her, that when the music began, she had instinctively drawn her arm half way from within her mother's. Her disappointment was bitter, and arose from a feeling much deeper than the mere loss of a partner for the dance could have excited. [Pg 70]

From her earliest childhood she had been in the habit of hearing her own family speak of Lord Nelthorpe as a very suitable match. As children together, they had been quite little lovers. Public schools and colleges had broken off this familiarity of intercourse. He had, however, since arriving at the age of manhood, often paid her a good deal of attention in the country, where he had nothing else to do; and in some of the summer evening walks of the young people, a declaration had more than once seemed to tremble on his lips; still nothing decided had passed; and poor Jane's heart had been given away, some couple of years before she had begun to doubt the sincerity of his attachment, or the certainty of their future union. And why was Jane mistaken? Because, society being artificially constituted, the language of nature cannot explain the motives which govern its members; nor our own feelings, till we too become sophisticated, [Pg 72]

teach us to calculate upon those of others.

The attention of Alfred was just at this moment attracted by the appearance of the younger of two ladies, who were standing at a little distance. They were evidently, from their striking resemblance, mother and daughter. The stature of both was rather above the middle height; that of the elder, from its queen-like carriage, and its being a little disposed to embonpoint, had a strikingly imposing and majestic effect; while that of the younger, though perfectly formed and beautifully rounded, was so delicate in its proportions, and so timid in its air, as to require comparison to convince the eye that the actual elevation was the same. The features of both were so regular, that it would be impossible for the scrutiny of the nicest artist, to discover a defect; but those of the elder were of a lustrous, conspicuous white, as though chiseled in Parian marble; those of the younger of a stainless transparency, as if modelled in the purest wax; the lips only of both were of a lively red; those of the elder, perhaps, a little too thin, but boasting the glossy scarlet of the coral; while those of the younger, full and bewitching in their expression, were of the tender tint of the rose's ambrosial centre. The hair, eye-brows, and eye-lashes of both were absolute jet; but while the firm braiding of the elder lady's tresses betrayed the usual defect of black hair—strength of texture—the raven ringlets of the younger rivalled the flaxen locks of childhood in their silken softness. The line of her eye-brow, too, was the most delicately penciled, and her eye-lashes the longest, or they seemed so, her eyes being cast down; while those of the elder lady were raised and fully visible. They were dark, large, and brilliant; but the supercilious vanity with which they moved slowly round, courting the universal admiration they drew towards them, without once shrinking from its glare, made it impossible for their lustre, splendid as it was, to reach any heart.

[Pg 73]

[Pg 74]

Alfred observed an elderly gentleman with whom he was acquainted join the two ladies, and converse for a time with the air of an old intimate of the elder. As soon as he quitted them Alfred joined him; and with as much circumlocution, preparation, and management, as though he had in view nothing less than the place of prime minister, demanded if he could venture to introduce him to his fair friends, as a candidate for the hand of the younger lady for the next quadrille. Nothing could be easier: Lord Darlingford was intimate with the parties; accordingly, he presented our hero to Lady Palliser and her daughter, Lady Caroline Montague.

[Pg 75]

The eyes of the latter were, at the moment of introduction, of necessity lifted to Alfred's face. In colour, size, and liquid lustre they resembled her mother's; but oh, how unlike were they in their mild, beseeching expression; and in the tremulous movement of the lids; which, as if weighed down by their sable veil of silken lashes, hastened again to overshadow them. The transparent cheek too, at the same instant that the eyes were raised, had been visited by a deep blush; gifting, though but for a fleeting instant, this beautiful, this almost too unearthly being with the warm glow of life.

[Pg 76]

The effect on Alfred of the momentary vision was decisive of his fate.

During the dance, to which this introduction led, the snatches of most exquisite pleasure experienced by our hero were when, by directly addressing his partner, he could again induce her to look up. On each such occasion, the beseeching expression already described, excited, despite the cooler suggestions of reason, a feeling as though the gentle appeal were addressed to him in particular. What was there so entreated that he would not have undertaken? The most difficult feats of ancient chivalry, nay, the impossibilities of necromancy itself, would have seemed tasks of easy performance in such a cause! His beautiful partner said very little; yet, from her general demeanour, and the fluttering frequency with which her changing colour came and went, it might be inferred that her reserve was neither that of haughtiness, nor of cold calculation, but rather an excess of almost painful timidity. This reserve, however, did not affect her performance of the quadrille, which was perfect; it was the harmony of motion realized. The absolute accordance was such that it seemed to be the influence of the musical sounds on the undulating air, which wafted the light form, "like the thistle-down floating on the breeze," through each evolution of the dance. Or when called upon to quit her original position in the quadrille for a few seconds and again return to it, such was the quiet grace with which she executed the task, that it seemed as though the delicate vision, fading away like Scott's White Lady of the Mist, had but ceased for a moment to be visible, and, in a moment more, again became palpable to sight.

[Pg 77]

[Pg 78]

From time to time she looked at Lady Palliser; not, however, as though it were there she sought a refuge; for, on the contrary, there was an indescribable something in the manner of the glance, which conveyed the idea that her ladyship was the principal object of her daughter's fears. Yet again, the moment the quadrille was concluded, Lady Caroline expressed a wish to rejoin her mother. Lady Palliser received our hero with a coldness that very soon made him feel obliged to take himself off. At once captivated and mortified, he felt disinclined to dance any more, and rather disposed to indulge in reveries, while pursuing with his eyes the form of his new acquaintance through the moving crowd. Instead, however, of reclining indolently on a sofa, or lounging about with other men, he devoted himself, in the most amiable manner possible, to his mother and sisters for the remainder of the evening; and though they found him somewhat deaf, performed, when they did make him hear, any little service they required of him with great alacrity. Notwithstanding which, ere the evening was over, each of his sisters had severally informed him that he was already in love. Such secrets are generally discovered by others before they are known to the parties themselves.

[Pg 79]

A friend of Lady Arden's, forgetful that her ladyship objected on principle to all younger sons,

*except her own*, had introduced Henry Lindsey to Louisa. Her exquisite beauty dazzled and delighted him, while her gratified vanity, at the enthusiasm of his admiration, made her manner so encouraging, that he believed himself well received, and gave himself up to hopes and feelings destined to cost him many a bitter pang.

[Pg 80]

Lord Darlingford, though a widower and a man, by his own account upwards of fifty, was much disposed, on the strength of his rank, to be a serious admirer of Jane Arden. This evening he found himself better received than usual; he did not deem it necessary to make a fool of himself by dancing, but was sitting apart with the lady, conversing very earnestly, and was just beginning to weigh the propriety of availing himself of so favourable an opportunity for making her an offer of marriage, when Lord Nelthorpe came up and asked her to dance. The moment before she had determined, if he did do so at this late period of the evening, to reject his offer. As soon, however, as he approached, and preferred his request, her spirited resolve vanished: with one of her sweetest smiles she rose and took his arm, and in the flurry of her spirits, forgetting to make even a parting bow to poor Lord Darlingford, left him sitting alone, looking what he was, quite forsaken, and cursing himself for an old fool.

[Pg 81]

Lord Nelthorpe now took pains to be particularly agreeable, and either from vanity or lingering attachment, was evidently anxious to discover if he still retained the power he knew he had long possessed over the feelings of his fair partner. He made allusions to her late companion, and half jest, half earnest, ventured several whispered comments, almost amounting to tender reproaches, watching her countenance while he did so. As he handed her into the carriage, he secretly wished, with something like a sigh, that he had no brothers and sisters to pay off. She went home in high spirits.

[Pg 82]

"I wish, Jane," said Lady Arden, as they drove from the door, "you would make up your mind to marry Lord Darlingford."

Jane made no reply.

[Pg 83]

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## CHAPTER VI.

The next morning Willoughby confided to his brother the determination he had come to on the last evening, of proposing for Lady Anne Armadale, the daughter of Lord Selby.

He described with great exultation how much attached the lady had been to a gentleman of whom her friends disapproved, and whom she was notwithstanding determined to marry up to the time he had become his rival; but that he had not been long in driving the former lover from the field, and securing the preference of the lady.

[Pg 84]

Alfred, in his anxiety for his brother's happiness, forgot for the moment his usual dread of offering advice.

"For heaven sake," he said, "Willoughby, pause! Be *quite* certain that you have secured her real preference!"

"I *am* quite certain," said Willoughby, taking up his hat impatiently.

"Nay, do not be hasty either with the lady or with me."

"You think it is impossible for any woman to prefer me, I suppose. I have, I confess, no pretensions to be an Adonis," he added with a sneer, for he knew that Alfred was considered remarkably handsome; "at the same time all people's taste are fortunately not alike!"

[Pg 85]

"Nay, my dear Willoughby, do not be childish! Is it not wiser to use a little caution? Have you no fear of finding yourself, when too late, the husband of a woman capable of sacrificing her feelings to her interest?"

Willoughby abruptly quitted the room. He went directly to Lord Selby's, and in less than an hour had proposed for, and been accepted by Lady Anne Armadale.

Unhappily for Willoughby, the slender share of sense he possessed was not only at all times hoodwinked by vanity, but in general superseded in its operations by temper. For if any friend happened to offer him the slightest advice, so jealous was he of having it supposed his judgment required assistance, that, without waiting to consider if any offence was intended, he would feel perhaps but a momentary resentment, yet, while under its dominion, as the readiest and most appropriate revenge, would resolve hastily on an opposite line of conduct to that suggested by his adviser; and having once so resolved, obstinacy would put its seal on a determination which in fact had never been examined by his understanding, while had there been no interference, he would at least have considered the subject, and might, possibly, have come to a just conclusion.

[Pg 86]

A man of a decidedly superior mind, on the contrary, having no private misgivings respecting his own capacity, is always well pleased to take under consideration any new views of a subject, which the suggestions of a friend, or indeed of any one, may present. It is of course his own judgment which finally decides, but like a just judge, after first hearing every witness, that is to say every argument which can be brought to bear upon the subject. Acuteness in prejudging is the boast of the fool. Discrimination to give its due weight to every part of the evidence, the

[Pg 87]

privilege of the man of sense. The fool is always telling you he can see with half an eye. We would request such persons to employ in future the whole of both orbs, and possibly with a vision so extraordinary, they might be enabled to pierce even to the bottom of that far-famed well, in which it is said that truth has hitherto lain hid from the researches of mankind.

Certainly no claim to merit or distinction can be more absurd than that which is founded on the wilfully limited means employed for producing the desired end.

Excellence, to challenge admiration, should be excellence in the abstract; while he who would be even a respectable candidate for the prize, should use every power that Providence has given to man, avail himself of every ray of light that the experience of past ages has elicited, and bringing all to a focus, pour the concentrated beam on the path to be explored.

[Pg 88]

Thus only can each generation hope to gain some step on the road towards perfection unattained by its predecessor.

[Pg 89]

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## CHAPTER VII.

Gloucester Villa, the residence of Mr. Salter, at Cheltenham, was in a state of high preparation for a dinner to be given to Lady Flamborough.

Mrs. Johnson had no leisure to assist the *young* ladies to dress, they were therefore left to perform that office for each other.

"By-the-by, I have been so much hurried, I forgot to tell you," said Grace, "but Lady Arden is now really coming: Mrs. Dorothea's maid has been telling Johnson all about it."

[Pg 90]

"Oh, I dare say it's just talk as usual," said Miss Salter.

"No, no, it's quite certain now," persisted her sister, "for Violet Bank is taken for her ladyship for six months certain, and the adjoining villa, Jessamine Bower, for another titled lady; and I daresay they'll be acquainted, so you see what we've lost!"

"Well, that is really provoking!" exclaimed Miss Salter. "I wonder would there be any use in sending her an invitation for this evening?"

"Sending who an invitation?" said Grace. "Mrs. Dorothea do you mean? Oh, quite ridiculous at this late hour; and after leaving her out of the ball too!"

"I know all that," replied Miss Salter; "but let me see, I'll write her a long apology about having sent a card for our ball to her old lodging in mistake! and for the short notice I'll say, that I know she likes friendly invitations better than formal ones, and that our party this evening is to be so particularly select, just what I know she likes; and then I'll give a list of the titles, and that I think will decide her, even if she does see through the excuses."

[Pg 91]

Accordingly Miss Salter, in great triumph at her own diplomatic abilities, wrote and dispatched her note.

"After all," she added, as she resumed her toilette, "these are sorrowful rejoicings for us, for I suppose with this fine lady coming to dinner, and being so gracious, and all that, she means to marry my father; and if she does, though to be sure it'll bring fine acquaintance, I suppose, but will it bring us husbands?—on the contrary, if it gets abroad that we're not to have a shilling—"

[Pg 92]

"We'll have but a poor chance, I'm afraid," interrupted Grace.

"But I'll tell you what I have done to endeavour to obviate that," said her sister; "I have been telling Johnson, and I have told her too that she may tell it where she pleases, for it's no harm that the truth should be known, that our mother's fortune was a hundred thousand pounds, and was so settled upon us that my father can't keep it from us; and she has begun already with Sir William Orm's man, and he has told his master, and Sir William is full of it; so we shall see how he behaves to-day."

"But what a shocking lie!" said Grace.

[Pg 93]

"Lie! Nonsense!" replied her sister, "Who tells the truth, I'd be glad to know?"

Here the answer to the note interrupted the conversation. It was of course a formal apology. Mrs. Dorothea had not been at a loss to see through the motives of her *friends* the Salters.

The *young* ladies now descended to the drawing-room, where Mr. Salter was already standing at a window, in high dress; with the bright white, angular points of a fresh put on collar, contrasting finely with the shining ruby of his cheeks. A carriage with a coronet drove up to the door; bless me, how fine! thought the Misses Salter; it was almost enough to reconcile their father's marrying again.

Lady Flamborough was announced. Her ladyship entered; her round, fat, rosy face, smiling in a round wreath of red roses. Her dress, a colour de rose satin, her ornaments, necklace and earrings of pink topaz.

[Pg 94]

The broad daylight, or rather sunshine, of the first day in May, in weather unusually fine, and even hot for the season, in a three windowed, south-west drawing room, at six o'clock, did ample justice to the glow of her ladyship's appearance, which nothing less than the entrance, immediately after, of Lady Whaleworthy, in a crimson velvet, could have at all subdued.

Lady Shawbridge arrived next. Her dress was a gold coloured velvet, and gold tissue turban, the wide circumference of which displayed the fiery countenance hinted at by Mrs. Dorothea to great advantage. Indeed the whole assembly was of a fiery order; although being, as we have said, hot weather, there was no occasion for fire. But the very furniture of the room, unluckily for the day and aspect, was crimson, while in addition to the red and reddish countenances already enumerated, Miss Salter's face, on all warm occasions like the present, was much too apt to emulate the glow of her father's. While even poor Miss Grace, though in general, from hardness and thinness, a chilly object, was subject with peculiar provocation, to a dullish red knob, like a winter cherry, just at the end of her nose.

[Pg 95]

The rest of the party having arrived, and among them Sir William Orm, Sir James Lindsey, Sir Francis Brierton, and the general, dinner was announced. Mr. Salter gave his arm to Lady Flamborough, and leading the way, was followed by the rest of the company, to the dining-room; which, having the same aspect as the drawing-room, and being, besides over the kitchen, was by no means calculated to cool the already heated guests. The two turtles, we mean Mr. Salter and Lady Flamborough, every way so well *entitled to the title*, being in their forms turtles, and in their present dispositions towards each other turtle doves, took their loving seats side by side, opposite to the turtle-soup, at the head of the table. (Men who have no wives of course head their own tables.)

[Pg 96]

The dinner having been entirely provided at so much a-head, by a pastrycook, who was to remove its remains, was of course only too good, we mean too fine, too much ornamented, too technical; in fact the display of each course resembled more a confectioner's counter than a gentleman's table. Every thing, in short, was so befrosted, and so beglazed, that if one had been at all absent, one might have put one's hand in one's pocket, and asked what was to pay.

[Pg 97]

It is an acknowledged fact, that to act the gentleman is impossible. It is equally impossible for people, though possessed of the purse of Fortunatus, to ape successfully, on special occasions, a style of living not habitual to them.

We hope we have not cooled the turtle-soup by our digression. Poor Mr. Salter, instead of quietly conveying ladles of soup to soup-plates, till the demand ceased, was most unnecessarily prolonging his own labours, and delaying the progress of the feast, by deliberately inquiring of every several member of the assembly by name, if they chose turtle-soup, and poising the while, his insignia of office over the tureen, till their ear caught the question and his the reply.

[Pg 98]

By the time similar rites had been performed over every steaming remove, it may be believed that the countenance of our host had lost nothing of its brilliancy. During the dessert he had more leisure to turn its lustre, adorned with smiles, on his fair companion; whose uplifted eyes languishingly met his, till there wanted but the pipe to make the pair an excellent study for a painter of the Dutch school. The attitude too, leaning back at their ease in their chairs, so favourably displayed their forms, that the couple in this particular very much resembled a *pair of globes*; though we must confess that, except in courtesy to the lady, we should not have been disposed to designate either the celestial.

Sir William Orm, who had handed in Miss Salter, was descanting with much feeling on the interested motives which governed the matrimonial views of but too many men in the world, and declaring that such must ever be secondary considerations with him. Miss Salter confessed that amiable sentiments like his were very rare now a days, and consequently the more to be admired. On the opposite side, Sir James Lindsey was giggling with silly self-satisfaction, as he sat receiving the assiduous attentions and pointed compliments of Miss Grace. While Lady Shawbridge was remarking aside to Sir Matthias Whaleworthy, that Lady Flamborough's youthful airs were quite disgusting; and Sir Matthias in return, made some comments on Mr. Salter's dancing, which sounded very ungrateful, proceeding from lips which had just finished a *second* plate of the man's turtle-soup.

[Pg 99]

[Pg 100]

Lady Whaleworthy, good soul, was telling Sir Henry Shawbridge one of the long stories about herself, her father and mother, brothers and sisters, husband, children, and servants, which she inflicted on all who had the misfortune to sit near, and the patience to listen to her.

Ere the ladies left the dining-room, the now completely enamoured Mr. Salter had determined, that in the course of the evening he would take a sly opportunity of making Lady Flamborough an offer of his heart and hand. Alas! how vain are human resolves, when we know not what an hour or at most an hour and a half may bring forth; for it could not have exceeded that time, when the gentlemen followed the ladies to the drawing-room, and yet Mr. Salter's visual organs by some process, possibly connected with a certain series of toasts, which despite of fashion, he might have felt it his duty to propose, had in that short period undergone such an extraordinary change, that when he approached what ought to have been the *sole* object of his affections, he beheld as it were two Lady Flamboroughs, sitting, or rather attempting to sit, on the same chair! He gazed in utter amazement, and strove to concentrate the powers of sight: for a second the mysterious vision amalgamated, and was but one! again, however, it glided asunder, and became two! nor did this happen but once, so as to leave any room for doubt or mistake, on the contrary, while our astonished host still stood staring, the extraordinary process was frequently repeated. Nay, once,

[Pg 101]

[Pg 102]

as lured by the smiles of the fair shadow nearest him, he ventured to address some complimentary remark to its ear in particular, it slid away as if for refuge behind its representative, and immediately after popped in view on the other side!

Whether it is that supernatural appearances have a tendency to awe the passions into stillness, or whether this glaring infringement on the classical laws of unity, by dividing, destroyed the interest; or whether possibly, some vague dread of being betrayed unconsciously into the sin of bigamy, might have presented itself to the imagination of Mr. Salter, we have not philosophical lore nor critical acumen sufficient to decide; we can only speak to the effect, which was, that Mr. Salter, instead of finding with this double provocation a double share of love inundating his heart and overflowing his lips, was struck perfectly mute, and continued so for the remainder of the evening.

[Pg 103]

So much for lovers continuing their libations at Bacchus' shrine until they see double.

[Pg 104]

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## CHAPTER VIII.

"Well, there is nothing like getting into *select* society after all!" said Miss Salter to her sister, when they had retired for the night. "Who would have thought, six months ago, of both of us having baronets for lovers? I dare say you are right, Grace, and that this marriage of my father's (for I suppose now it will take place), is the best thing that could have happened for us. And I know, I'm determined when I'm married to Sir William Orm (and he has gone great lengths, I assure you), that I will visit none but titled people. And tell me, how did you and Sir James get on?"

[Pg 105]

"Oh, delightfully!" answered her sister, "he asked me if I thought him very handsome; and of course I said I did; and then he laughed so. And then he asked me if I thought the silk of his waistcoat a pretty pattern; and I said I did; and he told me a lady chose it for him. And he asked me if I was inclined to be jealous; and I said if I thought he had any regard for me, I'd be jealous of every lady that looked at him; and he said, 'would you indeed?' and laughed again. And he asked me if I admired his dancing as much as most people did, for that he was thought a first rate dancer; and I said that nobody could help admiring his dancing. And he asked me if I could think what in the world it was that made so many young ladies refuse to dance with him; and I said it was, to be sure, because he danced so well that they were afraid it would make their own bad dancing the more noticed. 'And do you really think so?' said he, laughing again. And so, at last, only think! he asked me if I'd like very much to be my lady! and I said I should of all things. And so then he laughed, and said he could make any body a lady he chose."

[Pg 106]

"And I hope you said you wished he'd make you one," interrupted her sister.

"Why I thought of it," replied Miss Grace, "but I was afraid people would hear me; if we had been quite by ourselves, I would have said it."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Salter. "If you can get to be my lady, and have fifteen thousand a-year at your command, I think you can afford to defy people's comments about how you came by it! You said, the other day, that if luck knocked once at your door, it shouldn't have to knock twice. I'm sure it knocked then, with a vengeance, and such a knock as comes to the doors of but few, I can tell you; and you the fool not to answer it. It's such as you'll never hear again, with your little ugly black-a-moor face. And when you had the good fortune to get hold of a fool that didn't know the difference, if you dosed his draught with flattery enough, you should have said or done anything to please him, blockhead that you are."

[Pg 107]

"You needn't be so abusive, Eliza," said poor Grace, almost whimpering, "I'm sure I thought I was barefaced enough, this time, to please you."

"Such stuff, with your mock modesty," interrupted Miss Salter.

[Pg 108]

"And as for a black face, it's as good as a red one, any day," continued Grace, "and rather *genteeler* for that matter," she added, "since you're grown so mighty fond of gentility."

Miss Salter's rage now knew no bounds, and consequently became so coarse and disgusting in its manifestation, that we shall forbear any further representation of the scene.

Vulgar people are bad enough in good humour. Propitious fate deliver us from them when they are out of temper!

Before proceeding further with our history, we may as well take the present opportunity of sketching slightly the origin of this same titled personage, by a connection with whom the Misses Salter expected to gain so much consequence. Lady Flamborough was the only child of an hotel-keeper, who, in his hospitable calling, had amassed enormous wealth. He had not always, however, been the great man, even in his own line, which he ultimately became. His daughter, therefore, to the age of five or six, was brought up, literally running about in a very minor establishment, little better, in short, than a road-side posting-house; and, being a pretty, rosy, fat child, had, up to that age, been the pet and plaything, not only of her father, (she had no mother living), but of every waiter and hostler in and about the house. And often had she sat on her father's knee, while he drank his ale in the bar, and, when the jest and the tale went round, which

[Pg 109]



were, as yet, to the ear of the child, a foreign tongue, laughed merrily for very glee at seeing others laugh. But alas! amid the sounds and sights of scenes like these, native delicacy, even at this early age, was lost. For callousness is not so much a wrong bias given, as a class of feelings, out of which some of the most valuable traits of character are hereafter to be formed, destroyed; and if the material be gone, how can the superstructure be raised?

[Pg 110]

The child was, after this, sent to expensive boarding-schools, and as her father's fortunes rose, given every possible accomplishment. In these, and her being very pretty, Mr. \* \* \* \*, afterwards Lord Flamborough, but then a younger brother, and of course poor, found some apology for overlooking the lady's want of birth, and appropriating her immense wealth, which was his true object.

Soon after his marriage, his brother died, and he succeeded to the title and estates; and now, bitterly repenting his ill-assorted union, behaved with neglect, and even contempt, towards his wife. Upon which the lady, partly out of revenge, and partly out of levity, gave a favourable reception to the addresses of a lover in no very exalted sphere of life.

[Pg 111]

Proceedings were immediately instituted to obtain legal redress; but before the divorce had passed the house, his lordship, who had previously been in a bad state of health, chanced to die.

Lady Flamborough, therefore, though of course banished from all tolerable society, still continued to be Lady Flamborough, and to enjoy a handsome jointure. On her total expulsion from the set among whom her marriage had, for a time, given her a place, she descended till she found her level among that, rationally speaking, only disreputable class, made up of those who have lost caste by their own wilful departures from principle, and those who are contemptible enough to be willing to associate with vice, for the love of the *tarnished tinsel* which once was rank; forgetful that titles and honours were first invented as badges of the virtuous or heroic deeds of those on whom they were bestowed; that only as such they have any meaning; and that, when borne by the vicious, they become, in a peculiar degree, objects for the finger of scorn to point at, and seem to claim, as their especial privilege, the contempt and derision of mankind.

[Pg 112]

"'Tis phrase absurd to call a villain great."

Titles are attained for high treason, why should they not be so for every treason against good morals? Are not good morals as essential to the well-being of the community as good Government?

[Pg 113]

Nay, what is Government? Power to enforce moral order. Why then should not a sin against the end be visited as severely as a sin against the means?

Are men, whose vices invade the peace of the domestic hearth, and sunder the sacred ties of life,—or men who court luxury in foreign climes, while evading the payment of their just debts at home; consigning the while industrious tradesmen and their helpless families to ruin;—are men, in short, who are no longer men of honour, to be still misnamed *noble men*? Is it not the natural tendency of such misnomers to bring nobility into contempt? And is not this an injustice to the truly *noble*?

[Pg 114]

Are the vicious to be allowed to sully honours till the honourable cannot wear them?

Nobility would indeed be beautiful were it a guarantee of virtue! titles would indeed be honours, if the men who bore them must be pure! And if the certainty that those titles for ages had existed in that family, were thus an assurance that morality for centuries had not been sinned against in that house, then indeed, would rank be nobility. Let us not be misunderstood: let us not be supposed to mean that men of rank are more likely to offend against the laws of morality than other men; on the contrary, education and circumstances ought to render them less so: we simply assert, that when they do so offend, such offence ought to degrade them from their rank as *noble men*.

[Pg 115]

How glorious would be that land that first enacted such a law! how worthy its monarch of that greatest of his titles, "Defender of the Faith!" For what is this faith? Religion! and the author of Religion has defined it thus:

"True religion and undefiled, before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world."

[Pg 116]

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## CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Dorothea had been so busy all day, changing her lodgings again, that she had hardly had time to ask Sarah a word about the Salters' dinner-party.

On this occasion, however, we must remark, that she had moved to a furnished house, not to a mere lodging; for she was determined to make an exertion, while the Ardens were in Cheltenham, live how she might the rest of the year, having a great horror of living like a poor relation.

[Pg 117]

Most people have a particular objection to seeming to be what they really are.

Indeed Lady Arden had written most kindly to Mrs. Dorothea, inviting her to spend the time they should be at Cheltenham with them. Had the expense of a house or lodging been no object to Aunt Dorothea, she would gladly have availed herself of this invitation for the pleasure of the thing; but the arrangement would have been so very convenient, that her *pride* took the alarm, and would not suffer her to accept the offer. In her father's life time, as a daughter of the then head of the family, she had acquired notions of her own consequence, which became a painful incumbrance from the moment her circumstances underwent that violent revolution to which those of the daughters of the proudest and most ancient families are peculiarly liable.

[Pg 118]

*Pride* in any situation is a moral disease, which it would be highly desirable to see for ever banished from the world! but *pride*, when complicated with poverty, is apt to render the unhappy sufferer not only always very uncomfortable, but often very ridiculous. Added to which, it must ever be impossible for the heart that harbours *pride* to know contentment.

At present, however, Mrs. Dorothea was quite delighted. The house she had taken for six months certain for Lady Arden, though designated by the rural title of Violet Bank, was a splendid mansion. The one she had taken for herself for the same period, was both pretty and agreeably situated; it was accommodated with a cook, or maid of all work, who was taken with it as a part of the furniture. Mrs. Dorothea had also hired a footman for the great occasion, and put him into livery; so that with Sarah, her own maid, she had now, for a single lady, quite a respectable little establishment, and could look forward to returning the evening entertainments, at least of her relations, on something of an independent footing. Dinners of course she could not give, nor need she accept them; she did not care what she eat. She certainly liked the best society, and that she should now have, without laying herself under obligations to any one. For, much as she liked Lady Arden, (one whom no one could help liking, she was so truly amiable,) she could not forget that her ladyship was a stranger in blood, from whom, consequently, an *Arden* could not receive even a courtesy without requital.

[Pg 119]

Mrs. Dorothea was so glad too, as she told Sarah, while she stood in the centre of her new drawing-room, looking round her, to get out of that horrid place where she had been for the last two months, sitting every evening on those tiresome little chairs, for, as Sarah had prophesied, her landlady had never given her the sofa, nor put the drops to the chimney-light, nor even got a key for the chiffonier. Then, the woman of the house could not or would not afford a decent servant, so that the cooking was shocking, and the attendance wretched; and then the oven of the bakehouse next door she found out at last was just on the other side of the one brick thin wall, against which her bed stood, so that she had been nearly baked to death, and had been losing her health without knowing why. To be sure the carpet looked respectable, but then the lodging had no other recommendation, as in addition to its many discomforts, it had proved one way or other very expensive; for mistaking the heat and restlessness she felt at nights for the consequences of the lassitude and want of appetite of which they were in fact the cause; she had got frightened about herself, and had called in doctor after doctor, and taken ever so much medicine in vain, till at last happening to go in next door to correct an error in her baker's bill, in which she had been charged with all the bread supplied to her landlady, she became acquainted with the geography of the premises, and so discovered the whole mystery. Then being without a key to the chiffonier too, made a great difference in the groceries, though having no proof of the fact, it would not do to say so. This might have brought down the lawyers upon her; then indeed would the cup of her afflictions have been full. Poor Aunt Dorothea felt almost restored to the days of her youth by the comparative comforts which now surrounded her. She moved into her regular dining-room when her dinner was ready, and was there decently and respectfully attended by her own footman in livery. There was a sideboard, and her few articles of plate were arranged upon it, and things looked orderly and comfortable; it was enough to give one an appetite, and made her boiled chicken and quarter of a hundred of asparagus seem a dinner for an emperor. Instead of dining in the comfortless scramble she used to do, in her haste to send the tray out of the drawing-room lest some one should come in, she now ate as slowly as possible to prolong the gratifying sense of dignity which accompanied the ceremony.

[Pg 120]

[Pg 121]

[Pg 122]

[Pg 123]

The very next day the Misses Salter had the impudence to call, and the new footman not being in the family secrets, admitted them.

On their entrance Aunt Dorothea looked her astonishment with great dignity.

"What a sweet situation," exclaimed Miss Salter.

"What a charming house," said Miss Grace. Mrs. Dorothea bowed.

"How fortunate we were in finding you at home," said Miss Salter.

"Oh, yes, very fortunate indeed!" added Miss Grace. Mrs. Dorothea bowed again.

"How sorry we were you could not come to us last night," said Miss Salter, "we had such a *select* party, just what you would have liked."

"Yes, just what you would have liked," echoed Miss Grace.

[Pg 124]

"I hope we shall be more fortunate the next time," said Miss Salter. "We shall have a great many of those agreeable *select* parties just now. Our *particular friend*, Lady Flamborough, you see, and our *particular friend*, Lady Whaleworthy, and our *particular friend*, Lady Shawbridge, and all that pleasant set being here just now, naturally induces one to see a great deal of company. Then there are such delightful young men here at present, and that you know always makes parties

pleasant, there's *our friend*, Sir William Orm, *such* an elegant fashionable young man."

"And Sir James Lindsey," observed Miss Grace, "an old baronet, with fifteen thousand a-year."

"Yes," said Miss Salter, "such an agreeable good tempered little man, so affable and unassuming. And there is General Powel too, in short we quite abound in *nice young* men. And I hope," added Miss Salter, with an air of great friendship, "that we shall soon and often have the pleasure of seeing you, Mrs. Arden." [Pg 125]

"You are very obliging," replied Mrs. Dorothea, bowing gravely, "but my arrangements will for some considerable time be controlled entirely by those of my sister, Lady Arden, and her family, with whom I shall consider myself engaged, either at home or abroad, every day during their stay."

"So you expect Lady Arden," said Miss Salter, with well affected surprise. "Dear me, I'm sure we should be most happy to pay attention to any friend of yours."

"You are very obliging," observed Mrs. Dorothea, with if possible increasing stiffness, "but Lady Arden does not mean to extend her acquaintance." [Pg 126]

The discomfited Misses Salter finding lingering and last words useless, at length took their departure.

The Ardens dined on the road, but arrived in time to take tea with Aunt Dorothea. The weather was beautiful; the rural appearance of the little villa, situated among the plantations and pleasure grounds of the public walks, its own miniature lawn and veranda, adorned with flowers and flowering shrubs, and garlanded with roses as if for a festival, the fine trees of the Old-Well-Walk in view, and bands of music, as if hid in every grove, sending forth on each breeze some strain of melody, all seemed delightful and refreshing to people just escaped from the heat and fatigue of London. While the large and joyous looking family party, some seated within the open glass door, some standing in the veranda, some straying on the fresh mown turf of the little lawn, formed a picture of social felicity quite delightful to the usually solitary Aunt Dorothea; to whom the idea of the party being not only her near relatives, but also her guests, was altogether so pleasing that she had not been as happy for many years. To her kind heart must be ascribed the chief of the pleasure she experienced; if, however, there was a slight admixture of gratified vanity we cannot be surprised, when we consider that a pretty comfortable house of her own, in which to receive her friends, was to her so great a novelty. [Pg 127]

[Pg 128]

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## CHAPTER X.

So fond is youth of novelty, that Alfred and his sisters, though fresh from all the gaieties a London season has to offer, were quite impatient, the very morning after their arrival, to visit the public walks, of which they had had peeps the evening before from Aunt Dorothea's veranda. They had been told that about seven was the hour. Accordingly, as it was a fine sunny morning, the girls were all up soon after six. They had been told too, that notwithstanding the hour, it was usual to be extremely fine; but for this their habits of good taste were too inveterate; they equipped themselves therefore in quite close bonnets, and having roused and enlisted the goodnatured Alfred, set off for Mrs. Dorothea's, Lady Arden having by an arrangement of the evening before, committed the young people to the charge of their aunt, knowing that she should be too much fatigued herself after her journey to rise so early. [Pg 129]

Aunt Dorothea was quite ready. She was too happy in feeling herself necessary to her nieces, too happy in having the charge of them, too justly proud of them, proud of their beauty, and all their many attractions and recommendations, to feel anything like laziness, this first morning that she was to show, not only the walks to them, but them to the walks.

Thither then they proceeded immediately, guided through each shady maze, as in the play called *Magic Music*, in which the sounds become louder to denote nearness to the object of pursuit. So did the swelling notes of the band grow on the ear as they approached the immediate spot, which it is fashion's whim to throng as closely as any crowded assembly-room, while all around is comparative solitude. [Pg 130]

Here all-kind Aunt Dorothea's proud anticipations were fully answered by the sensation her nieces produced; every eye was turned towards them, and in ten minutes after their first appearance all the company who sat on the benches on either side the walk had asked each other who they were; the mammas who had daughters, and the *young* ladies who were *not young*, decided that they were not the style of beauty they admired, while the very young girls and all the men, had pronounced them the loveliest creatures they had ever beheld. As for the mothers who had sons, they prudently suspended their judgments till they should hear what fortunes the Miss Ardens were likely to have. [Pg 131]

Our party were joined instantly by Henry Lindsey. He had ascertained their movements from themselves, and quitted town when they did to be in Cheltenham before them. He was at Louisa's side in a moment, and was received with a blush and a smile which, though produced in part at least by gratified vanity, seemed to his generous nature all he could desire of encouragement. He was of course introduced to Aunt Dorothea, who, until she found out that he was a younger

brother, was quite delighted with him.

[Pg 132]

The Arden party now took advantage of vacant seats which presented themselves, and for a time became in their turn spectators of the moving crowd.

Soon after which, announced by noise, and with many coloured streamers flying, the fleet of the Salters, and their *select* friends hove in sight.

There was in the first place Mr. Salter, with a white hat on, which duly set off by contrast, that true secret for producing effect, a countenance, the hue of which we flatter ourselves we need not again describe. Lady Flamborough embellished his arm; her head thrown back, and adorned by a pink crape hat and feathers, her eyes raised, and practising their most becoming roll, her complexion heightened by the heat of the weather and the long walk up through the Sherbourn. Not that her dress was oppressive, on the contrary, it was light enough in all conscience, consisting of the softest India muslin, trimmed with superfine Mechlin lace, and ornamented at the neck, and at the wrists round the top, and round the bottom, down the sleeves, and down the front, with ties, bows, and ends innumerable, of pink ribbon, while a broad long sash of the same encircled the waist, tied behind in dancing-school fashion. The dress was made nearly as low round the bust as a dinner costume, while what shelter there was to compensate for this was derived from the long pendant white gauze-ribbon strings, and deep blond-lace edge of the hat, with merely a slight pink gauze-scarf, scarcely wider or longer than the said strings.

[Pg 133]

The next in the line (as it approached crossing the walk abreast), was Lady Whaleworthy, defying hot weather and sunshine in a crimson velvet pelisse. It was a thing which, as she told her own maid when putting it on, had cost too much money to be ever either out of season or out of fashion: it was only your dabs of things which every body could have that were sure to go out again before you could turn yourself round in them, so that there was no saving in the end. "I always *tells* Sir Matthias that a right good article, cost what it will at the first, is sure to be the cheapest in the long run."

[Pg 134]

Poor Lady Whaleworthy! a crimson-velvet pelisse had been the dream of her youth when she did not think she should ever possess such a treasure! and still such the hold of early impressions in a crimson-velvet pelisse was concentrated her ladyship's notions of the *ne plus ultra* of magnificence. Next came little Sir James, fantastically fine, with a lilac figured silk waistcoat, as many gold chains as a lady, and a glaring brooch, the gift of Miss Grace Salter, and taken for the purpose of being so bestowed from her own dress, and with her own brown hands transferred to the breast of his open-work-fronted and diamond buttoned inner garment; while the little man, during the whole performance of the flattering operation, had laughed almost hysterically.

[Pg 135]

Three titles were very well to muster for a morning walk; so next came the Misses Salter themselves. They never dressed alike, having each their own notion of the colours that became them. In shape, however, both their hats had been made by the same pattern, borrowed for the purpose from Lady Flamborough's. Miss Salter's was of yellow crape, Sir William Orm having been his own jockey at a late race, and rode in a yellow jacket; while Miss Grace's, in compliment to Sir James's waistcoat was lilac; both, of course, flaunted with feathers, blond, and streaming strings, and had artificial flowers stuck in the inside. Nor had such a show of beauty and fashion been a mere lucky hit; the Misses Salter, on quitting Mrs. Dorothea's, had fully weighed the subject, and resolved to show the Ardens, who might else be prejudiced against them, that they were not people to be looked down upon; they had gone to infinite pains in making their arrangements.

[Pg 136]

Alas! little did they think that this very morning was marked in the book of fate to cost them both their lovers: they, too, who had none to spare. But unhappily ladies so situated are so fond of showing off a supposed conquest—so fond of being suspected of being about to be married, that in their haste to be congratulated, they too often cast away all cause for gratulation; and by the noise they raise themselves, put a man on his guard before he is above half caught, whom they might perhaps have secured, had they been satisfied to delay their triumph, and keep him nodding at the home fireside till they had quietly netted him round. We speak of course only of ladies in *distress*, like the Misses Salter. The lovely sisters of Arden, on the contrary, so far from being under the necessity of laying snares for lovers, found them at their feet wherever they went; the only difficulty was to select from among them such as might both please themselves, and come up to their mamma's and brother's ideas of matches suitable to their family consequence. We left our party seated on one of the benches, which, as we have already stated, were ranged on either side this favourite portion of the walk. The eye of Sir James, as he passed with the Salters, was instantly caught by the extreme loveliness of the beautiful sisters. For the poor little man, though he had neither sense nor judgment to direct him in the formation of any thing approaching to an opinion, was not without some of the natural elements of taste, and was especially a great admirer of beauty: it dazzled and delighted him, as new and splendid toys would a child; and it was much that he had been taught to say, like the good child, "I'll only look!" for he would often stand with his hands behind his back, as if the attitude were intended to keep them out of the way of temptation, and to stare at strangers whose appearance happened to strike him, till people would be first offended, and finally guess the truth, that poor Sir James was silly.

[Pg 137]

[Pg 138]

[Pg 139]

On the present occasion, seeing his brother with the party which had drawn his attention, he joined him instantly; and even while speaking to him, as well as for some time after, eagerly passed his eyes again and again along the row of ladies, till they were finally fixed by the peculiar lustre of Louisa's beauty.

Henry now introduced his brother, and the party rose to renew their walk. Sir James attached himself to them entirely, and contrived, too, to make a good position next to Louisa, whose appetite for admiration was so insatiable, that even his was acceptable. While the whole party were so goodnatured, so agreeable, and so much amused; yet so much too well bred to show it in the rude and flagrant manner indulged in by too many towards those labouring under natural infirmities, that poor Sir James was perfectly delighted, and felt as if he was among the most charming, kind, agreeable people in the whole world.

[Pg 140]

The Misses Salter had in the mean time made several attempts to bow to Mrs. Dorothea; but that lady always took care to be so much occupied with other people, as to make it impossible for them to catch her eye. She however noticed their proceedings; and observing that some time after the desertion of Sir James, Sir William Orm arrived and joined them, she laid her plans accordingly. Sir William would not do to introduce to her nieces, but he should nevertheless desert Miss Salter.

[Pg 141]

The walk now began to thin; on which the Arden party, having invited Sir James and Henry Lindsey home with them to breakfast, an invitation very usual on the Cheltenham promenade, took the path which led to their own villa.

[Pg 142]

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## CHAPTER XI.

When breakfast was over, and the gentlemen had taken their departure, Louisa was amazingly laughed at by her sisters about her new lover.

He was mimicked and ridiculed in every possible way; walk, air, manner, voice, modes of expression, ways of looking, &c. &c.; till the girls had perfectly fatigued themselves with laughing.

We have heard it said, that it was a service of danger for any man to become the admirer of one of a large family; for that, let him be ever so successful in talking the lady of his choice into love, she was sure the moment he absented himself to be laughed out of it again by her sisters. It is no wonder, then, that poor Sir James did not escape. Lady Arden, however, and Mrs. Dorothea came from time to time to the rescue of the little baronet's memory.

[Pg 143]

"Heedless creatures!" said Aunt Dorothea, "how little thought you give to the future!"

"I only hope he may be serious, and really propose for Louisa," said Lady Arden; "and if he should, I trust she will have the sense to pause before she rejects so advantageous an offer."

"But then, mamma, is he not a fool?" asked Louisa.

"Why no, my dear, not exactly that. Indeed, I know a great many ill-tempered, reserved sort of men, without a grain more sense, who pass for Solomons! He is a vain little man, certainly; and perhaps too goodnatured. But then, only consider what a vastly *eligible* establishment it would be: you would have rank yourself, and be at once restored to the wealth and station lost to you all by the death of your father; and what, my dear, is still more important, you would be rescued *in time* from the comparative poverty, and consequent obscurity into which you must ultimately sink, if you survive me unmarried."

[Pg 144]

What dilemmas so humiliating as those to which *Pride* reduces its votaries!

Lady Arden, by nature amiable, affectionate, and high-minded; but by education tainted with false pride, thus stooped to the very depth of meanness, unconscious of degradation; and sacrificed her purest feelings to the supposed necessity of securing to her daughters that artificial station in life which a system of unjust monopoly had for a time given them, and of which the same system had again deprived them.

[Pg 145]

Artificial positions in society, like unnatural attitudes of the body, cannot be long persisted in without pain and weariness. Where is the dignity of human nature? Forgotten! for were it remembered, the beggar, when educated, might share it with us; and at this false pride takes alarm! And, therefore, do we leave man out of the account, and worship idols of silver and idols of gold, and titles made of the breath of our own lips.

"From *Pride* our very reasoning springs."

Louisa had nothing to say against such unanswerable arguments as those Lady Arden had used; but she thought of Henry Lindsey, and could not help wishing that he had been the elder brother, or, at least, that the fortune had been divided: even seven thousand five hundred with him would have been better, she could not help thinking, than the whole fifteen thousand with Sir James.

[Pg 146]

"It is always desirable," continued Lady Arden, "that a girl should marry in the same station as her father; but it is not always practicable, particularly if she is a daughter of the elder branch; for no family can have more than one elder son, while many may have half a dozen daughters, no one of whom ought, in common prudence, to marry a younger brother!!"

"Nay," said Alfred, "is not this sufficient to show how absurdly society is constituted? What is to

[Pg 147]

become, then, of five out of every six daughters, and all the younger sons in the world? What is to become of my hapless self, for instance?"

"We must hope, my dear, that you may be fortunate, and meet with an heiress."

"But consider, ma'am, how few heiresses there are. Parliament ought to make a new batch every session. It would, however, be of no use to me if they did," he added, despondingly, "for heiresses, of course, consider themselves entitled to marry, not only elder sons, but noblemen. I have often thought what is to become of me, if I should ever have the misfortune to fall in love."

"You did, I think, fall half in love one evening in town," said Jane.

[Pg 148]

"And, by-the-by," observed Lady Arden, "Lady Caroline Montague is an heiress."

Alfred coloured, and rising, sauntered towards a window as he replied, "And, therefore, very unlikely to be allowed to cast away a thought on an unfor—" Here he broke off, and after gazing for a time from the window, exclaimed, "That was certainly she—I had but a momentary view, but I am quite sure it was she I saw pluck a rose in that next garden, and run into the house again. Can they be living in the adjoining villa to us?"

The grass gardens or little lawns of these twin villas were separated only by wire palings, along which sweet briar and flowering shrubs were trained.

[Pg 149]

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## CHAPTER XII.

The family party, with the addition of Lord Darlingford, Sir James Lindsey, and his brother, were assembled round the luncheon-table at Lady Arden's.

Henry Lindsey had been amazingly piqued that morning by Louisa's reception of Sir James. The little baronet was now seated next to her, and making, if possible, a greater fool of himself than usual; while, in consequence of the lesson she had received, she was yielding him her attention with marked complacency. Henry sat opposite, and trembled with a mingling of agitation and indignation. He thought he could already foresee that he was to be deliberately immolated to avarice; yet, so thoroughly was he the slave of Louisa's beauty and his own passion, that no worthlessness on her part could have set him free. He felt, that were she already the wife of his brother, her image might drive him mad, but that he could not banish it from his imagination.

[Pg 150]

The hardship of Henry Lindsey's case as a younger brother was conspicuous, and displayed in a striking manner the evils consequent upon sacrificing justice to *pride*.

From a boy he had felt much on this subject; but being of a generous, warm-hearted, liberal nature, he did not long brood over his own individual wrongs; his mind, however, following the impulse thus received, though in the first instance from a selfish feeling, gave itself to the contemplation and discussion of natural rights generally, till it became enamoured of abstract justice, and learned to apply its searching test to every subject, especially the all absorbing topic of the day—Political Economy; while, with his characteristic enthusiasm, despising the sophisms of expediency, he embraced, without perhaps sufficient caution, theories which soon caused him to be considered by his friends a reformer, by his enemies almost a revolutionist, and by himself the warm advocate of the rights, not of younger brothers only, but of those whom he emphatically termed the step-children of the laws—*The People*.

[Pg 151]

Such were at all times his opinions, while the irritable state of his mind, at the moment of which we are speaking, added asperity to his manner of expressing himself, and caused him, in answer to some jesting remark of Alfred's on the old topic of younger brothers, to give vent to his feelings in a long, and almost angry political discussion. He objected, he said, to the law of primogeniture on the ground of its being a wretched system of monopoly, which placed in the hands of a simple individual what, if divided, would suffice to restore thousands of his degraded and oppressed fellow-creatures to the rank of humanity. The times were gone by when communities, formed for the general weal, would wilfully sacrifice prosperity to *pride*, and not only parcel out the whole land to, comparatively speaking, a few families, but the succession to those lands being limited to the elder branches, allow all place, preferment, and emolument, to be confined to the younger sons of the same families, because the land had given them influence; and the mass of the people to be thus reduced to do the work of the ass and the mule, and because they cannot also eat their food, the grass and the thistle, be often in danger of starvation.

[Pg 152]

[Pg 153]

The old feudal system itself was better than this: the ancient baron was at least bound to feed not only his relations but his vassals, and he did so in his own hall, at his own table. While, now-a-days, a man, as soon as his father's funeral is over, turns his brothers and sisters out of doors, to exist as they may, on a pitiful portion, the principal of which is in general infinitely less than one year's income of the property, on the scale of which they have been accustomed to live in their father's time; while the new master permits his servants to collect their wages by showing the empty baronial hall to strangers at so much per head, by which creditable means he is himself enabled to reserve all his rents to stake at hazard in London, or at *rouge et noir* in Paris. When parliament is sitting, he must of course attend, to vote against any infringement on his monopoly, which the enlightened spirit of the times may chance to propose. Thanks, however, to the Reform

[Pg 154]

Bill, the holders of the monopolies are no longer our sole law-givers; we have now some *chance* of justice *one time or another*.

"Besides," he added, "to return to the ancient baron, he was not only bound to feed his retainers, but in time of war to provide the government with a certain number of them, fitly clothed and armed; which was virtually bearing the burdens of the state. The baron was, in point of fact, but the trustee to a certain property, which property was to feed a certain number of the population, and to contribute its due proportion to the defence of the community. Instead of this, when the feudal system becomes dangerous to government the barons are forbidden to arm, and exonerated from feeding their retainers; yet, the trust-property left in their hands for *pocket-money*, while their late followers are not only turned out on the wide world to starve, but the taxes necessary to maintain the army which the barons are forbid to provide, are levied on the *bare palms* of the *hands* of the thus turned out and starving vassals; and not satisfied with this injustice, those who thus keep possession of the trust-lands, have arrived at literally billeting their younger sons on those said vassals, thus turned out and starving." [Pg 155]

"Explain! explain!" cried Lord Darlingford, "How can you make that out?"

"Are not," replied Henry, "the salaries and pensions of all the posts and sinecures they hold paid by means of taxes, a great proportion of which are levied on industry? Is this as it should be? If the *pride* of the great demand that their properties shall be inherited by their elder sons, and the offspring of that *pride*—if *false necessity*, require that places and sinecures be provided for their younger sons, should not the *rich co-operate* in raising a fund for the payment of the salaries of such, and not grind their thousands by pittances from the *real necessities* of the *poor*?" [Pg 157]

"What then is your panacea for so many crying ills?" asked Lord Darlingford, "Do you call on us to render up our trusts and proclaim an Agrarian law?"

"No; those whose motives are honest dare not go such lengths. This would be to resolve society into its mere elements, to open the flood-gates of anarchy, and awake the savage spirit of wanton plunder. Many large landed properties too have been purchased with the wages of industry; so that besides the horrible convulsions attendant upon the dissolution of the social system, there would be no such thing as drawing the line; to avoid, therefore, worse evils, I would allow the 'frightful disparities,' as an able writer of the day terms them, to exist till industry, unchecked, unladen, could work out for itself a gradual emancipation from the bondage of want. But I would not add to evils I dare not too suddenly remedy! I would not require the children of Israel to make bricks without straw! I would not lay the burdens of the state on shoulders already weighed down by nature's demand for daily bread. I would exempt from the whole weight of taxation the labourer, whether of brain or limb; he has no stake in the stability of the state; he can carry his head or his hand wherever he goes. He who keeps back the hire of the labourer is denounced in holy writ: I would not be worse than such, and rob the labourer of his hire. I would, therefore, repeal every tax *direct* and *indirect*, which now exists, and substitute for *all* a graduated property-tax, on *independent property only*, trifling in amount, say one per cent., where the property was small; and doubling, trebling, nay, quadrupling, if necessary, as it rises. What, if a man with thirty thousand per annum, pay twenty thousand, can he not live on ten? or if the man with two hundred thousand per annum, pay one hundred and fifty thousand, can he not live on fifty? This, some people are not ashamed to answer me would be robbing the rich; while they talk as loudly as vaguely of the sacredness of property and vested rights. But I would answer such, that starvation in the midst of plenty, on the plea of the sacredness of justice, is a practical blasphemy! What, therefore, relief from taxation did not effect for the absolutely destitute, I would complete by an amended system of poor-laws;—such assessments, however, to be levied on independent property only." [Pg 158]

"Poor-laws are bad things," interrupted Sir James, who having finished his luncheon, was now lolling on a sofa, "they make the common people so lazy." [Pg 159]

"As long as industry is not taxed in support of idleness," answered Henry, "the lazy rich man is entitled to no commiseration for being compelled to assist his brother, the lazy poor man! Poor-laws," he added, turning to Lord Darlingford, "as far at least as food goes, I consider the most sacred of vested rights. God said, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.'"

"But you allow," said his lordship, "that many of the great landed properties you would tax thus heavily are purchased with the produce of the owner's own exertions; state your reasons for giving immunity to present industry and not to past?" [Pg 160]

"Because," replied Henry, "when once a man has realized property he has acquired a stake in the country, a stake in the stability of the government; his property requires protection, whether from the foreign enemy or the home depredator; and, therefore, he should pay for such protection. If a man desires a wall round his garden, who pays for building the wall? The man who owns the garden! If a man wishes to insure his premises against fire, who pays the insurance? The man whose premises are guaranteed. Would either of these persons dream of calling a parish meeting to demand of their neighbours as a right, that they should subscribe towards the expense so incurred; nay, that every pauper subsisting on some shilling or two per week, should be compelled to pay two-pence for his penny loaf until the sum was made up; yet, such is the spirit of every tax, direct or indirect, levied on any thing but independent property. The machinery of government is the garden-wall of the landed interest, the insurance office of [Pg 161]

the fund-holder. Any tax, therefore, levied on those who have neither land nor money is a crying injustice, except, indeed," he added with bitter irony, "we admit of a small pole-tax to keep down burking. It is, no doubt, the houseless, nameless, friendless wretch, who has no one to ask what is become of him; the poor creature, who has nothing to be protected but the limbs and sinews he was born with, who runs the greatest risk of contributing these to the promotion of science."

[Pg 163]

"But," observed Lord Darlingford, "it is not the very destitute who pay taxes."

"I beg your pardon," said Henry, "indirect ones they do. If the beggar in the street succeeds in exciting the compassion of the passenger, and receives one penny, ere he can appease his hunger with a mouthful of bread, do not the corn laws, by doubling the price of the loaf, exact from him one half of the penny so obtained? And is not his mite, thus cast into the treasury, like that of the poor widow in the Gospel, taken from his *want*; and, therefore, more than all they (*the rich*) did cast in of their abundance?"

"Oh, it is all but too true!" said Lady Arden, feelingly. "I do think your scheme of taxation would be but justice. Willoughby would certainly have a great deal to pay; but he can surely afford it better than poor creatures who have nothing but what they earn, or what they beg. I see the subject now in quite a new light. I have always been in the habit of thinking people *poor* who had but *one* or *two* thousands a-year; and I never took the trouble of considering that there was any difference between hundreds a-year and nothing."

[Pg 164]

"How would you apportion this property-tax of yours?" asked Lord Darlingford; "and how ensure its being sufficient for the exigencies of the state?"

"On a graduated scale, as I have already said," replied Henry, "from justice to individuals: let those who have the largest property to ensure, pay, as at all other insurance offices, the most; but, as to details and calculations, I leave those to Mr. Hume, or some of the multiplication table people; I only advocate the principle. Indeed, one of the great recommendations of this plan is, that the principle once established, the work is done: when those who tie up the burdens have to carry them, they may be trusted to find scales of sufficient nicety in which to weigh them: we need, in that case, no longer call for estimates, or petition against sinecures; nay, we may give the very voting of the subsidies to the *Lords* themselves!—many of whom, I make no doubt, would forthwith become immortalised by the economical or '*twopenny halfpenny*' ingenuity, developed in the devising of future budgets. '*Twopence halfpenny*,' I would have the noble lords to know, though no object to them, is a sum which many of their destitute fellow-creatures would, at this moment, receive with joy of heart! Then, remember, in further recommendation of this scheme, the millions a-year of unprofitable expense that would be saved to the nation, by having but one instead of innumerable taxes to levy."

[Pg 165]

[Pg 166]

"I don't think," said Sir James, looking as if he had made a discovery, "that the people with large fortunes will like this law of yours, Henry."

"Many people, too," replied Henry, contemptuously, "don't like paying their Christmas bills."

Alfred, who had been looking over a morning paper near a window, and from time to time lending a share of his attention to the disputants, now joined them.

"We cannot, I think," he said, "blame any particular government, or set of men, for the ills of which you complain. The fault is in human nature; and the remedy, if there be one, is only to be found in laying step by step the wisest general restrictions we can on individual selfishness. The advance of civilization has already placed a salutary check on plunder by force; it remains for the march of intellect to discover one for plunder by stratagem. But we must be cautious; in desiring the higher steps of the ladder of wisdom and virtue, we must not undervalue those we have attained, and in our headlong haste, stumble; and, like our neighbours of the continent, fall back on the frightful abyss of anarchy that lays below! 'Tis well to rise in excellence; I hate the cant of dreading all chance: but, to keep to the simile of the ladder, let us take care that the lifting foot be firmly placed on the step above, ere the standing one be removed from the step below."

[Pg 167]

"Is there not some danger," said Lord Darlingford, "of a property-tax sending capital out of the kingdom?"

[Pg 168]

"It must be very easy," replied Henry, "for the inventors of all sorts of protecting duties to devise a means of meeting that difficulty, by some ingeniously arranged tax on the exportation of property, whether income or capital, with a tremendously deterring fine on any attempt at imposition; and minor exactments, to hunt evasion through all its windings. There might, also," he added, "be an alien tax, to prevent the foreign artizan from sharing the immunity from taxation, purchased by our own rich for our own poor."

"Is there not some danger," said Lady Arden, "that the deteriorated incomes of the great, by obliging them to lessen their establishments and expenditure, would throw many people out of employment, and so increase the numbers of the poor?"

[Pg 169]

"I should think not," answered Henry; "recollect there would be the same property in the kingdom, only in more general and more equal circulation. The servants dismissed, and the luxuries foregone by the few, would in all probability be more than compensated by the increased establishments and more numerous comforts of the many, though each only in a small degree. The standard of splendour might be lowered, but that of comfort would be raised. The change, too, is likely to be in favour of home productions: the overflow of inordinate wealth, the *too much*



of the few, is frequently squandered on luxuries obtained from abroad; while the fertilizing sufficiency, the *enough* of the many, would probably be expended on comforts produced at home. [Pg 170]

"I do not, however," he added, "mean to assume the character of a prophet, or even to argue the point of future consequences; I take higher ground, and end every such discussion with the same appeal to duty:

"Let each generation do what is clearly justice in their own day, and leave the future to the All-wise Disposer of events.

"If there were, indeed, a theory through the mazes of which moral rectitude knew no path, we might be excusable in taking calculation for our guide; but when our road lies before us, indicated by duty's steadily pointing finger, we are not entitled to balance ere we proceed, even though it should be where four frequented highways meet." [Pg 171]

Mrs. Dorothea, the sisters, and Sir James, had got tired of politics, and wandered into the garden. Henry, perceiving that Sir James was still in attendance on Louisa, became impatient, broke off the conversation abruptly, and following them, joined her, saying, "Lord Darlingford is too prudent a politician for me. I hate prudence and calculation, and worldly mindedness," he added, with impetuosity, and a provoked and mortified tone of voice, which Louisa was at no loss to comprehend. "The present artificial state of society," he proceeded, "has banished into the poet's dream every thing worth living for!—there alone all things deserving the ambition of an intellectual being now hold their unreal existence! Beauty has become a snare—feeling a folly, or a curse!—love a farce, and lovely woman, nature's most cunning workmanship, a *toy*, a *trinket*, which the rich man may draw out his purse and purchase!!!—heart and all!" he subjoined, in an under and somewhat softened voice, for Louisa had looked round, and their eyes had met for a moment. "Is it so?" he continued; "or are the beautiful looking deceptions now made to suit the *market* for which they are intended, *without hearts*?" [Pg 172]

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## CHAPTER XIII.

Whether Alfred's study was pamphlet, newspaper, or magazine, he could never contrive to discern the print by any light but that of the window, or rather glass door, at which we left him standing on the morning on which he first discerned the fleeting semblance of a fair vision in the adjoining garden. The glass door was generally half open, a muslin blind drawn half down across it, and the eyes of the student, like those of the naughty child in the pictures of bold Harry, just visible over the top of his book. [Pg 174]

On such occasions one of his sisters would often glide behind him, and startling him with a loud burlesque sigh, exclaim, "She is not there to-day." "Nonsense!" Alfred would say, rising. "This is a very well written thing," he added one morning, throwing his book on a table.

"What is it about, Alfred?" asked Madeline archly. He took up the book again to examine it before he could answer the question; "I declare he can't tell," she cried, "without looking at the top of the page;" a general burst of laughter followed, from which Alfred escaped into the garden. He had long since made it his business to ascertain that Lady Palliser and her daughter inhabited the next villa; but few, very few indeed, and "far between," had been the glimpses of his beauteous enslaver which his late studious habits and love of good light had procured for him. [Pg 175]

Lady Caroline appeared to be conscious that the garden was exposed to the view of their neighbours, and was therefore timid about entering it; or, when she did so, as on the first occasion noticed, it was only to pluck a flower, for she seemed fearful of remaining in it for a moment. This morning, however, both mother and daughter had appeared on the lawn and with bonnets on, which, combined with the early hour, had caused Alfred to suspect them of an intention of visiting the walks; and his consequent anticipations of a possible meeting, had, we must confess, made him rather absent.

He now called in at the window to his sisters to know if they were not yet ready, assuring them that the band had played several tunes, and that they would be late. [Pg 176]

"Don't you know that the Duke of Gloucester has arrived?" he continued, "did you not hear the joy bells yesterday evening? He is so punctual to seven, that the fashionables are always early when he is here."

This remonstrance had the desired effect; final arrangements were quickly completed and the party set forth.

On entering the Montpelier walk, Alfred beheld, quite near and coming towards them, Lady Palliser and her daughter, in company with the duke, and attended by two or three of his grace's aides-de-camp.

Alfred saw that Lady Caroline perceived and recognised him, for she coloured instantly, but looked as if she did not know whether she ought to acknowledge him or not; while he was so much startled and confounded, that he had not presence of mind to look for a recognition. Lady Palliser happened to be conversing with his grace, and did not see him. He passed, therefore, unacknowledged by either lady. [Pg 177]

The next turn, the next and the next again, he was determined to manage matters better, and accordingly kept a regular look out for the duke's party, but they were nowhere to be seen; it was evident they had been going off the walk at the time he met them.

How dull the whole gay scene became the moment this conviction reached him! How irksome the frivolity of every body's manner; while all the world, seeming to have made the discovery simultaneously with himself, kept telling each other as they passed that the duke was gone, just as if it was done on purpose to torment him.

[Pg 178]

In vain did Miss Salter, every time he encountered the party, address Lady Flamborough by her title, in an unnecessarily loud tone, to endeavour to draw his attention by showing him what exalted company she was in. Every effort was thrown away upon him, as well as all the extra finery sported this day on purpose for the duke. Little did his grace think how many husbands and fathers he had caused to grumble. As for poor Lady Whaleworthy, in her loyal zeal to make herself fit company for royalty, she actually crowned herself with the gold tissue turban which she wore at Mr. Salter's dinner; so that with this and her everlasting crimson velvet pelisse, to which she had added a gold waist-band for the occasion, she was altogether as fine as the hammer cloth of a lord mayor's coach.

[Pg 179]

Lady Flamborough trusted more to her natural attractions; these she displayed for the great occasion with a liberality which certainly did succeed in calling forth a remark from his grace, though by no means a complimentary one.

The new bonnets sported this morning would require the calculating boy to count them; and as for shoes, many a simple-hearted girl fresh from the country, submitted to hours of actual torture, in order that the Duke of Gloucester might go back to London convinced that she had very small feet.

[Pg 180]

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## CHAPTER XIV.

The next morning Alfred was on his guard, and watched the first approaches of the duke's party with a palpitating heart.

But, alas! Lady Palliser, as before, was occupied and saw him not; while, what was much worse, it was evident that Lady Caroline did see him at a distance, and from that moment kept her eyes fixed on the ground. They passed each other, and he could discern the glow of consciousness steal over her cheek as they did so. Again and again they passed—still without recognition; till at length he scarcely ventured to look that way. Lord Darlingford now appeared. He attached himself to Lady Arden's party—Jane in particular. After a turn or two, he apologised for quitting them, saying he must go and speak to Lady Palliser. Alfred, forming a sudden and desperate resolve, at which he often afterwards looked back with astonishment, took his lordship's arm, and accompanied him. The duke had just quitted the walk, and Lady Palliser, quite *désœuvrée*, happened at the moment to be in what she called a humour for being spoken to. She received, therefore, not only Lord Darlingford but Alfred with the utmost graciousness. Caroline, after a timid glance at her mother's countenance, looked round and recognised our hero with a smile that seemed to open to him in an instant the gates of Paradise. Nay, the Montpelier walk itself became, as by a sudden revelation, the very garden of Eden to his delighted eyes. He was walking next to Caroline—he did not know how he had got there! He was speaking to her—he did not know what he was saying! Her countenance was turned towards him to reply, while the close bonnet which, while it was so turned, hid its loveliness from every eye. It was a slight summer one of simple snowy sarcenet, and though it warded off the glare of the out-door sun-beam, it admitted through its half transparent texture a heavenly kind of light, which at once accurately defined, and seemed a fitting shrine for the perfectly angelic features around which it dwelt: the pure lively red of the lovely moving lip, where all else was so white; the smile of enchantment, exposing to view the pearly teeth; the delicately pencilled brow; the large dark eyes, which yet were so soft, so modestly raised, so meek in their expression, that their very lustre seemed that of compassion's tear ere it o'erflows the lid! Yet did their mild beams make such an unmerciful jumble of all Alfred's ideas, that he was quite sure he must be talking nonsense. But there was no help for it; if he spoke not, he saw but the fluted outside of the white sarcenet bonnet; it was necessary to make ceaseless appeals to Caroline's attention, or the graceful head would not be turned towards him; the lovely eyes would not be raised to his, the beauteous lips, fresh as rose leaves moist with morning dew, would not be parted in reply; to purchase delights such as these he was compelled to risk his reputation as a sage, and go on without an effort to think. At length, however he came to an unlucky pause, and instead of jumping over it, unfortunately began to weigh what subject he should next propound. But, alas! the precious moments flew past in rapid succession, and, one after another, became absorbed in the gulph of eternity, while our poor hero was still at a stand.

[Pg 181]

[Pg 182]

[Pg 183]

[Pg 184]

And now strange uneasy sensations began to blend with the dream-like felicity he had hitherto enjoyed, though he was not yet awake to the cause, which was simply this: the band was playing that well known note of dismissal—the national anthem—and anticipations of approaching separation began to steal over his senses. To his surprise and infinite delight, however, Lady Palliser suddenly asked Lord Darlingford and himself, with the prettiest and most petitioning manner possible, to go home with her party to breakfast. We need scarcely say that Alfred

[Pg 185]

consented; so did Lord Darlingford, though not quite so willingly, for he had intended to return to Lady Arden's party.

After this morning, Alfred not only joined his new friends whenever they appeared, but became in a short time almost a daily visitor at Jessamine bower; and apparently with the entire approbation of Lady Palliser. Indeed, it was in general some message or some commission of her ladyship's, or some allusion to the morrow made at parting, almost amounting to an appointment, which furnished him with an excuse for calling. He, poor fellow, was flattered, delighted, filled with hope and joy! But, alas! he was not sufficiently acquainted with the character of Lady Palliser to understand his own position. Her ladyship was a being without affections and without occupation; who in her intercourse with others, and from total heartlessness, cared not whose best feelings were the springs of the puppet-show, so the movements of the puppets amused her—and he happened to be the whim of the hour;—to order him about, to see him perfectly at her disposal, chanced to be what, just then, afforded a species of excitement to her restless idleness and morbid selfishness.

[Pg 186]

[Pg 187]

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## CHAPTER XV.

Meanwhile much of Caroline's excessive reserve, or rather fearfulness of manner wore off. In her mother's immediate presence indeed she was ever the same; but if Lady Palliser quitted the room for a moment, or was occupied conversing with some other visitor, Caroline's countenance would brighten, and her manner become comparatively easy and happy. Fully, however, to comprehend our heroine, it will be necessary to cast a retrospective glance over the manner of her education.

[Pg 188]

The most painful silence of the heart and all its best affections had from infancy been habitual to Caroline. She was an only child, and had no recollection of her father; while her mother's strange, unfeeling character, had made her from the very first shrink within herself. When arrived at an age at which young people, not self-opinionated, naturally wish to ask those older than themselves what they ought to do on various little occasions, which seem to them important from their novelty, poor Caroline would sometimes, in what she deemed a case of urgency, make a great effort and apply to her mother, on which Lady Palliser would treat her simplicity as the best of good jokes, laugh to excess, then rally her for blushing, and next perhaps for shedding tears; and, finally, either leave her question without reply, or give one turning the subject into absolute ridicule; till at last Caroline learned to feel a terror surpassing description of having any one thought, feeling, or opinion even guessed at by her mother. Yet her mother was her only companion. There was also a strange inconsistency in the character and conduct of Lady Palliser; for while she never condescended to advise, she was tyrannical in her commands, exacting implicit, unquestioned, instantaneous obedience to every whim.

[Pg 189]

Either there was something in the thorough kindness of Alfred's disposition which appeared in his manner, and secretly won the confidence of our heroine; or fate had ordained that they were to love each other. Whatever the cause, the consequence was, that Caroline, after the intimacy we have described had subsisted for some weeks, no longer felt alone in the world—she was no longer without thoughts that gave her pleasure; while those thoughts, though for their ostensible object they had a walk, a song, a book, or a flower, were always associated with the idea of Alfred—of something that he had said—or some little kind service he had performed—or, perhaps, some chance encounter of his eye—or the consciousness of his fixed gaze, felt without daring to look up, and which, though it had produced strange confusion of ideas at the time, was remembered with delight. Neither was she any longer without hope, though but a hope that they might meet on the walks, or that he might come in about something she had heard her mother mention to him.

[Pg 190]

It may be asked why should Caroline not always have had the hopes with which most young people enter life; merely because the buoyancy of youth had been pressed down, and the elasticity of its spirits destroyed, by the unnatural restraint under which every thought and feeling had been held during the period that her earliest affections had, as is generally the case, endeavoured to fix themselves on her parent.

[Pg 191]

As for Alfred, he had misgivings certainly, respecting his being a younger brother, and his consequent want of fortune. At the same time, when he felt that he was justified in harbouring the restless, delightful hope, that he was already not quite indifferent to Caroline, and that he received such decided encouragement as he did from her mother, what could he think, but that he was the most fortunate fellow in existence, and that he had met with the most generous, liberal minded, delightful people in the whole world!

[Pg 192]

Sometimes, indeed, he would take a fastidious fit, and murmur a little in his heart against fate, for compelling him to be the one to receive, and denying him the pride and pleasure of bestowing; but so absorbing was his passion for Caroline, that he soon closed his eyes against this objection, almost as absolutely as he would have done against the contrary had it existed. He was incapable, in short, at the time, of weighing any subject deliberately: a look, a smile, or the unbidden brightening of Caroline's countenance when they met, would have been sufficient to have upset the firmest resolves, had he even been visited by a lucid interval in which to have formed them; but on the contrary, from the first morning he had been so unexpectedly invited home by Lady Palliser, his head had become giddy with rapture; the pulsations of his heart had

[Pg 193]

never settled down to their steady original pace, nor had any one thought or feeling ever once been summoned before the bar of reason. That it must be a fairy tale—a dream—too much happiness to be true, would sometimes cross his imagination for a moment, and strike his heart with a sort of panic; but such thoughts not being agreeable enough to meet with a welcome within, were therefore quickly dismissed.

Whenever he was neither at Lady Palliser's nor at his old post at the window, he was wandering in some unfrequented walk, or reclining listlessly on a remote sofa in a deep reverie, calling to mind looks, smiles, or half uttered replies, from which, while they said nothing, every thing might be inferred.

[Pg 194]

He studied and learned to comprehend as a language hitherto unknown, the timid, shrinking, as yet undeveloped character of Caroline. To him her very silence now conveyed more than the eloquence of others; and however long he watched the downcast lid, if it was raised at last but for a second, he was amply rewarded.

And when he repaired to Jessamine Bower, to pay his now daily morning visit, and on entering addressed Lady Palliser first, as he made a point of doing, he literally trembled with concealed emotion as he noted the slight tinge, faint as the reflection from a rose leaf, steal over Caroline's delicate cheek, while she continued to bend over her employment, whatever it might be, and acting her part unnecessarily well, endeavoured to betray no consciousness of his presence, till her attention was absolutely claimed by some such formal address as—

[Pg 195]

"How is Lady Caroline this morning?" Formal as were the words, the tone of the voice was sufficient. The faint tinge would increase to a deep blush, ere the equally formed reply was articulated. On many occasions, Alfred would continue to converse with Lady Palliser, or perform any of her frivolous and whimsical commands, and nothing more apparently would pass between the young people; yet would he, the while, trace in slight variations of countenance, imperceptible to any other eye, all that Caroline thought or felt with regard to what was said. Sometimes Lady Palliser herself would suddenly fling down her netting or knotting, or whatever nonsense she was about, with an expression of disgust, declare she was sick of it, and ordering Alfred to look for her pet book of Italian Trios, and Caroline to put away her drawing and join them, seat herself at the instrument.

[Pg 196]

This to Caroline and Alfred was a wonderful improvement of position. Standing together behind Lady Palliser's chair, their voices united in the thrilling harmonies of the music, and sometimes in the utterance of words expressive of thoughts, which else one at least of the voices had never dared to pronounce. On one of these favourable occasions a circumstance occurred, trivial in the extreme, yet which forwarded Alfred's cause amazingly, and indeed conveyed to both a tacit conviction of each other's attachment.

[Pg 197]

A hand of each while they sang rested on the back of Lady Palliser's chair, and after a simultaneous attempt to turn over the leaf of the music-book, accidentally came in contact as they returned to their former position. It had been long ere a modest younger brother, like our poor hero, had found courage to possess himself by any direct means of the fair, soft, taper fingered, rosy palmed, little hand, of the great heiress, the beautiful Lady Caroline Montague; but an occasion like this was not to be resisted: Alfred's trembling fingers closed upon the fond treasure; while a hasty but faint effort of Caroline's to withdraw it, was met by a beseeching look that seemed to have the desired effect; for, though covered with blushes, she did not immediately succeed in disengaging the hand, while the little scene was at the moment supplied by the duet with appropriate words.

[Pg 198]



Langu il mio co-re per te d'a-mo-re.

Sang Alfred, while Caroline in faltering notes replied



Non so re-sis-te-re.

When our hero had taken his departure Caroline hastened to her own apartment. She felt unfit for any society, particularly her mother's.

Her pure unpractised delicacy of mind caused her to look back on the incident which had just passed as an event of the utmost importance; as, in short, not only a proposal, but also an acceptance. Nay, had she wished it, she would no longer have thought herself at liberty to retract; for she knew that she would not have allowed a man who was indifferent to her to have retained her hand in his for a single second. That she had permitted Alfred then to do so, she felt amounted to a confession of preference! Deep was the blush which accompanied this thought.

[Pg 199]

At other times Lady Palliser would be extravagantly late in the morning; and, if consequently not in the drawing-room when our hero called, she would send word that Mr. Arden was not to go away till she came down; and then so whimsical were all her movements, not perhaps make her appearance for an hour, or possibly two. Those were the occasions on which Alfred best succeeded in drawing Caroline into easy and familiar conversation, and thus inducing in her a feeling of confidence towards himself, which a young creature who had been blessed with any friend in her own family, would not have thought of mingling with her love for a lover: but the affection poor Caroline was beginning to feel towards Alfred was not only her *First Love*, but it was also the first friendship her heart had ever been encouraged to know. Thus it was, that to a being hitherto so totally alone in the world, he became in so short a time every thing. While the idea, however vaguely entertained, of being at some period of the future of existence protected by his affection from every harshness—sheltered by his tenderness from every sorrow, had almost unconsciously become the hope, the home, the resting place of all her anticipations.

[Pg 200]

[Pg 201]

[Pg 202]

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"But how are you to ask us to the wedding, Alfred, considering we don't even visit?" said Louisa one morning to her brother, who stood as usual at the window, but now without even the pretext of a book.

"Nonsense, Louisa!" he replied. "Wedding, indeed! I wish it were come to that! and it would be easy to arrange the visiting. By-the-by, ma'am," he added, turning to his mother, "independent of Louisa's jesting, I wish we did visit."

[Pg 203]

"So do I, my dear," replied Lady Arden, "but Lady Palliser, of the two, was here rather before I was; besides she is a person of the highest rank, so that I think the first advances ought to come from her. They say too, her ladyship is going to give a great fancy ball, and it would look as if I wanted to have the girls asked. However, I should suppose we must visit soon, one way or other; for Louisa's jesting as you call it, appears to me to go on in as serious a manner as you could desire."

"Oh—I—a—don't know, ma'am," said Alfred, colouring, and pulling off and on an unfortunate glove, which seemed destined to be martyred in the cause.

"Why certainly," persisted Lady Arden, "neither Lady Caroline, nor her mother for her, would be justified in receiving either your public attentions or your daily visits in the manner they do, if they meant to make the only objection which could be made to you—your being a younger son."

[Pg 204]

"Well—I hope you may be right, ma'am;" said Alfred, laughing, and escaping into the garden to hide his confusion.

"He will be a fortunate young man if he gets Lady Caroline Montague," said Aunt Dorothea.

"Not more fortunate than he deserves, Mrs. Dorothea," replied Lady Arden, "for he is the best creature in the world, as well as the handsomest and the most agreeable."

"No one can be more sensible of my nephew's merits than I am," said Mrs. Dorothea; "but I still maintain that few, even of the few who deserve as well, are as fortunate. Lady Caroline Montague, I understand, inherits the whole of the family estates, and her son, should she have one, will I suppose have the title."

[Pg 205]

"Why, no doubt she could command any match," replied Lady Arden; "'tis however a most fortunate circumstance that Lady Palliser has the good sense to see the advantage of her daughter marrying so thoroughly amiable a young man, who will make her so truly happy."

"Talking of happiness," said Mrs. Dorothea, "I hope poor Jane may be happy with Lord Darlingford."

"I trust she will," replied Lady Arden, with a half suppressed sigh; "and in point both of rank and fortune you know it is a most desirable match."

"No doubt of it," rejoined Mrs. Dorothea, "and people are very foolish who neglect such serious considerations, and allow their time to glide by them. Were I, at this moment, as I might have been but for my own folly, Countess Dowager of Ravenscroft;" and here Mrs. Dorothea drew up her head with great stiffness, "such people as the Salters would never have had it in their power to insult me; nor should I have been in danger of losing my life by being baked to death in that horrid lodging. To be sure the carpet looked respectable, and that was all it had to recommend it."

[Pg 206]

"By-the-by," said her ladyship, "I have often wondered, Mrs. Arden, how you, who have in general a very proper sense of your own dignity, came to make the acquaintance of such people as those Salts, was it you called them?"

[Pg 207]

"Your ladyship's remark is very just," replied Mrs. Dorothea, "but the old friend from whom they brought me a letter, is a highly respectable and gentlemanly man, and I was not aware till lately that he had only made their acquaintance himself casually at a boarding-house, where it seems they persecuted him with attentions, and then worried him for a letter to some one at

Cheltenham, where they said they were going perfect strangers. He was afraid to enter into those particulars in the note he sent by them, lest they should contrive to open and read it: and the letter he since wrote me to say how little he himself knew of them, and to apologise for the liberty he had taken, by explaining that they made such a point of his giving them a line to some friend, that he did not know how to refuse, was unfortunately delayed, waiting for a frank (he knows I don't like postages), till with my usual silly goodnature I had taken a great deal of trouble about those worthless people. Their vulgarity too disgusted me all the time; yet they so overwhelmed me with their thanks, their gratitude, as they called it, that I literally did not know how to shake them off."

[Pg 208]

"Really my dear madam," said Lady Arden, "you are quite too goodnatured."

"That has always been my weak point," replied Mrs. Dorothea: "when I see that it is in my power to serve people, I am fool enough to fancy that alone gives them a claim upon me."

And such was really the case, for poor Mrs. Dorothea, though she had been all her life threatening to grow wise, in other words selfish, had never yet attained to any degree of proficiency in this art of self-defence, if we may so term it. Too great goodnature was indeed her only apology for being still at fifty-five, what people of the world emphatically call young! For she had not been all her days blinded by the dazzling sunshine of unclouded prosperity; on the contrary, her horizon had been frequently overshadowed by those unfavourable changes, from which, as variableness of weather teaches the sailor seamanship, knowledge of the world is in general collected.

[Pg 209]

"But we were speaking of Jane," proceeded Mrs. Dorothea, "I have not the least doubt of my niece's good sense. Indeed Jane is a sweet girl, as amiable as sensible. I was only afraid that Lord Darlingford had rather a jealous temper."

[Pg 210]

"I hope not!" her ladyship replied, again sighing, "and you know, my dear Mrs. Arden, the impossibility of having every thing one's own way in this world. The connection, establishment, and all that, are in the highest degree desirable. And then between ourselves, Lord Nelthorpe has not behaved very well to poor Jane."

"In that respect, it is so far fortunate," said Mrs. Dorothea, "that she is now making a still higher connection. And then Sir James, with his fifteen thousand per annum, will certainly be a splendid match for Louisa; but she must mind what she is about, and not laugh at him as she now does after they are married."

"Of course she will have too much good sense for that," replied Lady Arden; but her eyes filled with silent tears as she thought of the infinite sacrifice Louisa would make, if she did indeed marry Sir James.

[Pg 211]

The three sisters had followed Alfred into the garden, and were collecting flowers to supply the vases in the drawing-room, and laughing in their usual light-hearted way, if but a blossom fell to the ground instead of into the basket held out to catch it. Caroline the while was standing in her mother's drawing-room, behind a Venetian blind, through which unseen she was observing their movements, and envying their happiness, which to her appeared to be satisfactorily accounted for by Alfred's being their brother. How fervently did she wish at the moment that she too were his sister, were it but that she might be privileged to go out and join the cheerful group, on which she thus wistfully gazed.

[Pg 212]

With her solitary musing, however, a thrill pleasure mingled, when from time to time she saw Alfred steal a glance of interest at the very window where she stood; and which, from the blind being down, he suspected was occupied by Caroline.

The Arden girls, at the moment, were all occupied plucking blossoms from various parts of a long trailing branch of woodbine, which as it hung from above their heads, it cost them an effort to reach.

"Look, look! Caroline," cried Lady Palliser, who was standing at another window, "how like they are to the drawings of the graces. I must go and see Lady Arden directly, and send them all cards; for I am determined to have those three nice girls to do the graces at my fancy ball."

[Pg 213]

Out of this mere whim of Lady Palliser's arose a visiting acquaintance with the Ardens.

Alfred and Caroline were, therefore, more than ever together, a consequence which Lady Palliser made no effort whatever to prevent. The fact was that her ladyship was in the habit of considering Caroline, who was but seventeen, a mere child; while her own excessive vanity, and Alfred's unremitting efforts to make himself agreeable to her for Caroline's sake, had completely deceived her into a belief that he was under the dominion of one of those absurd boy passions, which very young men sometimes conceive for women much older than themselves; particularly if they happened to be, as her ladyship well knew she was, still extremely beautiful. And though Lady Palliser was too proud and too cold to have the most remote idea of making a fool of herself, she looked forward to seeing our hero in despair at her feet as to the *denouement* of an excellent jest; while in the meantime she amused herself by drawing him on to commit every absurdity she could devise. And such, no doubt, if meant as attentions to herself, would have been many humble assiduities, which, for Caroline's sake, he willingly paid her ladyship.

[Pg 214]

During the progress of this amiable proceeding, the honest-hearted Alfred received every symptom of kindness of manner, as an indication of maternal feeling, and as a proof that Lady

Palliser already considered him her future son-in-law.

One evening they happened to be alone, when he was about to take his departure; her ladyship, on bidding him good night, held towards him her beautiful white hand in a very coquettish, but, as he thought, in the most frank, obliging manner possible. The idea struck him, that considering his comparative want of fortune, it might be more honourable in him to make some disclosure of the state of his feelings to Lady Palliser, previously to addressing Caroline herself; accordingly, in a paroxysm of grateful and dutiful affection, he seized her ladyship's proffered hand, respectfully pressed it to his lips, and began to murmur something about his own unworthiness. Lady Palliser, snatching her hand away, laughed and said, "Go, you foolish child." [Pg 215]

Alfred, thus discouraged for the moment, took his departure in silence, with some idea that Lady Palliser, however kindly and liberally disposed towards his humble pretensions, very possibly thought both Caroline and himself too young at present. What else could she mean by calling him a foolish child? Little did he dream of the construction put on his manner by his intended mother-in-law. [Pg 216]

As little had he suspected on former occasions, that her ladyship had believed him to be making a complete fool of himself, and had been in proportion well amused, when, in conversation with her, while every word was intended for the ear of our heroine, who sat silently by at her drawing, he had ventured on topics, which when alone with Caroline he dared not introduce; and eloquently painted his idea of an ardent, genuine, and worthy attachment, and the devotion of a whole life consequent upon it till he had become breathless with agitation: yet, seeing that Lady Palliser only smiled at the uncontrollable warmth which quite carried him away, he believed that he was tacitly approved of, and so thoroughly understood, that explanation, whenever the proper time for it should arrive, would be merely matter of form. [Pg 217]  
[Pg 218]

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## CHAPTER XVII.

The triumphs of Aunt Dorothea over all her enemies, particularly the Salters, were so numerous, that to avoid prolixity we have not recounted them. As for Miss Salter, she had brought on a most inconvenient pain in the back of her neck by the reiterated bows with which she had again and again, morning after morning, vainly endeavoured to draw the attention of Mrs. Dorothea Arden.

One day, however, when that lady was driving up and down the High-street, seated at her ease in her sister, Lady Arden's peculiarly splendid open barouche, she beheld, trudging along the flag-way and coming towards her, Mr. and the Misses Salter, with countenances which betrayed that they were not insensible to the heat of the weather; and shoes so assimilated by dust to the dust on which they trod, as to be nearly invisible. Mrs. Dorothea was not aware that the Salters had ever before seen her in this elegant carriage: so anxious was she therefore that they should do so now, that on the impulse of the moment, in defiance of having long since given them the cut direct, she made an almost involuntary, yet very conspicuous bow. Electrified and delighted, the whole party stopped short and performed no less than three bows each in return; while Miss Salter, who had by much the greatest portion of moral courage of the whole trio, added even a kiss of the hand. [Pg 219]  
[Pg 220]

Miss Dorothea had not been long returned home when she received a card of invitation from the Misses Salter to a quadrille party, accompanied by a long servile note, to say that they were much concerned at not having had earlier it in their power to offer some attention to her friends, Lady Arden and family, and also to her friend Lady Palliser, and begging to know if their waiting upon, and sending cards of invitation to these respective ladies would be agreeable.

To this was added a hint, that indeed the party was in a great measure made for her friends and would be very *select*.

To the invitation for herself, Mrs. Dorothea sent a formal rejection, without assigning any reason. Of the absurd and forward proffer of *attention* to her *friends* she took no notice. [Pg 221]

Nor were those dignified proceedings the sole mode of vengeance practised by Mrs. Dorothea against her pitiful foes; for much as she was herself engaged at present with more agreeable occupations, she had placed the affair from the commencement in such able hands, namely, those of her prime minister, Sarah, that no circumstance, however minute, had been lost sight of.

The origin of the Salters, by its coarsest appellation, had been diligently disseminated in every servant's hall, and thence arisen to the respective dining and drawing-rooms, till it had reached the ears of many, who else had never known that there were such people in existence as the Salters. [Pg 222]

What was if possible worse, Sir William Orm's servant in particular had been put on his guard about the deception practised on him by Mrs. Johnson, respecting the young ladies' fortunes; on which Sir William had without the slightest ceremony cut the connexion altogether. He never called or even left a card; he never joined them any where, and as to the bows he gave them in return for those they made to him from a mile off, they were really, except to persons in desperate circumstances, not worth having.

Sir James, it may be remembered, had deserted on the very first morning he had encountered

Louisa Arden; so that disconsolate indeed were now the pair who had so lately congratulated themselves on having two baronets for their lovers.

[Pg 223]

Their *select* acquaintance too, the Shawbridges and Whaleworthys, began to play fine; for in a watering place a title is a title, whether got by accident or by cheese, and though both beef and cheese, like all other necessaries, are sad vulgar things, experience had taught even the innocent hearted Lady Whaleworthy, that with a certain class, and she poor woman dreamed of no better, a title could cover a multitude of *cheeses*.

Not so, alas, with the Misses Salter's *family secret*, which seemed for the present to have abolished all variety of diet, for (crying injustice!) while scarcely any body would visit Mr. Salter, Mr. Salter's beef was, to quote Sarah's polite pun, "in every body's mouth!"

People could not even propound the flattering probability of his having amassed a large fortune without some one more witty than elegant adding the characteristic remark, that while salting his beef it was supposed he had taken care to save his bacon.

[Pg 224]

To complete the unfortunate position of the family, Mr. Salter had unluckily found it necessary of late, in consequence of an aggravation of his old complaint of the eyelids, to wear, protruding from beneath the brim of his white hat, a *green* silk shade, which gave occasion to the idlers on the Mountpelier-walk, green being the well known colour of disappointment, to assert that he had done so in consequence of the cruel desertion of Lady Flamborough, who had, simultaneously with the appearance of the said badge of despair, jilted him for a half-pay lieutenant; a gentleman who having received a hint to retire from the service of his Majesty, for reasons best known to himself and his brother officers, had come to Cheltenham to devote himself to the service of the ladies.

[Pg 225]

Nor had poor Mr. Salter, while dragged every day to the walks by his daughters, who now had no one else to walk with, a chance of forgetting his fair deceiver; for there she was to be seen morning and evening as gaily *undressed* as ever, flaunting away and smiling and languishing as usual; her white ostrich feathers too, at the highly improper instigation of the breezes, mingling from time to time with the bright red whiskers of the *ci-devant* lieutenant; while she, ungrateful woman, had the barbarity to pass poor Mr. Salter again and again, without so much as a recognition. "And that after," as he himself remarked, "having had the face to eat his good dinners;" the remembrance of the cost of which now added bitterness to the thoughts of slighted love.

[Pg 226]

This was the morning too of the very day, or rather evening, fixed for Lady Palliser's fancy ball, with the expectation of which the whole town was ringing. Even the walks were thinned by its prospective influence, or rather picked of fashionables; for those who were to be there, were keeping themselves up, that they might be quite fresh for an occasion to which the very capriciousness of her ladyship's character had lent, in anticipation at least, a more than common interest.

The Misses Salter, after weighing for two or three turns the poor chance which sad experience had taught them there was of their picking up a beau of any kind, against the certain disgrace of showing by their wretchedness of fatigue that they were not to be among the *élite* of the evening, decided on going home to their breakfast, which social meal commenced in a sulk and ended in a storm.

[Pg 227]

Miss Grace began again about the improvidence of cutting Mrs. Dorothea in the premature manner they had done. "And it was all your fault, Eliza," she continued, "that insolent temper of yours is always longing so for an opportunity to break out; and yet there is nobody that can sneak and cringe in the mean fawning manner that you can when you think there is any thing to be got by a person. If my advice had been taken, we would have been acquainted with all these genteel people, and going to this ball to-night, no doubt. To do Mrs. Dorothea justice, she was quite indefatigable in her kindness, and in getting people to call on us and invite us as long as we showed her any kind of gratitude; so we have ourselves to thank, or rather you for it all."

[Pg 228]

"Your advice indeed, you fool!" was all Miss Salter could find to say; having, as she could not help knowing, the worst of the argument.

"It all comes of *pride*, and upstartishness, and nonsense," said Mr. Salter. "Grace, the girl, however, is so far right; Mrs. Dorothea Arden is a very worthy gentlewoman, and showed us a great deal more civility than in our station of life we had any right to look for; and it certainly was our place to be very grateful for it, and if we have not been so it is no fault of mine; I knew nothing of the carryings on of you Misses with your boarding-school breeding forsooth."

[Pg 229]

[Pg 230]

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

In consequence of the expected ball in the evening, neither the Palliser nor Arden party had been at the walks in the morning. But soon after breakfast Alfred called at Lady Palliser's with his usual offering of sweets.

Caroline had just entered the drawing-room, and was proceeding towards a conservatory at its further extremity, when the appearance of Alfred arrested her steps.



He assisted her in arranging the flowers he had brought, and in selecting from them the favoured few she was to wear herself. This task drew from him some playful remark, more love-like than rational, on the good fortune of the happy blossoms thus chosen. [Pg 231]

Lady Palliser had been particularly harsh that morning about some trifle, and Caroline was consequently in very bad spirits.

"Why should it be good fortune to be chosen by me," she said, "when I am myself the most unfortunate of beings? The poor flowers that I choose," she added with a faint effort to laugh, fearful she had said too much, "will be the first to fade away," quoting Moore's little song.

"Or the young gazelle, with its soft black eye,  
If it *loved you well would be sure to die,*"

proceeded Alfred, humming the air and continuing the quotation; then in a half playful, half tender whisper, he subjoined, "The death-warrant of many of whom your ladyship little thinks would be already signed and sealed were this the case." But perceiving while he spoke that though Caroline tried to smile her lip trembled, he checked himself, and with an altered tone exclaimed, "I beg a thousand pardons! You are—you seem—what can have—" [Pg 232]

"Oh, nothing," she replied, "only other young people are light-hearted and cheerful together; there are your sisters for instance, how happy they always seem to be; and how kind to you all—how indulgent, how affectionate, Lady Arden appears. While I have neither sister, nor brother, and yet my mother"—here checking herself, she added hesitatingly, "I dare say—it must be my own fault—I suppose I don't deserve to be loved—but I am quite sure that—that—my mother does not love me—and oh, if you knew how miserable the thought makes me!" [Pg 233]

"You cannot be serious," he said.

"I am indeed!" she replied, looking up with innocent earnestness, while her eyes swam in tears.

Alfred caught her hand, pressed it to his lips, talked incoherently about the impossibility of knowing without loving her, then of his own unworthiness, his presumption, his poverty, his insignificance, &c. &c.; his being in short a younger son; and at length wound up all by making, notwithstanding, a passionate declaration of his love. If affection the most devoted, the most unalterable, had any value in her eyes, affection that would study her every wish, affection such as he was convinced no lover had ever felt before; if such affection could in any degree compensate for the absence of every other pretension, such, unable longer to suppress his feeling, he now ventured to lay at her feet. [Pg 234]

Caroline trembled and remained silent. He entreated her to speak, to relieve him from the fear that he had offended her past forgiveness by the very mention of his perhaps too daring suit.

"Does—my mother—know?" she whispered at last, "because—if not—I fear—"

"Lady Palliser I think," he replied, "must know, must understand; nay, I have ventured to allude slightly to the subject, and have even been presumptuous enough to translate her ladyship's kindly and indulgent admission of my constant visits as, however liberal on her part, a tacit consent to my addresses." [Pg 235]

"Oh, I hope you are right!" exclaimed Caroline, with an inadvertent earnestness which called forth from Alfred gratitude the most profuse, expressed, not indeed loudly, but in whispers so tender, so eloquent, that for some moments, Caroline, forgetting every thing but their import, felt a happiness she had never known before. New and delightful prospects of futurity seemed opening before her youthful imagination, hitherto so cruelly depressed. Her countenance, though covered with blushes, and studiously turned away to hide them, so far indicated what was passing within, as to encourage Alfred in adding,

"To-morrow, then, when Lady Palliser may possibly be at home, may I venture to speak to her ladyship on this subject?" [Pg 236]

After a short silence, Caroline replied with hesitation,

"Yes—I—suppose—you had better."

But she sighed heavily as she said so, for she dreaded the strange and whimsical temper of Lady Palliser; yet she now found that a feeling of consolation accompanied what had hitherto been her greatest sorrow, the sense of her mother's want of affection; for perhaps, she thought, she may not care enough about me to mind what I do! Here all her efforts at self-possession gave way, and she yielded to a passion of tears.

Alfred had been holding her hand, and anxiously watching her countenance; he became alarmed, and began to suspect, that perhaps she was herself undecided. "What can this mean?" he cried. "You do not repent of the permission you have given me? Caroline! say you do not! Say I am wrong in this!" [Pg 237]

She raised her eyes and moved her lips to reply, when a loud electrifying knock was heard at the hall door. The look however had so far reassured Alfred, that he again pressed her hand to his lips, and repeated with an inquiring tone, "To-morrow, then?" Footsteps were heard in the hall; the drawing-room door opened, and Alfred hastily disappeared, while a servant entering, laid cards on the table and retired.

Caroline was hastening towards the conservatory to take refuge there till her agitation should subside, when the Venetian blind which hung over its entrance was moved aside, and her mother appeared before her, scorn and rage depicted in her countenance.

[Pg 238]

Our heroine, her footsteps thus unexpectedly arrested, stopped short in the centre of the apartment, and stood trembling from head to foot.

From behind the Venetian blind, Lady Palliser had witnessed the whole of the interview between the lovers.

She was not herself previously aware that the heartless coquetry in which she had been indulging had taken so strong a hold even of her bad feelings; but disappointed vanity was perhaps a mortification she had never known before. She therefore scarcely herself understood the species of rage with which she was now animated; the almost hatred with which she now looked on the perfect loveliness of her blushing, trembling child. Of course, on prudential considerations she would have disapproved of the match at any rate; and of this she now made an excuse to herself.

[Pg 239]

She stepped forward, and when close before Caroline, stamped her foot, uttered an ironical, hysterical laugh, and almost gasping for breath, stood some moments ere she could well articulate.

"You piece of premature impudence!" were the first words she at length pronounced. After pausing again for a moment, she recommenced with a sneer, "So you have made your arrangement. I must congratulate you on Mr. Arden's obliging acceptance of your liberal offer, of heart, hand, and fortune!"

Caroline looked the most innocent astonishment.

"You really do not understand me," proceeded her ladyship, in the same tone of mockery. "Are you then not aware that I have been a witness to the scene which has just passed? and have, of course, heard your modest ladyship stating to Mr. Arden how much at a loss you were for some one to love you, forsooth! Barefaced enough, certainly! Upon which the young man could not in common politeness do less than offer his services. Besides, it was much too good a thing to be rejected; few younger brothers, and therefore beggars, would refuse the hand of an heiress of your rank and fortune. Go! you disgrace to your family and sex; go to your room, and remain there till you have my permission to leave it. As for Mr. Arden, I shall give orders that he is never again admitted beneath this roof. Should you hereafter meet him in society do not dare to recognise him. Go!"

[Pg 240]

[Pg 241]

Caroline was moving towards the door, without attempting a reply, well aware that remonstrance or entreaty would be perfectly vain.

"Stay!—I have changed my mind," recommenced her ladyship. "Mr. Arden comes to-morrow, it seems—let him come—I shall not see him. Receive him yourself, reject him yourself, now and for ever! Tell him that on reflection you have repented of your folly; and that the subject must not be even mentioned to me. Let the interview take place in this room—let your rejection be distinct, and let him suppose it comes from yourself. I shall be again in the conservatory—I shall hear and see all that passes; and on your peril, by word or look, say more or less than I have commanded."

Caroline flung herself on her knees, and with clasped hands and streaming eyes looked up in her mother's face. "Oh, do not, do not," she exclaimed, "ask me to see him, and in all else I will submit!"

[Pg 242]

Lady Palliser laughed out with malicious irony, saying, "So you offer conditional obedience. Do," she proceeded, frowning fiercely, and extending her clenched hand in the attitude of a fury, "precisely as I have commanded!"

"This evening," continued her ladyship, with affected composure, looking contemptuously down on Caroline, who was sobbing ready to break her heart, "this evening, deport yourself as though nothing had happened: dance as much as usual; and do not dare to have red eyes, or to show the slightest depression of manner. Should Mr. Arden make any allusion to what has occurred this morning, merely tell him to say nothing more on the subject till to-morrow."

[Pg 243]

Here Lady Palliser quitted the apartment, while Caroline remained on her knees, overwhelmed by utter despair, and shedding, with all the innocent vehemence of childhood, the large pure tears, which like summer showers fall so abundantly from the eyes of the young in their first sorrow.

The alternative of daring to disobey her harsh and heartless mother never once presented itself to her mind as possible.

[Pg 244]

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## CHAPTER XIX.

It was night—arrivals had commenced—the lights, the music, the decorations, the sight and scent of the flowers, all added to the aching of Caroline's temples and the confusion of her ideas, as she stood in a sort of waking dream, conscious only of wretchedness, near the door of the first of the reception rooms, courtesying with a mechanical smile to each new group that appeared. She

would have given the world to have been any where else, but this was the post her mother had commanded her to fill.

[Pg 245]

When the ladies of the Arden party entered, she felt a childish impulse to fling herself into the bosom of Lady Arden, and drawing all the daughters round her, entreat them to hide her from her cruel mother.

Alfred next appeared, accompanied by Sir Willoughby and Mr. Geoffery Arden. The two latter named gentlemen had been expected for some days, but had arrived only about two hours before.

Alfred presented both, and some unmeaning conversation passed about the heat of London, how long they had been on the road, &c. Our hero, the moment he came in, missed the flowers Caroline had promised to wear, and felt disappointed. If she had forgotten them in the hurry of dressing it was no very flattering token of her regard. If, on the other hand, Lady Palliser had noticed and forbid her wearing them, it was a bad symptom of his ultimate success. He longed for an opportunity of venturing some playful reproach which might lead to an explanation. When his companions moved on a step or two he drew very near, and asked in an emphatic whisper, if the chosen blossoms had faded already. A rush of colour, which the peculiar fairness of Caroline's complexion already described made the more remarkable, covered her cheeks in a moment; but she attempted no reply. After a short and somewhat anxious pause Alfred asked her to dance; she looked up suddenly but vacantly, as if scarcely comprehending what he had said, but still spoke not. He was just about to repeat his words, when Willoughby, who had been conversing with Lady Palliser, turned round and made the same request. Caroline, glancing towards her mother, and seeing her eye upon her, started, assented quickly, took Willoughby's arm, and walked to the quadrille.

[Pg 246]

[Pg 247]

Lady Palliser noted the chagrin of our hero with secret triumph, and suddenly forming one of her usually whimsical and tyrannical resolves, determined, as an appropriate punishment for the lovers, to marry her daughter to Sir Willoughby, whose match in town she had heard it confidently reported was off. Though he was but a baronet, his immense property made it at least an eligible marriage; and such, little as she cared about Caroline, she had always considered it a necessary part of etiquette some time or other to provide.

That Alfred, however, might ascribe Caroline's change to her own caprice, and be the more mortified, Lady Palliser took his arm, walked about with him for a considerable time, and treated him with more than her usual cordiality.

[Pg 248]

It had the desired effect, it threw him into complete despair; he could not now even console himself with the thought that Caroline was acting under the influence of her mother.

When the dancing had ceased, and Caroline was seated with her evidently delighted partner on a distant sofa, Lady Palliser led our hero up to her, and said, "Come, Caroline, I have no notion of giving up old friends for new ones altogether: you must dance one set with poor Alfred; do see how forlorn he looks."

Caroline was utterly confounded: had her mother forgiven them—was she going to relent.

Such happy thoughts, however, were soon scattered, for Lady Palliser, on pretext of arranging a stray ringlet, drawing very near, whispered, with a menacing frown, "Take care how you behave, and what you say." The frown and whisper destroying as they did the momentary hope, caused Caroline, on taking Alfred's arm, to look so much disappointed that it was impossible not to infer that she would rather have remained on the sofa. Yet Alfred could not bring himself to believe this! he was miserable, however, and did not know what to think; while he was so much occupied forming painful conjectures, that he himself behaved strangely and coldly.

[Pg 249]

Caroline thought with intense agony of the task she had to perform in the morning, while with a feeling allied to terror she stole from time to time a momentary glance at the features of him she must so soon mortally offend; to whom she must so soon give apparently just cause to view her henceforward with hatred and contempt. She even fancied that his countenance wore already a severity of expression she had never seen in it before. She bewildered herself too with the thought, that if she could get an opportunity and venture just to whisper, "Mr. Arden, don't mind any thing I am obliged to say to you in the morning," it might prevent his thinking so very very ill of her as he must otherwise do. This sentence she repeated to herself above an hundred times during the quadrille, yet whenever she was going to address it to Alfred, and more than once she moved her lips to begin, she either caught her mother's eye turned upon her, or she fancied it might be, and dared not look to see lest it should give her a conscious and guilty appearance; or the impression that Alfred was already displeased became so strong as to deprive her of the courage to speak to him; besides all which, her heart at each abortive attempt she made to articulate, leaped up into her throat, and by its excessive fluttering quite choked her utterance, till the convenient moment was gone by. On the music ceasing, Lady Palliser came up and took her away, as if in great haste to make some arrangement, yet, in so obliging a manner, and with so many pretty excuses, that Alfred thought her ladyship at least was unchanged.

[Pg 250]

[Pg 251]

And so must Caroline, he told himself again and again; "it can be but fancy on my part, or rather, all that seems strange and altered in her manner must proceed from her extreme delicacy, her excessive timidity, her consciousness that we now perfectly understand each other's thoughts makes her fearful to meet my eye, at least with others present; makes her afraid that all the world will know the moment they see us together what is passing in our hearts. I can well imagine one so gentle, so young, so fearful, feeling the newness of her situation, almost as

[Pg 252]

though she were already a bride; having listened but this very morning, for the first time in her life, I should suppose favourably, to the accent of a lover."

Alfred had wandered into the conservatory, where, amid the intoxicating odours of ten thousand exotics—pursuing this train of thought—he luxuriated for a time in dream-like meditations on the delicacy, the devotion, the exclusive tenderness, which must necessarily characterise the attachment of a being so pure, so innocent, so unpractised in the world's ways as Caroline—his Caroline! Yes, he was now entitled to combine with her idea this endearing epithet.

[Pg 253]

He was standing the while with his arms folded and his eyes unconsciously uplifted to a brilliant lamp, as if lost in contemplation of its brightness.

A change in the music broke his reverie; when his discerning vision passing along a vista of orange trees, found its way into the drawing-room, and fell on a group preparing to waltz. Among these, and occupying the very spot hallowed to memory by the interview of the morning, he beheld Caroline standing with the arm of Willoughby round her slender waist, and her hand resting on his shoulder—a moment after the couple had launched amid the tide of changing forms; but Alfred's eye still traced them as they floated round and round the prescribed circle, till, what with the moving scene, and his own thoughts of agony, his brain went round also. He had never been able to prevail with Caroline to waltz, her plea of refusal had always been that she did not waltz. Was she then changed in every sentiment—in every opinion—in every feeling! Had she become hardened to the world—lost to personal delicacy—lost to affection—lost to him! What had she—what had she not become! and all within a few short hours.

[Pg 254]

[Pg 255]

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## CHAPTER XX.

In vain had our heroine, when Sir Willoughby had asked her to waltz, pleaded the same excuse alluded to in our last chapter. Lady Palliser, who was near, and heard Sir Willoughby's request, interfered, and commanded compliance; while poor Caroline, who seems to have been born but to be the victim of her mother's caprices, was led away to join the gay circle, trembling and broken-hearted.

The report that Willoughby's marriage had been broken off was quite true: he had written the account to Alfred a day or two before. The lady had the very day previous to that fixed for the wedding eloped with her former lover; while Sir Willoughby had found himself, his preparations being all made, in rather an absurd situation.

[Pg 256]

The newspapers, too, had taken unwarrantable liberties with his name, and made some witty comments on the superior personal attractions of his rival.

His vanity it was which had in the first instance been gratified—his vanity now suffered proportionately. And so irritable was his temper and so depressed his spirits, on his arrival in Cheltenham, that Alfred, who had but just returned from his interview with Caroline, felt that it would be mistimed to mention her, or allude at all at present to his own happier prospects. He limited the confidential conversation, therefore, to kind condolence with his brother, being too delicate to remind Willoughby that he might have escaped this mortification had he taken his advice.

[Pg 257]

Thus was the foundation unintentionally laid of a concealment which finally led to many disastrous consequences.

The moment Willoughby was introduced to Caroline he was captivated by her beauty. After they had danced together, when our heroine was so unexpectedly desired by her mother to dance with Alfred, Geoffery Arden, who may be termed Willoughby's evil genius, took possession of the seat beside him on the sofa, which had been just vacated by Caroline; and well knowing his cousin's weak point, said, "Well, that is one of the most pointed things I ever saw."

[Pg 258]

"To what do you allude?" asked Willoughby.

"Did you not see how mortified her ladyship looked at having her flirtation with you disturbed."

"Flirtation, indeed!" repeated Willoughby, laughing; "the acquaintance is rather short for that, I should think."

"Nay, we hear of love at first sight; and it was certainly something very like it. You were not many minutes in the room when you asked Lady Caroline to dance; and I don't know whether you noticed it, but a moment or two before Alfred, who has been so long acquainted, had made the same request; the lady pretended not to hear: she heard, however, when you spoke, and consented with marked alacrity."

Willoughby's vanity, which had been so lately wounded, gladly welcomed suggestions so flattering. To woo and win the young, the beautiful, the rich Lady Caroline Montague, might well silence the jeers of those who were disposed to make impertinent comments on his late disappointment.

[Pg 259]

As for Geoffery Arden's motive for offering the incense of flattery to Willoughby, it was the same which in most cases governs most men—self-interest. It was by the grossest flattery that he had

long since made himself necessary to his cousin; and by the same means he still sought to retain an influence over him, which, in a pecuniary point of view, was particularly convenient to himself. On the present occasion also, he had seen with half a glance sufficient to make him suspect, at least, that Lady Caroline Montague was an object of interest to Alfred. If he was right in his conjecture, the circumstance might afford a favourable opportunity for sowing the seeds of dissension between the brothers, an object of which he never lost sight, well knowing that his own influence and that of Alfred could never go hand in hand—the one being for evil, the other for good.

[Pg 260]

Added to this, it was always more or less an object with him to throw obstacles in the way of any love affair of either of the brothers; for though he was not so romantic as to expect by such means to succeed in preserving them both old bachelors, should they reach old age—for such a chance could not be very important to him, who was so much their senior—it was just as well to keep the book of fate open as long as possible. There was no use in increasing the chances against himself. The fewer names, in short, above his own on the list of even improbable advantages the better.

[Pg 261]

While the cousins continued to occupy their sofa, and observe the dancers, Geoffery was eloquent in the praises of Caroline's beauty; quoting, as he well might, many high authorities for her being the acknowledged belle of the late season in town. He knew that weak men, with all their obstinate devotion to their own opinions, unconsciously see with the eyes, hear with the ears, and even speak in the language of others; and that their love most especially is a mere reflection!

Indeed, to gain an entire ascendancy over weak people only requires a little management; but unfortunately it is of that uncandid sort which their best friends are the least likely to adopt.

[Pg 262]

If you say to an ill-governed child, "My dear, you have eaten enough of that cake, give it me, and take this pretty toy to play with." The child says, "No, I won't; it's not a pretty toy," and eats faster than before. But lay down the toy carelessly within his sight, and if he has eaten sufficiently, he will drop his cake on the floor, and fly to seize the toy.

Men and women of weak minds are but children of a larger growth.

When the company had all retired, Lady Palliser thus addressed her daughter: "Your avoiding to dance with Mr. Arden was quite unnecessary. I have no desire that your manners towards him in society should be at all altered: such conduct would draw down remarks which I do not choose should be made. As for to-morrow," continued her ladyship, "remember that I shall witness the scene; therefore let your obedience be perfect! Also, if you have any regard to decency left, take care that no folly on your part gives Mr. Arden an opportunity of boasting that Lady Caroline Montague, in despite of the impropriety of the alliance, was indelicately ready to fling herself into his arms, if Lady Palliser had not interfered."

[Pg 263]

Her ladyship here quitted the room; and Caroline, her ideas confused by this new view of the subject, stood transfixed to the spot, till aroused from her reverie by the entrance of servants to extinguish the lights.

She retired, but it may be believed not to rest. She flung herself on her bed without undressing, and wept away the early morning, the brightness of which entering freely through the shutterless windows of a Cheltenham bed-room, shone with incongruous lustre alike on her glittering ornaments and her falling tears. We speak of morning, because the night, of course, had been over before the ball concluded.

[Pg 264]

[Pg 265]

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## CHAPTER XXI.

Alfred had no opportunity for private conversation with his brother before he went to his appointment at Lady Palliser's; nor indeed did he now desire it till he should have come to some explanation with Caroline.

In strange perplexity of spirits, trying in vain to persuade himself that he had every thing to hope and nothing to fear, he repaired to Jessamine Bower.

On entering the drawing-room he perceived Caroline, seated and alone. When he was announced, she did not move. He approached; her eyes still remained fixed on the ground, while the paleness of her complexion was even more remarkable than usual, and a very slight but universal tremor pervaded her whole frame. He stood before her, and as he did so, trembled himself with undefined apprehension.

[Pg 266]

"Good heavens, Caroline!" he exclaimed, sinking on one knee, and attempting to take her hand. She withdrew it hastily, and her cheeks crimsoned while she cast one involuntary glance in the direction of the conservatory. Alfred rose, folded his arms, and stood for a moment silent, then said—"If I have been presumptuous, Lady Caroline, I have much to plead in my excuse, and the interview of yesterday in particular; I was certainly led to hope for a more favourable reception, however little I may be deserving of it."

[Pg 267]

"I was—to blame," said Caroline, in a voice scarcely articulate, and still without looking up.

"Is it possible! Do I interpret you right? Were those hopes, to me so full of joy, altogether fallacious? But no, Caroline, I will not, I cannot believe it! Lady Palliser objects, and you deem it your duty to submit: even this thought would be happiness, compared with that of your indifference! Or—or—"

"My caprice!" said Caroline, looking up almost wildly for a moment, "Yes, think it my caprice!"

"I cannot believe it," he replied.

There was a considerable pause, during which he anxiously observed Caroline, and perceived that silent tears were stealing down her cheeks.

[Pg 268]

"Those tears are not caused by caprice," he said in a tone of tenderness; "in compassion say," he added with sudden and vehement earnestness, "that you are acting in obedience to Lady Palliser's commands, and I too will submit." While speaking again he sank on his knee before her, and tried to take both her hands. The terror however with which she resisted, hastily rising as she did so—the more effectually to avoid him—so much for the moment resembled aversion, that he rose as hastily, and looking his amazement, said with a hysterical intonation of voice, "If it is indeed so, I have a thousand apologies to offer to Lady Caroline Montague for my impertinent intrusiveness. To retire, however, and offend no more, will perhaps be better than entering further into the subject." He was about to depart, when pausing he said, "I will ask one question—Am I rejected? Do you finally withdraw the hopes you yesterday bestowed?"

[Pg 269]

"I do," she replied.

He stood for a few moments to master his emotion, then pronouncing a haughty good morning, hastily quitted the room and the house. In a few moments after, he was pacing, without plan or intention, one of the many shady and usually quite solitary walks, which branch off in every direction from the general scene of gaiety, and near to which both villas stood.

His pride, as well as every tenderer and worthier feeling, was wounded beyond description. He now appeared, even to himself, in the light of one who had indelicately, unfeelingly, and presumptuously sought a match of worldly advantage, to which he had no pretension; and though he could acquit himself of interested views in so doing, he felt that it would be a romance and absurdity to expect so candid an interpretation from any one else. The one continued dream, which had made up his whole existence for many weeks past, was now dissipated in an instant. Nay, he sought in vain among his own meditations for the apologies, even to himself, which had before seemed sufficient. Caroline, so silent, so fearful at the commencement of their acquaintance, had seemed to derive a new existence from his growing attentions, while Lady Palliser, instead of checking those attentions, and showing alarm at the visible pleasure with which her daughter received them, had herself given him what he then considered the most unequivocal encouragement, being always the first to make intercourse easy to both, by desiring the always timid Caroline to dance with him, walk with him, and sing with him. And then the silent glow of secret pleasure with which the welcome command was obeyed, confirmed sometimes perhaps by a momentary expression caught when the eyes accidentally met, or at other times merely by an alacrity of movement, or cheerfulness of tone in obeying or replying, which, notwithstanding, betrayed volumes in a character too fearful and gentle to let itself be regularly read aloud, yet too artless, too unpractised, to know how utterly to seal its pages.

[Pg 270]

[Pg 271]

While such things had been, the prejudices of society had faded from his mind; he had believed it not impossible that where an only child already possessed immense estates, a parent might prefer the happiness of that child to the unnecessary addition of other estates. Now all the artificial estimates of life and manners, taught by early education, returned in their fullest force, and he thought himself a madman ever to have entertained such an opinion.

[Pg 272]

He now believed that every one who knew he had had the presumption to pay his addresses to Lady Caroline Montague, would reprobate him and say, that because he was a younger brother, and of course a beggar, he wanted to make his fortune by marrying an heiress. How bitterly did he now regret that he had ever had the rash folly to confess his passion. Yet, so thoroughly disinterested had that passion been, that he had even for the time lost sight of the possibility of being suspected by others of motives of which he was himself incapable: all that through the happy intoxication of his feelings had presented itself respecting fortune, was a vaguely delightful remembrance that his poverty could never entail any privations on Caroline. What was now to be done? The wretched state of his feelings would have induced him to quit Cheltenham immediately, but wounded pride prompted him to remain; he wished to let Lady Caroline Montague see that her caprices should not govern his conduct; that he could behave with composure in her society—with polite self-possession even towards herself. But in this first moment of just resentment, he knew not the difficulty of the task he courted. He resolved to conceal the whole affair from Willoughby, and if his mother and sisters persisted in making allusion to the subject of his admiration of Lady Caroline Montague, to assure them gravely that he never meant, in his circumstances, to subject himself to the suspicion of seeking an heiress because she was an heiress.

[Pg 273]

[Pg 274]

Having come to so dignified a resolve, he flattered himself for the moment that he was almost composed. Scarcely however had he arrived at this conclusion, than fond memory, more at leisure than it had been during the late angry burst of disappointed passion, began retracing scenes, recalling looks, repeating words, recounting circumstances, till his mind again became a troubled sea, from amidst the breakers of which he beheld, but now with all the aggravated

feelings of one sent adrift in a bark without rudder or oar, tantalizing views, but too distant to admit a hope of reaching a smiling happy shore—a haven of bliss to fancy's eye, which appeared the more perfect now that it was unattainable.

[Pg 275]

At one time he stopped short, and stood for about ten minutes like an absolute statue, quite unconscious of any outward object. He was asking himself, if it were not still possible that Caroline was acting under the influence of Lady Palliser and if there might not come a time when that influence would cease?

[Pg 276]

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## CHAPTER XXII.

No language can paint the utter desolation of poor Caroline's mind; for she was too young, too inexperienced, too much accustomed from infancy, to be the unmurmuring slave of her mother's capricious tyranny to have any thing like a just estimate of her own situation.

Had she ventured to think, which she had never yet done, that when of age she should be her own mistress, she would, as very young people do when they look forward three or four years, have thought the period so remote as to be scarcely an object of hope; while she would still have trembled at the thought of venturing at any time, however distant, to disobey her mother, unless indeed she could be quite sure of never seeing her again.

[Pg 277]

Lady Palliser's plan of government when Caroline was a mere infant, had been a system of terror; nor had any thing in her subsequent conduct tended to soften that first impression. Frowns and menacing attitudes had been used towards the baby before it could understand words, if when occasionally brought into its mother's presence it had happened to stretch its little hand towards any attractive object. Hours of solitary imprisonment in a dark room had been inflicted on the child, for but a fancied dilatoriness of movement in the execution of a command, till poor Caroline had learned to start with nervous alarm, and fly with the alacrity of terror at the very sound of her mother's voice; while it was melancholy to see, during the seemingly willing movement the little innocent face of the child filled with the contradictory expressions of anxiety and dread.

[Pg 278]

Thus had early associations followed up by constant tyranny, imposed at the dictates of a temper unreasonable, capricious, and unfeeling, taught Caroline to view with a sinking of the heart the very smiles of her mother's countenance, as played off in company; none of them she knew were intended for her, even when their light, perchance, was turned upon her.

Overweening, all-engrossing vanity, was Lady Palliser's ruling passion; society therefore in which she could be the object of universal admiration was her only element. Not that she was what is commonly called a flirt:—she was too haughty—too exacting of general adoration for such a condescension towards any individual in particular; while yet within her hidden thoughts, concealed beneath an appearance of statue-like coldness, she had a secret delight in imagining every man with whom she was acquainted, as much in love with her as he dared to be, and withheld from a declaration of his passion only by her own haughty reserve: nay, so far did she carry this dream of vanity, that she felt more or less of resentment towards every man of her acquaintance who married or attached himself to any other woman.

[Pg 279]

Such was the person with whom poor Caroline had hitherto spent every domestic hour she could remember. Her home, which had thus never been a happy one, now by contrast with the vague hopes in which she had latterly ventured to indulge, presented to her imagination a long perspective of tenfold dreariness. The frowns in private, the artificial smiles in public of her unkind parent, were all that she anticipated in future. Her very youth seemed an aggravation of her misery, for the grave itself, which, in her present exaggerated and hopeless state of feeling, was she believed, the only refuge to which she could look forward, appeared at an immeasurable distance, the path to it stretching before her mind's eye an interminable pilgrimage of weariness.

[Pg 280]

We do not mean to support these views of the subject as rational or just; but Caroline in experience and knowledge of the world, as well as in chancery phraseology, was still an infant; even her love had at present something in it of the feelings of the child turning to the kind and gentle, as a refuge from the harshness of the more severe; and with the idea of Alfred was blended thoughts of his sisters and of Lady Arden, and of their happy home—that scene of cheerfulness and general goodwill, which she had latterly enjoyed the privilege of entering without ceremony, and which she had never quitted without regret.

[Pg 281]

The most severe, however, of all her sufferings was the thought that Alfred must now hate and despise her.

She was shut up in her own apartment weeping bitterly and giving way to a succession of dreary reflections, when she received a summons from her mother to appear in the drawing-room. So much was she accustomed to obey implicitly that she did not dare to excuse herself.

[Pg 282]

On descending, she found with Lady Palliser, Sir Willoughby Arden and his cousin Geoffery. Willoughby was turning over new songs and professing himself a great admirer of music; the true secret of which was that he sang remarkably well himself. After some trivial conversation, he discovered several duets in which he had often taken a part with his sisters, and intreated that

Caroline would try one of them. She excused herself on the plea of a headache caused by the music, lights, and late hours of the previous evening; but Lady Palliser interfering, she was compelled to make a wretched attempt; the manner spiritless, the voice tremulous and even out of tune. Willoughby's performance, however, was really good; he was therefore quite delighted. As the song was being concluded, Lady and the Misses Arden came in, and the latter being prevailed on to assist Willoughby with some more of his favourite duets, the visit was prolonged into quite a morning concert.

[Pg 283]

When the Ardens were about to take their departure for the avowed purpose of a walk, Lady Palliser insisted on Caroline's accompanying them, saying that the air would take away her headache. Caroline made a faint effort to excuse herself, but in this, as in every thing, was obliged to submit.

They soon met and were joined by Lord Darlingford and Sir James Lindsey; and it not being an hour at which any part of the walks was particularly crowded, they wandered on to where the shade by its coolness was inviting.

[Pg 284]

Willoughby attached himself entirely to our heroine, with whom he already fancied himself in love. Lord Darlingford walked soberly beside Jane, who after many relapses of a hope, fainter at each return, had resigned her early dream of first and mutual love, and was now quietly receiving his serious addresses. She had at length brought her mind to anticipate, with a placid sort of happiness, the hope of obtaining for life the companionship and protection of a friend whom she could respect; together with the certainty of securing a perfectly eligible establishment, and thus escaping all those miseries inflicted by the unfeeling world's scorn on the poor and the unprotected;—miseries against which her mother and her aunt had so often warned her.

[Pg 285]

Louisa was attended by Sir James, her expected marriage with whom was now the universal theme. She had herself, however, by no means made up her mind; she could not even approach a decision, her meditations on the subject always ending in a fruitless wish that Henry were the elder brother.

Madeline, who did not happen to have a lover present walked and talked with her cousin Geoffery.

Mrs. Dorothea had been called for as they passed her door; she was the companion of Lady Arden.

Arranged in the order we have described, our party came suddenly upon Alfred, standing where we last left him, and having just brought his solitary musings to the final summing up with which we concluded the last chapter.

[Pg 286]

[Pg 287]

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

Alfred could not without an appearance of great singularity avoid joining the party; he turned, therefore, and making his salutation to Caroline, and what other recognitions were necessary, in as hurried a manner as possible, took the unoccupied side of Madeline. Geoffery saw a good deal, and suspected more. "Where have you been all the morning, Alfred?" he said. "We have had some delightful music at Lady Palliser's."

"Indeed!" replied our hero.

"Yes," added Willoughby, "Lady Caroline was so obliging as to try one or two charming duets, in which her ladyship permitted me to attempt a part."

[Pg 288]

Alfred could scarcely credit that he heard aright—was it possible!—could Caroline indeed be so utterly devoid of feeling? What, but a few moments after having driven him from her presence, overwhelmed with despair by her capricious perfidy? However strangely changed, however indifferent she had herself become, had she not even the grace to compassionate the sufferings she had wilfully inflicted? Could she within the very same half hour be in such exuberant spirits that it was necessary to exhaust them by singing for the amusement of her morning visitors? Or was it indeed possible, that young as she was, she had already learned worldly wisdom sufficient to prefer the possessor of the Arden estates to his landless younger brother? So indeed it would appear. Had she not last night danced with Willoughby in preference to himself?—Had she not afterwards departed from her usual line of conduct to waltz with him also?—This morning, had not every thought and feeling undergone an evident and sudden revolution. That prudential considerations had been strongly represented to Caroline he made no doubt; it was highly improbable that such views had arisen spontaneously in her own mind; but of what value could the merely fanciful preference be that could be so easily turned aside? To believe Caroline worthless cost him a more cruel pang than even the knowledge that she was lost to him for ever.

[Pg 289]

As soon as the Arden family had reached home, after having left Caroline at Lady Palliser's, and parted from Lord Darlingford and Sir James at the door, the sisters began as usual to banter Alfred about his love; and Lady Arden observed laughingly, "But you seem to have quite resigned your post to Willoughby." Alfred made a strong effort to treat the subject with seeming carelessness, and replied generally, that younger brothers had no pretensions.

[Pg 290]



"That is," replied his mother, "as the lady may think. And I am sure Willoughby would be very sorry to interfere with your prospects; an heiress can be no object to him."

Willoughby looked amazed. Alfred begged Lady Arden would not treat the subject with such unnecessary solemnity, and assured his brother, with an earnestness that surprised the ladies of the family, that he had not the most distant intention of ever addressing Lady Caroline Montague, nor the slightest reason to suppose that if he were guilty of so silly a presumption, his forwardness would not meet with the repulse it should deserve. [Pg 291]

"I don't know that," said Geoffery; "it must depend on the share of encouragement a lady pleases to give."

"Lady Caroline Montague," observed Willoughby, "is certainly much to be admired; at the same time," he added, with evident pique, "I should be sorry, were I ever to enter the lists among her ladyship's adorers, to owe my success to being an elder brother, as my mother would infer!"

The girls persisted in laughing, and declaring there must have been a lover's quarrel; for that Alfred did not speak of Lady Caroline in the least like the way he used to do. [Pg 292]

"There is certainly a great change," said Mrs. Dorothea; "every thing appeared to be going on just as Alfred's best friends could have wished."

"How busy people make themselves," thought Willoughby, "but they shall not influence my conduct."

To avoid the painful topic, Alfred sauntered into the lawn by one of the open French windows. He was almost instantly followed by Willoughby, who took his arm and walked for some time up and down in silence.

"I wish Alfred you would be candid with me," said Willoughby at last, "I certainly admire Lady Caroline Montague, but mine is the admiration—the acquaintance of a day—an hour. If you are seriously attached, still more, if the attachment is, as my mother and sisters seem to think, mutual, tell me so honestly, and I am sure you will do me the justice to believe, that had I the vanity to suppose I could succeed in such an attempt, I would be the last being in existence to wish to interfere with your happiness; so far from it, that if fortune is the obstacle, say so, and I will make a settlement on you so splendid, as to leave no room for objection on that head." [Pg 293]

Alfred, quite overcome by his brother's generosity, was unable to articulate; he drew Willoughby's arm closer to his side in token of his gratitude, and they walked on a little, till finding themselves sheltered from the immediate view of the windows by a drooping acacia-tree, they paused by a sort of mutual consent, and Alfred, making an effort to master his emotion, said—"I feel Willoughby, if possible, more gratitude than if I were about to accept and be made happy by your noble offer. I feel too," he added, hesitating, "that I—owe it to your generous nature to make a confession, which else I had gladly avoided. I—I have been already rejected—rejected not by Lady Palliser on the plea of want of fortune, but by Lady Caroline Montague herself. You are, therefore, of course—free—to—to—" but he could not bring himself to give the palpable form of words to the remainder of the inference. [Pg 294]

"Rejected already! and by Lady Caroline herself!" repeated Willoughby. "Thank heaven then, my interference at least can never be alleged. What occurred before my arrival cannot be laid to my charge. This, under whatever circumstances may arise, will be an infinite consolation to my mind." [Pg 295]

Alfred did not judge it necessary to correct the slight error in chronology which his brother had made, and a protracted silence followed; at length Willoughby said, "Do you think it probable, Alfred, that you will be induced to renew your addresses?"

"Certainly not!" replied Alfred.

"In that case," said Willoughby, again breaking the silence, "who may or who may not ultimately succeed in making themselves acceptable to Lady Caroline Montague can in no wise affect your happiness?"

"My happiness," replied Alfred, in a strange hurried manner, "is quite irrelevant to the present subject: but I am not, I trust, so selfish as to feel any desire to condemn a lady to a life of celibacy, merely because—but let us lay aside this painful subject; I shall endeavour as quickly as possible to forget all things connected with it, except, indeed, the feelings of heartfelt gratitude so justly due to you, my dear Willoughby." [Pg 296]

While this conversation was passing in the lawn, Geoffery, whom we left in the drawing-room with the ladies of the family, addressed Mrs. Dorothea Arden thus:

"So you really think it will be a match between Alfred and Lady Caroline Montague?"

"I should think so, certainly," replied Mrs. Dorothea; "his attentions have been very marked, and have been received with decided approbation, both by mother and daughter; and I am sure that he is, poor fellow, very sincerely attached."

"We all thought it quite settled," said Jane. Her sisters echoed nearly the same sentiment. [Pg 297]

"There can be no doubt," observed Lady Arden, "that Alfred would have a right to consider himself very ill treated, if any objection to his pretensions were started at this late period."

"There was a great difference, however, last night," said Louisa, "in Lady Caroline's manner."

"And a still greater this morning," added Madeline.

"Your ladyship thinks Alfred attached to Lady Caroline?" asked Geoffrey.

"Unquestionably!" replied Lady Arden. "If the affair should not go on, it will be a very serious disappointment to him, I am convinced."

[Pg 298]

"And her ladyship received him well up to last night?" persisted Geoffrey.

"I should certainly say so," Lady Arden replied.

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END OF VOL. I.

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C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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