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MABEL.

A Novel,

BY EMMA WARBURTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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TO
MISS EMMA TYLNEY LONG,
THIS WORK
IS INSCRIBED
AS A SLIGHT BUT SINCERE EXPRESSION
OF GRATEFUL ESTEEM.

MABEL.

[1]

CHAPTER I.

Oh, timely, happy, timely wise,
Hearts that with rising morn arise,
Eyes that the beam celestial view,
Which evermore makes all things
new.

New every morning is the love,
Our waking and uprising prove,
Through sleep and darkness safely
brought,
Restored to life, and power, and
thought.

KEEBLE.

One morning, early in the month of August, a few years since, the sun rose lazily and luxuriously over the hills that bounded the little village of Aston, which lay in one of the prettiest valleys of Gloucestershire. The golden beams of that glorious luminary falling first upon the ivy-covered tower of the little church, seemed, to the eye of fancy, to linger with pleasure round the sacred edifice, as if glad to recognize the altar of Him, who, from the beginning, had fixed his daily course through the bright circle of the heavens, then pouring a flood of brilliancy on the simple rectory, danced over the hills, and played with the many windows of the old Manor House, which, situated at a short distance from the church, formed one of the most striking objects of the village.

[2]

Only here and there a thick volume of smoke rose from the cottages scattered over the valley, while the only living object visible was a young man, who thus early walked down the steep and winding path, which led from the rectory, and strolled leisurely forward, as if attracted by the beauties of the early morning. The slow pace with which he moved seemed to betoken either indolence or fatigue, while his dress, which was of the latest fashion, slightly contrasted with the

[3]

ancient-looking simplicity of the place.

Captain Clair, for such was his name, had quitted his regiment, then in India, and returned to England, with the hope of recruiting his health, which had been considerably impaired by his residence abroad.

On the preceding evening, he had arrived at the rectory, upon a visit to his uncle, who wished him to try the bracing air of Gloucestershire as a change from town, where he had been lingering for some little time since his return to England.

In person, the young officer was slight and well made, with a becoming military air; his countenance light and fresh colored, spite of Indian suns, and, on the whole, prepossessing, though not untinged by certain worldly characters, as if he had entered perhaps too thoughtlessly on a world of sin and temptation. [4]

There is, however, something still and holy in the early morning, when the sin and folly of nature has slept, or seemed to sleep, and life again awakes with fresh energy to labor. The dew from heaven has not fallen upon the herb alone, it seems to rest upon the spirit of man which rises full of renewed strength to that toil before which it sank heavily at eve; and as Captain Clair felt the breeze rising with its dewy incense to heaven, his mind seemed to receive fresh impetus, and his thoughts a higher tone. Languidly as he pursued his way, his eye drank in the beauties of a new country, with all the fervour of a poetical imagination.

On the right and left of the village, as he entered it, were high hills, covered with brushwood, a few cottages, with their simple gardens, lay in the hollow, and the church, standing nearly alone, was built a little above these, having the hill on the left immediately behind it. There was great beauty in that simple church, with that thickly covered hill above, and nothing near to disturb its solemnity. [5]

Further on, the hills opened, and gave a view of the whole country beyond, presenting a scene of loveliness very common in our fertile island. A small but beautiful river wound through the valley, carrying life and fertility along its banks. Wide spreading oaks and tall beeches, with the graceful birch and chestnut trees bending their lower branches nearly to the green turf beneath, enclosed the grounds of the Manor House, which, built on a gentle ascent, looked down on the peaceful valley below.

The house, itself, was a fine old building, well suited to the habits of a country gentleman, though not so large as the gardens and plantation surrounding it, might have admitted. These had been gradually acquired by each successive owner of the mansion, who took pleasure in adding to the family estate by purchasing all property immediately adjoining, but had wisely refrained from patching and spoiling the house itself. [6]

Captain Clair was determined to admire every thing; he had got up unusually early, and that in itself was a meritorious action, which put him in perfect good humour with himself. It was a very pleasant morning, too, numbers of insects, he had scarcely ever seen or thought of since he was a boy, attracted his attention, and flew out from the dewy hedges, over which the white lily, or bindweed, hung in careless grace. The butterfly awoke, and sported in the sunshine—and the bee went forth to the busy labors of the day, humming the song of cheerful industry. All combined to bring back long forgotten days of innocent childhood and boyish mirth; the pulse which an Indian clime had weakened, beat quicker, and his spirits revived before the influence of happy memories and the healthy breezes of the Cotswold. Then, as the morning advanced, he lingered to watch the movements of the villagers, and to muse upon the characters of the inmates of the different cottages as he passed them, and to observe that those who dwelt in the neatest were those who stirred the first. The labourers had gone to their work, and now the windows and doors were opened, and children came forth to play. [7]

As he returned again to reach the rectory in time for its early breakfast, he perceived one dwelling much superior in character to those around it, with its antique gable front ornamented with carefully arranged trelliswork, over which creepers twined in flowery luxuriance, and the simple lawn sloping down towards the road, from which a low, sunk fence divided it. Here, careless of observation, a young child had seated herself—her straw hat upon the turf beside her, while she was busily engaged in twining for it a wreath of the wild lily, forgetful that in a few minutes its beauty would perish; she was a lovely child, the outline of her infantine features was almost faultless, and her little face dimpled with smiles as she looked up from her occupation to nod some brief salutation to the poor men as they passed her on their way home. [8]

Arthur Clair could scarcely tell, why, of all the objects he had observed that morning, none should make so deep an impression as the sight of that young child, or why he felt almost sad, as he thought of her twining those fading flowers, and as he strolled on, why, he looked at nothing further, but still found himself musing on the delicate features of that young face.

When he reached the garden gate, he found his uncle strolling about, waiting for him.

Mr. Ware was a fine looking old gentleman, with silver hair curling over a wide and expansive forehead. Though a little under the middle height, there was a gentle dignity in his manner that could scarcely fail to be noticed, or if not noticed, it was sure to be felt. He was neither very witty, nor very learned—yet none knew him very long without liking him. His face, not originally striking, had become more handsome as he had grown older—for the struggle between good and evil, which must be in every well principled mind, a perpetual struggle, had been carried on by [9]

him for many years, and so successfully, that each year brought heaven nearer to the good man's thoughts; and now, as the race was so nearly finished, his zeal became more earnest, and his conscience more tender; fearing, lest, after a life spent in his Master's service, he might be found lingering at the last, and lose the prize for which he had been so long striving. In his eye was that look of serenity and peace which seemed to say, "he feared no evil tidings;" for he walked continually under the protection, which only can give that feeling of security which those who have it not would bestow great riches to possess. We have lingered longer than we at first intended in description, but, perhaps not too long. [10]

When we look back to the innocence of childhood, we sigh to think that we can never be children again; we recall that happy time when the world had not written its own characters of sin and falsehood in our hearts; we sigh to think that childhood is gone—but no sigh will recall it. But when we see an old man who has passed the waves of this troublesome world, true to the faith with which he entered life, we feel that here is an example which we may follow. Childhood we have left behind, but old age is before us, and if we live on, must come; and, as the body decays, do we not feel that the spirit should increase in holiness and strength, preparing itself for that beautiful world of light which it must enter or die.

Mr. Ware had resided for many years at Aston; when a younger man, he had been tutor, for a few months, to Colonel Hargrave, the present possessor of the Aston property—and though with his pupil, only during a tour through Italy, the attachment between them was such, that the young man solicited his father to prefer his tutor to Aston, when that living became vacant, partly, he told him, from his wish to secure himself a friend and companion, whenever he visited home. Mr. Ware gratefully accepted an offer which at once placed him in independence; and, as soon as he had settled himself in his new house, he carried one of his favourite projects into execution, by sending for his only sister, who had been obliged to procure her livelihood as a governess; his own small means being, since their father's death, insufficient for both. [11]

It was not then for his own sake entirely that he rejoiced in his improved circumstances. When he drove his neat little carriage to meet his sister, and when he brought her home, and shewed her his house—their house as he called it—with its pretty comfortable sitting-room, looking out upon the garden, and the neat little chamber, where all her old favourite books—recovered from the friend who had taken charge of them during her wanderings—rested upon the neatly arranged shelves, he felt as happy as man can wish to be. And when, with eyes glistening with pleasure, he assured her that it was her home as long as she lived—he said what he never found reason to repent, for the cheerful face of his companion bore perpetual remembrance of his brotherly kindness. [12]

He had once thought of marriage; but the idea had now passed away entirely. In early years, he had been sincerely attached to a school friend of his sister's, whom he had met during one of his Oxford vacations; but she died early, leaving her memory too deeply impressed, to make him wish to replace it by giving his affection to another. His sister, now almost his only near relative, had sympathised, most sincerely, in his loss, and had endeavoured to aid his own manly judgment in regaining that cheerfulness of tone so necessary for the right discharge of the every-day duties of life. She had been rewarded by the more than usual continuation of a brother's early love and esteem, and she had, therefore, no scruple of accepting his offer of protection, and a home. [13]

From that time, she had continued to keep his house with the most cheerful attention to his wishes and whims, and with an evenness of temper which had always been peculiar to her.

There was an air of gaiety about the whole house; the two maid-servants and the old gardener seemed to possess peculiarly good tempers—they were, indeed, scarcely ever disturbed, and we may venture to add, that they were not very much overworked.

There were hives of bees in the garden, chickens in the court-yard, and the gaily-feathered cock strutting about, giving a lazy crow now and then—all seeming to take their ease, and enjoy themselves. In fact, there was a blessing on the good man's home, that was always smiling round it. [14]

It was to this pleasant abode that the young soldier had come down wearied with London amusements, like some strange being who had yet to find a place in its social order.

"You are fortunate, sir," he said, as he strolled down the garden by his uncle's side, "in your neighbourhood. I have seldom seen anything before more comfortably beautiful, if I may use the expression."

"I am glad you like it," replied Mr. Ware, "and I assure you I shall be quite contented if it has the power to make you spend a month or two here agreeably. If you are fond of scenery, there are many places worth seeing, even within a walking distance."

"I suppose the Manor House is amongst the number?" observed his nephew, "I have been admiring it extremely. I cannot think why Hargrave does not come down here. Has he been since he came into the property?" [15]

"Yes—but only once, and then only for a short while; but you speak as if you knew him?"

"A little," replied Clair, "he came home with us from Malta; but friendship, sometimes, ripen fast. He found out my relationship to you, which commenced our acquaintance; I was charmed with him—indeed, I scarcely ever met more variety in any character. Sometimes I could scarcely keep

pace with his flow of spirits, and then he would fall into a fit of musing, piquing my curiosity to discover why so great a change should take place, as it were, in an instant—in short, I'd defy any one to get into his confidence. But you know him, sir?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ware, "I knew him very well at one time; his father sent me with him to Italy, and in return, the generous boy obtained me this preferment. But I have not seen him now, I think, for six or seven years—though we write to each other occasionally. You must tell me more about him at your leisure, however, for he is a great favourite with Mary as well as myself; but now, I think, you must be ready for breakfast—Mary is waiting for us, I see. Afterwards, if you are not tired, we will pay a visit to the church—there are two or three monuments of the Hargrave family worth looking at."

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"You are very kind," replied Clair, "I am sure I feel better already with the fresh country air—and health after sickness is happiness itself, sometimes."

At this moment, Miss Ware opened the glass door which led into the garden. She was dressed, with studied simplicity, in a black silk gown, with white muslin apron, and her cap, looking as white as snow, fastened round the head by a broad lilac ribbon; but the smile upon her face was the best of all, and was never wanting at the breakfast-table, for she always maintained that no one had a right to be dull after a good night's rest, or to anticipate the troubles of the day before they came.

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"Good morning, Edmund," said she to her brother, "and good morning, Arthur," giving her hand to her nephew. "I was just preparing to send your breakfast up-stairs, when I heard you had been out for more than two hours."

"I am not sorry to save you the trouble of nursing me, aunt—I have had enough of that in London," said Clair, gaily, as he followed her to the morning-room, where breakfast waited them. The meal was dispatched with cheerfulness, and he amused his aunt by an account of his walk, and the guesses which it had allowed him to make of the character of their poorer neighbours, with whom she was herself well acquainted.

After breakfast, Mr. Ware invited him to join his morning ramble.

"I shall have an opportunity," he said, as they descended the hill leading to the lower part of the village, "of pointing out to you some of the evils of absenteeism—of which you have, doubtless, heard much. I have always noticed, that what we gain from our own observation is worth much more than the information of others. In this little spot, unhappily, you will see very much to condemn. I have already told you that our landlord, Colonel Hargrave, has not been here for more than six years, and before that visit, which was chiefly occupied in field sports, his sojourn here had been very rare, for his talented mind led him to seek the more extensive knowledge to be gained from foreign travel, even before he entered the army. His father, who has now been dead some years, constantly resided here, till the death of his wife, which made Aston a very different place from what it is at present. Poor Mrs. Hargrave was universally beneficent, and was so much loved and respected by the people in this neighbourhood, rich as well as poor, that her name is scarcely ever mentioned without the title of 'good' being added to it. The time when good Mrs. Hargrave lived is always looked back upon with affectionate regret. When she died, however, her husband, who was passionately fond of her, took a distaste to a place which constantly reminded him of his loss, and he only paid very casual visits to it during the remainder of his life, which did not last long after the domestic blow he had sustained. At present, the estate is in the hands of a rapacious bailiff, who amply fulfils that proverb, which says, 'A poor man that oppressteth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food.' Unfortunately, I have no influence with him, and as he has to pay me tithe, he regards me in the light of others who are dependent upon him. It is an unhappy state of things, certainly, for the wages of the poor laborers employed on the estate, are, in some cases, kept back for months together. You may easily fancy how difficult it is for men to live under these circumstances, having no other resource beyond the fruit of their labors."

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They had, by this time, reached the hollow between the two hills, where a great many cottages were situated. About them was an appearance of neglect, that is, at all times, disagreeable to contemplate. In most parts, the thatch had become blackened by the weather, and here and there pieces of it had been blown off by the high winds, or were kept in place only by heavy stones laid upon the roof. In some places the walls, which bounded the little gardens, had been suffered to crumble down—loose stones lying in the gaps, but no effort seemed to have been made to replace them. A ditch ran along the road, partially covered with long grass and weeds; but the glimpses here and there afforded of it, told that it was used as a receptacle for the drains of that part of the parish—and a noxious stench arose from it exercising a baneful influence, as might be seen by the pale faces of the children who played about it.

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Added to this, there was a desponding tone over the general features of the place, which might have accounted for the wastes of ground which might be seen, here and there, covered with weeds, rather than converted to any useful purpose.

"Surely," said Clair, attracting his uncle's attention, "this self-neglect cannot be attributed to Hargrave?"

"Not altogether," replied Mr. Ware, "this is an evil which I hope time will remedy; there is, indeed, no excuse for it; yet the reason I believe simply to be, that the people, losing their accustomed stimulant, arising from a resident family, and depressed by the low and uncertain

wages they receive from an oppressive bailiff, have not yet learned to take care of themselves; but yet I hope, from day to day," said the good man, looking round, "it would not do for me to despond as well as the rest."

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Stepping over a small plank that crossed the ditch, they entered one of the cottages. The interior presented a kind of untidy comfort; a large heap of fuel lay in one corner, and a bed was at one side, and seemed used as a substitute for a seat during the day. The windows, where panes had been broken, were filled up with dirty rags; two or three children were playing about with naked feet, and their mother, a remarkably pretty young woman, was working at the darkened window. By the fire was seated a strong hale young man, with his hands upon his knees, contemplating it with gloomy fixedness. A red cap ornamented his head, and partly shaded a pair of dark eyes, and a scowling countenance.

Mr. Ware could not but enter the cottage with the consciousness that he was not particularly welcome; yet this did not render his visits less frequent.

"Well, Martin," said he, "I am sorry to see you at home, for I fear you are out of work."

[23]

The man answered, without rising from his seat—

"I am out of work, and so I am likely to remain, I suppose. It is up-hill work to have nothing better to look to than this comes to—and it is very hard to be owed ever so much money, which I have earned by as honest labor as was ever given in exchange for money. I have heard you read—'*cursed is he that keepeth a man's wages all night by him until the morning*,'—but I don't know what would be said to him that can keep them for months, letting a poor man starve, without thinking of him for a moment. When rent day comes round, then it must be rent, or turn out; we hav'nt got no power in our hands; but I say 'tis a very hard case."

"It is very hard, I allow, Martin," said Mr. Ware, "but the wrong done you does not excuse your sitting here idle; have you been trying for work?"

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"Yes, I've been to all the farmers round; but there's none to be got."

"How do you manage to get on then?"

"We live as we can," answered the man, sullenly.

"Well, my good fellow," said Mr. Ware, kindly, "make another effort, and do not sit down here idle all day. I hear that Colonel Hargrave is coming to England shortly, if, indeed, he is not already here."

"We have heard that so often," growled Martin, "that we cannot put any faith in it. He'll never come to do us any good, I reckon."

Mr. Ware offered him a little more advice as to exerting himself, and then, with a small gratuity to his wife, left the cottage with his nephew.

"He is a notorious poacher," said he, as they walked on, "and his excuse is, if they do not give us our own money, we must take an equivalent. It is difficult to preach while poverty and starvation are opposed to the maxims we would wish to inculcate. I wish something could make the Colonel believe the actual state of things; but I do sometimes fear he entirely forgets us. In that neat-looking dwelling," he continued, after a pause, "lives a woman, who has hitherto obtained her livelihood by supplying the poor inhabitants with bread and other necessaries; for some months past, however, Rogers, the bailiff, has found excuses to withhold the wages from most of the workmen engaged in repairing the premises at Aston, and they have been obliged to live upon credit, which this poor woman has been persuaded to give them—in consequence, she tells me, she is nearly ruined; and from the confusion in which her money matters stand, she has fallen quite into a state of melancholy. I went to her yesterday, so that I will not ask you to see her to-day; but we will come in here," he said, at the same time lifting the latch of a door, which opened into a small room, more like some hovel, attached to a tenement which contained several families.

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It was a wretched-looking place, and Clair could scarcely suppress a shudder as he entered it. It was but badly lighted from a broken window; an old piece of furniture served, at once, for a table and a sort of cupboard; two chairs, and a stool, completed the furniture, with the exception of a shelf, on which the poverty of the house was displayed, in half a loaf of bread which rested on it. Here an old man sat by the smouldering embers of a wood fire, holding his hands as close to it as possible, as if he hoped to find comfort in the miserable heat it afforded, for his thin hands looked cold, though it was still early in autumn. He welcomed them with pleasure, and offered his two chairs to the gentlemen with ready alacrity, taking possession of the stool for himself.

While Mr. Ware continued talking to the old man, Clair gave a searching glance round the poor dwelling, and trembled to think how the cold December wind would whistle through the old window; but when he thought of asking some questions concerning it, he was checked, by hearing the two old men discourse with such apparent ease and cordiality, as if they had entirely forgotten where they were.

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"Is it really possible, sir," said he, when they had left, "that nothing can be done for that poor old man?"

"I fear nothing can be done," returned Mr. Ware, "unless we can persuade Hargrave to return to

us."

"But how," enquired Clair, "would his coming remedy the evil."

"It would do so in a great measure," replied Mr. Ware, as they turned homewards. "A man with his wealth could afford to keep all that are now out of labour, well employed. A farmer cannot well afford to pay an old man for the little labour he can give, but a rich landlord can easily find him employment; at a lower rate of wages, of course. Formerly, those who were too old for hard work, were allowed to sweep away the leaves, or clean the weeds from the walks on the estate, which were a few years since beautifully kept. The absence of a rich family in a place where the people have learnt to depend upon them, is a serious loss. You will wonder, perhaps, that I do not instantly, and fully relieve the situation of the old man we visited just now, but the poverty which has prevailed in almost every house during the past year, has been very great; and I have been obliged to divide my charity so as to make it more extensive. Besides, I do not much approve of giving where it can be avoided; and, therefore, husband my means for the scarcity of the coming winter."

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"I should have guessed," said his nephew, "that some such motive influenced you, or I know such cases would meet with instant relief—but of one thing, I am certain, Hargrave cannot be aware of this."

[29]

"We will hope not," said Mr. Ware, somewhat sadly; "but I have written to him frequently, and if Rogers gave me the proper directions, it is hardly likely my letters have not reached him. It is too probable, that, like many more, he relies too much upon his bailiff."

They had, by this time, reached the rectory, and Clair, exhausted from unusual exercise, threw himself into an arm-chair, and took up a book.

CHAPTER II.

[30]

From dream to dream, with
her to rove,
Like faery nurse, with hermit
child,
Teach her to think, to pray, to
love,
Make grief less bitter, joy less
wild.
These were thy tasks,—

CHURCH POETRY.

About a quarter of a mile from the rectory, and close to the Church, was the pretty little residence which had attracted Clair's attention in his morning walk. It was an old fashioned little house, with gable front, and latticed windows, with ivy climbing over the walls, and jasmine and honeysuckle creeping in rich luxuriance over the old porch. In front, the grass-plot sloped down, with a wide gravel walk running round it, to the gate, which shut it in from the high road. At the back lay a spacious vegetable garden, irregularly laid out, and interrupted here and there by a rose-bush, or bed of beautiful carnations, as it suited the old gardener's taste—for he had lived in the family so many years, that no one dared dispute his will in the garden—it was conducted on his most approved style of good gardening; and old John would have defended that style against all the world. To have discharged him from her service would have been one of the last things his mistress would have thought of; therefore, the only alternative was to let him have his own way in every thing. One part of his system was to put every thing in the place best suited to its growth, without much regard to order, and the garden often presented a strange medley in consequence; the hottest corners were shared by early lettuces, and rich double stocks, and radish beds, and so on, throughout the garden; but there was something not unpleasing in the mixture, though it looked a little singular, and the general neatness was not to be found fault with—and the turf walks cutting the garden in many directions, were always smoothly cut and rolled.

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The spot where old John was most certain to be found, was just in the middle of the garden, where he had enclosed a small piece of ground by a high and closely clipped yew hedge, to keep out the wind. In this small enclosure, were two or three hot-beds, with cucumbers, melons, or some very early radishes, or cress under glass frames. He had always something to do round these beds, the matting covers were to be put on or taken off, and the glasses opened a little more, and more, as the day advanced, and then, of course, to be closed again, by degrees, towards evening. If any one touched them but himself, he looked as if his whole crop must inevitably be spoilt; but the secret might have been, that, he had always some little surprise to bring out of them, such as a cucumber ten days earlier than could have been expected; or some mustard and cress, before any one else thought of planting any, which, of course, was not to be seen till quite ready for the table.

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There was an appearance about the inside of the house, as well as of the garden, as if a great deal of money had been spent upon it formerly, for there were many solid and ornamental comforts in both, which might have been dispensed with if required.

The drawing-room, though small, was substantially and elegantly furnished, though old fashioned; every thing in the room too bore the evidence of refined habits, but nothing told of any present expenditure. Such as it had been ten years before, it very much remained now. The dining-room and usual sitting-room, had much of the same appearance though it did not give quite the same reflective, feeling—ladies' work, and a child's playthings, gave life and animation to it.

Colonel Lesly had lived here for many years since his retirement from the army, having lost a leg during the Peninsular war, where he had served as a brave officer, and only retired from the service when unable to be of further use to it. On his return to England, he, with his wife and child, settled in his native county—and fixed on this cottage for his residence. His wife was most sincerely attached to him, and her society with that of their daughter Mabel, made him scarcely regret, being obliged so soon to retire from a profession so well adapted to his tastes. He had been fond of reading, when a boy, and had not neglected the opportunities presented by his wandering abroad, to cultivate his taste for general information. One of his chief pleasures soon became that of teaching his little Mabel all he knew, and her intelligent questions often led him to take an interest in subjects he might otherwise have neglected. [34]

Since their settling at Aston, Colonel and Mrs. Lesly had had several children, who had all died in infancy, still leaving Mabel as the only object of parental love; fondly did her father guard the young girl's mind, growing in intelligence, and beauty, whilst her speaking features lighted up with smiles whenever he came near. Proudly did he watch her as each year gave her something more soft, more touching, more womanly; and earnestly did he hope that life would be spared him to guide aright a mind of such firmness and power, joined to feelings so warm and eager, that it seemed to him a question which would have the ascendancy, heart or mind. But that wish was not to be granted, and Mabel's first real sorrow, was her father's death. He had gone on a short visit to London, upon some urgent business, and had there taken the typhus fever, which made its appearance soon after his return home, and, acting on an enfeebled constitution, carried him to his grave, after a short illness. A few days after his death, Mabel's youngest sister was born. It was, indeed, to a house of sorrow and mourning, that the little child came, for her mother's constitution never recovered the shock she had sustained in the loss of one, not only most dear, but on whom she had become almost wholly dependent. [35]

It was then that Mabel felt the benefit of her father's lessons so firmly impressed on her mind, and resolved to act as she believed he would have led her to do, could he have been allowed the power of guiding her still. So severely did her mother feel the loss she had sustained, both in health and spirits, that she rather required support herself than felt able to afford it to those dependent on her; Mabel, therefore, soon felt the necessity of exerting herself, as all the family responsibilities seemed left entirely to her care. [36]

As soon then as she could at all recover from the blow occasioned by her father's death, she applied herself to the management of their now reduced income, and busied herself in cutting off all the expenses which the Colonel's liberal habits had rendered almost necessary to his happiness, but which were now quite beyond their means. [37]

In the course of her enquiries, she had no greater opponent than old John; he first insisted that he himself was quite indispensable to the arrangements of the family; and when he had gained that point, he was equally obstinate about the carriage and ponies. But Mabel had the advantage in that particular, at least; the old gardener was left in quiet possession—but the coach-house and stable were shut up—and after many a battle with their old friend, everything else that could be dispensed with, was cut off, till the expenditure was reduced to something within their income. John pined and fretted, but his young mistress had such a winning way, he could not keep his ill-humour long. He had declared, during one of his contests, that she never could be happy without the pretty pony which had carried her up and down the hills so often; but he was obliged to give up the point, when he saw the delight with which she carried her infant sister in her arms and danced her in the sunshine, with half a mother's hope and pride, as if she wanted nothing more to make her perfectly happy. [38]

Sometimes, when the child grew older, she would take her to gather the yellow cress, or the cowslip, and watch her trembling steps with the most careful attention, or lead her to the churchyard, and there, seated on their father's tomb, give her her first lesson in eternal things. And then they would return together to cheer their mother's solitude, and try to divert her from her never ceasing regrets; and thus years passed by, and if sorrow laid again its heavy hand on Mabel's brow, resignation had followed to smooth away its lines, and leave it soft and gentle as before. [39]

On that bright August morning, which we have before described, she was sitting with her little sister, now a beautiful but weak and unhealthy child, of seven or eight, at her lessons in the cheerful little sitting-room. Mabel—with her bright, quick eye, changing color, and speaking countenance over which a thought, perhaps a single shade of mournfulness had been cast, and the little girl by her side looked well together, and they were almost always in company. Amy was at her French lesson, which that morning seemed peculiarly hard to learn, and much as she always tried to please her sister, she could not help turning her wandering eyes rather often to the open window to watch the butterflies flit past in the merry sunshine.

"It is so difficult, Mabel dear," said she, at length, "I learnt it perfectly this morning, but I cannot remember the words now."

"Well, try once more," replied Mabel; "but you must not look out of the window."

"But my head aches so," said Amy, coaxingly, knowing that Mabel could hardly ever resist her plea of illness. [40]

"Well, there is mamma's bell, and while I go to dress her, you can take a run round the garden—but do not be long, or I shall have to call you."

Mabel went up-stairs, and Amy ran off to the garden—her first object was the fruit trees, to see if any were on the ground—she found none—but many beautiful ripe peaches were on one tree, which was carefully trained against the wall, and one finer than the rest, perfectly ready, and peeping out from the leaves, looked peculiarly tempting. She stopped to look, then felt it gently, then tried to see if it were loose, till one unfortunate push, and the peach tumbled to the ground. Amy looked frightened, and gazed round to see if any one was in sight, but seeing no one, she picked it up, and began to eat it.

Suddenly the awful step of old John was heard coming from the cucumber-bed.

"How did you get that peach, miss?" he said, roughly. [41]

The child turned red, but answered quickly,

"I picked it up."

"Well, I would not have lost that peach," said he, "for half-a-dozen others. Miss Mabel told me to save half-a-dozen for Mr. Ware, and this was the best of the lot—I shan't have such another beauty this year. Oh, miss."

"But you said I might have all I picked up," answered Amy, clinging to her subterfuge.

"Yes; but I thought this was too firm to fall, watching it as I did too," said he, as he looked in consternation from the tree to the half eaten peach in Amy's hand.

The child was not long in taking advantage of his silence, and ran into the house just in time to take up the French lesson before Mabel returned.

There was a look of indignation not easily mistaken by Amy on her sister's face, when she entered the room. [42]

"Oh, Amy," she said, in tones of anger and surprise.

Amy looked up, but said nothing—she was frightened, for she knew that she had been doing wrong.

"I did not think," said Mabel, while an expression of contempt curled her beautiful lip, "I did not think you could be so mean as to screen yourself from blame by a falsehood."

Amy was going to speak, but her sister interrupted her.

"I know every word you would say; but it is all, all wrong. I heard every word, and I dare say, guessed every thought. You did not really mean to pick the peach, but you could not resist the temptation to loosen its hold. When it fell, you were surprised and sorry; but you could not resist the temptation to eat, because you were alone, and thought that no one saw you; then, when John came, you turned coward, because you were wrong, and told him you had picked it up—and this was true, though it was also true that you were the means of knocking it down first—so you had neither the courage to speak the truth, nor tell a falsehood." [43]

Mabel spoke quickly and impetuously, and as the whole truth glared on the child's mind, the hot tears fell quickly on her burning cheek.

"You do not love me, Mabel," she said.

"Because I will not let you be mean, deceitful, and wicked. What would papa have said had he seen his child act so?"

"Oh, forgive me, dear Mabel, and do not talk like that," said Amy.

There was a tear in Mabel's eye that softened the severity of her tone, and sitting down by her, she said, more quietly—

"Amy, love, in that little action, I saw enough to make me indignant, and more to make me sorry; for if you do not get rid of that deceit, which has led you wrong now, it will go on, leading you into worse errors, and how can I take care of you if I am not certain you are speaking the truth. Falsehood is the beginning of all sin; and you will learn to deceive me; and when I think my darling is all I wish her, I shall discover something hidden and sinful, that will tell me I am wrong. Oh, I am so vexed." [44]

"Forgive me—oh, do say you forgive me?" cried the punished child.

"Have I the power to forgive what is sinful?" said Mabel, kissing her affectionately.

Amy understood, and running to the chamber where they both slept, she fell upon her knees, and

clasped her little hands in prayer.

A child's repentance is not very long, and Amy soon returned, her countenance meek and subdued, and looked timidly at her sister.

"Now then, Amy," said Mabel, "prepare yourself for a difficult duty—come and tell John all you have done." [45]

Amy hesitated and trembled.

"He will be so cross," said she, entreatingly.

"Very likely; but you are not a coward now—you are not afraid to do right. It is difficult, I know, for John will not understand what you feel, and may remember it for a long time; but still you will come."

Amy gave her trembling hand to her sister, and, with a very blank countenance, accompanied her in search of John.

They had to go all over the garden; but found him, at length, standing disconsolate by the peach-tree.

"John," said Amy.

"Yes, miss," replied the old man, gloomily, and half angrily.

"John," she continued, "I touched the peach, and that was why it fell down."

He looked too amazed to answer. [46]

"I am very, very sorry—will you forgive me for telling a falsehood?" murmured Amy, beseechingly.

John looked still very surprised and angry.

"Miss Amy," he began, "I could not have thought you—"

"But forgive her this time," interposed Mabel, "she is very sorry, and it has been a hard struggle to come and tell you how very wrong she has been."

"Bless you, miss," answered the old gardener, quickly, "you are your own father's child, and I know how much you must have suffered when you found any kindred of your'n a telling lies. But I forgive you, Miss Amy, and never you do wrong like that again. Bless you, Miss Mabel, for you be leading the dear young lady in the right path, as well as walking in it yourself."

CHAPTER III.

 [47]

Love not, love not, the thing you love may change.

What general interest is excited by the arrival of the post. Who ever settled himself in a new place, for the shortest time, without making himself acquainted with its details, the time when it arrives and leaves? And who ever entirely loses this interest, spite of its often more than daily occurrence? There is no sameness in it, because there is no certainty.

Letters only came to Aston twice in a week, and then they were brought by a man—who could hardly be dignified by the title of postman—at some uncertain time in the middle of the day. [48]

On these days the road by which he came was an object of interest to Mabel and her sister, and they often walked in that direction to secure any letters there might be for them, without waiting for their tardy delivery. They were often joined by Mr. Ware on the same errand, and that afternoon they overtook him as he was leisurely mounting the first hill on the road.

"Well, young ladies," said he, greeting them with a smile, "we are all going to meet the postman as usual I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mabel, "the post always seems to have sufficient interest to make even you choose this road on Tuesdays and Fridays."

"Well, I confess," he replied, "I always have great pleasure in seeing the man turn the corner, besides, as he is so uncertain, one is tempted to take a longer walk, expecting to see him every moment." [49]

"Yes," said Mabel, "we almost always meet him, and yet there is seldom more than the possibility of a letter after all."

"My hopes are not quite so indefinite," said Mr. Ware, "I am always certain of a paper, which is often worth more to me than a letter. I used to think when a person took great interest in the post it was a sign that they were not quite happy at home or in themselves."

"And do you not think so still?" said Mabel.

"Not so much, certainly," he replied, "I think it often arises from the feeling that we are not quite independent of the outer world till the letters of the day have been read. Good and bad news must frequently come by letter, and, therefore, as long as we have any friends separated from us, we must feel a little anxious to know if there be any news at all."

"Do you not think," said Mabel, "that this is sometimes carried too far, and may degenerate into almost a sickly feeling?" [50]

"Yes, certainly; I would not have any one indifferent on common subjects, but too great attention to things of this kind must be wrong."

"I have often thought so," said Mabel, thoughtfully, "when I have felt quite anxious on seeing the man coming, and then when I open my letters, full of the most ordinary business, I feel quite ashamed of myself."

"And what were you really hoping for, dear child?" said Mr. Ware.

The color rose fast over her truthful countenance, but at this moment the postman himself was seen, and saved her the pain of answering.

Mr. Ware soon secured his papers, and one or two letters, and being anxious to convey one home to his nephew, he took leave of them where the road separated.

"Now then," said Mabel, when they had parted from him, "let us see which will get home first, for mamma will be glad to get this letter from aunt Villars." [51]

Amy reached home first, but Mabel quickly followed her to the drawing-room.

"Here, mamma, is a letter from aunt Villars," said Mabel, echoed by Amy.

"From Caroline," said Mrs. Lesly, "I do not think it can be from Caroline, for there is no Bath post-mark, it comes from Cheltenham."

"Do open it mamma, and see if they are at Cheltenham," said Mabel.

"Fetch me my glasses then," returned her mother, "stay—here they are, but you must not hurry me, or my head will begin to ache again, it has been very bad all the morning."

"Oh, yes, mamma, there is plenty of time; come, Amy dear, and take your bonnet off."

Mabel had taken up her work before she again ventured to ask any questions. At length she said —

"Is aunt Villars at Cheltenham, mamma?" [52]

"Yes, my dear, but only for a week or ten days."

"Will she come and see us now she is so near?" she enquired.

"I will read what she says about that, my dear," said Mrs. Lesly, taking up the letter, (some part of the aunt's communications being always mysteriously reserved).

Here it is:—

"I cannot leave Gloucestershire without coming to see you, dear Annie, and your sweet children, and therefore, if you say nothing to the contrary, I will drive over some how on Monday, and remain till Tuesday. If not asking too much of my dear sister, I shall leave Lucy with you; she is not quite well, and a run in the country will do her good, after the heat of Bath. My little girl finds pleasure in anything, and I promise you she shall be very good if you will let her come to you."

"Oh, how nice, mamma," cried Amy. [53]

"Very nice that your aunt is coming, I allow," said Mrs. Lesly, "but I do not know what to say to Lucy, all little girls are not so good as my Amy."

"It would be unkind to refuse her," said Mabel.

"And if she is not well, poor child," added her mother. "I quite forget how old Lucy is, she cannot be so very little after all."

"But," said Amy, "aunt calls her, her little girl, and says she will be very good; if she were grown up like Mabel, of course she would not be naughty."

"I do not know that," said Mrs. Lesly, with a smile, "grown up people are often as naughty as little ones; so either way she was right to promise. Well, we must have the spare room opened, it must be quite damp, I fear, after being shut up so long."

"Oh, no, mamma," said Mabel, "I open the windows every morning, myself, so that I am sure the room is well aired." [54]

"There must be a fire there, however, I suppose," replied her mother, trying to exert herself to think.

"Yes, Betsy shall light a fire there to-day, and I will see that the room is comfortable."

"But stay," said Mrs. Lesly, who was always troubled by anything like arrangements, "who is to sleep in Lucy's room when Caroline is gone. I am afraid we cannot manage it."

"We will see how old she is when she comes," suggested Mabel, "and if she is afraid to sleep by herself Betsy must sleep with her; but from what I remember she cannot be very young."

"Well then, my dear," said her mother, "and so you will promise to contrive to make everything comfortable; now nothing makes me so ill as arranging, and your poor papa never left me anything of that kind to think of. I remember once going down to Weymouth, when you were a baby. I could not tell what I should do there, being obliged to sleep at an hotel, for the first night, for we could not find a lodging, the town was so very full. So when we came there, we could get nothing but a small, uncomfortable room; and some how or other, we could not find any of the baby's things without pulling our boxes all about so, and I was so tired and teased, that I sat down, and—and—

[55]

"'Annie,' said he, 'now don't cry—I can bear anything better than your tears—leave everything to me—it will be much the easiest plan.'

"And so I did—and he put my nurse to work so busily, that my baby was asleep before I could think about it; and the next morning he was up early, managed to secure us a lodging, and made us all comfortable. Ah, I am afraid he spoilt me, I do not know how to do anything now, I fear."

"Well, dear mamma," said Mabel, twining her arm round her neck, and kissing her affectionately, "I would not have you miss my dear papa less than you do; but you must not tease yourself about anything. Did I not promise to try and supply his place? I do not mean to let you have any trouble at all. Here is your desk and a new pen—the ink is a little too light, but it writes freely—and now, while you answer my aunt's letter, you will be glad to get rid of us."

[56]

"I do not want to drive you away, love," replied her mother; "but you know I can never write if there is the least noise—so, perhaps, you had better go, and take Amy with you. I have not written for such an age, it makes me quite nervous."

"Oh, yes, I know, mamma dear; come, Amy, we will go and look to the spare room. I will seal your letter, mamma, when it is finished."

Mabel was soon busy in thinking over the accommodations necessary for visitors, with Betsy's aid, amidst Amy's incessant questions.

[57]

"Do you think, Mabel," she began, "that Lucy is very little?"

"I do not much think she is little at all," replied Mabel.

"But aunt Villars called her, my little girl," persisted Amy.

"Yes, but many mammas talk of grown up children in the same way."

"Do you think," said Amy, after watching her sister for a few minutes in silence, "I had better put some of my books on the shelf for her to read, if she happens to like them?"

"If you have any that will look pretty, you may put them there certainly."

"Do you think she will like the swing at Mr. Ware's?"

"If she is like you, perhaps she may; but whether she be little or not, we must both try and make her pass her time pleasantly, you know," said Mabel, as she glanced round the room with approval.

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The chintz curtains had been re-hung—the snow-white coverlet had been placed upon the bed—and the dressing-table arranged with the most careful attention to comfort and convenience. Everything, in the careful arrangement which Mabel had bestowed upon the room, seemed to speak a welcome; and through the open window the fresh breezes of the Cotswold hills passed freely.

"Does it not look comfortable?" said Mabel, appealing to her talkative companion.

"Yes, Mabel, dear, everything looks nice that you manage; but," added she, returning to the former subject, "if she is a great girl, what can I do to amuse her?"

"Oh, many things," returned Mabel; "even you can do, I think, if you try; you must not talk to her very much, and ask her too many questions."

"Do I tease you, Mabel, dear, when I ask you questions?"

[59]

"Not often; but then you know I love you," said her sister, "and therefore do not get teased."

"But why do you think she will not love me?"

"I think it very likely she will love you," said Mabel, looking down upon her affectionately, "if you are good; but not till she knows you, not very much, at least. You know, we must buy people's love."

"Do you mean by making them presents?" said Amy, looking a little shocked at the idea.

"Not what you mean by presents certainly," said Mabel, smiling.

"What then?"

"Well then, first, you must give them your love, before you consider what they think of you."

"Is that a certain way of buying love?"

"It will be nearly certain," said Mabel, "to get you good will, at least, from every one, whose esteem is really valuable, for when we love, we try to do everything that is kind; we are not easily offended by little things that might annoy us, if we did not love; and then the wish to avoid giving offence, will lead us to govern our feelings, so that we may not be sullen, or out of temper, which would make us disoblige them by saying anything to wound their feelings." [60]

"Would it do anything else?" said Amy, who always liked to hear her sister talk.

"Yes, I think it would lead us to speak the truth, for fear of encouraging them in any bad thing; for if we must not do wrong, we must not let it be done by others, if we can help it, particularly by those we love."

"But then," said Amy, "if a person is bad, do not you think it would be better to wait and see? We ought not to like a bad person, you said, one day."

"Not exactly that; I told you not to be intimate with Mary Watson, because she did many things I did not like, and knew a good many little girls, who could not teach her any good; but still, I think, if, for some reason, we were obliged to have Mary Watson here, you might love her just as much as I told you to love Lucy, for if you spoke the truth, she could not think you liked any of her naughty ways." [61]

"Then why may I not know her now—could I not speak the truth?"

"Perhaps you might," said Mabel; "but I think, sometimes, that not to avoid temptation, is taking one step to evil; so I thought it best to avoid Mary Watson, as I could scarcely hope you would do her very much good, and she might do you harm."

"You always think of me, Mabel," said Amy; "when do you find time to think of yourself?"

"When I go to bed," she replied, "and then I ask myself if I have been as kind to my little orphan sister as I ought to be?"

"But, Mabel, dear, when you sit alone, sometimes, and look so very sad, and I come in, and see tears on your face, is that about me?" [62]

"No; but it is not often so."

"Not often; but I am so vexed when it is. Why is it, Mabel dear?"

"Because," she said, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke, "somebody loved me once, who does not love me now."

"No, I am sure that is not true—every one loves you; mamma, Mr. Ware, Miss Ware, Betsy, John, every one." "I am sure that can't be true, and it is naughty to fancy unkind things; Mabel, dear, dear, Mabel," said the child, jumping on a stool and throwing her arms lightly round her neck, "and you are never naughty."

"Oh, yes I am, many many times a-day," said Mabel, hiding her face on Amy's shoulder, "my good, good, child, what should I do without you."

"Oh, nothing without me, you could not get on at all without me." [63]

"Not very well, I think, certainly," said Mabel, smiling through her tears at Amy's satisfaction, "but we have been a long time away, and mamma must have finished her letter—come and let us seal it before the man calls again, for if it is not ready, what will become of our visitors."

"But, Amy," said she, sinking her voice almost to a whisper, "never tell mamma or any one that I ever cry, or why I cry."

"Oh, never, you know I can keep a secret."

"You promise," said Mabel.

"Yes, I promise faithfully."

CHAPTER IV.

 [64]

This is a likeness may they all
declare,
And I have seen him, but I know
not where.

Mrs. Lesly had been, as a girl, both beautiful and accomplished, gifted with good natural talents, though possessing little perseverance and much indolence of character. Upon her marriage every faculty of her mind became absorbed in devotion to her husband, and an almost indolent dependence on his will. Since his death she had continued so very depressed that, at the time when both Mabel and Amy might have much needed a mother's care, she felt every exertion too great for her weakened nerves and failing health.

[65]

She had, by her marriage, entered a family a little above her own, and now suffered the too general consequence, in the neglect of her husband's relations. She felt all things deeply, and this, if possible, aggravated her loss. The Lesly and Hargrave families were closely connected, but the absence of the Colonel, whose family mansion lay so near them, prevented her receiving that attention which the neighbourhood of a rich relation might have procured her. The secluded life to which she now clung so earnestly, only increased the extreme sensitiveness of her feelings. Her mind therefore, suffered to prey upon itself, became a curse instead of a blessing, as it might have been, had it been employed in any useful purpose; and the delicacy and refinement of her nature, now only quickened her perception of the slightest coldness, or unkindness in those around her; spreading about her a kind of atmosphere of refined suffering, which duller eyes would never have discovered.

[66]

Yet the indulgence which she claimed from others always rendered her an object of affection, and her devotion to the memory of her husband veiled many failings, and excused her indolence sometimes even in the eyes of the most ascetic. Joined to this weakness of character, however, she possessed many fine qualities. She was generous in the extreme, and liberal to a total forgetfulness of self, and would forgive, where no injury was intended, with a magnanimity, which, applied to a real offence, would have been noble. She was also very patient under the oppression of continual ill health, and though too indolent to exert herself, she was capable of suffering without complaint.

Mabel inherited her mother's intellect and delicacy of feeling, but seconded by a strong will and great common sense. She possessed also beauty equal, if not superior, to hers, though in her face it always seemed secondary to the feelings which were spoken by it. But there was one peculiar charm in her character, which secured the love of those around her as powerfully as an Eastern talisman. It was a reliance on the good will of others, drawn perhaps from the reflection of her own heart—a kind of security in the feeling that there is always good to those who rightly seek it; a trust in the virtue of others which often proves a touchstone to wake its hidden springs, whilst all feel ashamed of disappointing a hope, founded more on the truest feelings of charity, than on weakness or pusillanimity.

[67]

Unlike her mother, she scarcely ever suffered from illness, and gratefully used the blessing of strong nerves and untiring strength in aiding the weakness or bearing with the irritability of others.

Happy the child who possessed such a guide and playfellow, to listen to all the questions and trifles so wearisome to the sick or weak.

Mabel's patience was often called in requisition during the few days which passed before the arrival of the aunt and niece from Cheltenham. At least half a dozen questions would be asked almost in the same form, to which she had to give answers.

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At length however, the long expected hour arrived, and Amy had seated herself on the lawn to catch the first sight of that corner of the road which was the furthest point visible, and Mabel was frequently sent to the gate to watch for the carriage, by Mrs. Lesly, who was enduring all the discomfort and nervousness of being quite ready to receive them a long while before it was at all probable they would arrive.

Captain Clair, too, who had, as Mr. Ware's nephew, established a kind of intimacy at the cottage, was leaning over the gate, refusing to come in, lest he should disturb the family meeting, yet seeming well inclined to chat away the time with either of the sisters.

"I am sure you are spoiling your sister, Miss Lesly," said he, after hearing the patient answer to the sixth repetition of 'do you think they are coming;' and Amy had ran in to her mamma to report.

[69]

"That is a very grave accusation, but I do not think you quite believe it," said Mabel; "indulge, but not spoil."

"Well, indeed," said he, "it would be difficult to find fault with such persevering self-denial, so we will say, indulgence."

"It requires little self-denial," said Mabel; "to be kind to a very young, and very dear sister. No, self-denial will not do, I will not take the praise of a martyr for doing what I love best. Are you certain," she added, "you do not feel the sun too much, where you are standing, had you not better come in and speak to mamma?"

"Not on any account, thank you," he replied, smiling; "I intend to vanish when the carriage comes up, and present only the very interesting appearance of a departing friend, in order to give a little life to such a landscape."

[70]

Mabel laughed.

"Here they are, then, now you may look picturesque."

"Not quite yet, wait a bit, I must be a little more prominent first, or they would never see me. Now is the very moment," raising his hat to Mabel, and with these concluding words, he walked slowly away.

Mabel was seized with momentary shyness, and retreated unobserved, to seek Mrs. Lesly, whose head began to ache, from waiting so long—but, as the party took a long time in alighting, and collecting from the vehicle a multiplicity of boxes, she felt ashamed of being afraid of strangers, and ran down again to meet them.

"Oh, my charming niece," exclaimed her aunt, with apparent cordiality, and kissing her warmly; "how do you do, my sweet girl, let me make you acquainted with my Lucy."

Lucy, who, to Amy's disappointed eye, did not look at all little, took Mabel's hand with earnestness, and putting one arm round her neck, kissed her with extreme warmth, exclaiming:— [71]

"We shall be dear friends, I know."

"I hope so," said Mabel, startled alike at her relation's warmth, and her own composure, which appeared something like coldness.

Mrs. Lesly was met by her sister with the same enthusiasm which quite overcame her weak nerves, and she burst into tears; she could not tell why, she thought it might be joy, or that her head was overpowered by the sweet scent on their pocket-handkerchiefs, or the rapidity of her sister's conversation, and expressions of endearment. Mabel looked on in dismay, a scene had been produced which she was puzzled to remove.

"Dear mamma, do not cry," said she, then turning to Mrs. Villars who was overwhelming her with caresses, she added, hastily; "mamma is not quite well to-day, but she will be better presently, if she is quiet a little while. Will you come and take your bonnet off, aunt, for you must be tired after your drive." [72]

"No, my dear, but I think I will venture to leave her a moment while I run down and see if our boxes are all right; an immense deal of luggage, but then, I am going home, you know. I brought my maid too, though I forgot to mention her in my note." Mrs. Lesly looked alarmed. "I really do not know if she has looked to every thing, but I will go and see, I always like to see things right myself," and with an important air, she hurried down stairs.

Mrs. Villars was of imposing appearance, though too bustling in her manners to be altogether dignified, with colour a little too brilliant, and hair a little too stiffly curled, to be quite natural. Yet, whatever was artificial, was very well added to a good figure, and fine face.

Poor Amy was quite awed into a bewildered silence. Mrs. Villars presently bustled back again, telling Mabel she was now quite ready to go to her room. [73]

"This way, then," said Mabel, shewing them to the chamber she had so carefully prepared; "this is your room, and I hope you will find every thing comfortable."

"Oh, I dare say," she said, looking round, as if approving a child's doll's-house; "everything so very neat and nice, and where is Lucy to sleep."

"This is the only spare room we have furnished and fit for sleeping in now; the rest are shut up," said Mabel, a little timidly, "and we thought you would not mind sleeping together for one night, as you say you cannot stay longer, aunt."

"Oh, yes, we will contrive—but what is to be done with our maid."

"I must manage for her presently," said Mabel; "Betsy has been told to make her comfortable for the present." [74]

"What time do you dine, dear," said Mrs. Villars; "the air of these hills makes one hungry. I really could dine unfashionably early to-day."

"I fancied so, and therefore ordered dinner to be ready half an hour after your expected arrival," said Mabel; who tried to keep them in conversation till Mrs. Lesly should have time to recover herself; and this delay so far succeeded, that on their return to the drawing-room, they found her quite composed.

Dinner being soon after announced, Mrs. Villars gave her arm to her sister, in the tenderest manner possible, saying.

"Well, dear, I hoped to find you quite strong, I must not have any more of these naughty hysterics, or I shall think you are not glad to see me."

"Indeed—indeed, Caroline, you mistake my feelings."

"Well, then, smile away, and I shall read them right. What do you think of my Lucy?" she added, in a whisper; "I wish I could shew you all my girls—for admiring beauty, and accomplishments, as you always did—I do not know what you would say, if you saw them all together. Now, in my opinion, Mabel is perfect." [75]

The last speech reached Mabel's ear, and, perhaps, was intended to do so—but quick as she was in the ready perception of virtue, she had never feebly blinded herself to the faults of others. These few words made her feel uncomfortable—for she was immediately aware that there was a want of sincerity in her aunt's manner, which, betraying some latent reason for dissimulation, always produces a feeling of dislike, or fear.

To Mrs. Villars Mabel soon became an object of fear—she could not tell why, but she had scarcely been a few minutes in her company without perceiving that superiority which the weak-minded find it difficult cheerfully to recognise. Superiority in what, she did not stop to analyse—but even while most lavish of her endearments, she was secretly almost uncomfortable in her presence. [76]

Mrs. Villars had given herself a worldly education, which, though it had moulded even her virtues and foibles according to its own fashion, had never yet been able, entirely, to eradicate the sense of right which had been inculcated in earlier years; yet she only preserved it as a continual punishment for every act of dissimulation and wrong, without ever allowing it to regain entire ascendancy over her; though it was a conscience to which she felt bound perpetually to excuse herself. So false, indeed, had she turned to herself, that Mabel's open, honest, truth-telling eyes seemed something like a reproach.

Love for her children—one of the greatest virtues of a woman's heart—had become one of her greatest failings. Her natural disposition rendered her love strong and untiring; but worldliness had warped its usefulness, rendering that love, in its foolish extreme, only a means of making herself miserable, without really serving them. She learned to spoil, but had no resolution to reprove; and they had grown up in accordance with such training. [77]

As children they had been coaxed and bribed to appear sweet-tempered and obliging in company—the plan succeeded; but only left them more ill-tempered and unmanageable when the restraint was removed. This system was, however, too readily followed; and as they grew older, their foolish parent saw no other efficient plan for securing their position in society, than that of continuing the same course of indulgence. She now tried, by the most unbounded gratification of their wishes, to secure to herself that love which timely discipline might easily have preserved in tempers not naturally degenerate. But veiling this weakness, she prided herself on the greatness of her parental love, and threatened to weary every one else by the excess to which she carried it. [78]

Glad of an opportunity of touching on her favorite topic, she said to her sister—

"You must come and see us all some day. Mr. Villars would be so glad to see you, and I should have an opportunity of shewing you my pet girls."

"I never stir out now," returned Mrs. Lesly, shaking her head mournfully, "scarcely even beyond my own door. But Lucy will, I dare say, give us a specimen of all your sayings and doings in time. I should much like to see the children; but fear there is but little inducement to ask any of them to a place where there is so very little going on. My Mabel is very fond of the country, or I should often have been vexed at our seeing so little company."

"Oh, you are quite mistaken, my dear," said Mrs. Villars, quickly. "Caroline and Selina are very fond of the country, and so are you, Lucy." [79]

"Yes, I like it very well in the summer," said Lucy, languidly.

"Do you like the snow?" asked Amy, speaking for the first time.

"No, not much; but we had better not talk of snow in August—it is too near to be pleasant," said Lucy, a little impatiently.

"You forget the balls, my dear," said her mama, soothingly, and watchful of her children's tempers as a lover of his mistress.

"No, mama, I was speaking of snow in the country, and there, I suppose, there is not much dancing. Are you fond of balls, Mabel? but I forgot, I need not ask, for, of course, you are."

"I have never been to a public ball," replied Mabel, "but I have often enjoyed a dance at a friend's house."

"Have you really never been to a ball," exclaimed Lucy, opening her pretty blue eyes wide, with half real and half affected astonishment. "You would be enchanted with Bath. We have such delightful balls once a week. The Thursday balls they are called, and then every season—" [80]

"Lucy, love, you will tire your aunt with your prattle," said her mama, "now confess, Annie, does she not make your head ache?"

"A little," replied her sister, "but do not let my weakness interfere with her enjoyment. She will have little else to listen to besides her own voice," Mrs. Lesly added, trying to smile away her sister's chagrin at finding it really possible that she could be tired at hearing Lucy talk.

There was a momentary pause, when Mrs. Lesly, anxious to conciliate by returning to the subject she perceived gave most interest, enquired—

"Is Lucy your eldest?" [81]

"Oh, dear no! Caroline is the eldest, Selina second, and Lucy the youngest."

"But I think you have one more, have you not?" said Mrs. Lesly.

"How can you forget how many children your own sister has?" said Mrs. Villars.

"My memory is getting feeble, and you must excuse me," replied Mrs. Lesly anxiously, "my forgetfulness arises from no want of affection; but I have not seen you for a year or two now."

"I had forgotten," returned Mrs. Villars, "how time flies. I really must write oftener to you, and keep up your knowledge of us. Well, there is my Maria—but, poor child, I am in despair with her—so unfortunate."

"Not ill, I hope?" enquired Mrs. Lesly.

"No, no—that could be cured—a doctor might cure that; but this, nothing can cure. She is ugly—positively ugly—by the side of her sisters at least; and more than that, she is ungraceful. I have tried the best academy in the town, but nothing will do her any good—such a contrast to the rest, she never will settle I fear."

[82]

Mabel glanced at Amy, who was drinking in her aunt's words with the eager curiosity natural to a child, and fearing the effects of this worldly conversation upon her young sister, she persuaded Lucy to come with them into the garden.

Lucy put her arm in Mabel's, whilst Amy watched the movement jealously.

"Here is a lovely peep at the hills," said Mabel, leading their guest to one of the prettiest parts of the garden, where a stone seat was placed near a break in the trees, commanding a view of the country beyond.

Here they seated themselves, looking for a short while, in silence, on the landscape, which the setting sun rendered still more lovely. Had Mabel expected any fine remark to follow this momentary pause in the conversation, she would have been disappointed, for Lucy's next enquiry was whether there were many nice people in the neighbourhood.

[83]

"Yes," said Mabel. "Mr. and Miss Ware are very nice people."

"Who are they?" asked Lucy.

"Our rector and his sister."

"Is he unmarried?" enquired Lucy, with increasing interest.

"Yes," replied Mabel, smiling, "but not very young."

"But still marriageable, I suppose?"

"Barely," said Mabel, "at least, I do not think he would consider himself so now. Why, he must be nearly seventy."

"Then who was that fine young man that was walking down the road just now, with light whiskers, and a military air. I did not expect to see such a handsome, *distingué* looking young man down in the country here."

"That is Mr. Ware's nephew," said Mabel.

"Oh! then he does live here—what is his name?"

[84]

"Captain Clair; he is only here for a short time, for his health," replied Mabel; "but how could you tell he had light whiskers?"

"Because he passed while we were at dinner, so that I had a good look at him," said Lucy, half blushing.

"Amy," said Mabel, "there is Captain Clair beckoning for you to run to him, and I dare say he will get you the blackberries he promised you."

Amy ran away to the garden-gate, where Captain Clair was waiting for her, and hand in hand they were soon down the blackberry lane that led to the fields.

"What a very fine young man," exclaimed Lucy, as she watched them out of sight; "do you see him often—I suppose he is a beau of yours?"

"No, oh, no," said Mabel; "a sort of friend he has made himself—but certainly not a beau."

[85]

"Ah, you say so."

"And I mean so," said Mabel.

"You mean then, that he is free for conquest," laughed Lucy, coquettishly.

"As far as I am concerned, he is as free as air," said Mabel; "but I would not have you attempt such a conquest, I should think he was too easily won to be kept long in subjection."

"Ah, I know what you mean," said Lucy; "a sort of man that falls in love with every tolerable girl he meets—the very thing for a country visit."

"Well, I suppose neither party would be in much danger if those are your real sentiments," said

Mabel. "Captain Clair is too discerning to be entangled by a mock feeling, and you are wise enough to think of nothing more."

"Exactly so," replied Lucy; "but oh, whose pretty house is that amongst the trees?"

[86]

"Colonel Hargrave's," said Mabel.

"Colonel Hargrave!" cried Lucy, "cousin Henry, as we call him now. Do you know, Mabel, he is just come back to England, and mamma wrote to ask him to come and see us in Bath. I am so longing to meet him; and we have made up in our minds, already, a match between him and Caroline—that you know would do very well, for she is just thirty, and he must be a few years older, must he not?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mabel.

"And that would be a very nice difference, you know. I am quite longing for him to come. I have talked the match over with Selina so often, that I cannot help looking upon it as quite certain; and then we should have such a nice house to come and stay at; and you would be so delightfully near—would it not be pleasant?"

"You will find it cold without your bonnet," said Mabel, evasively, "shall we go in and fetch it."

[87]

"No, thank you," said Lucy; "but I see you are not fond of match-making."

"No, I confess I am not," said Mabel; "but I suppose you hear a great deal of it in Bath, where so many matches must be talked over."

"Oh! an immense deal—it is quite amusing to hear of so many projected marriages, and of their coming to nothing after all."

"But that is why I think match-making anything but amusing," said Mabel.

"But then all the *éclat* of a conquest would be gone," suggested Lucy, "if there were no talking beforehand. I assure you, last year, there were I do not know how many half offers in our family. Selina and I used to walk round the Crescent and count them all up, and they helped us through the dull weather amazingly; something like the nibbling of a trout, which just serves to keep up the hope of ultimately catching one. Mamma talks a great deal about Caroline's beauty, and her charming spirits—but she does not know how to sleep for wishing her married. It would be horrible to have her an old maid—so I hope and trust the good Colonel, with, I dare say, Indian guineas, and an Indian face, will take pity on her, and bring her here."

[88]

"Give me a description of Caroline," said Mabel, suddenly. "Is she not very beautiful and accomplished?"

"How you startle me," said Lucy. "Why she is very tall—fine features, people say—she has black hair and black eyes, and dances splendidly—polks to admiration—so very good-natured—and witty before company—and rather the reverse behind the scenes—in short, would do much better for Mrs. Hargrave than for the eldest of four maiden sisters—and so, in all due affection, I should be very glad to see her married."

"Is she clever as well as beautiful?" said Mabel.

[89]

"She sings and plays beautifully. Yes, I believe she is clever—knows French well."

Mabel sighed.

"I do not know how it is," said Lucy, when after a short silence, they prepared to return to the house, "but I feel you to be quite a friend already. I must love you, whether you will let me or not."

"I shall be very glad to have you love me," said Mabel, gently; "but wait till you know me better."

"I can never wait and deliberate, when loving is the question," said Lucy; "it is like me; I am always quick in my likes and dislikes—and I feel now as if I could tell you every secret of my heart—I am only nineteen, so such want of consideration is pardonable—is it not, dear Mabel?"

"It is not quite safe, perhaps," replied Mabel; "but yet rather easy to forgive, in the present—instance—at least, when I feel myself to be concerned. But if you make me your friend, you must give me the power of an elder sister."

[90]

"Not like Caroline," said Lucy, with a look of pretended terror.

"I shall not let you find fault with Caroline," said Mabel, "that is my first effort of authority; but you have chosen to love me, and you must take my friendship on my own terms."

"Well, I think I will take it on any terms. I dare say it will be worth having," said Lucy; "but first, you must seal our friendship with a kiss, and tell me that you love me as much as I do you."

"My love is of slower growth," replied Mabel, smiling; "but I promise to deal with you as if I loved you. Will that do?"

"I suppose it must," said Lucy.

"You are right," said Mabel, kissing her pouting lips, "that must do till we know each other

CHAPTER V.

[91]

Whence then that peace
 So dovelike? settling o'er a soul that
 loved
 Earth and its treasures? Whence that
 angel smile
 With which the allurements of a world
 so dear
 Were counted and resigned?

MRS. SIGOURNEY.

Mabel and Lucy retired that night early, in order that they might leave the sisters time to talk quietly over the fire, which a chilly evening rendered not unwelcome.

Mrs. Villars placed her feet on the fender, and turning up her dress to prevent the fire injuring it, she made herself perfectly comfortable in preparation for a long chat. Mrs. Lesly had seated herself opposite in her arm-chair, with a glass of lemonade on a small table by her side, which she sipped from time to time, as she listened to long accounts of her sister's hopes and fears for her children's welfare, together with various anecdotes, tending to show the admiration they excited wherever they appeared. At length, these long and varied narrations came to an end—and Mrs. Villars, turning to her sister, enquired, in a tone which seemed to say, confidence claimed confidence, if there had not been some story about Mabel's marrying. [92]

A very sensible feeling of pain passed for an instant over Mrs. Lesly's countenance before she replied—

"Yes, but that was a long time ago, and I cannot bear to think of it now."

"But," said Mrs. Villars, who always peculiarly interested herself in anything relative to marriage, "you never told me the particulars, and I should so like to know them."

"No," said Mrs. Lesly, "I remember I only just mentioned it for I was so much pained at the time, that I could not write on the subject." [93]

"You never even told me the gentleman's name," said Mrs. Villars.

"No, Mabel made me promise to mention that to no one; I felt it was delicate and right in her to wish it, and I have never spoken of him openly since, indeed amongst ourselves he is as if forgotten."

"A man of property, was he not?" said Mrs. Villars, "and quite young I think you said?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Lesly, with a half sigh, "the marriage seemed in every way desirable, they were well suited in age, and I thought in character, and rejoiced to think that she would have a companion in life so well calculated to show her off to advantage. He was, besides, a man of considerable fortune, and my Mabel is, I think, particularly fitted for a station above that which she at present enjoys. Her taste in painting and sculpture, has been acknowledged by masters—and tho' so kind and useful and simple hearted now, I always thought she was fitted to dispense even patronage. Ah, well, these were the dreams of days gone by, and I do not know why I bring them up to-night, except to shew you that the sacrifice she made was no ordinary one. Ah, poor girl, the contrast is striking, now she is soon likely to want even a home." [94]

"Was it not a long attachment?" said Mrs. Villars as her sister paused.

"Yes," returned, Mrs. Lesly, rousing herself, "they had been more or less attached from childhood. There was always a kind of wayward goodness in Mabel, that was very attractive. She had generally her own way, but that way seemed so unselfish that I had neither the power nor the wish to complain. He admired this spirit, mixed with so much sweetness; nothing she did seemed wrong, and even when she was indiscreet, which I dare say she might have been very often—he said, it was because she was more pure-minded than other people." [95]

"Well, I do not see anything very sad in all this. I should have been highly flattered," said Mrs. Villars, "now my Selina is so like what you describe, she does the most indiscreet and pretty things imaginable sometimes."

Mrs. Lesly continued silent for a few minutes, then again rousing herself she continued—

"He used to call Mabel his little wife, long before her papa died, and I used to think over it all, as you remember we used to talk of things a long time since."

"I see," thought Mrs. Villars, "a case of jilt, very distressing, but an old story to those who know the world as well as I do." She felt a slight sensation of comfort at arriving at this idea, when she

remembered her own unmarried daughters.

"Well," continued, Mrs. Lesly, "whenever he came to the neighbourhood, which he often did, they were almost always together. Sometimes they would walk in the fields at the back of our house, Mabel leaning on his arm, whilst he carried Amy. But unfortunately when his father died he went to Paris, and staid there about a twelve-month. When he returned he was altered, how or why I could not tell, but it seemed as if the simplicity of his character was gone, though I tried hard to think him only more manly. Mabel was a beautiful girl when he returned, and it was soon easy to perceive that however changed he might be in other respects, his affection for her remained unaltered." Mrs. Lesly stopped to sip her lemonade, and then with some little effort continued—"His return," she said, "to which we looked forward so much, did not make us happier. He would persuade her to go out sometimes, but she always came back soon, and often looked as though she had been crying, though she never said any thing—I then noticed and watched him more carefully, and at length I found that he had not entered the church since his return from France, a practice he never before neglected. I then paid more attention to his conversation, and often brought up serious questions on purpose. Here I discovered the sad truth; he talked very seriously of virtue and moral responsibility, but if I spoke of religion in connexion with it, he changed the subject or looked at Mabel, and was silent." [96]

"I was now quite puzzled, it seemed hard to find fault with one so good in every other respect, but in religion, which he spoke of as a curious and useful superstition, acting as a guide to vulgar minds. 'Mabel,' said I, one day, 'what does all this mean? What has come over him to make him think as he does?'" [97]

"You must know, Caroline, that indolent as my weak health has made me, and careless of imparting things, I used so much to value, I had not neglected my child in the most important of all points of knowledge; sickness had made me prize that, in proportion as every thing else lost interest; but I did fear for her when, with only my weak lessons she had, perhaps, to answer the arguments of a man of peculiar talent, and great though mistaken penetration, aided by the love, I was well aware, she felt for him." [98]

"But you studied these points well I know," said Mrs. Villars, "and I dare say fully explained them."

"You are right," replied Mrs. Lesly, "at least I tried to do so, I always have endeavoured to make the heart and head act together. You will see that I succeeded, beyond my hopes. It seemed that he had been in the constant habit, of confiding every thing to her, and had always found an admiring listener to his thoughts on most subjects. On his return from France, he was too candid to conceal from her, the change his opinions had undergone. It appeared, from his own account, that while abroad, his society had been mostly composed of those generally distinguished by the name of free thinkers. Perhaps, feeling that he could argue well, and with a too presumptuous trust in himself, he courted every opportunity of disputing with them on the nature of their opinions. With daring intellect, he trusted every thing to his understanding, and nothing to his faith. He found superior intellect, and the consequences were too natural—I do not think he had any settled views afterwards, and I very much fear became little less than an infidel. All this I gleaned by repeated questions from my poor, broken-hearted child." [99]

"'Now,' said I, 'my Mabel, this is too serious a point for husband and wife to differ upon, this I once hoped you would be to each other, but he is no longer worthy of you. Now you must prove what and how you believe.' I spoke sternly, for I feared for her, she kissed me fervently but she could not speak. 'Do you understand me, Mabel,' I said."

"She only replied, 'I do,' but that was sufficient, my heart ached for her, but I was at peace. It was not long after this conversation, that the last scene occurred; I remember I had been sitting in my room all the morning, finishing some work that Mabel had begun for me. At length, I grew tired of being alone, and, taking up my work, I went down stairs. I heard a voice speaking loudly in the sitting-room, and I guessed whose it was. I felt frightened—for since my William's death, everything affects me—so I stopped; but I heard my child sobbing, and I opened the door directly. She was seated at the table, leaning down, and covering her face with her hands. She always feared to vex me by letting me see her grieve; but I saw she was too agitated even to think of me at that moment. He was standing opposite, glaring on her like a maniac." [100]

"'Madam,' said he, turning to me as I looked for an explanation, 'it is well, perhaps, that you are here, to witness your daughter's coquetry, or her madness.'" [101]

"'Sir,' replied I, 'pray remember to whom you speak; there may be a slight difference in our rank, or wealth rather, but none that I recognise where my child is concerned.'"

"'Do not attempt to reason with me,' he replied, 'I am mad. Your daughter, in whose love I, at least, had faith, is fanatic enough to refuse to marry me, because we differ on some absurd points of superstitious doctrine.'"

"'I cannot agree with you,' I said, trying to speak calmly, 'in calling them absurd, and that is where we differ. What happiness can Mabel expect with one who ridicules the motives which are, at once, the guide and blessing of her existence?—or what reliance can she have on a man who does not even recognise the principles on which she alone relies for strength. I think Mabel is quite right to remain as she is, sacrificing, as she does, every worldly interest to a noble principle.'" [102]

"The poor girl started up, and walking to him, laid her pretty hand upon his arm, and looking at him beseechingly, she said—"Do not let us part in anger—I can bear anything but that—let me remain your friend for ever, even as you are; but do not think me wrong for refusing to be your wife."

"I never shall forget that moment; he shook her from him, as if she had been a serpent. She reeled back for an instant, and then sank at my feet.

"He looked down upon her, as she lay upon the floor, hiding her face in my gown, as if he would have withered her with his contempt. Oh, how could he think I could have trusted her to one like him?"

"Feeble as was my hold on religion before," he burst out—"It is broken now, if this be the effects of it," and he looked down upon my poor stricken girl.

"I was silent.

[103]

"What right," thought I, "have I to retaliate upon him reproach for reproach?" but I thought my heart would break.

"Why did she not try to win me to her truth," he exclaimed, "if she thinks it of so much consequence?"

"Has she not done so for the last four months?" I said.

"Yes; but as a wife," he replied, "she would have had treble power."

"She is forbidden to be your wife," I said, "by the very religion she professes—and would her acting in opposition to its laws have convinced you of its truth?"

"There was no love in the case," said he, not heeding me, "and now she wishes to be my friend," he continued, with a sneer, "as if there were any medium with me between love and hate, except utter forgetfulness." "Madam," he exclaimed, as if suddenly remembering himself, "forgive me what I have been saying; had she let me, I would have been to you more than a son—as it is—fare well."

[104]

"Without another word to Mabel, he left us, and I have never seen him since.

"I dare say a great deal passed more than I have told you; but I am very forgetful now—though I well remember how miserable I was that day, and for a very long time afterwards, for poor Mabel was very ill, and never left her bed for weeks. I sent to our good Mr. Ware, and told him everything, and asked him to come and comfort Mabel; and so he did, most effectually. Night after night did I sit by her, terrified by her fits of delirium and the dreadful exhaustion which followed them. I took cold then, and my nurse wanted me to go to bed, and leave her to watch by her; but what was life and rest to me, without my child?"

"Amy sat upon her pillow nearly all day, and would whisper, 'don't cry, dear Mabel.' There was not much comfort in her baby words; but I think Mabel liked to hear her.

[105]

"Mr. Ware was unwearied in his attentions to her; and, at length, she began to rally. Then I became ill, with anxiety, perhaps, or the cold I took from the night-watching, and it was quite touching to see how hard she tried to get well, that she might nurse me in turn. Oh, what a comfort it was when she began to smile again. You see how well she is now—she is never ill, and how cheerful and happy she seems. I try to think it all for the best, though it is difficult sometimes."

"Well, you have, indeed, had a great deal to vex you," said Mrs. Villars, much touched.

"I have, however, much happiness to look back upon," said Mrs. Lesly, sighing gently, "in my William's kindness for so many years; but my health is failing sadly—and I have one care certainly, when I think of leaving my children without a friend in the world to take care of them—particularly as with my life, my pension, which is the only source of our income, will cease."

[106]

"Yes," said Mrs. Villars, "it was almost a pity she did not marry the young man—what a provision it would have been for both."

"I think you would have acted as I did," said Mrs. Lesly, "would you not?"

"Why you know," she replied, "I never thought of those things as seriously as you do, and my love for my orphan children would have been a great temptation. Indeed, that love for my family guides me in almost everything, and after all, why his staying away from church would not have prevented her going."

"No, no, Caroline," said Mrs. Lesly, too indolent to contest this narrow view of the subject. "I have been foolish in many things, over and over again, but in this I feel that I acted wisely."

"Not with much worldly wisdom, dear Annie," said her sister, smiling.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Lesly, "those who believe in an overruling Providence, act most wisely, even for this world, when they obey its laws."

[107]

Caroline sighed; her sister's single-minded language recalled days long gone by; when their views had been more in accordance, and for the moment, she would have given much to have

retained the simple faith of their childhood; for her life was made up of shallow, and quickly forgotten repentances.

After a pause, she said:—

"Annie, I hope you will live many years; but if it should be otherwise, do not have one care for your children, for while I live they shall find a home, wherever I may be."

"My dear, dear sister," said Mrs. Lesly, while tears of gratitude and affection dimmed her eyes; "that is so like your old kindhearted way of speaking. Could I believe that you would, indeed, be a friend to my children, I should be spared many a wakeful night, and this freedom from anxiety might prolong my life. But, Caroline, you have a large family, and can ill spare your means." [108]

"It may be so," replied the other; "but you set me an example of doing right without regard to consequences; why should I not follow it? And you recall the days of our happy childhood, when these feelings, and such as these, were common to us both—let them be common again, dear Annie."

Mrs. Lesly, kissed her sister with grateful affection, and again, and again, thanked her for her generous promises. Alas! judging of her by herself, she little knew how evanescent were her resolutions, nor guessed that the sentiments she sometimes professed, as little belonged to her own heart, as the delusive images of the Fata Morgana to the waters they enliven. They soon afterwards parted for the night, Mrs. Lesly more cheerful, and her sister more serious than before their evening conversation.

CHAPTER VI.

He only can the cause reveal,
Why, at the same fond bosom fed;
Taught in the self-same lap to kneel,
Till the same prayer were duly said.

Brothers in blood, and nurture too,
Aliens in heart so oft should prove,
One lose, the other keep, Heaven's clue;
One dwell in wrath, and one in love.

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

Mrs. Lesly found Mabel waiting for her in her room. A book was lying open by her side, but she appeared to have been rather thinking, than reading.

"Mabel, my love," she said, "it is past twelve o'clock. I am so sorry you sat up for me."

"I am only waiting to undress you, mamma," said Mabel, "you are so much later to-night, that I thought you would be tired. I have been lying on your sofa, half asleep, for more than an hour. Have you been talking of me?" she added, lowering her voice. [110]

"Yes, a little," replied Mrs. Lesly; "but why do you ask, what can any one say ill of you."

Mabel sighed.

"I talked of you, dear, not merely to satisfy my sister's curiosity; but, because there is in the world a very strong prejudice against single ladies, old maids, as they are termed, in contempt, when there is no good reason given for their not marrying. It is a foolish prejudice, but still a strong one; and, therefore, I would rather that people knew why you are not married; at least, that all those who have any right to criticise your conduct, should know that it has been by your own choice."

"Ah, mamma," said Mabel, "you are thinking of my feelings as they would once have been." [111]

"And as they may be again," said the mother; "but not as they ought to be, I allow. But you bear your trial so well, love, that I would not have it increased by one unkind, or worldly remark. You have done right, and can, therefore, afford to suffer; yet there is no harm in sparing yourself any needless pain. Go to sleep, now, my child, I do not wish to see you tired, to-morrow."

Mabel retired to her own room, with feelings stirred up, she scarce knew why, by the arrival of their new guests, and she would willingly have thought awhile in silence, but Amy was awake, and restless.

"What time is it, Mabel, dear," for by that affectionate title, she usually addressed her.

"Past one o'clock, dear," said Mabel; "are you awake, still."

"I have been to sleep, once," said Amy; "but I was dreaming all the time, first of Lucy, and then about Captain Clair, and the blackberries. You said she would not like me quite at first, but she seems to love you in one evening—how is that?" [112]

"I really do not know; Lucy puzzles me, rather, but she says she likes, or dislikes, quickly."

"But that is what you tell me not to do," said Amy, sitting up in her bed, as if prepared for a regular discussion of the subject.

"Yes," said Mabel, "because I am afraid you will not choose your friends well, and may be mistaken if you judge too quickly."

"Well," said Amy, gravely; "I suppose Lucy is clever to find you out so soon, but it puzzles me to think how she could tell you were good, in one evening."

"I do not think she does know much about me, yet," said Mabel; "but do not let us think of her just now, for if we never think of ourselves at any other time, I think we should before we go to sleep. So, now you must not talk any more."

Mabel then turned her pillow, smoothed the hair back from her heated cheeks, and made her comfortable, so that Amy, having no further excuse for keeping awake, soon fell asleep. [113]

The next morning Mrs. Lesly was up earlier than usual, that she might enjoy as much of her sister's society as her short visit permitted.

After breakfast, Mrs. Villars said, that if they could have a chat by themselves, she should be glad.

To this Mrs. Lesly willingly agreed, and after some little conversation on the arrangements of the day, led her to her sunny dressing-room, where her own mornings were most frequently spent.

"I hope," said Mrs. Lesly, taking up her work, "that nothing unpleasant has occurred, to make you wish to speak to me; but, perhaps you have been thinking over our last night's conversation."

Mrs. Villars coloured slightly with the consciousness that the feelings awakened by her sister's conversation, had been of very short duration. [114]

"No, dear," said she; "last night I listened to your trials and troubles, this morning you must hear mine."

"Oh," said Mrs. Lesly, "I would never have taken up your time last night, had I known that you were thinking of any thing that pained you."

"You are always too kind to me," said Mrs. Villars, "and I am sure I would much rather hear you talk than talk myself, for it does me good to be with you, but really, now we are sitting down, I have hardly the courage to speak of what I wanted to say."

"No one is ever afraid of me," said Mrs. Lesly, "and you know, if you are in any trouble, I never can find fault."

"Well then," said Mrs. Villars, "I will tell you exactly how I am situated. You must know that Mr. Villars has had, or pretends to have, had a great many losses this year, which have really quite soured his temper. He does nothing now but grumble, saying, I am not half so economical as I ought to be, and I do not know what peevish stuff. He says I dress the children too expensively, and then he tells me they would look better in white muslin than in all the laces I put on them." [115]

"Well, there I think he is right," interposed Mrs. Lesly, "nothing makes a girl look so nice as a simple white dress."

"I cannot agree with that," said Mrs. Villars. "Caroline has just the figure—just the majestic style of beauty that does not do for white muslin and simplicity, and in her black velvet and pearls, I do assure you, she looks fit to be a duchess. Selina, too, has just that fairy beauty which requires the lightest and most delicate of colors, and how very soon they soil, particularly with polking—and, besides, they cannot always be wearing the same dresses in a place like Bath. I cannot help wishing to see them respectably dressed, when I hear every one speak so highly of their beauty. You must forgive a mother's pride, but I cannot help it." [116]

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Lesly, "if your object is to marry them well, you ought not to dress them so expensively. Few men intending to marry, like the prospect of furnishing an extravagant wardrobe. The idea of having to pay for their dress should gently insinuate itself, not glare upon their attention in velvet and satin."

"Now, Annie," said Mrs. Villars, "how unkind it is of you to talk in this way. You see, I had reason to be afraid of speaking to you."

"I meant it most kindly, I do assure you," said Mrs. Lesly.

"That may be," said Mrs. Villars, poutingly; "but that cutting way of speaking hurts the feelings, and you are very fond of it, sometimes."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Lesly, "I only meant a little good advice, but as you do not like it, I will say no more." [117]

"Besides," continued Mrs. Villars, "I expect girls with such pretensions and advantages as mine have, to marry men of wealth and station, who will only be too proud to see them dress well. You ought to see them enter a ball-room, and how immediately they are surrounded."

"Ah, yes, I dare say," said Mrs. Lesly, who was always too indolent for any long argument, and generally gave up a point, even with Amy, when persisted in beyond her patience.

"But now then, to return to my little difficulty," said Mrs. Villars, recovering her good-temper. "You know Mr. Villars is so horribly cross now, I do not dare to bring anything before him."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Mrs. Lesly; "my William never said a cross word to me, that I remember."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Villars, "it is very different with me, I assure you—Villars is always finding fault now, since the girls are come out." [118]

"Well," repeated Mrs. Lesly, "I certainly never remember being afraid of my poor husband."

"No; but then he was a soldier, that makes a man very different," said Mrs. Villars, "so kind and open-hearted. Now Villars, though he has left his business in the city, and is only a sleeping partner, yet he seems to take as much interest in it as ever; and if anything goes wrong, then he is off to London to give his advice, he says, and comes home so cross, there is no speaking a word to him, and if he finds us going out, as we do, of course, nearly every night, then he goes off sulky to his study. Married life with such a man, is no joke, I can tell you. When we first married, he had such an easy temper; he says I spoiled it, but the fault lies at his own door, of that I am certain. But I would not say this to every one." [119]

"I hope not, indeed," said Mrs. Lesly, much pained; "it is better to keep these things from everybody; and you cannot blame him without finding fault with yourself at the same time."

"And that I am not disposed to do," interrupted Mrs. Villars; "no, I assure you, before company, I make him appear the very pattern of perfection. I would not lower myself by showing the world how very little influence I have over him. But now to the point—I must tell you, that last winter, I was foolish enough to run up some bills with my jeweller, milliner, and others, a little higher than ordinary, and now every day they become more importunate, and I have made excuses till they will listen no longer. I do not know where to turn for money, till this business pressure is over and Villars has recovered his temper. Now could you, I know you could if you would, just lend me a hundred pounds for a few months?"

"Ah, Caroline, but ought I?" said Mrs. Lesly; "think of my poor children, and my health such as it is." [120]

"But what possible harm could that do them?" said Mrs. Villars, as if surprised; "do you think I could be so barbarous as to think of hurting them. It is perfectly safe with me; and I will pay you in six months."

"But, my dear Caroline," said Mrs. Lesly, "why not tell Mr. Villars? it will be but the anger of an hour—contrast that with the pain of deceiving him."

"I do not mind telling him everything, when his present difficulties are over—now it would be unkind to ask me."

"But," answered her sister, timidly, "do you think I am right in suffering more of my money to be in private hands, even in yours?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Villars, coloring slightly, "you are speaking of the five hundred I owe you already; but you know I promised to pay that back with five per cent interest when my aunt Clara dies, and leaves me the legacy she promised, and which Villars always said I should do just as I liked with. I gave you a memorandum of the promise, in case of any mistake." [121]

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Lesly; "but I really do not know what I have done with it—I am afraid it is mislaid."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Villars, again coloring, and looking down upon the spill she was twisting from the pieces of an old letter; "but surely, if it be lost, you could not think your own sister would—"

"Oh, no, no," said Mrs. Lesly; "I think nothing but that you are imprudent; and oh, Caroline, however I may disguise the truth from Mabel—I am not ignorant that a few weeks may, and a few years certainly will, bring me to my grave. Now am I right to trust so much even to you?"

A mother's courage was strong, even in her timid and indolent mind, and she spoke with tears in her eyes. [122]

"Now then," said Mrs. Villars, "I promise, if you will be generous this once, that your children shall never want a home while I have one, and every comfort which my own possess shall be theirs; only rescue me this once from my husband's anger."

"I have done it so often," said Mrs. Lesly, "I am afraid it is unkind to both of you to do it again."

"Oh, do not say so," cried Mrs. Villars, "oh, think again, do not say that, and you so kind and good. You know I have given you a written promise, to pay it out of the legacy aunt Clara is to

leave me, and that is as binding to my mind, beloved sister, as a legally executed deed; as Villars promises positively, I shall do what I like with the money, when I get it. Have I not promised to continue to pay five per cent interest to your children as well as yourself, should you not live, as I hope and trust you may, many, many years. I can do that easily, as I have done before; at least I could have done so had we not agreed to let the interest accumulate, that I might pay you in the lump. Where is my promise? you have lost it you say, but I remember it all well enough. Oh, good, kind Annie, think again."

[123]

"But that paper is lost," said Mrs. Lesly, with a vacant look, and she passed her hand over her forehead, as if trying to remember something of it.

"I would offer to write another promise," said Mrs. Villars, "only I do not like to bind myself to two sums; for every one may not be so honourable as yourself, and you must have it somewhere, but you need not doubt me if it is lost, need you?"

"I wish you would not talk of doubting," said Mrs. Lesly, "it makes me feel so uncomfortable; but once again, my dear sister, let me entreat you to have no concealments from your husband, they never lead to good. If you will tell him everything, I promise to lend you the money."

[124]

"That is as good as refusing altogether," replied Mrs. Villars, sulkily, "why not say you will not at once, that would be plain and open, but as it is," she added, bursting into tears, "I see you do not care for me."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Lesly, much pained, "you know I can never bear to see you cry—dry your tears and listen to me. How are we to get the money?"

Mrs. Villars brightened up in an instant.

"Why," said she, "you bank at Coutts's—write me a draft, and I will get it changed in Bath, some how; I can manage it as I did before."

"My money," said Mrs. Lesly, with unusual gravity, "has been reduced for your sake, to a very few hundreds, a mere trifle, but my children!" exclaimed she, suddenly dropping her pen, and clasping her hands convulsively.

"I have promised to be their mother," said Mrs. Villars, "but nonsense, you will live many years yet."

[125]

"Do not think of it, do not think of it, my doctor knows my constitution too well to flatter me with such vain hopes. I have been better since you have been here, but that is excitement, and now my head aches so."

She placed her hand upon her forehead, and sank into deep thought.

Mrs. Villars grew impatient; for there was a struggle going on within her, in which her better self was busily engaged; and the worldly woman almost feared the world would lose the victory, while she trembled at the feelings she was exciting.

The whole truth indeed being, that the money she so earnestly solicited, was intended, not to discharge debts already incurred, but to furnish additional display both in dress and housekeeping, during the approaching visit of Colonel Hargrave to Bath, which the worldly mother hoped, till she believed, would end in a marriage between him and her eldest daughter, whose temper was becoming soured, by the failure of repeated matrimonial speculations.

[126]

Mr. Villars had found it necessary to lay down a plan of economy for the following year; limiting its proposed expenditure in a manner which little suited the taste or the tactics of his family, and it, therefore, occurred to his imprudent wife, that there would be no harm in forestalling the legacy of a thousand pounds, promised by an invalid aunt, by adding another hundred to the five she had already borrowed upon it, under the impression that any present expenditure would be amply compensated if she succeeded in placing her daughter in possession of Aston, with whose broad lands she was well acquainted, though of the character, disposition, or principles of its owner, she was quite ignorant.

She well knew how to work upon her sister's feelings, already enervated by grief and ill-health, and the narrow views of a selfish woman had often led her to do so; but now, as she regarded the weakness that seemed to implore protection, she felt her powers of dissimulation fast failing before these new thoughts of compunction. After all, she thought she might do without the money, the girls' old dresses were new to Hargrave, and he might be a man of simple habits, and, perhaps, would really be more attracted by white muslin, than crimson velvet—if so, she was perhaps sinning for no purpose—might she not do without the money—she might, but she had never learnt the principle of self-denial, where right and wrong is concerned; and then come second thoughts—why did she wait for them? When temptation is present, the first quick generous impulse is the safest. There is a voice in our hearts which never directs us wrong, let us listen to its least whisper. Why, like the avaricious prophet of old, are we dissatisfied with its first answer—why will we ask, and ask again, till the reply suits, not our conscience, but our desires.

[127]

In this case as in many others, Mrs. Villars's second thoughts triumphed. Why should she submit to her husband's pitiful economy—was it not his fault if she were forced to borrow; and she paid, or meant to pay, her sister good interest, which would atone for every thing; and, at the end of the season, no doubt the longed-for marriage would take place; and, even supposing her grateful

[128]

daughter forgot to share her pin money with her, Mr. Villars could not but applaud her conduct and settle her debt; and, even if not—but she was in no humour for ifs—and a glance from the window at the rich woods which skirted the Aston estate, and a glimpse through the trees at the mansion itself, quite settled the question, and she continued twisting her spills with perfect satisfaction.

Not so Mrs. Lesly, she had seated herself at her desk, indeed, and taken up her pen with a trembling hand; but her eyes were vacantly following her sister's occupation.

"This will never do," thought the worldly woman; yet she was afraid to hurry her.

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Lesly, at length, after continuing in the same attitude of observation, "I was thinking how very strange it was that I never remember our talking about money, but you were making spills all the time." [129]

"Why, you see," said Mrs. Villars, carelessly, "I never thought it worth while to bring my work for the short time I generally stay, and I never like to sit quite idle."

"Yes; but when you stayed with me for a month, it happened then as well," said Mrs. Lesly, in a musing kind of tone.

"It was rather strange, certainly—but more strange that you should remember such trifles," said Mrs. Villars, her face turning rather disagreeably pale.

Poor Mrs. Lesly, fearing she had offended her, took up her pen, and wrote like a frightened child, then quickly handed her the draft.

Mrs. Villars hastily rose and kissed her, and then, taking her pen from her hand, wrote a memorandum of the loan, which Mrs. Lesly placed in her work-basket.

At that moment, Amy ran into the room, crying out— [130]

"Mamma, mamma, I have cut my finger—do please give me a piece of rag, or I shall spoil my dress."

Mrs. Lesly, easily frightened, hurried to her assistance, and, though Amy kept exclaiming that she was only anxious about her dress, hurried her off to a receptacle of old linen, which she kept in preparation for every accident.

Mrs. Villars glanced at the paper she had just written.

"How careless Annie is," thought she. "Yet she seemed suspicious just now about the spills—could she have guessed I tore up the other papers I wrote? No—impossible! It is so awkward to be pressed for money, at all sorts of times, and poor Annie is not long for this world, I see. That Mabel has a sharp eye, and would not be easily deceived. Well, it does not alter the obligation one bit, and what does it signify between sisters. I only do not wish to be hurried." [131]

A clue to these thoughts might be given by her putting out her hand, and drawing the paper to her, amongst the pieces she was tearing up. Where was the voice of conscience then? Alas! for a time, it slept, for she had slighted its first warning.

She tore the paper in two, and then said to herself, "Well, it is done now," rather as if somebody else had done it, and it was no act of her own. Then she slowly twisted bit after bit into spills, laying each with those she had already done, and the last piece had just assumed its taper appearance, when Mrs. Lesly entered the room.

"What did I do with that paper?" said she, after looking on all sides for it, "how careless I am."

"I think," said Mrs. Villars, "you put it in your secretary—you had it open while you were writing."

"Ah, so I must, I suppose," said Mrs. Lesly; but she looked suspiciously at the secretary, she had no remembrance of going there; yet, she had had it open that morning, she knew. Her sister must remember better than she did. She would look presently, she had not quite the resolution to look now; and suffering her characteristic indolence to overcome her prudence, she sank into an arm-chair, and took up her knitting. [132]

At this moment, the chaise, which had been ordered, slowly drove up to the door, and Mabel entered to tell them that luncheon waited them in the sitting-room.

Mrs. Villars started up, full of business and bustle, which she felt to be a welcome relief after the morning's *tête-à-tête*, and hurried down stairs. Mabel regarded her mother's pale looks with affectionate anxiety; but there was little time for thought, as Mrs. Villars and her maid kept the house in a perfect ferment for the next five minutes.

Amy stood looking aghast at a very bright carpet-bag, with a kind of travelling scent about it, which she thought grander and newer than anything of the kind she had before seen; and she quite shrank within herself when her aunt kissed her, and blessed her in a tone which made her feel cold; nor was she sorry when she saw her get into the carriage, attended by the bright carpet-bag—and when box after box was moved to the top of the creaking vehicle—and when the vehicle itself moved down the walk, she drew a long breath, as if relieved from some heavy pressure, feeling the place once more quite their own. [133]

Lucy ran to the gate, to open it to let her mamma pass, kissing her hand to her, and stopping to

watch till the carriage turned the corner, and was only visible down Amy's point of observation on the wall. She then came back with her cheeks crimson, and putting her arm round Mabel's waist, she whispered—

"Who do you think passed while I was holding the gate?"

"Who?" said Mabel, a little surprised at anything like an apparition in their quiet village, and not yet quite aware of their Bath cousin's usual train of thought. "I cannot guess." [134]

Lucy's cheeks were of a deeper tint, as she whispered—

"Captain Clair."

CHAPTER VII.

 [135]

But when the weight of sorrow
found
My spirit prostrate and
resigned,
The anguish of the bleeding
wound
Taught me to feel for all
mankind.

ELIZA COOK.

Mrs. Lesly's ill health had made her rather retire from society, than take any pains to seek it, during her widowhood, and she had gradually drawn her circle of friends so closely round her, that it now scarcely extended beyond her immediate neighbourhood. Mabel, whose affectionate attendance was necessary to her mother's happiness, never thought of leaving her, by accepting any invitation to stay from home; and years had almost insensibly passed away in the cultivation of elegant tastes, and in constant, but local benevolence, without their being tempted to ask any distant relative or friend to visit them. [136]

Mabel was, therefore, at first, a little puzzled to think how she might render their quiet home agreeable to the gay girl who had so unexpectedly entered it. Lucy, however, seemed determined to be pleased, if only allowed to be moving, and she ran away with great cheerfulness, to prepare for the walk which Mabel proposed soon after the departure of Mrs. Villars.

"Do you often call at the rectory?" she asked, as they strolled up the hill leading through the village.

"We will call as we return from our walk," replied Mabel, "if you fancy going there with me."

"Oh, yes," said Lucy, "I should like it so much, for you said Mr. Ware was such a nice man; his sister, I suppose, is quite an old maid."

"She is such a pleasant old lady, that you cannot help liking her," said Mabel; "but I ought not to say that, I suppose, as some people always dislike those they are told they shall like, and I should be very sorry if you were not pleased with them both." [137]

"Oh, I shall be sure to like them if they are favorites of yours. But do look how lovely;" she exclaimed, as a sudden turn in the winding walk they had chosen, gave them a fine view of the distant country, with Aston manor in the fore-ground. "What a beautiful house. Is that the house we saw from the garden? Is that Harry Hargrave's?"

"Yes," was the laconic reply.

"Why do you look so grave?"

"I did not mean to look so," said Mabel; stopping by an old hawthorn tree, which was lying upon the ground, though the branches were still covered with foliage. "Let us sit down here, for the sun is quite oppressive. This," continued she, "is a favorite seat of mine; the tree fell a long time ago, and has been left as it is, ever since. You will get a better view of the house here, than you will find any where else." [138]

Lucy readily seated herself by Mabel's side, upon the old tree which had fallen in a pleasant spot. A high hedge shaded it from the sun on one side, and clusters of wild roses hung down it, and scented the air. A gentle breeze stole up from the valley, and a small stream rippled by in melodious monotony, falling in a tiny cascade over the bank into the river below. The songs of many birds came from all sides of the well wooded country—and here and there a gay butterfly crossed over the fields.

They continued for some little time in silence, which Lucy was the first to break, by enquiring if Aston Manor were as pleasant inside as it seemed to promise to be.

"Yes, even more pleasant," replied Mabel; "it is a very compact house, the rooms are of a very

good size—and the whole place splendidly furnished, and generally admired in our county; the hall is surrounded by a gallery, hung with paintings of great value. The gardens are very beautiful, and every thing else in keeping. Indeed, I think it is quite a bijou of a place." [139]

"Is there any room that would do nicely for a dance?" enquired Lucy.

"They used to have many pleasant dances there, in good Mrs. Hargrave's lifetime, which mamma remembers well."

"Oh, that will be so nice," said Lucy.

"What will?" said Mabel, in surprise.

"Why, when our castle in the air marriage takes place," said Lucy; "because Caroline is so very fond of dancing, and could lead off a ball with such spirit; and I shall contrive to be nearly always staying with them."

"Why do you suppose every thing so certain," said Mabel, startled, alike at the indelicacy of the scheme, and Lucy's cool thoughtlessness in speaking of it.

"Do not say it will not be," said Lucy, "or I shall punish you some how or other. Now, would you not be glad to have us down here, Colonel Hargrave and all; think what nice parties there would be; and who knows what nice beau might come down and take you away with him." [140]

Mabel's cheek blushed scarlet, and her lips curled in preparation for some angry retort—suddenly she checked herself as she remembered the conversation of the preceding night. Have I then failed so soon, thought she to herself.

"Ah, mamma, you know my vain wicked heart better than I do—for the first observation that seems to point me out as single, and needing a lover, makes me angry."

"Ah, you blush, Mabel," pursued her heedless tormentor, too unaccustomed to feel for others, to be able to read her countenance, or tell why her words had given pain; "perhaps, you are engaged to some one, under the rose, all the while."

Mabel was silent for a moment; it required that moment to seize the reins with which she usually held her temper in check, and then she replied, gently, but gravely.

"I am not engaged to any one; you mistake my face entirely, but I colored because I was silly enough to feel angry at your thinking I was wishing to be married—but it was wrong of me, because you could not understand my feelings without being told. So I must tell you," she continued smiling, "that I am a determined old maid; though, perhaps, you may think such a resolution needless in a place where gentlemen seldom come to disturb our equanimity." [141]

"What, wedded to your duties, are you? Or what other queer reason may have led you to such a determination," enquired Lucy, who could not help feeling that her new friend's speech meant more than it usually does in the mouth of a beautiful girl; and she was surprised to think she should wish to retire from the field of conquest, before actually driven from it by dulness or age. Her own vanity could not conceal from her, a certain indescribable something which rendered her cousin particularly attractive, and, though she certainly ranked her second to herself, that did not imply any very low degree of merit. [142]

Mabel's composure, which was seldom lost, was now entirely restored, and she answered Lucy's wondering eyes with one of her peculiarly sweet and gentle smiles.

"You may well wonder," said she, "that I, who seem so little your senior, should already have made such a resolution. I too, who am fond of society, fond of companionship, and all that is domestic, and choose solitude only as wholesome medicine; but some destinies are fixed early, others late; and I, who once thought, and still think, marriage, with its social harmony and sweet feelings of dependence, most fitted for a woman's nature, have yet quite made up my mind to remain single."

"I shall not believe you till you give me some good reason," said Lucy.

"You are too kind," replied Mabel, as her voice slightly trembled, "to seek to probe a wound only from the curiosity of seeing how deep it is—when you have no power to heal. I speak of myself now," she added, hastily; "lest in our future conversations, you may pain me without knowing it, and perhaps I might think you unkind when you were only seeking to amuse me. Oh, Lucy," said she, turning round with sudden energy, "I have suffered terribly, and still suffer, when I lose my self-command for a moment—do not then talk of my loving or needing love—do not tease me with the intention of pleasing—do not talk—" Mabel suddenly stopped and burst into tears—for a very long time, she had never spoken intimately with a young girl in her own station of life, and the novelty had surprised her. A few large drops rolled quickly down her crimson cheeks, but were soon brushed away, and half smiling, she begged her cousin's forgiveness for speaking so hastily—in a few more seconds, she was again gentle and submissive as a child. [143]

"Then must I never speak of love at all?" said Lucy, fearing that all the most interesting of her stories would find an unwilling listener.

"Oh, you mistake me," said Mabel; "do not think me so selfish—talk as much as you like of yourself, and forget me; and you will, perhaps, find me a better listener, perhaps a better adviser, because I have altogether retired from the lists of conquest; and, be assured, the necessity of [144]

placing a guard over myself, and the difficulty of doing it effectually, only tells me how much I ought to feel for others. If you will always let me speak the truth, without being offended with me, I will take interest in your feelings at any time, only remember that mine are like 'The Arab's sealed fountain,' whose waters will never see the light again."

"You are a very strange girl, my sweet, new friend," said Lucy; "but I love you better for having a history, although I see I must not read it quite yet; at all events, not till I know you better, and you learn how well I can keep a secret."

"No, not even then," replied Mabel, "I cannot speak of myself without speaking of more than myself; so content yourself with what I have told you, and do not think of me again, or I shall repent having said anything." [145]

"Well, it shall be quite as you like, I will do anything you wish, only you must tell me, that you love me very, very much indeed."

"I will tell you no such thing," said Mabel, laughing; "remember, I only met you yesterday morning."

"Well then, come and call at the rectory, and that will shew me you love me."

"But I could do such a little thing, whether I loved you or not," said Mabel; "so I will take you for charity's sake, for I see, like the cat who was turned into a lady, and yet ran after mice—you cannot go without your accustomed food."

"I thought you said you liked society," said Lucy.

"And so I do—so let us walk on, for this green lane will lead us round to the rectory." [146]

One of the rectory pets was an immense Newfoundland dog, who began to bark loudly as they approached the house.

"Oh!" said Lucy, with a half scream, "I cannot go on—I am sure he is untied—nasty thing."

"No, he never barks when he is loose—come on, dear, I am sure he will not hurt you."

Lucy clung to her arm in real or affected terror till they reached the house door.

Much to her disappointment, they found no one but Miss Ware at home, and she sat up during the visit, as silent, and apparently as timid, as a child, amusing herself by poking her parasol through the cage of the pet parrot, who appeared highly offended at her familiarity.

Mabel was a great favorite at the rectory, and Miss Ware, certain of finding her interested in her news, had many little things to tell her; she had had a letter from one old friend, and had worked a birth-day present for another, with many other little incidents to notice, which Lucy amused herself by silently turning into ridicule, though they were so kindly told that few would have found it difficult to enter into the little cares and joys which, after all, were never selfish. [147]

"My brother and nephew are gone to look over the church," said she, "which I conclude Miss Villars has not yet seen. Edwin is always wishing to improve the old tower, and to scrape away the mortar and white-wash from the walls inside the church, for he says they are painted with beautiful figures—but he will never have money enough for that I am afraid—yet he puts by all he can spare—for he does not like running into debt, and I agree with him, it is doing evil that good may come. So he saves every year—but I fear he will not get enough in his lifetime, to carry out this pet scheme."

"I wish we were all rich enough to raise a subscription," said Mabel, "I should so much like to see him fully employed in finding out all the beauties of our dear old church." [148]

"Yes," said Miss Ware, "I like to hear him talk on the subject, because he enters upon it in the true genuine spirit—he feels it to be almost an insult to religion to allow its altars to be kept in the slovenly state they too often are; grudged almost the necessary repairs by those who are lavish where their own minutest comforts are concerned. The Roman Catholics might cry shame at us."

"Why do you not ask Colonel Hargrave, ma'am?" enquired Lucy, turning round from the parrot.

"My brother has mentioned the subject several times," said Miss Ware, "without being able to interest him. Young men too seldom enter, with warmth, on these subjects, and he has now left us so long."

"Oh, I will tell him he must," said Lucy, "with his fortune it is really quite shabby of him." [149]

"Do you know him then?" enquired Miss Ware.

"Yes—no—not exactly—but he is a relation of ours. He is coming to stay with us in Bath, and I will take an early opportunity of mentioning the church to him."

"Oh, I remember," said Miss Ware, "he is, I know, related to you through Colonel Lesly, but I am afraid you will scarcely succeed, where my brother has failed—if strength of argument be needed, few can put a thing in a stronger light than Edwin can."

"Oh," said Lucy, laughing, "I never condescend to argue with a man—I will tell him he *must*—"

suggest that not to do so is shabby, mean—with a few more epithets to match, and then leave his own good taste to draw the conclusion."

"Well," said Miss Ware, recovering from her slight pique, at thinking any one could succeed where Edwin failed, "if you never use your ridicule for a worse purpose, you will do well."

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The subject here took another turn, and Lucy again applied herself to tease the parrot with the same listlessness as before—thinking the conversation very dull, yet too idle to throw in her share. She was aroused from her apathy, by hearing Miss Ware ask Mabel if she would bring her young friend to tea on the morrow, if Mrs. Lesly could content herself with Amy's company; for to ask her, she knew to be useless. Lucy feared Mabel was going to decline, and she cast such an imploring look at her as to decide the question, and make her promise that, if Mrs. Lesly continued as well as she had been, and would consent to part with them, they would come with pleasure. Lucy thought this, a very satisfactory conclusion, to so dull a visit, and once again all smiles, shook Miss Ware warmly by the hand, as Mabel rose to leave, and returned home in high spirits.

CHAPTER VIII.

[151]

A parent's heart may prove a
snare;
The child she loves so well,
Her hand may lead, with
gentlest care,
Down the smooth road to hell.
Nourish its flame, destroy its
mind,
Thus do the blind mislead the
blind,
Even with a mother's love.

Lucy Villars was a pretty girl, with fairy-like figure, small features, laughing mouth, bright blue sparkling eyes, and a profusion of light ringlets. Her step was buoyant, and her voice full of animation. It might have been vanity that made the sparkle of those eyes so brilliant, and her smiles so frequent, but as her merry laugh echoed back the joyousness of her own heart, few were disposed to condemn the feeling, whatever it might be, that rendered her so seemingly happy with herself, and all around her.

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What mental abilities she might possess, however, were completely overshadowed by the mistakes of early education; at times they would peep forth when her feelings were really stirred by any strong impulse of good or evil; but so uncommon were these indications of mind, that no one could regard them as any true sign even of an originally strong intellect; and her ordinary flippancy was, perhaps, more certainly chosen as an index to the spirit within.

She had been but an apt pupil in a bad school. When scarcely more than a tottering child, she had taken her place at the dancing academy, learning in her lisping language to compare waltzes and polkas, and criticise dress, and to display her tiny figure for the admiration of spectators; feeling her little heart bound when perhaps she attracted notice from being the smallest and gayest of her companions. Then, in the juvenile party, where the lesson of the morning could be so well displayed, where she early learnt to hear her nonsense listened to with pleasure, and, where, even the old and sensible regarded her little affectations with a smile, she found another opportunity for display in the world for which she was educated.

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These were too tempting after the dry formula of French verbs and geography lessons, not to engross the greater part of her thoughts; and, as she grew older, the evening ball, with its glare of light, its flirtations and too visible admiration, and the morning promenade, concert, or town gossip, served to keep up the excited, thoughtless feeling to which she had been so early trained. Oh, England, do you educate all your daughters in this manner! Your matrons, revered by all nations, answer no!

It could scarcely be wondered at, that Lucy Villars had thus learnt to place too high a value on personal beauty. We would not for an instant deny its merit. We reverence all that is beautiful in art or nature, we glow with admiration of a fine picture, and the sight of a rich landscape elevates the feelings of him who gazes upon it; we picture angels beautiful, and we look forward to a heaven where all is perfect beauty. It cannot then be valueless when exhibited in the human face or figure. It has indeed been much over and underrated. May we not look upon it as a talent bestowed for some high purpose, as a means of influence which must be some day accounted for.

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No such thoughts ever occupied Lucy's mind for a moment; she had learnt her own estimate of its value from the frivolous admiration of a gay city; she had heard it praised in others as if of the greatest importance; and she had chosen her acquaintance amongst those who studied every means of enhancing its charms.

She now entered on her country visit with the same feelings; and, bent on displaying herself to the best advantage at the rectory, she spent the greater part of the next morning, during the hours usually occupied by Mabel in attending to Amy's lessons, in selecting from her wardrobe a dress best suited for the occasion. Mabel was again and again consulted, and Amy began to show great impatience at her sister's divided attention, usually all her own, during her study hours.

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But Mabel, much to her disappointment, not unwilling to teach her self-denial, persisted in attending to Lucy's questions, and in the evening the latter found herself attired to her perfect satisfaction, and looking remarkably well.

"You seem to think dress of little importance," she said, lounging into her cousin's room, and stopping to take another peep in the glass, without seeing that Mabel had not finished dressing, and was a little late.

"No indeed," replied Mabel, fastening a bouquet of geraniums in her simple white dress, without the aid of the usurped mirror, "I think it of so much consequence, that no woman should be indifferent to it, when at her toilet, or with her milliner. They say a lady's taste is to be read in her dress, and I should not like to give soiled lace or badly blended colors, as an index to mine."

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"Do you find any fault with my dress to-night?" enquired Lucy.

Mabel only suggested that a simple brooch might be preferred to the bright bow which ornamented her bosom, but she had ample time to repent the observation, for Lucy insisted on going over her whole box of jewelry to find a substitute, and was scarcely ready by the time when Mabel, having provided books, work, tea, and every thing she could think of for Mrs. Lesly and Amy, waited for her in the garden.

They found Mr. Ware looking for them at his garden gate. Mabel hurried forward to meet him, and then turned to introduce her cousin.

"Most welcome, my dear young ladies," said he, extending a hand to each, "my sister has no mean opinion of her own hospitality to venture on inviting you to join our party."

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Lucy blushed with conscious beauty, while Mabel said, with a smile—

"You throw all the blame on Miss Ware. I fear then, you would not have asked us to come yourself."

"Nay, nay, I cannot exactly say what I would have done; but here is Arthur, no doubt he can play at words better than I can."

Captain Clair gracefully raised his hat as he came in sight, and then shaking hands with Mabel, requested, in a low voice to be introduced to her lovely cousin. The "lovely," was pronounced distinctly enough to reach Lucy's ears, and the blush with which she received Mabel's introduction shewed him that the compliment had been accepted.

As the party lounged round the garden, Mabel reminded Mr. Ware of his promise to show her some improvements he had been making amongst the evergreens in the shrubbery; and Lucy Villars gladly seized the opportunity of commencing a flirting conversation with Captain Clair, who, being well drilled in the accomplishment of small talk, by long practice, easily fell into a *tête-à-tête*.

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Mabel's hand was placed affectionately in the old man's arm, as they walked on together, finding some kindred thought from every topic they chose. He had been kind to her when a firm friend had been most needed, and she now sought to shew, in every way, that he had not bestowed that kindness on one incapable of appreciating it.

The ready sympathy she felt in all in which he took any interest, was, perhaps, the best return she could have thought of. We value most that for which we pay the highest, and friendship is purchased by no common coin.

It was a great pleasure to Mr. Ware, to have her society and ready sympathy. Few friends lay within reach of Aston, and her elegant mind supplied what would otherwise have been wanting in his simple home, and gave him an opportunity of conversing on his favorite topics.

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"We shall not be seeing so much of you I fear," he said, as they walked back towards the house, "but I must not be selfish."

"Indeed I hope that will not be the case," she replied, "do come and walk with us whenever you have time. No one can shew the the beauties of our county better than you can, and I never enjoy a party so much as when you are with us."

"If you are in earnest I feel inclined to gratify you, if not, to punish you, by accepting your invitation."

"Do not let us even pretend to be insincere," said Mabel, eagerly, "hypocrisy is so hateful. Take me at my word, and trust me till I break it."

"Well, then, so I will; I scarcely know which I like most, to trust or be trusted, both are so pleasant; so, if you are going to do any thing delightful out of doors, like a walk or a nutting expedition, ask us to join you, and we will do the same, so we shall the better be able to amuse our guests. People often require too good a reason for meeting—we will have none."

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"I will most willingly promise," returned Mabel, "only remember, that on some days mamma feels so low that I never leave her—then you must excuse me, for every thing at home depends on her."

"You are quite right to let it be so," said Mr. Ware, "and I will never say a word against such an arrangement. Only tell her we mean to take her by storm some night and come to tea. You shall give it us on the green, and then she can look on without minding our noise."

"Mamma will be very glad to see you, I am sure," said Mabel, "if you will only propose it. The effort would do her good."

"Very well then, I will tell her when I see her next," said Mr. Ware, with a smile.

They had now reached the open window of the sitting-room, where Mabel was welcomed by Miss Ware. [161]

"The evening is really quite sultry," said she, "yet the air at this time of day so often gives me cold, that I had not courage to venture out, though I so much wished to join you."

"Had I known that, my dear Miss Ware, I should not have been tempted to remain out so long."

"No, no, dear child, I am not so selfish, for I know when once you begin to talk to Edwin there is no leaving off; but I hope you have not forgotten your pretty cousin to-night. You promised to bring her with you."

"Oh, yes, she is with us," said Mabel, turning round, but no Lucy was to be seen.

"Oh, Arthur is taking care of her, I believe," said Mr. Ware, "and they will be here soon, I dare say."

It was some little time, however, before they did appear, and then they were seen advancing [162] down the gravel walk, both laughing, and Lucy with a very high colour.

"Why," said Mr. Ware, "you stole a march upon us, Arthur, where have you been keeping this young lady in the damp?"

"Are we at the chair of confession?" asked the young officer, still laughing.

"Yes, yes, every one confesses everything here; but sit down to tea first, and take off your bonnet, Miss Villars."

"Well then," said Clair, when they were comfortably seated at the tea-table, "I perceive I must apologise for a very grave offence in keeping Miss Lucy Villars so long absent; the whole crime, I fear, lies with me, I indeed, the scape-goat for every offender, must, I fear, take the blame on myself."

"Come, come, Arthur," said his uncle, "be laconic."

"My dear uncle, you should allow a prisoner to state his own case fairly—if he has not studied Burke on the 'Sublime and Beautiful,' the 'Patriot King,' and other models of pure English composition, you must let a poor fellow express himself as he can, so that he speaks the truth. So to proceed; we were talking of country pursuits, and Miss Lucy could not understand how I could contrive to while away my time, after being accustomed to town, Portsmouth, Southampton, Cheltenham, Scarborough, Bombay, Calcutta and such places; how, in fact, I contrived to vegetate here." [163]

Lucy laughed merrily, and displayed in doing so a very pretty set of white teeth. But Mr. Ware saw with regret that a new spirit had entered their small circle of society, whose influence might do much to counteract his own on the versatile disposition of his nephew, even without being conscious of it.

"Well, aunt," Captain Clair continued gaily, "you look serious, as if I meant any bad compliment to the sweetest village in England; though, my dear aunt, vegetation is vegetation after all, whether displayed on the Cotswold hills or in the back woods of America."

Mabel looked at him for an instant, and her deep blue eyes seemed to deprecate a remark which [164] her ever kind heart told her was giving pain. Clair bowed, and then said almost in a whisper: "Thank you, I was wrong," and continued his narrative, after a moment's pause.

"Well, as I before said, Miss Lucy wished to know how I amused myself in the country, and, amongst other things, I mentioned my workshop, situated, as you may remember, over the stable, and accessible only by a ladder. However, this lady honored me by expressing a wish to see it, and you know how difficult it is to refuse to gratify a lady's taste for a hobby of our own, therefore, we proceeded to the stable, where, after some time being spent in the ascent of the ladder, in looking at my tools, and all my attempts at carpentering rickety garden chairs, and tables that never will be persuaded to stand even, and after my giving her a promise to turn her a jewel box, (which I hope she did not believe) we experienced the same difficulty in coming down, [165] that we did in going up, but at length we are here, and at your service."

"What a long story about nothing," said his aunt.

"Then, if you think so, you do neither me nor my narrative justice; I have given it for the amusement of the public, and feel myself ill-used to find it not appreciated. Miss Lucy you play

chess, you said. Honor me by playing? We are ill-treated by the rest of the company, so may well retire from notice."

Mabel was surprised to see the sudden intimacy which had sprung up in less than an hour, and expected that Lucy would evade the familiarity with which she was so soon treated, by some evidence of woman's tact; but she very soon saw her seated by the little chess-table, in the corner, apart from the rest, and listening to the low conversation addressed to her, as if her host, and hostess, and friend, had not been in the room.

She could not help feeling a little angry at her cousin's total neglect of the friends whom she had ever been accustomed to treat with affection and respect, but studiously endeavoured to engage their attention, and to prevent their thinking of it. Still, it is never so difficult to talk as when we most try to do so, and, almost for the first time, with them, she felt it tedious to support the conversation. [166]

At length, after giving Lucy two or three games, which her inferior play would never have won, Captain Clair shut up the board, and the two turned round for amusement to the rest of the company.

"Do you know, Mabel," said Lucy, "that Captain Clair came home from Malta with Colonel Hargrave."

"Yes, Mr. Ware told me so."

"Do then join with me in begging a description of him."

"Surely," she replied, "Captain Clair does not need two requests."

"Do then," said Lucy, turning to him, "give us a nice long description of him." [167]

"I really do not know where to begin," said he, "particularly as you say you will see him so soon."

"Oh, yes," said Lucy, with quiet pride, "he is coming to see us in Bath. But now do describe him," she reiterated, with her prettiest look of entreaty.

"Well then, though it is hard to have to describe a character that throws one's own into shade."

"No, my dear boy," said Mr. Ware, his eyes glistening at this modest avowal; "true praise of another's worth only enhances your own."

"Not in every one's opinion, I fear, uncle; virtue seems to stand so much by comparison, at least, I have often found it so; but that shall not prevent my giving as faithful a picture as I can remember of Hargrave. I am rather fond of studying character."

"How you wander," said Lucy; "do begin—." [168]

"No, miss Lucy, I was not wandering so much as you think, my observation on character might after a bit have led to Hargrave—but, like a true knight, once more I obey. What shall I begin with? A man's agreeable qualities are generally judged by his acres; allow me," said he, waving his hand towards the window, and pointing to the landscape of hill and vale, and rich woods, and winding river, over which the moon was shining, to shew you his most agreeable phase in the eyes of fair ladies.

Lucy visibly colored, and Clair looked at her scrutinisingly, till she laughingly told him to go on.

"Well, if that description does not satisfy, I must be more minute, and bring up qualities, which, in these refined days, are not so much thought of, unfortunately. First, then, his personal appearance. He is very tall, and broad shouldered, and athletic; yet, at the same time, though he is as strong as a giant, you might almost call him graceful. He seems to have acquired the difficult art of standing perfectly still; no shifting from one foot to another, a habit, Miss Lucy, I am prone to indulge in. Now then for his face, dark eyes, dark hair, dark complexion, white teeth, and a good nose, and I suppose my description is complete." [169]

"No, not yet, by any means," said Lucy, "tell us a little more."

"Ah, I forgot his sneer, which is perfect, I never saw one so cutting before; but then his smile atones for it, though as rare as the sunshine in November. The sneer is that of a proud, contemptuous, arrogant man—the smile, that of an infant. Then, his eye—there is no describing his eye—you, may remember it, uncle; it seems as if continual fire were sleeping in it, like the fire of uncurbed intellect; an eye capable of reading the countenance of another, yet, almost slothful in the attempt to do so." [170]

"What a horrid man!" exclaimed Lucy.

"You will not think so when you see him, or if you do, you will be singular," said Clair. "Then I was going to tell you, that he is changeable as the moon. Perhaps, when you are alone with him, he will startle and entrance you, by his eloquent observations on men, and things; and you will invite your friends to meet him, expecting them to be equally fascinated; but, perhaps, during the whole evening, he will scarcely make even a common-place observation. He is, indeed, a curious, fascinating, wilful being; clever, and accomplished, beyond a doubt, and his character is unimpeachable; yet he always seems to want something to make him entirely happy."

"Poor fellow," sighed Mr. Ware.

"Perhaps he is in love," suggested Lucy.

"Hardly unsuccessfully, I should think; indeed, were I he, I should never despair—but I own," said he, laughing; "I have sometimes caught him looking at the moon." [171]

"Well," said Mabel, rising; "I am sure we have to thank you for your description of our lord of the manor, though you have made him rather a terrible personage. Come, Lucy, I fear we must go."

"If you must, you will allow me to see you home," said Clair.

"I always take Mabel home," said his uncle; "but, if you will come with us, as there are two ladies to be taken care of, we shall walk home together."

Clair gladly assented to this arrangement; but, to Lucy's surprise, offered Mabel his arm, leaving her to walk with his uncle; a plan she so decidedly disliked, that she insisted on keeping her pocket-handkerchief to her mouth the whole way home, though the night was remarkably clear, and her stifled and negligent answers gave little encouragement to her companion's attempts at conversation.

When they reached home, they found only Betsy, waiting up for them, and Mabel begged Lucy to go as quietly as possible to her room, for fear of waking Amy—but she insisted on following her, without stopping to remark the expression of unusual paleness and fatigue, which was visible in her countenance, and compelled her to listen to the story of her evening's adventures. [172]

"You know," said she, blushing, "when I was up in that high poky place, at the top of the long ladder, Captain Clair said he would not let me go down till I gave him some reward; of course I knew he wanted a kiss, but I was not going to give it him, and so I stood still, till I was so tired, that I compromised the matter by giving him my hand to kiss; so then he let me go, saying, he supposed he must be contented."

"Oh! Lucy," cried Mabel, "how could you be so imprudent as to go up there alone—how impertinent of him—why did you let him take such a liberty." [173]

"Come, nonsense, now sweetest, do not be a prude, it does not become you to look like an old maid. What is the harm of having a kiss on one's hand, one's cheek would be different, and, of course, I would not allow him to do that."

"But, Lucy, dear, is it not imprudent to place yourself in a position which would allow him to ask such a thing—will it not make you appear a flirt—does it not lower you to allow him to be so free, after seeing him only for a few hours. Do consider."

"Why, one would think I was a grandmother. I hate being cross at every little thing. I am sure it is more wicked to quarrel, after all."

"Yes, but if you would only understand me," said Mabel, "you would know, I would not have you quarrel, either. But if you will let me, we will talk of it again to-morrow, for now poor Amy is waking. You know," said she, gently putting her arm round her pretty cousin, and kissing her forehead softly; "you know you promised to let me talk to you in this way, and you half promised to listen." [174]

"Well, sweet cousin, I think you may be speaking the truth, after all. It was very naughty of me, perhaps," she added, with a smile, "to go up in the loft, and so I will try and be better in future. Oh dear! dear! Amy is awake; well, I am very sorry. Go to sleep, child, Mabel is tired," and off she ran to her own room, leaving her cousin to soothe the restless child as she could.

Perhaps it was as well that Mabel was thus prevented from following the train of depressing thought into which she seemed to have fallen on her return from the rectory, for, as she sunk to rest, with Amy's head upon her arm, she remembered, that if sorrow had ever laid its heavy hand upon her life, the treasure of a sister's love had yet been given her—a sister rendered more dear by sickness and weakness. And in these thoughts the unselfish girl soon forgot all other feelings. [175]

CHAPTER IX.

 [176]

But a trouble weigh'd upon
her,
And perplex'd her night
and morn.

TENNYSON.

Mr. Ware and his nephew did not neglect to take advantage of Mabel's proposal, that they would mutually help to pass the few weeks that remained of the warm weather, more pleasantly than usual. Each bright day of autumn we value the more highly, as we fear it may be the last; and the little party of friends took every opportunity of visiting the prettiest sights of the neighbourhood, either on foot, or in Mr. Ware's carriage. Much as she enjoyed these excursions, Mabel, at length, found that she was frequently obliged to excuse herself. The slightest additional pallor on her [177]

mother's countenance, had always been sufficient to make her give up the merriest party, or the most engrossing study; and she now tried in vain to hide from herself the growing weakness, and the fading and changing color she often wore—though, with her accustomed buoyancy of disposition, she believed that, the few autumn months once passed, her mother would again be strong.

Mrs Lesly, sometimes tried to bring the subject of her precarious state of health before her, yet could scarcely find courage to damp her hopes. Since her sister's visit, she had felt an uneasiness which she found it difficult to suppress, and, instead of being relieved on her children's account, by the promise that they should share the comforts of a home with her sister's own family, she experienced a sensation of vague terror, which she found it impossible to define. Even the loss of six hundred pounds, supposing them lost, could not be equivalent to the pain she suffered. [178]

The magnitude of our misfortunes depends, not so much on themselves, for the pain they give us, as upon the state in which they find us. In good spirits, and vigorous health, we may, perhaps, smile at trials which would make another's cup of sorrows run over.

Poor Mrs. Lesly, weakened in health, and with feeble nerves, began to entertain suspicions that she had acted imprudently. A fear, of she knew not what, entered her mind, and she began to feel a restless impatience to find the written promise given by her sister, which remained as the only security for the money with which she had so weakly parted. This anxiety seemed, for a time, to conquer her constitutional indolence, and much of her time was spent in looking over old drawers, desks, and boxes, and the search always ended with the secretary, where she turned over every paper in a vain investigation. Every excuse she could make for being alone, she eagerly seized upon to renew it; for, while she had, at first, felt it difficult to explain to Mabel, that she had risked the greater part of her small fortune, not from any strong motive, but, simply because her sister had been extravagant enough to embarrass herself by the purchase of luxuries, and she had been too weak to refuse the loan which the superior claim of her children had rendered rather unjust than generous, she now found this difficulty increased by a constant fear that she should guess the truth. It was, therefore, necessary to carry on the search unobserved, and the wish to do so, fixed upon her like a spell, and harassed her continually. She would, then, on the morning of any proposed expedition, endeavour to appear as gay and well as possible, that she might induce Mabel to join the party; but, on their return, hours of harassing disappointment generally shewed themselves in her sickly appearance at night; and Mabel was grieved to find that, instead of welcoming her return as usual, after even the shortest absence, she seemed rather surprised to find she had come back so soon; regarding her presence almost with feverish impatience. In vain, Mabel entreated to be allowed to know the cause of this change. Mrs. Lesly only answered her questions by excuses; or, if much pressed, by tears, causing poor Mabel the utmost uneasiness. The restless agitation she continually felt, rapidly wore upon both health and spirits, and their failure only increased the nervous desire to find what now seemed of tenfold importance to her disordered fancy. [179]

It is melancholy to trace the effects of bodily illness, when it finds, as it were, an echo in the mind of the sufferer. [180]

It was in vain that Mrs. Lesly reasoned with herself, trying to believe that she could perfectly rely on her sister's promise. She could not but remember her wanton extravagance, and the little guard she had ever learned to place on herself, even in the indulgence of the slightest whim; and her affection for her could not blind her to the fact that she had chosen for her children a guardian too weak to protect herself from the slightest temptation. Again and again, the same thoughts pressed upon her, and the same course of reasoning occurred, giving her less satisfaction on every recurrence to it. [181]

Then followed the burning desire to recover the lost papers; with renewed impatience she would return to the secretary—till wearied and worn out she would sink into her chair disappointed and spiritless.

"Ah, dearest Mamma," said Mabel, when having determined to remain at home, though the day was lovely, and favored a walk to the woods which had been agreed on, she entered the room, and found her seated, unoccupied, except by her own harassing thoughts. "You are unhappy, and will not tell me why. Is not this unkind?"

"Unkind," echoed Mrs. Lesly, vacantly, "yes, I have been very unkind to you both."

"No, no, dear Mamma, I do not mean that—not really unkind—only it vexes me to see you so sad." [182]

"I am sad indeed, my dear," returned Mrs. Lesly, in the same absent tone, "but I cannot find them, though they are all here." She stopped and glanced at the secretary wistfully, as if its old-fashioned drawers could speak if they liked.

"What is lost?" said Mabel, "let me try and find it—I will look over all the papers if you will let me."

"No, no, what I have lost I ought to find, it is my own indolence which has done it."

"Yes, but do not think of that now, mamma, love, remember Doctor Parkinson said you were to be kept quite quiet, and now you are wandering about all day—only think how precious your health is to us, and how happy we all are when you are well."

"Mabel, you kill me by these words—I feel that I am dying, but do not kill me before the time

appointed."

Mabel was silent, and stood looking at her mother with painful earnestness.

[183]

"Do not look at me so, sweet child. Well may you be surprised when I have ruined you both."

"Ruin! my own mother, what do you mean?"

"Ah, you may well wonder at me," replied Mrs. Lesly, much excited, "how could I be so silly as to injure my own children."

"Ah, now you are unkind," said Mabel, "why not tell me—is there a sorrow I have refused to bear—is it not my privilege to be sorrowful."

Tears rolled down her heated cheeks, and Mrs. Lesly continued to regard her in silence.

"Is it not unjust to me, your own child," continued Mabel, (for she had often before failed in obtaining her confidence,) "day after day you are wearying yourself with something you will not let me know, and injuring your health, which is more precious to us than any thing else—mamma—I did not know you could be so unkind."

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"Dear child, do not talk in this way, my only thought is of my children, and oh!" said she, turning her head towards the secretary, "if I could but find them."

"What?"

"The papers."

"What papers? Do tell me, can any thing be worse than this concealment—you have always told me everything."

"Ah, if I had," said Mrs. Lesly, with a sigh.

"But do tell me now, I would rather hear any thing than see you suffer."

"Can you really bear it?" enquired her mother, seeming to shake off the oppressive calmness with which she had been speaking before, and looking attentively at her daughter, whose warm feelings were almost ready to burst control.

"I will bear any thing," answered Mabel, walking to her, and kneeling by her side, "any thing you can tell me."

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"Then you shall hear me now, lest you have cause to curse your mother's memory, if you heard it when I was gone from you. Your poor father put by a thousand pounds, which I never told you of before. It would have been but a poor pittance—yet it would have saved you from want; but this is nearly all gone now, for my sister has been borrowing of me from time to time, promising to be a mother to my children—I have lent her six hundred of the thousand, and I have lost her promises to repay them back. Should any thing happen to either of us, what will you do?"

"Trust to me, mother, dear. He who has supported me through far worse trials will support me still."

"Reproach me now, Mabel," said Mrs. Lesly, sorrowfully, "but do not live to curse me in the bitterness of your heart."

"No, my loved mother," said her daughter, looking up in her face with unmistakeable cheerfulness, "think no more of this now. Amy shall not suffer while health is left me, and power to use the education my dear father gave me; and I am so happy to think nothing worse is to be feared, even should any thing so strange occur as that aunt Villars could not pay us. And do you think I could once forget that it was because you were kind, unselfish and generous, that you lent the money."

[186]

Mrs. Lesly lent down and folded her child in her arms, saying, in a low repentant voice—

"Not generous but weak, we should but injure ourselves, not those dependent on us in order to serve others."

Yet she felt as if a weight had passed from her heart, and though she was still apprehensive, she was no longer despairing.

CHAPTER X.

[187]

How brief is the time since her voice was
the clearest,
Her laughter the loudest, amid the gay
throng.

HEMANS.

Could the selfish but remember how much less they would feel their own sorrows by sharing those of others, they would learn an easy way to alleviate the unhappiness they are continually guarding against, by so occupying themselves in thoughts of pity and kindness as to leave little room in their own minds for fear or regret.

The kindhearted very soon begin to feel an interest in those who are thrown much with them, and, though Lucy presented many faults to her notice, Mabel learnt to watch her with great interest. It soon became evident to her that she was perfectly in earnest in her attempts to engage the affections of Captain Clair, and, though at first she had been disgusted and pained at the idea—more ready to pity than condemn—she felt for Lucy when she perceived, by her variable spirits, that her heart was engaged in the flirtation she had so thoughtlessly commenced. The conduct of Clair puzzled her, she wished to believe that his attentions were serious, and yet she could not help thinking they meant nothing beyond the fashionable love he might often have professed for the most pleasing young lady of any society in which he happened to find himself. Still, she hoped she was mistaken; and thought, over again and again the little anecdotes which Lucy daily brought to her confidence, assuming them as unmistakeable signs of an affection which would soon declare itself. [188]

Mabel knew that a look, a single word, even an emphasis on an ordinary word are sometimes the evidences of affection. Yet, all that Lucy told her, seemed to fall short, certainly of her ideas of love, formed, as they had been, from her own unhappy history. Yet she hesitated to speak her opinion freely; for, after all, it might be only a very unkind suspicion of one who had not given any very good cause for believing him to be a trifler. He had, besides, been so kind to herself, that she could not help feeling prepossessed in his favor. [189]

Meanwhile, Clair appeared as attentive as ever, but his attentions were never varied by ill humour or depression. Still Lucy rested confident in the power of her own attractions—and, persisting in believing he was only diffident—she became more and more lavish of encouragement, without, however, finding her admirer become either warmer or bolder.

What was to be done? Her letters to Bath had been full of the admiration she had inspired in the young officer, and of expectations that, in a few more posts, she would have to announce his decided proposals. The letters she received in return were full of delighted badinage from her sisters, and good advice from her mother. How then could she bear to return home with the tacit confession that her vanity had deceived her; and thus subject herself to her sisters' cutting jests, and the bitterness of her often disappointed mother. The poor girl had been spoilt by education and companionship, and she was, according to her own idea, forced to play desperately in order to justify what she had written home. She did not stop to consider that all delicacy, modesty, and all that is precious in a woman, would be risked in such a game, when she read such words as these in her mother's letters, "you might well pride yourself," she wrote, "on being the first of my daughters whom I shall have the pleasure of seeing married. Indeed I have always flattered myself, that my Lucy would be the first to secure herself an establishment." [190]

The seeds of vanity, thus sown by a mother's hand, grew quickly in the daughter's heart. To be the first to be married was an idea that filled her with pleasure; she did not stop to analyze, or she might have discovered that the hope of mortifying her sisters by her marriage, was inconsistent with the love she believed she felt for them. [191]

But now, what could she do! how could she bring her backward lover to a proposal! She eagerly seized any opportunity of meeting him, and never neglected pursuing any conversation which seemed likely to lead to love. Still she was as far from her object as ever, and at length she felt the feverish eagerness of a gambler to bring the game to a successful close.

Mabel, who saw she suffered, sincerely, pitied her, though unable to divine her thoughts. Disappointed affection the poor girl might have successfully struggled against; but she could not banish the idea of the sneers and jests, which, in contrast to her present popularity, would meet her at home. Home, which in its sacred circle ought to have afforded a refuge from every evil passion, as from every outward danger. She knew it would not be so, and willingly would she almost have thrown herself at the Captain's feet, and begged him to protect her from it, rather than oblige her to return to such a sanctuary. [192]

Oh, fashionable and speculating mothers, why do you crush in your children some of the sweetest and loveliest of their feelings. Why are you so utterly foolish, as, first to make them unworthy of a husband's trust and confidence, and then wonder that they do not obtain them. A man seeks, in his wife, for a companion to his best feelings, fit your daughters to fill such situations, and, should they then fail to obtain them, they will still hold an honored place in society.

Lucy felt that her success, in a matrimonial point of view, was all that her mother regarded, that she seemed to view her daughters with the eyes of the public, and valued them in proportion to the admiration they excited, and she now strained every nerve to gratify both her and herself. [193]

There was one little plan to which she looked with great interest. Mr. Ware's proposal of their taking tea in Mrs. Lesly's garden, was to be carried into effect. They were all to dine early, and drink tea soon enough to prevent any danger of taking cold, and Mabel was to prepare them tea and fruit in the garden, while Miss Ware would take hers quietly in doors with Mrs. Lesly. Amy talked herself tired with planning it, for a week before, asking Mabel for an exact list of all the fruit she meant to get for their entertainment. Lucy looked forward to it more seriously; she fancied Clair entered so eagerly into the plan that she hoped he had some particular reason for

wishing it, more than the mere pleasure of taking tea in the open air. Was it not very likely, that lounging down one of the shady walks which skirted the garden, he might find courage to tell all she so much wished to hear. [194]

The expected evening at length arrived.

Mrs. Lesly was unusually well, for the renewed confidence between herself and her daughter had produced the most happy effects. Lucy was all sparkling animation, and Clair forgot to be rational in the effervescence of his good spirits. Lucy, whose fear of caterpillars was quite touching, had persuaded Mabel to place the tea-table on the open grass-plot—and there the sisters had delighted themselves in arranging the simple repast. Amy was so accustomed to bustle along by Mabel's side, that she had come to the belief that she could do nothing well without her; and she now hurried about, laughing merrily, as she conveyed to the table, plates of early fruit, which old John had always carefully matted through the summer. Mr. Ware was particularly fond of fruit, and it was a great pleasure to the sisters, to store up every little luxury for him.

The table looked very pretty with its fruit, and cream, and flowers, and the little party was a merry one, ready to take pleasure and amusement in anything. Mr. Ware told stories of other days, and Clair brought anecdotes of the fashionable world of his day, while the girls were well-pleased listeners. [195]

When tea had been fully discussed, they strolled round the garden, watching for the sunset, which was to be the signal for taking shelter in the house. Lucy, the captain, and Amy, went off laughing together, while Mabel, choosing the driest path in the garden, paced up and down by the side of Mr. Ware.

"It is very kind of you," he said, "to prefer my company to those who are gayer and younger; but I am sorry to perceive that you are not quite in your usual spirits—I hope you have no reason to be depressed."

"None at all," replied Mabel, "and yet I am foolish enough to feel low-spirited. But have you never felt a vague apprehension that something dreadful was going to happen—I cannot overcome it to-night." [196]

"I have often felt the same from no reason, as you say, and have as often found my fears groundless. Do you not remember those beautiful words—'*He feareth no evil tidings?*'"

"Oh yes—I must not think of it again."

Mr. Ware thought this might be no bad opportunity of speaking of Mrs. Lesly's delicate health, and leading her to prepare herself for a trial which he foresaw was not far distant; but at the very moment that he was thinking how to introduce the subject, the sound of merry laughter came from the other side of the garden, and Mabel exclaimed—

"Oh, I fear they are at the swing, and John says it's unsafe. I must go and stop them."

And so saying, she ran quickly across the garden, till she reached the spot where the swing was suspended from the branch of two tall fir trees.

Amy was in the swing, which Captain Clair was pushing, while Lucy was clapping her hands as each time the child rose higher in the air. [197]

"Oh, do stop," said Mabel, running up to them quite out of breath, and scarcely able to say any more.

"No, no," said Lucy, "we want to see if Amy can touch that bough. What a beautiful swinger she is—she nearly did it then, I declare—try again, Amy."

"John says it is unsafe," cried Mabel, trying to be heard, "do, do stop—for mercy's sake, Captain Clair, do stop her."

Both were, however, deaf to her entreaty. Lucy rejoiced in what she thought superior nerve, and called to her not to be an old maid, frightened at everything; while Clair thought her very feminine and pretty, but apprehended no real danger.

Mabel continued to exclaim, till unable to get a hearing, she burst into tears of vexation and alarm, fearing to touch the rope, lest she might cause the accident she feared.

At the same moment, while she watched Amy ascend quickly through the air, till her feet scattered a few leaves from the bough she had been trying to touch, there came a heaving sound, then a loud crash—the swing gave way, and Amy fell violently to the ground. With a scream of piercing anguish, she sprang to her side, where she lay close by a knotted root of the tree, which she had struck in falling. [198]

Lucy stood blushing and terrified, uttering some confused excuses for not listening to one who justice whispered was never fanciful.

Captain Clair looked bewildered and thoroughly ashamed, for often the only excuse for daring is its success.

Mr. Ware fortunately soon reached the spot, and though extremely vexed at such a termination to

the day's enjoyment, merely roused his nephew, by telling him to carry the poor child into the house, and then to fetch a doctor, that they might be certain she had sustained no serious injury.

His nephew, too happy to have some duty assigned, raised Amy in his arms, for she was perfectly insensible, and, as Mabel supported her drooping head, carried her into the house. Mabel's conduct during that short walk cut him to the heart; she seemed entirely to have forgotten that his obstinacy had injured her sister; and in her anxiety for her safety, she did not suffer a complaining word to escape her. Those who possess little control over their own feelings, often reverence those who have great self-command—and to Clair, who a few minutes before, had been laughing with almost childish excitement, and was now utterly depressed, Mabel seemed like a superior being in the calm dignity of her silent distress. [199]

At length, Amy was safely placed upon her bed, and leaving Mabel and their servant-maid to try every means to restore her to consciousness, he hastened in search of a surgeon. He met Lucy in the lane, who told him that she had anticipated his errand, but that the doctor had gone to see a patient many miles away.

"Then I shall go for a horse, and follow him," said he, "anything will be better than this suspense." [200]

"And what shall I do?" cried Lucy, wringing her hands; but Clair had no comfort to offer, and hurried on to the village to find a horse.

Lucy returned to the house, frightened, and ashamed. She did not like to remain alone, yet there was no one in the sitting-room; and not daring to seek any one, she retired to her own chamber, which looked so still and lonely, that she put the door half open, and seated herself in a chair close by, to listen for any news from Amy's room. She could not help recalling to herself the wild laugh of the poor child only half an hour before, and she could not bear to think of how still she was lying there.

At length she heard Betsy, the privileged maid, say:—

"It is all Miss Lucy's fault, I know, for the house has not been the same since she came into it." [201]

"Hush, Betsy," was the murmured reply, in her cousin's well known voice; "those thoughts will only make it harder to bear."

Betsy was not so easily stopped, but Mabel seemed to reply no more.

Every word went to Lucy's heart. The frequent question of despairing feeling. "What shall I do?" received no answer, and she sat on in her desolate seat, or varied her watch by stealing on tiptoe to the end of the passage. Thus the weary time slipped away, and she had listened to the church clock, as it struck the hours till midnight—she then heard the sound of horses' feet, and anxious for any change, she ran down stairs—but she found that Clair and the surgeon had already been admitted by Mr. Ware, who was watching for them, and, feeling herself of no use, she again crept to her room to listen, trembling for the doctor's opinion. The examination lasted a long time, and she became nearly worn out with waiting, and trying every minute to divine something from the hurried voices, or hurried steps of the attendants in the sick room. But she could learn nothing, till she heard the doctor leave the room, and lead Mabel to that next her own, and then she heard her say in a tremulous voice. [202]

"What do you think of her, Mr. Williams?"

"The accident has been a severe one," he returned.

"Can she recover?" was asked, in a tone which Lucy trembled to hear, and she leant forward to catch the answer.

"A complete cure is beyond hope, my dear Miss Lesly; I entreat you to bear up against this blow," were the words she caught; "my heart bleeds for you, but I see the back is broken, and you know—" a groan of anguish, which she would have fled miles to have escaped hearing, was the only answer sentence thus given.

Then followed confused words, as if he were trying to comfort, broken by suppressed sobs.

An agony of terror, alike for Amy and her sister, then seized her—she trembled in every limb; and when she attempted to cry out, her tongue seemed to refuse to utter a sound. She sank upon the floor, too overpowered to move, and yet without the relief of fainting. Her thoughts became more and more distinct—of Amy, growing, perhaps, in beauty and womanhood, stretched on the bed of helpless sickness, unable to find advantages in either. What a blight had she cast upon a home she had found so happy. And Mabel, too, the beautiful unselfish Mabel, no longer the playfellow of innocent childhood, but the hopeless nurse of youthful decrepitude. [203]

Too carelessly instructed as she had been, in the forms, and almost wholly deficient in the spirit, of the religion she professed, she knew of no balm that could heal a wound of such bitterness—she saw no light that could have guided her to comfort. Highly as she prized youth and its enjoyments, its hopes, and its ties, much as she sparkled in company, and revelled in the admiration she excited, so much did she feel the reverse to be dark and hard to bear. She pictured Amy passing, in one five minutes, from her joyous youthfulness, with its light laugh, and bounding glee, to the trials of sickness which she might never more escape; probably, too, the highly intellectual child becoming only the feeble-minded woman, weakened by disease and suffering, and cut off from all those endearing ties so prized by a woman's heart. As these [204]

thoughts passed slowly, and impressively before her—she covered her face with her hands, and wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

[205]

Oh, how much more doth beauty
beauteous seem,
By that sweet ornament which truth
doth give.
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it
deem,
For that sweet odour which doth in it
live.

SHAKSPEARE'S SONNET.

How awful is the feeling with which morning breaks in a house where sudden grief and desolation has been wrought. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we shrink from each other, as if we feared to read our own feelings in the faces of others, whose sufferings only embitter our own.

The stillness of the past night broken by household sounds usually so familiar as to attract no attention, recall the mind to the fact that another day has opened on our life, showing more clearly the sorrow of the night before. [206]

Poor Amy! Mabel's love had thrown a kind of halo round the orphan child, and those who did not love her for her own, loved her for Mabel's sake.

Old John went heavily to his work, to move the benches and other signs of the last evening's simple pleasure.

"Miss Mabel shall not see them again," he said to himself; "I cannot give her much comfort—but I may spare her a little pain."

Mr. Ware and his sister had gone home, after affording all the comfort and assistance in their power.

Mrs. Lesly had been persuaded to lie down, for, terrified and ill, she needed repose, and Mabel, in grief, as in gladness, always took the lead.

Lucy, exhausted and spiritless, too weary to get up, and too irresolute to undress, had thrown herself upon her bed, and fallen asleep. [207]

When she again opened her eyes, the noon-day light was streaming in upon her bed, and, to her great surprise, Mabel was standing by her; she was pale as the dead, and her countenance gave evidence of the agony of the last few hours—but there was a pale light in her eyes, and a still repose about her, that seemed to hallow the grief they concealed.

"I am glad you are awake," she said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper—"I feared you might be ill—you slept so long."

Lucy's eyes were swollen with weeping and watching, and she looked at her for a moment in despairing silence; at last she raised herself, and seizing Mabel's hand, grasped it eagerly.

"Oh, Mabel, Mabel," said she, "what have I done—where can I hide my face?"

And she sank again upon the bed, and buried her face in the pillow.

"You meant me no harm," replied her cousin—"at least, not much—and I forgive you from my heart. My grief is too heavy for resentment. But get up, Lucy, and do not distress me still more by giving way in this manner." [208]

"Oh, how I despise myself! to think that I am lying here while you are waiting on me."

"Well, dear Lucy, get up now, for you will be better doing something, and I cannot help pitying you here alone."

"Then tell me something I can do for you. Oh, I will do anything, but I cannot get up to sit as I did last night."

"This is Saturday," replied Mabel, "and there are many things you can do for me, which will enable me to be entirely with my poor Amy. Shall I leave them to you?"

"Oh, yes," cried Lucy, jumping up, and throwing her arms round her; "you are an angel—I cannot forgive myself—yet you forgive me before I ask you."

Mabel kissed her silently, and gliding from the room, was soon again by her sister's bed.

Amy was feverish, and perpetually wanted something to drink, but it was touching to see how gently she asked for it, and how earnestly she seemed to try to repress her own fretfulness, with her large blue eyes fixed on her sister's face, as if trying to read her approval of every checked complaint.

[209]

"It was very naughty of me," she whispered, "to get into the swing, Mabel dear, when you told me not in the morning. Will you forgive me?"

"You are in pain, love," said Mabel, tremulously; "and I cannot call you naughty now."

"Then I am glad you have taught me not to want to be told—but I shall not be happy till you just say you forgive me."

"My own darling, I forgive you a thousand times—would that I could suffer instead of you."

"If I had not done wrong, I should not so much mind," said Amy, thoughtfully; "but give me a little water, dear."

Mabel held the water to her lips, and Amy looked at her earnestly as her hand trembled.

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"Do not cry, Mabel dear," said she, in a feeble voice, "I shall very soon be well again."

And weary with the pain she was bearing, without a murmur, she closed her eyes.

Mabel's restrained tears fell fast, for well she knew that years to come might find her the same helpless invalid as she now lay before her.

The surgeon had given little hope, even in the first moment, when it is seldom withheld; and she threw herself upon her knees, and covered her face with her hands. Amy's fortitude and patience, while it deeply moved her, made her thankful to find that her early lessons had not been bestowed in vain.

Meanwhile Lucy roused herself with a stronger desire to be really useful than she had felt for years. Mrs. Lesly had gone to sit with her two children, so that she required nothing from her. She felt Mabel could not more effectually have forgiven her than by allowing her to assist in her duties, for it prevented her feeling the remorse of the evening before. She ran down stairs with cups and waiters from the sick room, which, if allowed to accumulate, give such real discomfort to the sufferer, and even busied herself in helping Betsy in the kitchen, spite of the sulkiness with which her services were accepted.

[211]

But idle habits are not easily thrown aside with the distaste for them; and, as the day wore on, she began to feel so fatigued that she could not think how Mabel managed to do everything she did on ordinary days—when, spite of her desire to please her, she felt her strength fail in a few hours.

"But I have not been brought up like Mabel," she thought, too willing to throw the blame on others, if by so doing she at all removed it from herself. "How can she ever get through it," she said to herself, eying disconsolately the large basket of clean linen, caps, and frills, which Betsy had just laid down before her, saying that Miss Lesly had said she would be kind enough to sort them.

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She forced herself, however, to attempt it with many a sigh over its difficulties. She had scarcely finished her task, when she saw Clair coming up to the house, and, feeling a better conscience from her exertions, for her spirits were easily elated, she went down stairs to meet him.

When she entered the sitting-room, where, not venturing to knock or ring, he had already seated himself, she found him with his head buried in his hands, which rested on the table before him. He looked up as she entered, and a momentary shudder passed over him, which she could not help perceiving. His face was deadly pale, and his features drawn together, and bearing the traces of deeper thought than that in which he usually indulged. He had indeed done many things more careless, and ten times as wrong, but the consequences had never followed so rapidly nor been so heart-rending.

"Oh, you have suffered," exclaimed Lucy, "and what a night I have passed!"

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"If you can see Miss Lesly," returned Clair, scarcely heeding her observation, "ask her, in mercy, to see me for a few minutes."

His first thoughts are of Mabel, thought Lucy, with ready jealousy, not one kind word for me.

"Will you?" said he, seeing her hesitate, "will you ask her to see me? What does she say? How does she bear it? Does she reproach me?"

"What question shall I answer first?" said Lucy, with a little of her returning levity.

Clair bit his lip, and looked at her with surprise, but Lucy quickly recovering herself, said quietly,

"She bears it as we might have expected from her, she never spoke of you—and forgave me before I dared ask for forgiveness, and she would not suffer her servant to reproach me to her."

"Then there is some hope for me," he exclaimed, "but oh! how ten times more killing is it to have injured one who will not return an injury by an unkind word. Last night she looked at me with such pity in her beautiful eyes, that I could have worshipped her. But do go."

[214]

Lucy burst into tears.

"What!" thought she, "was I earning for Mabel, when I was trying to shew how much more nerve and spirit I possessed?"

Clair sat in silence, he did not spring to her side and take her hand, soothing her, as only a lover knows how; and she left the room to seek Mabel with feelings of indescribable remorse. Having delivered her message to Betsy, she locked herself in her room, and once more gave way to the most passionate grief.

Clair was left only a short while alone, before Mabel entered the room. One glance at her pale cheek and sorrowful countenance, was sufficient to tell, at once, how great the suffering had been, and how it had been borne.

"Ah, Miss Lesly," he began, hurriedly, "can you ever look upon me again without shuddering? I, who have been the cause of this dreadful, desolating blow. Is it possible you can ever forgive me? but I know you can; were I the vilest person on this earth you would forgive me, if I asked it, but never will you look on me without lamenting the horrid scene I shall always recall. Yet, I must hear your forgiveness, and oh! if you could know what I have suffered, in these few last wretched hours, you would pity me." [215]

"I should not do you justice, Captain Clair," replied Mabel, trying to speak steadily, "if I did not pity the pain you must feel in having been the most unwilling cause of such an accident; but you must not forget that it was unintentional: and I forgive you, from my heart, for any share you may have had in this unhappy accident."

"They tell me," said he, shuddering, "that she never can be quite well again. Oh!" cried he, throwing himself on his chair and groaning heavily, "that I should have lived to be such a curse." [216]

"You are but the instrument in a Hand mightier than your own," replied Mabel.

"Few punishments can be so great," replied Clair, bitterly, "as to be chosen for the instrument of justice. It is only the worst soldier in the army that is forced to inflict death on his condemned brother. You will hate the instrument that has been raised to afflict you?"

"Should I not then be rebellious against the Hand that raised it?" replied Mabel. "But, for my sake and your own, command your feelings. I dare not think, yet, and you would force me to do so. Why this has been suffered I must not ask now, for my faith may be too small for argument, while grief has almost robbed me of my senses. But I can see that you may have been made the unwilling cause, possibly that you may *think*. Do not forget the merit of suffering, for, if it chastens, it often purifies the heart; and do not let poor Amy's health and hopes in life be offered up for nothing, for there is a nobler self within you, which sorrow for our loss may call forth—shake off all that sullies your character—all its littleness or frivolity—and be yourself. Devote your life to some higher purpose, and to nobler aims—go forth to the world again, a blessing to those around you—and then," said she, sinking her voice as her eye lost its brilliant fire, "and then Amy, on her sick bed, will feel that her loss has been your advantage." [217]

Clair almost held his breath while she spoke, and then exclaimed, with a soldier's energy, as his eye seemed to have caught the fire which had died in hers,

"I will, I will! You have doubly forgiven, for you have bestowed thoughts which inspire me with hope. You," said he, as he respectfully raised her hand to his lips, "you have more than forgiven, and I bless you from my very soul." [218]

Mabel gently withdrew her hand, and, excusing herself from staying longer, left him to indulge the new reflections which her words had awakened.

CHAPTER XII.

 [219]

In the service of mankind to be
A guardian god below; still to
employ
The mind's brave ardour in heroic
arms,
Such as may raise us o'er the
grovelling herd
And make us shine for ever—that
is life.

THOMPSON.

It was with increasing uneasiness, that Mabel perceived the effects of their common grief on the weakened constitution of her mother. Mrs. Lesly, at first, insisted on being constantly with her sick child, but day by day her cheek became more pale, and her low hollow cough more frequent, until she could scarcely reach Amy's room without fatigue, and, instead of being able to nurse [220]

her, required, herself, a further exertion of Mabel's ever watchful care. Grateful indeed did the latter feel for the strong health, and stronger nerves, which enabled her to maintain the watching and waiting required of her—while the consciousness of being loved taught her that each personal service rose in value because she rendered it. Lucy still remained with them; she had insisted on her services being received; and, though the idle girl was rather giving trouble than making herself useful, Mabel did not refuse her offer to continue with her, hoping that the wish to serve might be the seed of better feelings and stronger self-denial.

But Lucy had not perhaps fully understood her motives, when she ascribed her wish to stay to the desire to be of service.

Clair seemed entirely to have forgotten her, or only to make use of her to deliver messages, or to convey grapes and other luxuries to the little invalid; but it seemed entirely to have escaped his memory, that any thing, even so interesting as a common flirtation, had ever taken place between them; and indeed he seemed in every way altered, as if he were trying to convince her that he was scarcely the same person. However, she did not altogether give up the hope of regaining the affections she had before so fully counted upon. Yet, having thrown aside the light and fashionable gallantry which he had delighted to display, he was now utterly impervious to all the common attacks of even the most accomplished flirt; and, however clever she might be in raillery, badinage, and spirited nonsense, Lucy had learned little of that language which springs from heart to heart, in trouble and suffering—or of those serious and elevating thoughts which alone bring with them consolation to the deep thinking. [221]

She was, then, entirely at a loss when she found her former companion, rather annoyed than otherwise, by conversation which would formerly have amused him for half a-day; but this change only increased her affection, while it effectually removed him from her power; she listened, waited, and watched for him, but, though she tried every capricious art to bring him again to her side, she found that nothing prevailed, and, at the close of the day, she had not even the lightest word to treasure up, as an evidence of the love she had already spoken of as certain, to her friends in Bath. [222]

One evening, as events were progressing in a manner so unsatisfactory to Lucy, Mr. Ware and his nephew might have been seen pacing up and down the lane leading to Mrs. Lesly's house, which was rendered romantically pretty, by the trees which overhung it, from the garden which was considerably raised above it.

Clair had been for some time engaged in silently beating down the leaves and branches, which grew most prominently in the hedge above their walk, with a light cane he carried in his hand, when Mr. Ware, turning kindly, yet with a slight tone of embarrassment, said to him— [223]

"My dear boy, I would not wish to presume a moment either upon my age or my relationship to you, but would rather gain an interest by favor, and as a friend; may I then ask a question, which my anxiety for you alone dictates."

His nephew looked slightly surprised at this address, but replied in a depressed tone.

"You may say any thing you like uncle, without fearing that I shall mistake the kindness which leads you to speak at all. You have been too kind to me, ever since I have been with you, not to make me feel that affection must ever second the duty and respect you deserve from me."

"Thank you," replied his uncle, "I feel that the late unhappy accident has much changed you; and what you now say convinces me that the change is one which, however it may sadden you, cannot be regretted."

"I hope not," replied Clair, in the same tone of depression; "can you understand what I mean, when I say that I feel, that, though I had no intention the other evening beyond causing a momentary pain, which, in a beautiful girl I thought charming, I yet feel that I have been so thoughtless of the comfort of others, during my past life, that I have deserved to be the agent of such a misfortune, in retribution, as it were, for all that has before gone unpunished. Little Amy's sweet voice rings in my ear wherever I go—such as it was when I first saw her, when she looked up from the wild wreath she was twining, to give some kind word to the laborers as they passed her, the morning after my coming here. Her simple questions return to my memory, and her purity and innocence have made a deeper impression on my mind, by the sad reverse which has followed my acquaintance with her family—I cannot help thinking what an interesting young woman she might have been, through the careful training of such a sister, who has planted in her mind, young as she is, her own childlike tenets of religion. When I reverse the picture, I see her growing up a weak unhappy cripple, perhaps, sinking under accumulated disease, the victim of an early grave. Can you wonder that I am changed, uncle, and that I now find the follies and amusements, in which I have too often sought forgetfulness of the weakness of my own heart, now utterly repulsive to me? When I see Mabel Lesly forgiving without reserve, and enduring without complaint, sorrow which would have found me in a very different temper, can you doubt, dear uncle, that, contemplating such rare and beautiful virtues, I have been led to seek the cause, and to find out on what basis they are founded; and, while raising my thoughts to the source and spring of every true virtue, and pouring its healing waters on my soul, must I not shudder to discover there, nothing but pollution, and feel depressed and sad, with the sense of what I am, and what I have been. [224]

"Yet do not think this dejection is attended with anything like despair; no one, who had conversed with your sweet friend, would long retain such a feeling. A few words, indeed, from her, while [225]

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they convinced me of the aimless existence I have been rather enduring, than living, gave me an inspiring principle which spoke of better things. You may think I am suddenly turned into an imaginary, but you can scarcely tell how deep an impression this late accident has left upon me."

"Not so," replied Mr. Ware, "the heart that awoke to chivalry in other days, is not dead because chivalry has assumed another form—and, indeed, we too often try to be lukewarm in our feelings. But, to be candid, my dear Arthur, I do think, as you say, that too much of your time has been trifled away in the pursuits of garrison glory, and watering-place amusements. I have been, for some weeks, patiently waiting for some season or time, when I could enforce the necessity of sowing a richer harvest for the decline of life, than you have hitherto been doing. Could I have chosen some other less touching call to wakefulness, I would have done so; but these things are not in our own disposing—it only belongs to us, to use well the circumstances and opportunities which are given us; and I was even now going to say what you have anticipated. Grateful, indeed, am I to think, that, even so trying a time, can yield its sweetness, for I hope you speak of your feelings without any exaggeration."

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Mr. Ware paused, but, as Clair did not seem disposed to reply, he continued—

"There is one subject in which I feel particularly concerned—may I—I ask it as a favor—may I speak candidly upon it?"

"You may speak with candour on any subject, sir, without fearing that I shall be weak enough to take anything but in good part."

"Thank you for this confidence. May I then ask if you are quite sincere in your attentions to Miss Villars? and, if so, why your behaviour has so decidedly changed with regard to her? Forgive me for asking so delicate a question, which nothing but the interest I take in your happiness could excuse."

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"Oh, do not be so alarmed on my account," said Clair, half smiling, "it is only my tenth garrison flirtation, and you cannot think me seriously entangled."

"Then," said Mr. Ware, with a tone of severity, which he very seldom used, "what do you mean by becoming her constant companion—paying her every attention, short of actually making love. Shame on your new-found repentance—if this be the fruit of it."

"Do not be too hasty in forming your judgment," replied Clair. "I have only done what most other young men would, under the same circumstances—though, I own, my changed opinions have led me to withdraw the attentions you condemn."

"I own that I would much rather have had your thoughts fix upon a girl more like her cousin; but, when I believed you sincerely attached—since you persisted in your attentions spite of my hints—I thought it could not be helped; and, perceiving she returned your attachment, I ceased to object, feeling that love corrects many faults. Little knowing that all this time, you were acting a part which should have made me blush for shame."

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"Uncle, you are passing a stern judgment—sterner far than I deserve; give me your patience for a few minutes, and I will convince you that I am not so much to blame. Lucy Villars is one of that class of girls called flirts, and, for a flirt, she possesses all the necessary qualifications. She is chatty, thoughtless, and good-humoured—and, better than all, has no heart. She is, however, something more than a flirt—she is a husband hunter, and set her would-be affections on me, before she knew a single feature of my face, much less a quality of my mind—so that I do not flatter myself with possessing anything in her eyes beyond an average fortune and family. Had I been a man of no discrimination, I might have fallen a victim to a very bold game; but, as I happen to have seen a little of the world, I have spent a few weeks more pleasantly than ordinarily. And now may I ask you, uncle, would you, even with your high sentiments of right, expect me to marry a girl whom I could never trust—who would jilt me for a richer man tomorrow, and if not so, granting even that she loved me, would form but an insipid companion at the best."

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"You are wrong," said Mr. Ware, who had been listening with great impatience, "and you know that you are wrong, or you would not use so much sophistry to convince me you are right. Let me ask you, if she be the girl you describe her to be, was she a fit companion even for your idlest moments? If she be the designer you would prove her to be, was it right to place yourself in daily temptation, by communion with one whose sentiments must be corrupt, if they rise from such a polluted spring? Were you right in choosing for the object of your admiration, one whom you despised in your heart? Sorry am I that you had not courage to withhold your countenance from one whom you did not approve, but could rather act so deceitful, so mean a part. But, think again, your judgment may have deceived you, and, if she be not what you say, may she not have given you a heart, which (if it be so) you have obtained in so unworthy a manner."

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"Could I think so," replied Clair, "I should be more vexed than you will give me credit for; but I am too well acquainted with the world, to believe anything like real affection can be hidden under such open and daring encouragement as I have received from her; and, really, my dear sir, you must not be grieved on her account, or my own. I feel too much the frivolity of my past character, to try such amusements again; but, at the same time, no chivalrous principle tells me that I should do right to bring into my confidence, or to unite myself in, the holiest of self-formed ties that can exist on earth, with a girl whose character is so feathery. Far different would my choice be when thinking seriously of marriage. The woman I should choose for a wife would be

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one who would inspire me with higher thoughts and lead me to better things. One, who pure as sensible, would make my home a paradise, and while, by her zeal, she led me to heaven, would, by her womanly attentions to my wishes, make a happy road to it. Such a woman would as much excel a flirt as a small piece of gold would one double its size in tinsel."

"Arthur, your eloquence and sophistry are carrying you away altogether. Had you acted thoughtlessly only it would have been easier to excuse; but, now, I see, that with proper ideas and the most worthy sentiments, you have yet been capable of acting a part as unlike to them as your own comparison of gold to tinsel. Your excuses are common ones, and I fear will not privilege you to minister to the follies of others by indulging your own. How much kinder would it be to withhold undeserved admiration, and to shew that yours is only to be earned by what really deserves it. Would you not in this way, perhaps, find an opportunity of reading a lesson without words, to many, who are still young enough to improve by it. By refraining altogether from such deceitful flirtations, you might tend to discourage those mothers who educate their daughters for display, and force them to try for an advantageous settlement."

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"And how many do you think would follow my example?" enquired the young man with a smile.

"It is a consideration of no weight when making up your mind to do right—though it sweetens a good conscience and embitters an evil one—to remember that no one is so mean as to give no impulse to virtue or vice by his example. One great mistake is, that men unfortunately forget that they are christians, when in the fashionable world, as if our duties were altogether banished by an evening dress, or the light of conscience entirely eclipsed by the brilliant and fantastic tapers of a ball-room. It is for this reason that so many turn anchorites: forgetful that the world may be enjoyed with a christian's dress, and a christian's thoughts, they only remember, that when they visited the gay scenes they have resigned, they did so with a conscience peculiar to the occasion, and entirely different from the one they were familiar with in retirement."

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"You speak severely," said Clair.

"I speak with the courage which arises from my knowing, that, though you are thoughtless enough to err, you possess sufficient candour to bear reproof without reproach to him who offers it, and, however scrupulous I may in general be about offering advice, or venturing to find fault, I cannot allow such sentiments as you have just expressed to be uttered in my presence without testifying my sense of that error, if heard in any company and from any person, much less from one so dear to me as yourself, and I have spoken boldly, hoping to lead you to refine your sense of honor, till it reaches a standard which a christian soldier may not justly be ashamed to acknowledge."

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A few weeks since Clair might have smiled at the simplicity and unworldliness of his uncle's remarks, but there was something within him then that told him they were stamped with the irresistible force of truth.

He walked on in silence, pushing aside with his feet, the few withered leaves which were straggling in his path. It was one of those dark, mysterious days, when the wind blows sullenly amongst the trees, speaking strange words, in its own wild tones, of the year that is past; and the withered leaves as they spin round in the eddying wind, seem to call attention to themselves, and to ask what men have been doing since they budded forth in the gay spring, full of hope and promise to the sons of earth. They had played their part well and merrily, they had gladdened the heart and delighted the eye, they had made fair and beautiful the spots where their short day of life had been spent, and now, as they fell with their fantastic motion to the ground, their rustling music seemed to speak in forcible language to the heart of him, who had idled away part of the glowing summer of his life with few thoughts but of selfish amusement.

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With some such thoughts as these the two continued their short walk, which had been confined to the dry bit of road under the trees, which in damp or dirty weather was often chosen as a sort of promenade.

Mr. Ware was not sorry to see his nephew's unusual silence, for he was naturally too ready to act without thinking, and often, by the readiness of his professions in favor of any new idea of improvement, cheated his conscience of its performance, and he now watched him, with the grave interest which a good man feels, when he looks on the struggles of conscience, and does not know on which side the victory will lie.

"Even you, sir," exclaimed Clair, rather suddenly, "would not wish me to marry Lucy Villars! fool as I have been, you do not think I deserve so great a punishment, as the possession of such a wife."

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"I wish you," replied Mr. Ware, "to do neither more nor less than your own sense of honor and good feeling may dictate, under the difficult circumstances in which you have placed yourself."

"I cannot—I never can do that!" exclaimed Clair, vehemently.

"Neither will I ever ask you to approach so sacred a rite with lightness, much less with repugnance; but, at the same time, you ought to understand, that your attentions have been sufficiently pointed, to make people suppose that you only wanted a convenient opportunity of declaring yourself."

"Impossible! Who ever heard of a man's making serious love in such a manner. You at least do not believe it."

"Now, certainly I do not, for your words bear a different interpretation, and, if I mistake not, the opinion you now entertain of her, arises from comparison with another character of a higher standard."

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Clair colored, but he answered quickly.

"If you have so far read my thoughts, do you find it possible to blame me. Could I be insensible to the attractions of a girl of such uncommon excellence?"

"Alas, I do blame you," replied Mr. Ware, sadly, "for you have been acting a doubly deceitful part, but I cannot withhold my pity, for you must meet the difficulties with which you have entangled yourself."

"I must think uncle, I must think," said Clair, stopping, "you put my mind into complete confusion—I believed I was going to act for the best; now, I do not know what to be at, though my chief consolation is that Lucy Villars never cared a straw for me. I know you lay bare the wounds of conscience only to heal them, and though you have spoken severely I know you feel for me. What am I to do under these circumstances? I feel I have been wrong, and would willingly make any atonement, but remember, how many struggles there are in the world to make us wretched, without our adding a desolate hearth, and a miserable home to make everything else doubly hard. I must go and think alone."

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"And remember," said Mr. Ware, "that Miss Lucy may deserve some allowance for her feelings. I am not quite certain that she is so much a trifler as you would make yourself believe."

"Why you will drive me out of my senses, uncle, I cannot increase my difficulties by thinking that to be possible. I know women too well—but, for the present, good bye," he said, laying his hand on the stile which divided the path to the Aston woods from the road, "but do not, at least till we meet again, think even so hardly of me as I deserve," he added, in a tone of gentle persuasion, which often screened him from blame, or, if not altogether so, had obtained the love of those with whose esteem he often trifled.

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Then, with a light bound, he cleared the stile, and, walking quickly onwards, he was soon lost in the windings of the path he had chosen for the scene of his meditations.

CHAPTER XIII.

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My friend, your house is made
of glass,
As any one may see,
I pray you, therefore, have a
care,
How you throw stones at me.

CULVER ALLEN.

"If you please miss," said Betsy, entering Amy's room, where Mabel was sitting, "will you go to Miss Lucy's room for she is crying and sobbing like any thing, and she has got the door locked and will not open it—something must be the matter."

"I will go to her directly, and will soon be back, love," said Mabel, kissing her sister, who never saw her leave without regret.

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She then went to Lucy's room, and tapping gently, demanded admittance.

After a short pause the door was opened by Lucy, whose eyes were swollen with weeping, and her cheeks wet with the tears which were flowing quickly. She had been lying on the bed, and, content with letting Mabel in, she threw herself again upon it hastily, rubbing her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, though the tears burst forth afresh on every attempt to clear them away.

Mabel's woman's heart quickly thought of Clair, and, seating herself by her side, she waited patiently till she became a little composed, and then begged her to say if she could do any thing for her.

"Nobody can do anything for me," said Lucy, and the effort to speak called forth a fresh burst of sobs and tears.

"What has happened, do tell me?" said Mabel, "has any one been unkind to you, dear Lucy."

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"The wretch," sobbed Lucy, "the mean-spirited wretch."

"I hope you do not speak of Clair," said Mabel, "what can he have been doing?"

"Oh, go away," cried Lucy, "go away, I am so unhappy, so wretched, I wish I had never seen him—never come here. Oh! leave me, go away, where shall I hide my face."

"I cannot leave you thus—do tell me what he has been doing?"

"They will laugh at me at home. What will Miss Lovelace say—oh dear!"

"Come, do tell me," said Mabel, anxiously, "I may be able to give you comfort."

"Oh, I cannot tell you."

"Why not?"

"Ah, Mabel, if I were as good as you I should not cry."

A faint blush passed over her countenance, and she was silent, till, presently, after many tears and sobs she told Mabel the cause of her distress. [244]

She had been walking in the nut avenue by the side of the lane, and had thus overheard the greater part of the conversation between Mr. Ware and his nephew, narrated in the last chapter. The sound of her own name had attracted her attention, and, having once yielded to the temptation of listening, she found, as she imagined, sufficient excuse for wishing to hear all—and enough had, in this manner, reached her ears to send her home full of mortified feeling.

Mabel listened, with unfeigned surprise, to the story of this adventure—and to those sentences, which, applying directly to herself, Lucy had most accurately remembered—but, when she heard from her of the admiration which she had so unconsciously inspired, she looked entirely amazed, and at a loss. This Lucy dwelt upon with a candour which surprised her.

"The wretch," said the latter, when she had concluded her story—"the worst of it is, that I cannot hate him as he deserves." [245]

"Do not say so," replied Mabel, "if you are able to forgive him so easily, you will have much less to suffer; there is nothing so painful as the indulgence of sinful or angry passions."

"Mabel," said Lucy, gravely, "you will marry him, of course, and I will try to wish you both happy."

"Dear Lucy," replied Mabel, taking her hand kindly, "I am very, very sorry for you, but rely on my friendship if you can, and I, who have suffered as much as you are suffering now, may be some support to you. Do not, for one moment, imagine, that, should Captain Clair ever place it in my power to marry him, I should for an instant think of it. I have told you already, that unhappy circumstances have rendered all thoughts of love repulsive to me, and, even if it were not so, I could not give my affections to one whom I have so long regarded as your lover."

"Do you really mean that?" cried Lucy, with the desperation of a drowning man catching at a straw. [246]

"I do indeed. Do you think I would trifle with you, when you are in distress. You must not let his unhappy preference prevent your trusting me as much as before, and you must let me guide you till you are strong enough to guide yourself."

Lucy flung her arms round her neck, saying heartily—

"You shall do anything you like with me, my own sweet friend; but, oh, there is something wanting in my heart which you have not the power to heal; but let me talk to you for a few minutes—if you understand me, you can better advise me."

Mabel was silent, and Lucy, leaning back upon her pillow, and looking fixedly at her, said, after a moment's pause—

"I have been brought up in a very different home from yours—and when you think of me, you must give me all the excuses my circumstances claim. I feel I might have been happier in a different life, yet, as it is, I have been happy enough. When I first came here, I thought I never could live in so dull a place, though I appeared delighted with it, because I feared to offend you; but now I dread nothing so much as leaving, and going back to Bath. Mamma talks a great deal of being very fond of us—but she despairs of getting so many girls married, and would give her right hand to get rid of us in a respectable manner. Very little is talked of when we are alone, but the chances of this or that young man's coming forward. I confess, with shame, that no one has talked on this subject, with more zeal than I have done—and I boldly determined to do my very best to get married. You will call this all very unwomanly, and so I acknowledge now, but anything seemed preferable to being an old maid. So far, you see, Arthur Clair was right; when I first saw him—marriage being at all times uppermost in my thoughts—I wished to make a conquest of him, if possible. You see how far I succeeded—even you were deceived, and thought him sincere, while, it appears, he was only trifling with me, as I deserved. I wrote home glowing accounts to Bath—and by this time, it is whispered half over the town, in all the coteries where mamma visits—and I shall now have to go back to disappoint them, and be laughed at myself; but this would be nothing, if I could go back, as light-hearted as I came here. Arthur Clair is wrong in supposing I have no heart—but I do not love him less for despising the character he supposes me to be. It was very cruel of him to act as he did—but yet I must have appeared to him a sad trifler, and worse than that, for, while I really loved you more than I do any other girl I know, I was, when with him, perpetually turning you into ridicule to prevent his admiring you. You, too, must hate and despise me; but I am tired of deceit, and will have nothing more to do with it." [247] [248]

Mabel's quick judgment foresaw that her cousin's repentance was probably as light, as her confession of deceit was easy—but she knew, at the same time, that she had no right to take this [249]

for granted, and that her only duty was to catch at even the lightest spark of virtue, and use her utmost power to kindle it into a bright and lasting flame. Sorrow was around her in every shape, destitution and dependence were before her, yet, no grief of her own, could prevent her turning a willing ear to the complaints, which, her truly womanly nature told her, arose from that suffering which is perhaps the hardest a woman can feel.

With extreme gentleness she offered comfort, mingled with the censure, she could not in sincerity withhold, and Lucy listened with surprise to advice unmingled with any taunt or reproach.

"Do you not think," she said, "that I had better tell him I heard what he said, and that I know that I do not deserve that he should think well of me."

"By no means," replied Mabel; "I would strongly advise you to give up all thoughts of him at once, for you are convinced that he does not care for you, and you acknowledge that you have, in a great measure, brought this unhappy affair upon yourself. You must forgive him fully, for, from what you tell me, he certainly does not seem so much to blame as I supposed; and, if you took any unworthy means to obtain his good opinion, you certainly fully deserve to have lost it. I do not admire a prude, but I do think that no woman has a right to make the first advances, and, if she does so, she certainly must be prepared to take the consequences. But let me earnestly beg you, to spend this season of affliction in schooling your own heart against this and future temptations, and hasten to vindicate your character to yourself, and to him. Shew him, that if you have been wrong, you are changed. It will be very difficult, I own, to teach him thoroughly to respect you; nay, do not curl your lip at the mention of respect; there may be a time when you will learn, how valuable, how necessary, respect is to a woman's peace; and the calm dignity with which you can bear this disappointment may purchase it, even from the doubting Clair. A calm and composed behaviour you must aim at—do not assume total indifference, for that will soon be perceived—but submit, if possible, without complaint, and without resentment—you will find this the easiest way of bearing trials." [250]

Mabel secretly hoped, that, by following her advice, Lucy might not only reform her character, but also display it to advantage in the eyes of the man she loved—nor did she think it improbable, that, disappointed in his suit to herself, he might find in Lucy's altered behavior, a charm sufficiently strong to lure him to a real, instead of a feigned affection, and thus preserve her from the snares which surrounded her in her own home. [251]

With these thoughts she returned to the sick chamber, leaving Lucy to think over what she had said.

During the last few weeks, she had allowed herself but little repose. Her time was spent alternately with her sister and mother, who in their separate rooms, each needed the refreshment of her presence. Her step was quick—her ready hand untiring—and her watchful eye always observant—yet, though no complaint had passed her lips since the sad night of Amy's accident, few could fail to observe how heavily she felt the sorrow by which she was subdued. [252]

The nights passed wearily, marked only by the hollow cough, which told her of her mother's failing health, and the loud wintry wind which whistled in the crevices of the house, or swept by it in loud blasts from the hills.

All who have felt sorrow, or who have been called to watch by the bed of the sick, must remember how much more sad these times appear in winter, than in any other time of the year.

We need our best spirits to laugh away the frost, and snow, and foggy days, and all the associations called up by the withering earth and closing year. [253]

Yet all these, with present trouble, past regret, and future fears, marked this sad time to Mabel. Her greatest satisfaction now, was the paying the most lavish attention to the two invalids.

Though their means were at all times limited, she spared no expense, where it could be likely to be of any service to the sufferers; she prevailed upon her mother to allow her to draw, as she pleased upon, the few hundreds still remaining of her savings, and this enabled her to procure, for both, the best medical advice which England afforded, though at a cost which the warmest of her friends could scarcely advocate.

All her efforts, however, were unavailing, her mother's strength rapidly failed, and the utmost care could scarcely keep her sister from sinking under the pain she suffered.

Day after day, the opinion of the medical man fluctuated, until he scarcely gave any hope—for he well knew that Amy's constitution, from infancy, little fitted her to struggle with disease of any kind. Still Mabel clung fondly to the possibility of her recovery, with a pertinacity which made her enter eagerly into any new course of treatment, which she hoped might prove more successful. [254]

It was with difficulty that she found time to think of Lucy—yet a willing heart can do much. She endeavoured to keep as much with her as possible to support her, in her new formed resolutions—and she was gratified to find, that Lucy had been able to meet Clair several times, with the composure she had recommended.

Poor Lucy's dignified calmness, however, very much resembled pouting, and, instead of inspiring Clair with any great respect, a little amused him; for he looked upon this change in her manner as a new mode of attack, against which he resolved to be armour proof. Her stability of character

being not very great—she could scarcely preserve her manner, when she saw it produced no immediate effect as she had anticipated. It was vain to hope that he would notice her composed forgiveness; and her well-meant resolution faded away before the disappointment of failure.

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She was one afternoon engaged busily in blaming him, and excusing herself, when he entered the morning-room, where she was seated at work, and, saying he had been to meet the postman, presented her with a letter from Bath. It contained the news, that Mrs. Clifford, one of the richest ladies in the town, intended giving a fancy ball at the Rooms which was to eclipse everything that had been seen for many seasons, and Mrs. Clifford was very anxious she should return for it. Besides, Colonel Hargrave had accepted the invitation to visit them, and was expected in Bath the following week. The letter was of great length, but contained little more than those two pieces of news greatly enlarged upon.

It seemed as if all Lucy's grief and gravity had disappeared, like the mist before the sunshine; for, starting up, she gave three bounds towards the ceiling, clapping her hands in utter thoughtlessness.

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"Miss Villars," cried Clair, indignantly, "can you forget where you are? How can you give vent to such expressions of joy, in a house you have helped me to make desolate?"

"I wish," exclaimed Lucy, turning round pettishly, "that you would not preach to me all day the same disagreeable truths, with a face as long as that of a methodist parson—and such a face too, 'tis indeed a pity it covers such a wicked dissembling heart; but there is no trusting appearances in these days."

"What do you mean, Miss Villars?" he enquired, coloring violently.

"Ask your own conscience, and then, if it has not forgotten how to speak the truth, you will find which is the greatest sinner, you or I," said she, trying to speak playfully, to hide the real passion which burnt in her eyes, and tingled in her cheeks.

"Surely," said Clair, a little haughtily, "you do not allude to the silly flirtation, which I have quite sufficiently repented, as my manners may have already expressed."

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"You double dealing wretch," exclaimed Lucy, in a perfect rage at the superiority he assumed, "you oily-tongued hypocrite, how dare you talk to me in this way? Why, I heard you talking to Mr. Ware, when you little thought I was walking in the nut-avenue. You despised me, did you, in your vaunted goodness—and, because you are fickle enough to turn from one girl to another, you try to justify your behaviour, by abusing me to one too good to listen to such stuff about either of us. What do you say to me now?" she said, her eyes dancing with delighted passion at seeing him utterly confounded. "Now carry your sanctimonious looks elsewhere, for they will not take with me, I can tell you. I could have forgiven your flirting, because they say—'a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind;' but, bad as I am, I never abused a man that had been silly enough to admire me—nor did I ever set myself up as anything better than I am. I am glad you feel what I say, and now go to the noble-hearted Mabel, and say, 'Here I am—I have been flirting, before your very eyes, with a girl I despised; but she served to make a few weeks pass more pleasantly than they might otherwise have done. I have been sporting with her feelings instead of making honest court to you.' And then, flushed with the success, purchased by such hypocrisy, tell her, that you have come to lay your laurels and a deceitful heart at her feet, and that you think them just offerings to her purity, and an ample return for the cruelty you were led to commit, by my persuasion. It will be safest to lay all the blame on me, to her, as well as to Mr. Ware. It told with him, and it may with her—go and try."

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She here stopped for want of breath, but, as Clair made no reply, she quickly resumed.

"You have not a word to answer me, have you now? How very pretty you look, standing abashed before the girl you despised. If I were a man you might run your sword through me, for want of a better argument in your favor, but, as it is, I am afraid there is nothing to be done," she continued, (as her companion threw himself into an arm chair and seemed determined to let her say her worst, without the slightest attempt at interruption,) then walking to the window she began singing part of the Spanish girl's song to her Irish lover.

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"They say that the spirit most gallant in war
Is always the truest in love."

"For Mrs. Lesly's sake do not make so much noise," said Clair.

"Unfortunately," replied Lucy, "I am not so unfeeling, for Mrs. Lesly's room is at the other end of the house. You said, if I remember rightly, that my character was too feathery to suit you—nevertheless, I think for a feather my strokes are rather hard. Have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"Yes, when you have blamed me as much as you may think I deserve, I will venture to reply."

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"Oh, say on, I have done."

"Then, if you have leisure to hear me, I will now say, that, before this conversation, I thought I might have been wrong; but I am now fully convinced by the indignation you so openly express, that I have been mistaken in you. I confess that I have injured you in the most ungenerous manner—for which I dare not offer any excuse, since every one would be too light to have any

weight. I will then only ask you to be generous enough to forgive me?"

Lucy, whose feelings were ever subject to the most sudden variations, burst into tears and ran out of the room, but, as Clair continued regarding the door through which she had made her sudden exit, it opened as quickly as it had closed, and she again entered; holding out her hand, as she walked up to him.

"I am glad you are not gone," said she, panting for breath, "because I can tell you I forgive you on condition that you forgive and forget all I said in my passion just now." [261]

"It was richly deserved," said Clair, grasping her hand warmly.

"But that does not make it the more easy to bear, you know. If it is quite unjust we let it pass as 'the idle wind which we regard not,' but, if it be just, we take it more to heart, and, seriously, I am very sorry for what I said just now."

"And I," said Clair, "am very sorry for a great many foolish things I have said and done in the last few weeks."

"Well then," cried Lucy, "we are both sorry, so let us be friends, and talk no more about love and all that kind of nonsense. I shall go home in a day or two, and then," said she, with a half sigh, "all I ask is, that you will not think me quite so thoughtless and foolish as you did; or, if you do," she added, smiling quickly, "remember you were as weak and thoughtless as myself."

"I will not fail to do so," he answered, returning her smile, "if the remembrance of your present generosity, does not make me forget everything which caused it to be called into exercise." [262]

"I have had quite enough of your flattery," said Lucy, holding up her finger, "do not give me another dose, or I shall be obliged to repeat the antidote, and give you another scolding. Come now, I am thinking of the fancy ball, and, as I am determined to be in time for it—for I am of no use to Mabel by staying here—I shall choose my character at once. Here," handing him a book of Byron's beauties, "choose me the one you think would suit me best."

"Let me venture to suggest," replied Clair, as he took the book and turned over the leaves thoughtfully, "that leaving such a house as this, it would scarcely be right for you, to appear at a fancy ball at all."

"Oh, you methodist! give me the book."

"You will not then be persuaded," he said, laying his hand gently on the sketches of the frail beauties she had asked him to choose among. "Think, that for the sake of a few hours of doubtful enjoyment you lay yourself open to severe self-reproach, and may wound the feelings of your friends here. It may sound odd that I should venture to speak so seriously, but—" [263]

"Yes, it does seem very odd, certainly, and I thought I had given you a surfeit of preaching just now."

"Yet before you decide, I would ask you to consider whether you are not wronging yourself, by acting so thoughtlessly."

"Now let me ask you in return," she replied, pettishly, "if I am at Bath what harm my going would do or what good I could get by staying away?"

"Very little, perhaps, actually, but no one could think any unkindness intended by your remaining at home. I can hardly expect you, however, to listen to me, but, should your own better judgment lead you to come to the same determination I shall be rejoiced."

Lucy sat down, half sullenly turning over the book of beauties, and seeming to be examining their dresses with the greatest attention, as if she were trying to discover how they might be imitated by tinsel and gauze. [264]

The Captain stood looking at her earnestly. Mr. Ware's advice recurred to his mind, and, though he had found it difficult to follow it, he had tried his best.

Lucy, with her face glowing with excitement, her eyes moist with recent tears, looked exceedingly pretty, and he could not help longing for the power to plant a different spirit within her, at length he exclaimed, with sudden energy—

"Lucy Villars, will you not listen to me. Do not trifle, after the fearful judgment that has fallen upon this house, through our means. Is it possible you can forget what a withering blow it has been. Surely, surely you will not go to a fancy ball, while Mabel is watching over her suffering mother and sister. You do not mean it, you surely cannot; only think for one moment," said he, laying his hand upon hers, and staying the quick motion with which she turned over the leaves of the book. It is doubtful how Clair might have felt (for he had certainly deceived himself when he imagined she had never made any serious impression upon him) had his advice, his first effort at serious advice, been well received, for there was an earnestness in his manner, which he had never before displayed. But Lucy rose hastily, and brushing his hand aside with an indignant motion, prepared to leave the room; turning at the door, she said coldly— [265]

"There might have been a time when Captain Clair could have asked a favor, without risk of being charged with interference or impertinence, but I can now see no excuse which would lead me to make his wishes the rule of my actions—I would advise you in future to obtain influence,

before you seek to use it."

So saying, and bowing coldly, she left the room.

Her return home, and her plan of travelling, were soon settled by her hearing of a friend who was at this time returning to Bath from Cheltenham, and whose escort was offered her. [266]

Perhaps the pleasure of piquing Clair, added a little zest to the preparations which were carried on with a cheerfulness that surprised him. Deeply touched himself by recent events, and quite unable to recover his spirits, he regarded her with a wonder not a little mingled with contempt.

Mabel herself, as keenly susceptible to pain as she was open to pleasure, could scarcely understand the variable nature of her cousin's disposition, which, at times attracted her by its *naïveté* and candour, at others, alarmed her by its indifference and frivolity. Though really a little hurt at the coolness with which she prepared to leave her, directly it suited her own convenience, after her many professions, she suffered her to take her course without remark; particularly when she found, from the account she received of her conversation with Clair, that she could not preserve towards him, the composure necessary to ensure her own dignity. [267]

All was, therefore, soon arranged, and Lucy, as the parting drew near, became so affectionately distressed, that Mabel quickly forgave her previous indifference, and parted from her with a regret, she had scarcely supposed she could have felt a few weeks before.

As she stood for several moments in the garden, watching the vehicle which bore her from the village, her thoughts naturally recurred to the hour when, with far different feelings, she had stood in the same place to wait her coming. The scene was the same, and yet how changed. There was not a leaf upon the many bold trees which skirted the landscape. Here and there round the garden a single monthly rose bloomed in place of the many gay, autumnal flowers, which had then been so brilliant. Heavy clouds hung overhead, and silently and gloomily feathery pieces of snow fell through the cold air. [268]

"It is the sunshine of the heart that is gone," thought Mabel, unconsciously clasping her hands, and glancing at the scene around her; while she remembered how comparatively free from care she had been that day, and how gladly had the little Amy waited to catch the first sight of the expected carriage, how eagerly she had watched the first peep of the high road. Where was she now, poor child? when would her light feet carry her so merrily to that gate again.

"I know it must be right," thought Mabel, as if unwilling to dwell longer on feelings and afflictions which unnerved her; but sick at heart, and with tears swimming in her eyes, she turned towards the house. She stopped on hearing Clair's voice, who approached to meet her, having waited till the parting was over, hoping to remove any feeling of loneliness she might experience on Lucy's departure. His steps were sedate, and his countenance serious and reflective, as it had of late become. [269]

"Ah," said he, as he joined her. "Happy would it have been for you had neither of us crossed your path, to throw the shadow upon it we have done."

"We will not blame poor Lucy now she is gone," said Mabel, "and do not blame yourself again. I did not think I should miss her as much as I do; but there is such a pleasure in meeting a friend of about my own age."

"If there are three dark sides to a subject, and one bright one, you are sure to turn to the bright," said Clair.

"Should we not do so?" said Mabel, smiling faintly—"particularly when we must feel that even the one bright side is undeserved."

"I should very much have liked to have known your poor father," said Clair, rather abruptly.

"You would, indeed," said Mabel, "but what made you think of him?"

"Because I have heard that the lessons he gave you were so admirable; and practically illustrated—they are beautiful!" [270]

"Nay, if you wish to flatter me, speak of him—not myself; truly, he was a gentleman, a scholar, and a soldier," said Mabel, as her eyes brightened, "and I cannot tell how much I owe to him. Now, if I am tempted to do anything wrong, his spirit seems to stand between me and the temptation. See what an advantage it is to be good," said she smiling, as if fearful of speaking too much of herself, "what an influence you possess."

"You do, indeed, possess an influence," said Clair, emphatically, as he turned his eyes to hers, with an expression of mingled admiration and respect.

"I must go in," replied Mabel, hurriedly, "talking of my dear father has cheated me into staying longer than I meant to have done. I must go to my dear child—good bye," said she, extending her hand frankly. "Go, and do anything but be sad about me."

Without waiting for a reply, she ran into the house, and Clair leant upon the gate and watched her departing figure, like one entranced, till, fearful of attracting observation, he briskly roused himself, as if from some pleasant dream, and pursued his walk through the village. [271]

Meanwhile, Lucy continued her journey. At first the natural pain of parting from Aston led her to

a train of sorrowful reflection. Perhaps she too remembered how different the home she had left had been when she entered it; but she had also to remember many mortifying things besides. Her easy conquest, as she imagined, had ended in total failure. If she had unintentionally brought evil on Mabel, she had also brought good, in the admiration of the fascinating Clair. Her recollections soon became too painful to be encouraged, and she took the ready source of comfort open to those who do not care to probe the conscience, and tried not to think at all. It was easiest and most agreeable, but she had to arm herself for the reception she would probably meet at home. How could she say she had entirely failed; and what reason could she give for believing that Clair was in earnest; she had not the heart to blame him. "If Mabel had not been there," she thought, "he never would have changed, but I will not think any harm of her, I *suppose* she could not help it."

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"Once in Bath, this country dream will be over, and I shall have the pleasure of preparing for the fancy ball—and then, the arrival of Colonel Hargrave, and possibly—if he is not attracted by Caroline's majestic style of beauty, who knows but he may find other objects of admiration—" and she glanced down upon her pretty little foot, with an air of condescending affection, as it rested on the shawl which lay beneath it. Then came the remembrance that Mabel had lent her that shawl, and had herself wrapped it round her with that attention to the comfort of others, which was so peculiar to her, and she lent back and wept bitterly for some miles.

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At Cheltenham, however, she was joined by her promised fellow traveller, also returning to Bath for the season. Mrs. Richardson, for this was her name, was a good-tempered, stout little lady, who possessed a great fondness for young people, particularly for those who, either pretty, witty, or engaging, were sure to be popular in society. She formed a very useful chaperone, in case of necessity, never being unwilling to join any party of pleasure, from the most crowded rout, to the dullest and quietest card party.

Lucy had not been slow in finding out this useful virtue, and, Mrs. Richardson being a great admirer of hers, they usually got on very well together. But now, the badinage she had to endure, on the many conquests she must have made, during her country visit, amongst rich squires, grated sadly on her ears; while her attempts to divert the conversation, only renewed her companion's desire to obtain an account of all she had been doing and seeing.

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The tedious journey, however, drew at length to a conclusion, and she found herself once more in Bath. Again settled at home, she was not a little surprised, and not quite pleased to find that her Aston adventure had occupied far less of the family attention than she had imagined. Indeed, so thoroughly were they occupied in preparing for Colonel Hargrave's visit, that they scarcely listened to her accounts. The whole house, and household furniture, seemed stirring up to look their best welcome to the rich Indian wanderer. The best stair carpets were laid down, and the best drawing-room was uncovered and made habitable, and a thousand little expenses were excused, under the pretence of necessity, on such an occasion. The name of Hargrave was passed perpetually from one to another, and Caroline already fancied herself mistress of Aston Manor.

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"Oh!" thought Lucy, "could I have thought they cared so little about me, I would have been more independent of their opinion."

She, however, soon endeavoured to dispel the listlessness which followed her return to old pursuits, by entering into the subject of general interest, with as much seeming zest as her sisters; but, sometimes, when she seemed the merriest of them all, her thoughts would revert to Aston, and her gay laugh would find a check. Gaiety may sear, but it never yet has healed a wounded heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

[276]

He shall again be seen when evening
comes,
And social parties crowd their favorite
rooms,
Where on the table pipes and papers
lie,
The steaming bowl and foaming
tankard by.

CRABBE.

Almost every village possesses a house of public entertainment, however humble in appearance. Unfortunately, this is generally the most comfortable place accessible to the lower orders, who are often unwittingly tempted to increase the one pint of beer, which secures a seat by the large inn fire, drop by drop, till habits of drunkenness are too readily acquired. Some have recommended the establishment of something similar to a coffee-room in every village, where laboring men might enjoy the pleasures of society and conversation, without the temptations to a vice which adds many a tragedy to "the short and simple annals of the poor."

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It could indeed scarcely be wondered at, that at Aston, many of the laborers left their weather-beaten cottages, which, in some cases, formed scarcely a shelter from the wind and rain—and, without stopping to calculate the mischief which might ensue to their neglected families, should frequently resort to the "Hargrave Arms," where a blazing fire and a comfortable seat by a chatty neighbour were generally to be found. Here, at least, poverty and discomfort might be forgotten for a while, even by those who did not seek to drown remembrance in the fatal draught.

One Friday evening, many of the regular customers of the house assembled themselves as usual, more, perhaps, to chat than to drink, for they seldom carried their conviviality to any great height, except on the Saturday, when the young men of the village brought, too often, the first fruits of their week's earnings. On the occasion we now mention, a more sober conclave was assembled. The white haired Giles, whom Clair had visited with his uncle, on the first morning of his visit, was one of the guests. Not, now, with his head bent, and his hands extended over the dying embers of his wood fire, but with head erect in a comfortable corner, with the air of a man whose opinions are respected, and whose words claim immediate attention. Martin, the poacher, was also there, smoking a pipe, whose dusty colour bespoke long service. Besides these, were several of the most respectable labourers of the village, young and old. [278]

The landlord, himself, was a middle aged, sleepy looking man, with eyes that seemed to say that they had no particular time for taking rest, but seized every opportunity that occurred for shutting up at a moment's notice. [279]

The night was cold and gusty, and the large fire burnt with peculiar brightness—conversation went on briskly; when a new object of attention presented itself in the sound of horses' feet, which at this hour were very unusual.

This caused the landlord's eyes to open to the things about him, and he walked to the door to offer whatever hospitality might be required by the new comer.

By the time he had reached the open air, which he did with some reluctance, he found that the rider had dismounted. His horse appeared to have been well ridden, for, though a fine strong built animal, fitted for the hilly country he had been through, he seemed exhausted, and covered with dust and foam. The gentleman, on the contrary, seemed perfectly cool and free from fatigue, and equally indifferent to the weather, though the wind was high, and easterly, and his short cloak was whitened by the snow, which had been falling, at intervals, during the afternoon, giving signs of an early coming winter. There was sufficient of that nameless something in his appearance, even by the light of our host's lantern, to speak him a gentleman, and to procure for him a series of nods, intended for graceful acknowledgments of welcome. [280]

"My horse wants rest, and a good stable," said the new comer; "light me, and I will see him housed, myself. I will follow you."

This was spoken in a tone of accustomed and easy authority, and taking the bridle over his arm, he followed his landlord to the stable; where, with indifferent extravagance which baffled any interference, he seized an immense armful of straw from a heap which lay in one corner, and threw it on the bed, which already seemed tolerably supplied. So rapid and easy were his movements, that, before his astonished landlord had framed the remonstrance he meditated offering, he announced himself ready to accompany him to the house.

"Would you like dinner in the parlor, sir," enquired his sleepy host, leading him back through the court-yard. [281]

"No, I will take a glass of grog, in the bar."

"The bar is full, sir; and maybe you will not like—."

"What," enquired the stranger, "to sit side by side, with a poor man—you are mistaken, but hearken ye," said he, stopping, "the less civility you show me the better, I will pay you."

"I twig," he replied, shutting one sleepy eye with an attempt to look cunning, while, at the same time, he was a little startled at the deep and peculiar tone of the voice which addressed itself so particularly to his ear, and he was not sorry to catch a full view of his own huge blazing fire, and the familiar faces around it.

"A stranger wants a seat by the fire," muttered he, as he entered the bar.

"A stranger should have the best seat," said old Giles, moving quietly to offer him his arm-chair. [282]

"I have been accustomed, sir, to take place according to my years," said the stranger, in a voice of peculiar melody, as he declined the offer, and, at the same time, chose a seat further from the fire, where the fitful light only sometimes partially illumed his countenance.

"Landlord," said he, "your guests will, I dare say, join me in my grog; bring enough, not forgetting yourself."

A short silence followed this speech, partly caused by the landlord's absence; during which all eyes were turned to observe the appearance of the last arrival. His figure was considerably above the middle height, but his limbs were in such exact proportion, that he preserved the appearance of strength which tall men often lose. His shoulders were broad, and his chest wide and expansive. The only sign of delicacy about him appeared in his hand, which, for his height, was small, and very white and smooth, ornamented by a plain signet ring. This, they had an [283]

opportunity of observing, for his head was resting on his hand, though, seemingly more in thought than fatigue. His eyes were large, dark, and penetrating, made to flash with anger, to command, or reprove; yet, bearing in general a cold still hue, as if more accustomed to command, or to suffer, than to ask, or supplicate the world's favour. The mouth was expressive of great sweetness, as long as his features continued, in repose, though the lips seemed especially capable of curling into a sneer. His nose was long and aquiline, and gave a character of boldness to the countenance; and a finely sloped head, well set upon his shoulders, added to his lofty bearing.

All these features, fitted to form a face of striking manly beauty, were quite spoiled by the fact that, while the whiskers, moustache, and finely arched eye-brows, were black; his hair, of which he wore a great deal, and that, too long for the English fashion, was of a bright red, and gave a very peculiar shade to his countenance. [284]

His dress was half military, though remarkably simple, and on the present occasion, much soiled with long riding, and even shabby; with the exception of his boots, which appeared to have shared the care which had secured to the hand the marks of gentle breeding. It would have been very difficult to trace his age, in any part of his outward bearing, beyond the certainty that he was neither twenty nor fifty—anything between these two periods might have been attributed to him without much difficulty. Since his entrance he had not changed the position into which he had thrown himself; perfectly at ease in every limb, and still as a statue, he seemed scarcely aware of the observation he excited from his companions.

Probably he was inured to the weather, and indifferent to its effects, for he did not attempt to dry his clothes by drawing nearer the fire. Perhaps, his studious silence was intended to set his companions at ease, or, perhaps, occupied with other thoughts, he really forgot them after the first order he had given for their entertainment. However it might be, conversation gradually returned to its former channel, and he remained almost unnoticed. [285]

The snowy afternoon led them to speak of the weather, when Martin enquired, with an indifferent tone—

"Did it come in upon you last night, Giles?"

"It did sadly," he replied; "I was obliged to get up, and move my bed."

"Has the rain been so heavy here then?" enquired the stranger with some interest.

"Not in particular, sir," said Martin, "if our roofs were waterproof—but they ain't; I don't care who knows it. Look at this old man," he said, turning to Giles, "is he fit to live in a hole with the roof half off, and the sun and rain coming in every where. It almost drives me wild to think of it—and if it goes on much longer, there'll be mischief come on it, that I know." [286]

"Do not talk in that way," said old Giles, gently, "if I am content with my house, you should not make it a cause for dispute."

"Yes; but if any one could claim a proper shelter for his head, it is you, Giles. You served the family for fifty years, and after spending the best part of your life working for them, the least they could do, would be to keep the wind and rain off your old white head."

"It is not right to talk like this, Martin," returned Giles, gravely, "for you might make me discontented with my lot. You forget that by allowing me to work for them, they gave me food for all those years—and if I did my work honestly, only for the reward they had to give me, I deserved to lose it."

"Of what family are you speaking?" enquired the stranger, slightly rousing himself, and drawing a little more into the circle.

"Who is your landlord, and what prevents his seeing to your comforts?" [287]

Martin seemed anxious to reply; but he was prevented by Giles.

"Our landlord is Colonel Hargrave, a very brave officer, I have heard; but, in looking for glory abroad, he has, unfortunately for himself and us, forgotten his dependents at home. He has scarcely seen anything of us since he came into the property."

"But surely," said the stranger, warmly, "if he did spend his time beyond the seas—I dare say, for some private reason—he must have left some trusty steward, who could take charge of his property during his absence, and protect the labourers on his estate from the privations you speak of?"

"Trusty steward, indeed," Martin began, in a growling voice, but Giles again interrupted him.

"Sir, it is kind of you to take so much interest in our concerns. It may be that you have estates somewhere yourself—it may be that you have left them to the care of others, believing that you are trusting honest servants; but, if you could see how much we have suffered, you would never do so again. Our landlord has left with us an oppressive and cruel man, who takes pleasure in shewing his power in the smallest thing. In our good lady's time, we were allowed to pick up any wood that the wind blew down, so that our firing cost us next to nothing; but now this is entirely done away by the keepers. Many of our little rights too he has taken away, according, as he says, to his master's orders, though 'tis not very likely a gentleman abroad would think of such things [288]

so many miles away. He receives our rents without spending any part of them in repairing our cottages, and the consequence is, they are tumbling down for want of repair, while the same rent is demanded for them. This brings much illness and discomfort—but what I lament over most," said the old man, with a sigh, "is that the feelings of every one are aggravated against Colonel Hargrave, who, it may be, knows nothing about it."

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"Then he ought to know," said Martin.

"There is a sad spirit spreading, sir," said Giles, casting, as he continued, a reproving look on Martin, "amongst our young men, and a hatred of the gentry, which cannot be right, though it is hard to keep them from it when we have so much privation."

"Aye, that is true enough," said Martin, glancing at his younger companions.

"Why do you not write to Colonel Hargrave?" said the stranger, bending forwards, and suffering his large full eye to fall on Martin for an instant, "surely you should not judge him so hastily."

"Parson Ware has written, and the only answer he gets is, that Mr. Rogers is an old and tried servant, and he can depend on his doing for the best."

A bitter laugh went round the circle in echo to this unpopular opinion.

The stranger lent back in his chair, and fixing his eyes on the fire, seemed inclined to leave the conversation, which the wounded feelings of those present appeared likely to render too heated.

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"Things never went right," said a little old man in the chimney-corner, in a deep husky voice, for he prided himself on being a sort of prophet in the village, "since he went to France, and I never had no very great opinion of Frenchmen before—ha, ha, ha!" There did not seem much to call for laughter; but he generally accompanied his speeches with that peculiar chuckle, which sounded anything but pleasantly to those who were not accustomed to him. "I saw him many times after that," continued he, "and he warn't the same open-hearted gentleman he was afore. He often looked as if he'd got some one looking over his shoulder as he didn't over relish—ha, ha!"

The sepulchral chuckle which followed this remark produced a short, uneasy silence, which was broken by Martin, who enquired—

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"Do you think his religion has anything to do with our houses and wages?"

"Yes," replied Giles, "can we expect that he who has proved disloyal to his Maker, would be thoughtful for his fellow men."

He spoke in a tone of such gentle authority, that even Martin was silent, and, for a few seconds, the ticking of the old-fashioned clock, and the crackling of the wood on the fire, were the only sounds.

"I can call to mind," resumed the old man, interrupting the silence, which had followed his last remark, "a time of much sorrow to me, and I never think of it without trembling. It is some years since, now, when I worked on the Manor, and I used to be something of a favorite of my young master's; and I am sure, at that time, I would have given my life to serve him; he had such a way with him; no one had anything to do with him without loving him. Well I remember how glad I was when he ordered me to go out with him to beat up the bushes for game. But the time I said I was sorry to remember, was when, one Saturday night late, he came down here in a great hurry, and he said he must go again on the Monday, and so he would look about him. I can't tell how it was we took so to each other; but I was strong and hearty then, though 'tis but a few years ago. Martin speaks truth when he says I have served the family fifty years, for I began by running errands for the servants, when I was but a little boy, and I am now nearly seventy; but I was quite a strong man at that time I have been talking about, and I used often to go out shooting with Master Hargrave, to carry his game, and such like. Well, on this Sunday morning, he told me to take his gun, and wait for him at the entrance of the wood. Nobody ever said no to him then, and I had not the courage, and, though I knew that I was doing wrong all the while, I took the gun; and went as he bade me. We had a regular good day's sport, and we went to the woods furthest from the village, for fear the guns or dogs might be heard. 'Twas a beautiful autumn afternoon, I know, as we came home, and, when we came to the wood overlooking the church, the bells rang out such a merry peal. I had forgot 'twas Sunday, for my blood was hot, and the sport was good; but now, as we stopped on the top of the hills, like thieves, I could not help wishing we had never been out, and I said so with a dogged, frightened air, for I was afraid of him all the while. He laughed at my fright, and began talking as if going to church were all mummery. Well, I could not help listening—what he said seemed so clever and funny, I could not answer him. After that day, I began to doubt and doubt, till I believed nothing the minister said, and left off going to church."

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"And what turned ye?" enquired the little man in the chimney-corner.

"I was wretched," replied Giles; "I felt that I had no comfort upon earth, and no hope beyond it. Till, at last, I thought that this unbelief was only a curse for having done wrong. So I took to prayer, and never gave it up till better thoughts came."

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"But how," asked the stranger, bending forward, and regarding the old man earnestly, till it made him almost shrink from that dark eye, which looked almost piteous in its intensity, while the voice of the enquirer was touching, deep, and melodious, "how could you pray when you had no faith."

"Sir," said Giles, "whatever creed or religion you may profess, you must still feel, that to doubt as

I did, is the greatest curse that can fall upon the heart of man, and doubt as we may, we know it to be a curse. If you ever feel as I did, do not ask questions, and put yourself wrong, and then try and set yourself right by your own judgment, as I did; but go down upon your bended knees, and pray for light as a child might pray—I never found peace till then."

The stranger folded his arms upon his breast, and, with his eyes fixed on the fire, as before, gave no sign that he had even heard the reply to his question. [295]

Giles, perhaps, thought he had said too much, and remained in confusion, glancing uneasily at him. The wind, which had been rising more and more during the evening, now howled aloud increasing the comfort of the inn fire, and the dislike of the party to separate; yet no one seemed inclined to speak, and the wind roared on, yelling as it swept in heavy gusts through the building.

Suddenly, a loud and tremulous knocking was heard at the door, together with voices demanding admittance. After a little hesitation, the door was opened by the landlord, and several women rushed in, crying vehemently.

"For, heaven's sake, come and help us, for the place is all on fire!"

CHAPTER XV.

[296]

She came with smiles the hour of pain
to cheer;
Apart she sighed; alone she shed the
tear.
Then, as if breaking from a cloud, she
gave
Fresh light, and gilt the prospect of
the grave.

CRABBE.

On the night which followed Lucy's departure the cottage seemed singularly lonely. The wayward girl could not but be missed in so small a household. Her very waywardness, indeed, had caused excitement, which slightly roused Mabel's thoughts from present and coming evils.

It was night—how strange is its power over us? Can it be more than fancy that the spirits of darkness have freer power to wander unseen upon our earth? Why else should we start with such vague terror, at the slightest sound which breaks the stillness? Why should we often feel almost a childish desire for companionship? [297]

Mabel had stolen to her mother's room to persuade herself that she slept, and stood for a moment watching her. The feeble light of the night lamp shone upon her features, and she trembled when she marked the sunken cheeks, and the countenance deeply traced and drawn down by care and pain. It seemed as if, in that moment, the conviction which she had so long defied, forced itself upon her mind, and she felt that that loved parent must die. Those only who have experienced that sudden belief can tell of the bitterness with which it comes. And it is sudden, for we may speak of death as possible, nay, even probable, with calmness; but this is not belief, not the feeling which comes when the varying color, the emaciated hand, or the hollow eye attracts our attention, and we feel the truth striking coldly on our hearts. Then, almost for the first time, the full power of fear and love is known. We long to arrest the hand of death by the vehemence of our passion; and, though we know such efforts are vain, yet how difficult is it to be resigned. [298]

Mabel turned from her mother's room with the choking sensation, of tears, that will not be suppressed. The cold, loud wind beat against the cottage, tossing dry leaves and broken sticks against the casement, then howling round, as if in derision of her grief. Amy was sleeping, the sweet, gentle, exhausted sleep, that sometimes follows pain; but Mabel knew that in a short while she would awake, and require refreshment, and she did not care to lie down, till she had made her comfortable.

There was a letter lying upon the dressing-table, placed so as to catch her eye; the sight of it was a relief to her, and she took it and broke the seal, then shading the light from her sister, she sat down and read as follows:—

"DEAR MISS LESLY,

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"I will trust that you will forgive me the liberty I take in addressing you by letter; for your unwearied attention to those who now claim your care, gives me little hope of speaking to you without interruption. I might not have time to tell you that the remembrance of my share in the late unhappy accident renders me miserable when I am compelled to watch your patient suffering, without the power to afford you the least redress or comfort. It is impossible to remember the last few happy weeks, without contrasting them, but too painfully with the present. I cannot

forbear continually reproaching myself with the change, nor shall I cease to be unhappy till I may, in some way alleviate your sufferings. Let me entreat you, then, to forgive my presumption, in seeking a remedy in the gratification of the fondest hopes of my life. I needed some acquaintance with you, to remove the prejudices which I have been led to form, through the too thoughtless behaviour of some ladies, it needed, I may say, even the last bitter trial, to shew me the nature of your character, and the refinement to which sorrow could bring it. How else could I have been aware of the existence of such uncommon resignation, and such sweet forgiveness. They have inspired me with a feeling, which, while hope remains, softens the pain I feel; they lead me to aspire with boldness, which may surprise you, but I am a soldier, and though too accustomed to feign sentiment which does not exist, I am only capable of bluntness where my heart is really touched; and, therefore, at once, most boldly, but most respectfully do I ask you to be my wife.

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"The fortune with which I am blessed, renders my profession more an amusement than a necessity, and it would be amply sufficient to secure your sweet sister all the comforts which may alleviate pain, and all the medical advice which may help to remove it. Only give me the power to protect you from the cold blasts of the world, and the right to aid you in taking charge of one, whose helplessness has been caused by my fault, and I will shew you that a husband's tenderest love and a brother's most watchful care will ever be ready to protect you both. One word more. Though with the most jealous hand I would guard you from all pain, I must, though but for a moment, inflict it in alluding to past events. I am aware of much, if not all, of your early history, and know that I cannot be the first object of your affections; yet would I rather have your second love, or even your friendship, than the warmest attachment of any other woman living.

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"Do not then turn away from me without consideration, think of your sister—of me—and of yourself, unprotected in a world of strangers, and, if you can, accept the love of

"Your most devoted and respectful

"ARTHUR CLAIR."

"The Rectory,

"Friday Evening."

Mabel was troubled, not only by the generous tone of the letter, but because it brought to view, subjects which she had not allowed herself to think upon; for her real strength consisted in a knowledge of her weakness, and she knew that she should be quite incapable of acting, if, to present pain, she added the contemplation of future trials. But now, Clair, in offering her a provision for the future had forced her to think of it. Perhaps generously to save her from the imputation of accepting him, only when pressed by circumstances, as she might be, in but a few weeks.

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Now the letter as it lay before her would have her think. She had but a few minutes before left her mother's room with the saddest conviction; and now, crowding on her remembrance came a thousand little speeches, that told her, how earnestly, that dear mother had tried to warn her of her approaching death. Speeches which then appeared but the result of nervous weakness, now occurred to her as truths, which no reasoning could controvert. Some of their little property she knew rested in the hands of an improvident and extravagant aunt, and the remainder of their income would fail altogether when her mother's pension dropped.

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And Amy, whose precarious health rendered her now unable to be even moved from room to room, she on whom she had lavished all the comforts which affluence can invent, how could she bear the trials of poverty? How could she suffer the privations to which they would inevitably be reduced; she who could scarcely hear the sound of a heavy footfall without pain, or be moved, without the greatest agony, from the couch on which she constantly lay. Not that she wavered with regard to Clair, but his letter made her uneasy. Poverty, death, and even that place where "all that's wretched paves the way to death," she would have preferred to marriage, if she could but have endured them alone. But who would be her companion? She turned her eyes to the bed where, with cheeks flushed and eyes that scarcely closed, lay the little sufferer, her small, wasted hand tightly compressed as if with pain. At this moment she slightly moved, and Mabel was instantly by her side. Her eyes glistening bright with fever were now opened wide, and gazing anxiously on poor Mabel's tell-tale face.

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"Mabel," said she in a low, sweet but peculiar voice, "sit down by me, for I must talk to you to-night, as my pain is all gone."

Mabel seated herself by her, and took the little hand in hers.

"You will not be frightened, Mabel dear," said the child, "if I talk about strange things, and about going away."

"No, sweet one, no," replied her sister, "talk of anything you like; but where are you going?"

"Mabel, dear," she returned softly, "I suffer such pain that I do not think it will be much longer—I must die soon, and then I hope I am going to that beautiful country we have talked of so often in

the church-yard. I wish you could come with me, Mabel dear, for I dream so often that papa is waiting for me, and it is all so beautiful." [305]

A quiet pressure of her hand was the only answer.

"But I cannot help thinking of you, love," continued Amy, "and what you will do without me when I am gone; but yet, Mabel dear, think how strange it would be to me to lie here always; and, if I grew big like this, you would only cry over me, as you do when you think I am asleep; so, Mabel dear, let me go to heaven."

The last words were spoken in the coaxing tone with which she used so often to carry her point in some little argument, and, finding no answer, she pat her hand under Mabel's head, which was bent down, and raised it gently, her face was very pale, and tears were streaming from her eyes.

"Mabel, dear, dear Mabel," cried Amy, "I, who have been such a trouble to you all my life, are you so sorry to part from me, your naughty child. But now, I know it was very good in you to correct me sometimes, or I never should have been as happy as I am, and now, I feel it to be all right that I should be in such pain. Will you not rejoice too, darling? Look at me, there are no tears in my eyes though I am talking of leaving you." [306]

But the moment the sisters' eyes met, Amy's were filled with tears, and her head sunk back exhausted. Mabel could not trust herself to say anything; but, gently smoothing her pillow, she suffered her own head to sink upon it, and, fatigued alike by grief and want of rest, she closed her eyes, and fell asleep.

"Tired nature's sweet restorer balmy sleep,"

Of what untold comfort are you to the mourner. Cares, that bow the head to the earth at night, seem lighter to the waking thoughts, refreshed, perhaps, by good angels while we sleep. Were there no such sweet forgetfulness of sorrow, could we bear to look upon it long?

CHAPTER XVI.

 [307]

But oh! to him whose self-accusing
thought
Whispers: 'twas *he* that desolation
wrought.'

HEMANS.

"Fire! fire?" Who starts not at that terrible cry?

The terrified women had scarcely told their tale, before all the men in the "Hargrave Arms" were on their feet, starting into the open air. They soon perceived cause for alarm. Proceeding from that quarter of the village where the houses lay closest together, rose a column of smoke and flame, blown hither and thither by the boisterous wind, which was spreading the red sparks in every direction, tossing them high in the air, and then suffering them to fall on some distant cottage, whose thatched roof rendered it a ready prey. [308]

So rapidly had the fire spread, that several cottages were already burning, and the men ran hither and thither from one to the other in consternation, and uncertain what course to pursue to save their property. All seemed at stake—wives, children, the sick, household furniture, the cherished articles purchased, perhaps, by long and mutual saving before marriage, and therefore doubly dear—and these thoughts occurring to each, confused the movements of all.

But, in the midst of these sudden difficulties, the coolness of the stranger did not desert him. He had followed his companions from the inn, to ascertain the cause of alarm, and he was almost immediately after seen leading his horse. Arresting the attention of old Giles, he enquired—

"Where shall we send for fire engines?" [309]

"There is not one to be had nearer than Cheltenham," was the reply.

"Now then," cried he, seizing a young man, who was hurrying about, scarcely knowing what he did, "do you know the road to Cheltenham?"

Being answered in the affirmative, he bade him mount his horse, and ride as fast as possible in search of engines. Well he knew his own good steed would die rather than give up the journey, and, though he sighed as he thought how long the way would be, he dared not reckon his horse's life against those of his fellow creatures.

His next effort was to bring the scattered crowd a little into order, for the purpose of checking the rapid spread of the fire. Nothing secures obedience to a command so much as the decision and coolness with which it is given; and all were soon engaged in pulling down, at his suggestion, the cottage which lay nearest to those already burning.

But the futility of the attempt was soon perceived by the sparks leaping over and catching the [310]

roof of a more distant tenement. As soon as the fire touched it, an up-stair lattice-window was thrown open, and a woman leaning out, and raising her hands wildly in the air, cried aloud for help.

"Come down," said the stranger, in a voice distinctly heard above the tempest, and the confused noises around him, "come down, and you are safe—nothing hinders you."

"My father!" screamed the woman, "I cannot move him—come up, in mercy, come to me. Help! help!—we are all on fire!"

The stranger, followed closely by Clair, who, on hearing the tumult had hurried to the scene, accompanied by his uncle, hastened into the house, and soon reached the upper room, from which the woman had called for assistance. The strong fire-light gleaming on all around, disclosed to their view a room, which made the stranger shudder. A low bedstead, scarcely raised from the ground, with a box in one corner, on which an old coat was lying, formed the only furniture of the room; while thin holes in the lath and plaister wall, let in the cruel blast. On the floor was lying an old man, with some bed-clothes huddled round him. It seemed that his daughter had dragged him from the bed; but had been unable to get him farther than the door. [311]

"Father's been bed-ridden these two years," said the woman, hastily, "he cannot crawl down stairs, and I cannot carry him."

"You are safe now," said the stranger, in a re-assuring voice. "Follow us;" and he took the old man up in his powerful arms. "Why do you stay?" he said, turning at the door. "Could there be anything worth saving," thought he, "in this wretched hovel—anything but life?"

The woman soon joined them, bearing in her arms, a small geranium-pot, and an old Bible.

The stranger turned aside his head, and the old man wondered to see a tear in his fearless eye. [312]

Gently placing his burden on the ground, he returned to the house, and, leaning his shoulder against the door, forced its rusty hinges to give way, then, throwing the scanty mattress upon it, he lifted up the old man, and placed him securely on this hastily formed litter, which had been constructed before the woman had time to think of her deliverance. He then called to two or three able-bodied men,

"For the love of mercy," cried he, "carry this poor man to Aston Manor, and tell the house-keeper to see to his comfort."

"She'll never open the doors," growled the men in surprise.

"I tell you she will," cried he, as quickly roused by opposition as a spoilt child, "take him along with you."

Thus urged, the men took up the rude litter, and, attended by the woman bearing her cherished treasures in her arms, they made as much haste as could be, to the Manor House, leaving the burning village behind them. They needed neither moon nor stars to help them on their way, for the sky was red with light, and the hills around reflected back the fire—many times had they to rest, and often, as they did so, they turned their eyes back—where sometimes the attempts of the villagers would give a temporary check, or, the falling in of some roof, would damp the flame, and give a moment's hope, till, presently, it would again burst forth with wilder fury than before. [313]

Then, urged with the desire to get back, or the curiosity to know whether they would really be admitted beyond the closely shut door of the Manor House, they moved on more quickly up the narrow pathway which lay most directly in a line with it. Presently, they perceived a man hurrying towards them, with a frightened and bewildered air. On coming closer, they recognised the hated bailiff Rogers—he was one whose manners, though smooth and oily to his superiors, were, to his inferiors, blustering and loud; not indeed the off-hand manner which often accompanies and conceals a good and kindly heart, but rather a studied recklessness of wounding the feelings of others, a total forgetfulness of the circumstances and tempers of those dependent on him, to whom a kind word would have cost him nothing. Alas, since our feelings are so finely tuned, why are we not more careful how we play on those of others. But Rogers found that this deliberate carelessness of offence, was, with the timid, a skilful weapon, for it made them fear him, and he rejoiced in the influence this fear gave to him. He forgot in the day of power, how little substance it possesses, or that the sway of tyranny bears in itself the elements of decay, and must crumble away before the force of circumstances. [314]

He was evidently at that moment feeling at a disadvantage. His thin, lanky figure hastily attired, looked not half so important as usual, and he was trembling within with agitation or cold. [315]

The whole party stopped; and the eldest of the young men, whose countenance was very far from prepossessing, drawing the bailiff aside, said, with a low, chuckling kind of laugh—

"Are you going down to the village, sir?"

"Yes," replied Rogers, "I have not come from it very long, and only just stepped back to the Manor. But why do you ask?"

"Because, if you take my advice, you'll keep as clear of it as you can, for the men are hot, and you know, sir," he added, with a low laugh, "they aint all on em very particlar friends o'yourn. I heard words spoke to-night, as may be you would not like."

"I must go, however," replied Rogers, with a shaky attempt to look swaggering, "and I should like to see what the cowards dare do."

"I tell you ye'd better not," said the young man, decisively, "but I've given my warning, I heard some one say, it was very hard if one life was not lost in the bustle to-night—though I do not like peaching, but I owe you a good turn for sending Sally Lyn and her old sick father out of their cottage, that cold Christmas night, at my asking," he added, with a bitter laugh. [316]

Rogers did not look particularly obliged by this grateful reminder, that he had once lent himself to his revenge at an easy bribe. As the mingled smoke and flame rose in columns of awful majesty, like the workings of a supernatural power, till he felt sickened at the sight, he would have given a great deal could the young man have recalled one single act of disinterested mercy.

"Yet I must go," he said, at length, "I cannot help it."

"Well, then, be careful, that is all," replied his companion.

Rogers smiled nervously, and passed slowly on towards the village, leaving him to join the others, who, anxious to complete their task, were waiting impatiently for him. [317]

They had not much further to go, and soon entered a side gate from which a narrow pathway led through a shrubbery of evergreens, round to the back entrance. Here two or three dogs began to greet them with a loud bark, giving no very pleasing indications of welcome; and, as they carried their living burden up the court-yard, they felt half inclined to turn back or to leave the sick man at the door to speak for himself; but the woman hastily prevented them by ringing loudly at the bell, which sounded through the building, making her heart sink. There was rather a lengthened pause, and, tired with waiting for the unexpected welcome, and anxious to shift the responsibility from themselves, the men laid down their burden, and, spite of the woman's entreaties, left them to their fate. They had scarcely passed the court-yard before they heard the sound of doors unbolting, but they did not stop to enquire further, and hurried back to the village, glad to escape from an office of which they were heartily tired. [318]

On their return, they found the place full of confusion; women and children, endangered by the falling sparks, were running in all directions; Mr. Ware, with a bottle of brandy and a glass, was moving about, giving enough to the fainting men to keep up their strength, and to encourage them to continue the labour of carrying water to throw upon the flames.

"We must save the Manor House and the rectory, at least," said the stranger, to a group of men who thronged around him in despair at the failure of every effort; "but I see no hope for the thatched cottages."

"And the church," said Mr. Ware; "but that stands alone, and, I hope, is safe."

"I would not raise my hand," said a sullen voice, which all recognized as that of Martin the poacher—"I would not raise a hand to save the Manor House, if I were to die for it."

"Shame on you," said the stranger; "if it be necessary, I will make you."

"I should like to see how," said Martin, scowling on him; "there is not many as can make me do as I don't like. And I say, if the master leaves us to starve, he may take care of his house himself. Share and share alike. We owe him little enough." [319]

And he turned his eyes towards the fire, and pointed to his own cottage which was smouldering in ruins.

The stranger fixed his quick eye upon him for a moment, and then turned to Rogers, who, making his way through the crowd, came up, and whispered for a few moments in his ear. He bent his head to listen, and then looking at those around him, he said, as he fixed his keen eye on Martin.

"I have received a message, which tells me, friends, that Aston Manor is now open, for the women and children who may like to take refuge in it; and you may put any of your furniture, which you can save, in the stables; there it will be in safety. I understand that there are many fine pictures, statues, and ornaments of every kind there, and I need not ask you to take care of them." [320]

Every one listened with surprise to this unusual news; but he bade them hasten to send their wives and children away. "We shall be able to act better when they are gone, sir," he said, bowing, for the first time, to Mr. Ware, who failed not to applaud a measure, at once humane and judicious, since it gave an object, to the discontented, to protect the mansion should it be necessary.

In a short time, all the children had left the scene; but most of the women remained, employed in dragging the furniture from the fire, either laying it in heaps, or carrying it towards the stables.

Suddenly a frightful yell burst upon every ear.

"Some poor creature is in danger," said the stranger, who was the first to speak—"I thought you had searched the burning houses. Come all of you."

So saying, he sprang to the nearest cottage, whose blazing roof threatened every moment to fall in. [321]

Clair followed him closely, crying aloud—

"Do not venture, the roof is coming down—I have searched that place myself."

But, as he said so, another yell sounded upon their ears.

"The door is tied here," said the stranger, tearing at a well-knotted cord with impatient violence—but it would not give way. "Help me then," he said to Clair; and, leaning his shoulder against the door, the hinge snapped, though the cord remained firm.

The apartment, on which they thus entered, was bare of anything, save one living object. Both started, as they beheld the wretched Rogers, tied round the waist, by a thick cord, to a strong piece of wood which ran up the side to the ceiling. His eyes were glaring and distended—his face filled with death-like anguish. Blood was gushing from his mouth and nostrils, for he had ruptured a blood vessel in his attempts to free his hands and mouth from the bandages, which appeared to have been tied over them. [322]

"Wretched man, repent before it is too late," said the stranger, as he hastened to undo the cords which bound him.

It was not an easy matter, and every moment seemed an age of peril to the three.

Rogers opened his eyes, wide with horror, upon the stranger, for a moment, and then turned aside his head and fainted. The room was heated to suffocation, and fast filling with smoke. Clair felt sick with horror; but the stranger, whose thought seemed action, raised Rogers in his arms. With his head laid carefully on his shoulder, and his own hands and garments dripping in his blood, he bore him out, assisted by Clair. Scarcely had they cleared the threshold, when the roof fell in, and the cottage was in ruins.

A shout, from those who had feared to follow, welcomed them as they appeared; and the stranger staggered through the ruins spread around him, to the group who anxiously waited them. He singled out Mr. Ware, and laid his fainting burden at his feet, then, bending his knee in Eastern fashion before him, he said— [323]

"Father, judge who hath done this, for he is a brother, though a sinful one."

A murmur of horror passed through the crowd; and Mr. Ware, kneeling by the side of the hated Rogers, tried to reanimate him.

"He is not dead, sir," said he, in a low voice; "he will live, I trust, if we can once revive him."

"He will have time to repent, I hope," said old Giles; "bring some water to moisten his lips, and let us clear the blood from his mouth."

"Will you watch by him, sir?" said the stranger, again addressing Mr. Ware, "he is too sinful to die; and if he wakes, you can give him comfort."

"I will," said he, "I will take care of him."

The stranger covered his face with his hands, as if anxious either to shut out the scenes which had terrified him, or to collect his thoughts. [324]

Then rose a hasty cry, "Widow Dacre's—the fire has taken it—there are sparks on the roof."

He started, as if with sudden pain, and then ran wildly towards the hill, at the bottom of which lay the widow's cottage. On its height the church looked down in its holy stillness, and between both lay the picturesque thatched cottage belonging to Mrs. Lesly.

CHAPTER XVII.

 [325]

But when I see the fair wide brow
Half shaded by the silken hair,
That never looked so fair as now
When life and health were
laughing there,
I wonder not that grief should
swell
So wildly upward in the breast,
And that strong passion once rebel
That need not, cannot be
suppressed.

All hands were now directed to save the small cottage belonging to the Widow Dacre, but with very little effect, for the wind which came down from the hills with furious blasts seemed to mock at every effort to extinguish the fire, while it fanned the faintest spark into a flame, and then spread it with wonderful rapidity. But it was not for the sake of the tiny cottage, which its owner had long since vacated, they all labored so zealously, but because it now seemed a link between [326]

the ruined village and the dwelling which all looked upon with interest. Romance seemed to have cast a kind of charm round the little family, to which Mabel belonged.

Upon whose threshold had Mabel's light step been unwelcome? And who was not ready to protect the roof that sheltered her from danger?

Now, as all eyes watched the building, it was, for the first time, perceived, that no one stirred within; the shutters were fast closed, and there was not the slightest sign that the general alarm had reached it.

"Is it possible," said the stranger, turning to Clair, "that amidst all this din and confusion they should sleep on and hear nothing?"

"I will go and try to get in," said Clair.

"And I," said the stranger, as they walked both together to the door and rung the bell, at first gently, but more loudly as they heard no one moving. [327]

Presently a shuffling step was heard, and a somewhat sulky "Who's there?" from within.

"It is I," said Clair, "open the door, for the village is on fire."

The door was immediately thrown open and old John the gardener staggered back as he perceived the red sky, which glared above him on all sides.

"The ladies!—" he exclaimed.

"We will take care of them, only go and dress, and then come and help us," said Clair.

John speedily availed himself of this permission, and then, with considerable coolness, he hurried to the stable after his mistress's Bath chair, which had not seen the light for many a month.

Meanwhile, the two gentleman hurried up stairs; they had, however, scarcely reached the landing-place, when they heard a shout from the outside, which made the stranger spring back down the stairs to ascertain the cause, begging Clair to remain. The latter, accordingly, began to search for the bed-rooms inhabited by Mrs. Lesly and her daughter. Having hastily tapped at one, and receiving no answer, he did not hesitate to open it. Here a night lamp was dimly burning, and, when he looked at the heavy oak shutters, and the closely drawn curtains, and perceived the stillness within, he no longer wondered that they slept. This was Mrs. Lesly's room, and, on a bed at her feet, reposed the faithful servant Betsy, and so soundly that Clair had to shake her with some little violence before he could awaken her. Her expressions of terror soon roused Mrs. Lesly, to whom Clair explained as much as he thought proper, begging her to get up and allow him to take her from the house, should it be necessary, saying he would wait for her on the outside. [328]

She needed no second bidding, but suffered the affrighted Betsy to assist her to rise. Clair left the room with the intention of conveying the same warning to Mabel, but, before he could do so, the stranger hurried to him, and, seizing him by the hand, he wrung it wildly, saying, [329]

"That shout told that the back part of the house is already burning. Will you take care of Mrs. Lesly and her maid? promise me not to leave them till they are safe, and I hope I can manage the rest."

There was one other duty which Clair would willingly have chosen, but there was now no time for parley, and the eager pressure of the hand, which the stranger returned for his promise, made him no longer regret it. But, as he leant against the wall of the passage, waiting for Mrs. Lesly, his countenance became more and more haggard in appearance, and his bloodless lips and heavy eyes rather spoke of mental pain than the fatigue of bodily exertion.

But, there was not much time to think, the passage in which he waited began to feel intolerably warm, and the air gradually thickened with smoke. [330]

He then called eagerly to Mrs. Lesly, and once again entering the room where poor Betsy was sobbing with alarm, he hastily finished her preparations, by taking up an immense cloak which lay on the floor, and wrapping it round the poor invalid, who was coughing violently from the exertion of dressing, he hurried her from the room, and down stairs to the open air.

Here he was rejoiced to see the faithful gardener.

"Put missis in here," he said, dragging the chair forward, which he had provided for her—"for I don't know which'll do her most harm, the fire or the air."

"That's right," said Clair, placing her in it, and as he did so, stooping down kindly, to sooth her anxiety for her children, and covering her up from the night air, which blew chilly upon her, for she had not left her bed for several weeks. [331]

Hiding her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief, she turned away at once from the terrific scene before her, and the many cherished objects of her home, soon, perhaps, to be the spoil of the raging fire. A thousand recollections crowded upon her mind, which was too sensitive, and too delicately framed for the struggles of common life. The acuteness of her feelings, added bitterness to every trial, by representing them to her in the most touching, and even poetical light, till her heart was entirely overcome by the sufferings she was too skilled in describing to

herself. In vain Clair endeavoured to comfort her, as he accompanied her a little way on the road to the Manor House, when, finding his presence of little service, he left her in the hands of her careful servant, and hastened back to afford any assistance he could offer to the sisters.

During his absence, the stranger had not been idle; assured of Mrs. Lesly's safety by the promise which Clair had given him; he turned to another door, and, too impatient to summon its owner, he opened it gently. Here, too, a lamp was burning, and the light that it spread around, was quite sufficient for his rapid gaze. He turned to the bed where lay the beautiful, delicately shaped child; her countenance still wet with tears, yet serene and happy as if her dreams were not of earth. Mabel's head lay upon the same pillow; the little hand in hers, and the rich curls of her chestnut hair, half concealing her face; she seemed, in her motionless slumber, like some trusting child, who knows that watchful eyes guard her from danger—yet sorrow in many shapes, had been, and was still around her. [332]

He paused—the hasty call which would have wakened both, died upon his lips; and he stood, as if entranced, and forgetful of the danger which every moment's delay increased. He bent forward, and earnestly contemplated the sleepers, and, as he did so, a smile passed over Mabel's face, and she murmured something which made him listen still more earnestly. [333]

But, now she starts, her bosom heaves as if something troubled her. Again, she sleeps—but only to start again—her hand unclasps, she turns as if in pain—then, leaping to her feet—she suddenly stands before him—yet scarcely roused from the dream which had awakened her.

Light, brighter than the moon, and more glowing than the sunshine, streamed in upon the room, and rendered the stranger's face clearly visible; Mabel's eyes fixed upon him with something between terror and surprise; she tried to speak, but her lips trembled so convulsively, that she could not utter a sound—she tried to advance, but she felt that his eye quelled every movement; and what did that dark look mean, with which he regarded her; and why, as it grew more dark, did Mabel's form become more erect, while her lips curled, her cheeks flushed crimson, and her eye also fixed on his, flashed with a fiery pride, which but seldom showed itself upon her face. Yet, this was but for a moment, for the stranger taking the cloak which he had brought for the purpose, he threw it round her, and raising her almost from the ground with the rapidity of his movements, he hurried her from the room, and down the stairs. When they reached the garden, he loosened his hold, and suffered the cloak, which had entirely covered her face and head, to fall back. Mabel looked wildly round; a busy crowd was about the house; the sickly smell of fire was in the air, and, as she gazed back, she saw flames bursting from the lower windows of their cottage. In an instant she had freed herself, and springing past him with a wild cry of terror and agony, she entered the house, and through the smoke and sparks scattered about her, she was once again by Amy's side, who was awake, and greatly terrified; and, as Mabel threw herself upon her knees beside her, she cried:— [334]

"Do not leave me, Mabel dear—I shall die if you do."

"Leave you, my darling," cried Mabel, "nothing but death shall part us."

"If you had waited but a moment, I would have brought her to you," said the stranger.

"Oh, why did you think of me first," cried Mabel.

"'Twas wrong, perhaps," said the stranger; "but it made only the difference of a few moments. Come, my child," said he, stooping to lift her from her couch.

"No, no," said Mabel, "you must take couch and all. Oh!" said she, wringing her hands, "will no one come and help you?" [335]

"I am not afraid of fire," said a gruff voice, and Martin entered; "I'll help, but you must make haste."

"But my Mamma, where is she?" exclaimed Mabel.

"She is safe, and the two servants are with her." [336]

"Oh then, dear Amy, let us go to them," she said; and, in a quick but concise manner, she explained how the springs of the couch might be altered, so as to render the carriage of it more easy.

The counterpane was then laid closely over, and a shawl placed over Amy's face, and the stranger and Martin, carrying the couch, proceeded carefully to leave the house—Mabel, bending over her sister, and soothing her at every step, while she placed herself in the way of anything which was blowing towards them, seemingly forgetful of her own safety; but, though nothing shielded her, she passed through the fire entirely uninjured.

Occupied as all were, each with his separate interests, few could resist a feeling of admiration for the beautiful girl, who, in her own simple neighbourhood, had won so much of the love of those around her.

Bending over the couch, which the stranger and Martin bore between them, her hair blown in wild disorder about her face, which shewed a thousand mingled feelings, as she sometimes turned, shrinking, from the terrible scene around her, to which she had so suddenly awakened—sometimes, looking up in strange bewilderment, but always, with out-stretched hands, placing her unprotected figure between the loved child, and the sparks and timbers, which were [337]

repeatedly blown across the road; she looked like some wild and beautiful spirit of the storm, which it had no power to harm. The uneasy motion gave the greatest anguish to poor Amy, who, though usually so patient, uttered shriek after shriek of agony, which pierced the hearts of those who hurried round in the vain hope of affording assistance. At every turn they took, fresh torturing cries broke from the little sufferer, who, agonised with pain, and terrified at the scene around her, lost every power of self-control.

[338]

Entirely overcome by the cries, of the poor little sufferer, Mabel entreated them to stop, and rather to lay her on the road side, than take her further; Martin, who, though a bold, and not an over humane man, looked pale and sick with the duty he had undertaken, readily suggested that they might place her in the lodge, which had long been deserted by its owner—an old woman—who had taken refuge with the children at the Manor House.

To this the stranger consented; and, after some little difficulty, they contrived to lay her in the old woman's room.

"It is the hardest night's work I've ever had," said Martin, as he turned away. "I'll go and send some one to her, sir, as will do more good than I can."

Poor Amy's shrieks had been heart-rending when they laid her down; but shortly afterwards, they subsided into a low moaning sound.

"Though there's plenty of fire," said Martin, "I don't think there's a candle left in all the place; but I'll find one if I can."

[339]

He then went away, and the stranger alone remained, for no one else had followed so far but Clair, who had now gone to call his aunt.

"Can I do anything more for you?" said the stranger, in a voice trembling with emotion.

Mabel raised her eyes, and as they met his for an instant, a warm blush overspread her pale countenance.

"Bless you for what you have done," she murmured, despairingly.

"Water?" said Amy, opening her eyes.

Mabel turned entreatingly to the stranger, who, without another word, left the room.

Martin soon afterwards returned with a light, and placed it on the floor, and Mabel again entreated for water to moisten Amy's parched lips; but it was more difficult to obtain than she imagined, for the whole furniture of the house had been long since removed, and the empty cupboard looked comfortless indeed.

[340]

But, in a short while, the stranger returned, and presented her with a cup of pure water, which she eagerly gave to Amy.

"Thank you, sir," said Amy, gently, "and thank you for carrying me. Did you mind my crying? I felt very ill, and could not help it," she looked at him timidly. "Sir," she continued, rousing herself with an energy which surprised him, "Mabel will soon be alone. Do you think any one will comfort her, and take care of her?"

"May I," said he, to Mabel, suddenly moving towards them, "may I speak to her alone?"

"Yes, yes," said Amy, eagerly, "let him speak to me."

"Her time is precious;" said Mabel, rising reluctantly, "do not keep me from her long."

"No, I will not, but a few minutes," said the stranger, hurriedly, and Mabel leaving the room went into the open air, and, leaning against the door way, she tried to tranquillize her thoughts. The village was shut out by the tall trees which surrounded the entrances to the Manor House, and the low sighing of the wind, which was now beginning to sink, was the only sound which met her ear, while the busy clouds, dimly lighted by the occasional appearance of the moon, traced their way across the heavens. There were wild thoughts in her own mind, which made her heart beat tumultuously. With a sudden burst of anguish, she threw herself upon her knees, and laid her forehead upon the cold earth in the bitterness of her soul.

[341]

She only rose when she heard the stranger's step, and then, passing him quickly, for she dared not trust herself to speak, she re-entered the room.

Amy's cheeks were flushed, and the look of pain seemed entirely to have passed away. Her eyes were bright, "as if gazing on visions of ecstasy," while over her white countenance was spread a halo, at once so childlike and so serene that Mabel stepped more softly and knelt in silence by her side.

[342]

Amy put out her hand, and fondly stroked her cheeks and smoothed her hair.

"You are very beautiful, Mabel dear," she said, with gentle pride, as if she spoke to her own thoughts, "and you look more and more beautiful because you are so good, and what pretty hair," she said, still speaking to herself, while her sister blushed unconsciously at her praises.

"Oh, it is a dear, good Mabel," said Amy, fondly; then changing her tone, and dropping her hands upon her bosom with simple devotion, she said, softly—

"Sing me to sleep."

Mabel made a strong effort to overcome her emotion.

"I hear old John outside," said Amy, suddenly, though her sister could hear nothing, "but I cannot see him," and her eyes filled with tears, "but will you tell him to let no one else come, for I want to be alone a little while, I feel better with you. Ah, poor mamma," she added, thoughtfully, "but I cannot see her either, to-night." [343]

Old John was at the door as Amy had said, and Mabel telling him to keep any one from coming in, as Amy was going to sleep, returned to her and then began the evening hymn. Sweetly did those beautiful lines sound, breathed in low and trembling melody, but she had scarcely finished the third verse when sobs stopped her utterance, she was, however, trying to go on, but Amy laid her hand upon her lips.

"Don't go on, Mabel, dear, I shall soon hear angels' music. They are waiting for me now, but I must go alone," she said, "and your dear voice is the last sound I wished to hear on earth. Do not leave me," she added, seeing her attempt to rise, "you have done all that can be done for me, and you must not go away now." [344]

Mabel saw indeed that it was too late to call for assistance, and she scarcely breathed, lest a word might escape her ear.

"You have been very kind to me," murmured Amy, in faint accents, "and it is very hard to part, but listen, listen," said she, holding up her tiny hand; then, as if the sound were dying away, her hand fell softly down, and all was over. A holy stillness stole over the chamber of death, unbroken by a sound, for Mabel's anguish was too great for tears.

The old gardener had seated himself on the door step, and tears chased each other down his weather beaten cheeks, as he listened to Mabel's low singing, and remembered how often the voices of both had mingled in gay and thrilling merriment, which had made his old heart dance, when he had pretended not even to hear them.

"Ah," thought he, "let the old house burn since they that made it glad are going or gone." But then came thoughts of the sunny garden, made more pleasant by the cheerful faces and glad voices now hushed by death or sorrow, his grief burst out afresh, and, burying his head in, his knees, he gave himself up to old recollections, heedless of every thing about him. [345]

END OF VOL. I.

T. C. Newby, Printer, 30, Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square.

Transcriber's Note

Obvious typographical errors were corrected, as listed below. Other apparent inconsistencies and errors have been retained, including a mixture of British and American word usages. Perceptible missing or incorrect punctuation or capitalization has been silently restored and hyphenation has been made consistent. Period spellings, punctuation and grammatical uses have been kept.

Page 5 and 332, "chesnut" changed to "chestnut". (Wide spreading oaks and tall beeches, with the graceful birch and chestnut trees bending their lower branches nearly to the green turf beneath,...)

Page 8, "of" changed to "or". (Though a little under the middle height, there was a gentle dignity in his manner that could scarcely fail to be noticed, or if not noticed, it was sure to be felt.)

Page 10 and 206, "recal" changed to "recall". (... we sigh to think that childhood is gone—but no sigh will recall it.)

Page 22, "comtemplating" changed to "contemplating". (By the fire was seated a strong hale young man, with his hands upon his knees, contemplating it with gloomy fixedness.)

Page 23, "morniny" changed to "morning". (*'cursed is he that keepeth a man's wages all night by him until the morning;'*)

Page 23, "no" changed to "not". ("It is very hard, I allow, Martin," said Mr. Ware, "but the wrong done you does not excuse your sitting here idle; have you been trying for work?")

Page 28, "therfore" changed to "therefore". (Besides, I do not much approve of giving where it can be avoided; and, therefore, husband my means for the scarcity of the coming winter.)

Page 50, "eommon" changed to "common". (I would not have any one indifferent on common subjects, but too great attention to things of this kind must be wrong.)

Page [61](#), "thought" changed to "thought". (... so I thought it best to avoid Mary Watson, as I could scarcely hope you would do her very much good, and she might do you harm.)

The third paragraph on page [62](#) appears to contain speech from both Amy and Mabel, and inconsistent use of double quotation marks. This has been left as it appears in the original.

Page [72](#), "stffly" changed to "stiffly". (Mrs. Villars was of imposing appearance, though too bustling in her manners to be altogether dignified, with colour a little too brilliant, and hair a little too stiffly curled, to be quite natural.)

Page [85](#), "subjection" changed to "subjection". (I should think he was too easily won to be kept long in subjection.)

Page [98](#), "seeemed" changed to "seemed". (It seemed that he had been in the constant habit, of confiding every thing to her, and had always found an admiring listener to his thoughts on most subjects.)

Page [99](#), "opprrtunity" changed to "opportunity". (... he courted every opportunity of disputing with them on the nature of their opinions.)

Page [104](#), "let" changed to "left". (Without another word to Mabel, he left us, and I have never seen him since.)

Page [104](#), "wisper" changed to "whisper". (Amy sat upon her pillow nearly all day, and would whisper, 'don't cry, dear Mabel.')

Page [116](#), extra "you," deleted. ("I meant it most kindly, I do assure you," you," said Mrs. Lesly.)

Page [124](#), "Leslie" changed to "Lesly" for consistency. ("Well, dear," said Mrs. Lesly,...)

Page [124](#), "droppiing" changed to "dropping". ("My money," said Mrs. Lesly, with unusual gravity, "has been reduced for your sake, to a very few hundreds, a mere trifle, but my children!" exclaimed she, suddenly dropping her pen, and clasping her hands convulsively.)

Page [127](#), "than" changed to "then". (... where right and wrong is concerned; and then come second thoughts—why did she wait for them?)

Page [139](#), "und" changed to "and". (The gardens are very beautiful, and every thing else in keeping.)

Page [150](#), "any ony one" changed to "any one". ("Well," said Miss Ware, recovering from her slight pique, at thinking any one could succeed where Edwin failed, "if you never use your ridicule for a worse purpose, you will do well.")

Page [158](#), "siezed" changed to "seized". (Lucy Villars gladly seized the opportunity of commencing a flirting conversation with Captain Clair, who, being well drilled in the accomplishment of small talk, by long practice, easily fell into a *tête-à-tête*.)

Page [163](#), "compostion" changed to "composition". (My dear uncle, you should allow a prisoner to state his own case fairly—if he has not studied Burke on the 'Sublime and Beautiful,' the 'Patriot King,' and other models of pure English composition, you must let a poor fellow express himself as he can, so that he speaks the truth.)

Page [164](#), [201](#) and [213](#), "Clare" changed to "Clair" for consistency. (Clair bowed, and then said almost in a whisper: "Thank you, I was wrong," and continued his narrative, after a moment's pause.)

Page [169](#), "n" changed to "in". (... yet, almost slothful in the attempt to do so.)

Page [173](#), "hm" changed to "him". ("Oh! Lucy," cried Mabel, "how could you be so imprudent as to go up there alone—how impertinent of him—why did you let him take such a liberty.")

Page [187](#), "fee" changed to "feel". (The kindhearted very soon begin to feel an interest in those who are thrown much with them, and, though Lucy presented many faults to her notice, Mabel learnt to watch her with great interest.)

Page [188](#), "Clari" changed to "Clair". (It soon became evident to her that she was perfectly in earnest in her attempts to engage the affections of Captain Clair ...)

Page [202](#), "answe" changed to "answer". (... which she would have fled miles to have escaped hearing, was the only answer sentence thus given.)

Page [224](#), "past" changed to "passed". (Little Amy's sweet voice rings in my ear wherever I go—such as it was when I first saw her, when she looked up from the wild wreath she was twining, to give some kind word to the laborers as they passed her, the morning after my coming here.)

Page [228](#), "forning" changed to "forming". ("Be not be too hasty in forming your judgment," replied Clair.)

Page [235](#), "edying" changed to "eddying". (... and the withered leaves as they spin round in the eddying wind, seem to call attention to themselves, and to ask what men have been doing since they budded forth in the gay spring, full of hope and promise to the sons of earth.)

Page [238](#), "highter" changed to "higher". (... if I mistake not, the opinion you now entertain of her, arises from comparison with another character of a higher standard.)

Page [274](#), "attempts" changed to "attempts". (... while her attempts to divert the conversation, only renewed her companion's desire to obtain an account of all she had been doing and seeing.)

Page [278](#), "errect" changed to "erect". (Not, now, with his head bent, and his hands extended over the dying embers of his wood fire, but with head erect in a comfortable corner, with the air of a man whose opinions are respected, and whose words claim immediate attention.)

Page [286](#), extra "you" deleted. ("Do not talk in that way," said old Giles, gently, "if I am content with my house, you should not make it a cause for dispute.")

Page [290](#), "did'nt" changed to "didn't". (He often looked as if he'd got some one looking over his shoulder as he didn't over relish—ha, ha!)

Page [294](#), "yonr" changed to "your". (If you ever feel as I did, do not ask questions, and put yourself wrong, and then try and set yourself right by your own judgment, as I did;)

Page [301](#), "repectful" changed to "respectful". (Your most devoted and respectful ARTHUR CLAIR.)

Page [302](#), "altogther" changed to "altogether". (Some of their little property she knew rested in the hands of an improvident and extravagant aunt, and the remainder of their income would fail altogether when her mother's pension dropped.)

Page 303, "footfal" changed to "footfall". (... she who could scarcely hear the sound of a heavy footfall without pain, or be moved, without the greatest agony, from the couch on which she constantly lay.)

Page 326, "wonnderful" changed to "wonderful". (... for the wind which came down from the hills with furious blasts seemed to mock at every effort to extinguish the fire, while it fanned the faintest spark into a flame, and then spread it with wonderful rapidity.)

Page 331, "toughing" changed to "touching". (The acuteness of her feelings, added bitterness to every trial, by representing them to her in the most touching, and even poetical light,...)

Page 332, "haud" changed to "hand". (Mabel's head lay upon the same pillow; the little hand in hers, and the rich curls of her chestnut hair, half concealing her face;)

Page 344, "murmered" changed to "murmured". ("You have been very kind to me," murmured Amy ...)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MABEL: A NOVEL. VOL. 1 (OF 3) ***

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