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FALKLAND

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK III.

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE.

Friday.—Julia is here, and so kind! She has not mentioned his name, but she sighed so deeply when she saw my pale and sunken countenance, that I threw myself into her arms and cried like a child. We had no need of other explanation: those tears spoke at once my confession and my repentance. No letter from him for several days! Surely he is not ill! how miserable that thought makes me!

Saturday.—A note has just been brought me from him. He is come back—here! Good heavens! how very imprudent! I am so agitated that I can write no more.

Sunday.—I have seen him! Let me repeat that sentence—I have seen him. Oh that moment! did it not atone for all that I have suffered? I dare not write everything he said, but he wished me to fly with him—him—what happiness, yet what guilt, in the very thought! Oh! this foolish heart—would that it might break! I feel too well the sophistry of his arguments, and yet I cannot resist them. He seems to have thrown a spell over me, which precludes even the effort to escape.

Monday.—Mr. Mandeville has asked several people in the country to dine here to-morrow, and there is to be a ball in the evening. Falkland is of course invited. We shall meet then, and how? I have been so little accustomed to disguise my feelings, that I quite tremble to meet him with so many witnesses around. Mr. Mandeville has been so harsh to me to-day; if Falkland ever looked at me so, or ever said one such word, my heart would indeed break. What is it Alfieri says about the two demons to whom he

is for ever a prey? "*La mente e il cor in perpetua lite.*" Alas! at times I start from my reveries with such a keen sense of agony and shame! How, how am I fallen!

Tuesday.—He is to come here to-day and I shall see him!

Wednesday morning.—The night is over, thank Heaven! Falkland came late to dinner: every one else was assembled. How gracefully he entered! how superior he seemed to all the crowd that stood around him! He appeared as if he were resolved to exert powers which he had disdained before. He entered into the conversation, not only with such brilliancy, but with such a blandness and courtesy of manner! There was no scorn on his lip, no haughtiness on his forehead—nothing which showed him for a moment conscious of his immeasurable superiority over every one present. After dinner, as we retired, I caught his eyes. What volumes they told! and then I had to listen to his praises, and say nothing. I felt angry even in my pleasure. Who but I had a right to speak of him so well!

The ball came on: I felt languid and dispirited. Falkland did not dance. He sat: himself by me—he urged me to—O God! O God! would that I were dead!

FROM ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ., TO LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE.

How are you this morning, my adored friend? You seemed pale and ill when we parted last night, and I shall be so unhappy till I hear something of you. Oh, Emily, when you listened to me with those tearful and downcast looks; when I saw your bosom heave at every word which I whispered in your ear; when, as I accidentally touched your hand, I felt it tremble beneath my own; oh! was there nothing in those moments at your heart which pleaded for me more eloquently than words? Pure and holy as you are, you know not, it is true, the feelings which burn and madden in me. When you are beside me, your hand, if it trembles, is not on fire, your voice, if it is more subdued, does not falter with the emotions it dares not express: your heart is not like mine, devoured by a parching and wasting flame: your sleep is not turned by restless and turbulent dreams from the healthful renewal, into the very consumer, of life. No, Emily! God forbid that you should feel the guilt, the agony which preys upon me; but, at least, in the fond and gentle tenderness of your heart, there must be a voice you find it difficult to silence. Amidst all the fictitious ties and fascinations of art, you cannot dismiss from your bosom the unconquerable impulse of nature. What is it you fear?—you will answer, disgrace! But can you feel it, Emily, when you share it with me? Believe me that the love which is nursed through shame and sorrow is of a deeper and holier nature than that which is reared in pride, fostered in joy. But, if not shame, it is guilt, perhaps, which you dread? Are you then so innocent now? The adultery of the heart is no less a crime than that of the deed; and—yet I will not deceive you— it is guilt to which I tempt you!—it is a fall from the proud eminence you hold now. I grant this, and I offer you nothing in recompense but my love. If you loved like me, you would feel that it was something of pride—of triumph—to dare all things, even crime, for the one to whom all things are as nought! As for me, I know that if a voice from Heaven told me to desert you, I would only clasp you the closer to my heart!

I tell you, my own love, that when your hand is in mine, when your head rests upon my bosom, when those soft and thrilling eyes shall be fixed upon my own, when every sigh shall be mingled with my breath, and every tear be kissed away at the very instant it rises from its source—I tell you that then you shall only feel that every pang of the past, and every fear for the future, shall be but a new link to bind us the firmer to each other. Emily, my life, my love, you cannot, if you would, desert me. Who can separate the waters which are once united, or divide the hearts which have met and mingled into one?

Since they had once more met, it will be perceived that Falkland had adopted a new tone in expressing his passion to Emily. In the book of guilt another page, branded in a deeper and more burning character, had been turned. He lost no opportunity of summoning the earthlier emotions to the support of his cause. He wooed her fancy with the golden language of poetry, and strove to arouse the latent feelings of her sex by the soft magic of his voice, and the passionate meaning it conveyed. But at times there came over him a deep and keen sentiment of remorse; and even, as his experienced and practised eye saw the moment of his triumph approach, he felt that the success he was hazarding his own soul and hers to obtain, might bring him a momentary transport, but not a permanent happiness. There is always this difference in the love of women and of men; that in the former, when once admitted, it engrosses all the sources of thought, and excludes every object but itself; but in the latter, it is shared with all the former reflections and feelings which the past yet bequeaths us, and can neither (however powerful be its nature) constitute the whole of our happiness or woe. The love of man in his maturer years is not indeed so much a new emotion, as a revival and concentration of all his departed affections to others; and the deep and intense nature of Falkland's passion for Emily was linked with the recollections of whatever he had formerly cherished as tender or dear; it touched— it awoke a long chain of young and enthusiastic feelings, which arose, perhaps, the fresher from their

slumber. Who, when he turns to recall his first and fondest associations; when he throws off, one by one, the layers of earth and stone which have grown and hardened over the records of the past: who has not been surprised to discover how fresh and unimpaired those buried treasures rise again upon his heart? They have been laid up in the storehouse of Time; they have not perished; their very concealment has preserved them! *We remove the lava, and the world of a gone day is before us!*

The evening of the day on which Falkland had written the above letter was rude and stormy. The various streams with which the country abounded were swelled by late rains into an unwonted rapidity and breadth; and their voices blended with the rushing sound of the winds, and the distant roll of the thunder, which began at last sullenly to subside. The whole of the scene around L——— was of that savage yet sublime character, which suited well with the wrath of the aroused elements. Dark woods, large tracts of unenclosed heath, abrupt variations of hill and vale, and a dim and broken outline beyond of uninterrupted mountains, formed the great features of that romantic country.

It was filled with the recollections of his youth, and of the wild delight which he took then in the convulsions and varieties of nature, that Falkland roamed abroad that evening. The dim shadows of years, crowded with concealed events and corroding reflections, all gathered around his mind, and the gloom and tempest of the night came over him like the sympathy of a friend.

He passed a group of terrified peasants; they were cowering under a tree. The oldest hid his head and shuddered; but the youngest looked steadily at the lightning which played at fitful intervals over the mountain stream that rushed rapidly by their feet. Falkland stood beside them unnoticed and silent, with folded arms and a scornful lip. To him, nature, heaven, earth had nothing for fear, and everything for reflection. In youth, thought he (as he contrasted the fear felt at one period of life with the indifference at another), there are so many objects to divide and distract life, that we are scarcely sensible of the collected conviction that we live. We lose the sense of what is by thinking rather of what is to be. But the old, who have no future to expect, are more vividly alive to the present, and they feel death more, because they have a more settled and perfect impression of existence.

He left the group, and went on alone by the margin of the winding and swelling stream. "It is (said a certain philosopher) in the conflicts of Nature that man most feels his littleness." Like all general maxims, this is only partially true. The mind, which takes its first ideas from perception, must take also its tone from the character of the objects perceived. In mingling our spirits with the great elements, we partake of their sublimity; we awaken thought from the secret depths where it had lain concealed; our feelings are too excited to remain riveted to ourselves; they blend with the mighty powers which are abroad; and as, in the agitations of men, the individual arouses from himself to become a part of the crowd, so in the convulsions of nature we are equally awakened from the littleness of self, to be lost in the grandeur of the conflict by which we are surrounded.

Falkland still continued to track the stream: it wound its way through Mandeville's grounds, and broadened at last into the lake which was so consecrated to his recollections. He paused at that spot for some moments, looking carelessly over the wide expanse of waters, now dark as night, and now flashing into one mighty plain of fire beneath the coruscations of the lightning. The clouds swept on in massy columns, dark and aspiring-veiling, while they rolled up to, the great heavens, like the shadows of human doubt. Oh! weak, weak was that dogma of the philosopher! There is a pride in the storm which, according to his doctrine, would debase us; a stirring music in its roar; even a savage joy in its destruction: for we can exult in a defiance of its power, even while we share in its triumphs, in a consciousness of a superior spirit within us to that which is around. We can mock at the fury of the elements, for they are less terrible than the passions of the heart; at the devastations of the awful skies, for they are less desolating than the wrath of man; at the convulsions of that surrounding nature which has no peril, no terror to the soul, which is more indestructible and eternal than itself. Falkland turned towards the house which contained his world; and as the lightning revealed at intervals the white columns of the porch, and wrapt in sheets of fire, like a spectral throng, the tall and waving trees by which it was encircled, and then as suddenly ceased, and "the jaws of darkness" devoured up the scene; he compared, with that bitter alchymy of feeling which resolves all into one crucible of thought, those alternations of sight and shadow to the history of his own guilty love—that passion whose birth was the womb of Night; shrouded in darkness, surrounded by storms, and receiving only from the angry heavens a momentary brilliance, more terrible than its customary gloom.

As he entered the saloon, Lady Margaret advanced towards him. "My dear Falkland," said she, "how good it is in you to come in such a night. We have been watching the skies till Emily grew terrified at the lightning; formerly it did not alarm her." And Lady Margaret turned, utterly unconscious of the reproach she had conveyed, towards Emily.

Did not Falkland's look turn also to that spot? Lady Emily was sitting by the harp which Mrs. St. John appeared to be most seriously employed in tuning; her countenance was bent downwards, and burning

beneath the blushes called forth by the gaze which she felt was upon her.

There was in Falkland's character a peculiar dislike to all outward display of less worldly emotions. He had none of the vanity most men have in conquest; he would not have had any human being know that he was loved. He was right! No altar should be so unseen and inviolable as the human heart! He saw at once and relieved the embarrassment he had caused. With the remarkable fascination and grace of manner so peculiarly his own, he made his excuses to Lady Margaret of his disordered dress; he charmed his uncle, Don Alphonso, with a quotation from Lope de Vega; he inquired tenderly of Mrs. Dalton touching the health of her Italian greyhound; and then, nor till then—he ventured to approach Emily, and speak to her in that soft tone, which, like a fairy language, is understood only by the person it addresses. Mrs. St. John rose and left the harp; Falkland took her seat. He bent down to whisper Emily. His long hair touched her cheek! it was still wet with the night dew. She looked up as she felt it, and met his gaze: better had it been to have lost earth than to have drunk the soul's poison from that eye when it tempted to sin.

Mrs. St. John stood at some distance: Don Alphonso was speaking to her of his nephew, and of his hopes of ultimately gaining him to the cause of his mother's country. "See you not," said Mrs. St. John, and her colour went and came, "that while he has such attractions to detain him, your hopes are in vain?" "What mean you?" replied the Spaniard; but his eye had followed the direction she had given it, and the question came only from his lips. Mrs. St. John drew him to a still remoter corner of the room, and it was in the conversation that then ensued between them, that they agreed to unite for the purpose of separating Emily from her lover—"I to save my friend," said Mrs. St. John, "and you your kinsman." Thus is it with human virtue:—the fair show and the good deed without—the one eternal motive of selfishness within. During the Spaniard's visit at E——, he had seen enough of Falkland to perceive the great consequence he might, from his perfect knowledge of the Spanish language, from his singular powers, and, above all, from his command of wealth, be to the cause of that party he himself had adopted. His aim, therefore, was now no longer confined to procuring Falkland's goodwill and aim at home: he hoped to secure his personal assistance in Spain: and he willingly coincided with Mrs. St. John in detaching his nephew from a tie so likely to detain him from that service to which Alphonso wished he should be pledged.

Mandeville had left E—— that morning: he suspected nothing of Emily's attachment. This, on his part, was Bulwer, less confidence than indifference. He was one of those persons who have no existence separate from their own: his senses all turned inwards; they reproduced selfishness. Even the House of Commons was only an object of interest, because he imagined it a part of him, not he of it. He said, with the insect on the wheel, "Admire our rapidity." But did the defects of his character remove Lady Emily's guilt? No! and this, at times, was her bitterest conviction. Whoever turns to these pages for an apology for sin will be mistaken. They contain the burning records of its sufferings, its repentance, and its doom. If there be one crime in the history of woman worse than another, it is adultery. It is, in fact, the only crime to which, in ordinary life, she is exposed. Man has a thousand temptations to sin—woman has but one; if she cannot resist it, she has no claim upon our mercy. The heavens are just! Her own guilt is her punishment! Should these pages, at this moment, meet the eyes of one who has become the centre of a circle of disgrace—the contaminator of her house—the dishonour of her children,—no matter what the excuse for her crime—no matter what the exchange of her station—in the very arms of her lover, in the very cincture of the new ties which she has chosen—I call upon her to answer me if the fondest moments of rapture are free from humiliation, though they have forgotten remorse; and if the passion itself of her lover has not become no less the penalty than the recompense of her guilt? But at that hour of which I now write, there was neither in Emily's heart, nor in that of her seducer, any recollection of their sin. Those hearts were too full for thought—they had forgotten everything but each other. Their love was their creation: beyond all was night—chaos—nothing!

Lady Margaret approached them. "You will sing to us, Emily, to-night? it is so long since we have heard you!" It was in vain that Emily tried—her voice failed. She looked at Falkland, and could scarcely restrain her tears. She had not yet learned the latest art which sin teaches us—its concealment! "I will supply Lady Emily's place," said Falkland. His voice was calm, and his brow serene the world had left nothing for him to learn. "Will you play the air," he said to Mrs. St. John, "that you gave us some nights ago? I will furnish the words." Mrs. St. John's hand trembled as she obeyed.

SONG.

1.

Ah, let us love while yet we may,
Our summer is decaying;
And woe to hearts which, in their gray

December, go a-maying.

2.

Ah, let us love, while of the fire
Time hath not yet bereft us
With years our warmer thoughts expire,
Till only ice is left us!

3.

We'll fly the bleak world's bitter air
A brighter home shall win us;
And if our hearts grow weary there,
We'll find a world within us.

4.

They preach that passion fades each hour,
That nought will pall like pleasure;
My bee, if Love's so frail a flower,
Oh, haste to hive its treasure.

5.

Wait not the hour, when all the mind
Shall to the crowd be given;
For links, which to the million bind,
Shall from the one be riven.

6.

But let us love while yet we may
Our summer is decaying;
And woe to hearts which, in their gray
December, go a-maying.

The next day Emily rose ill and feverish. In the absence of Falkland, her mind always awoke to the full sense of the guilt she had incurred. She had been brought up in the strictest, even the most fastidious, principles; and her nature was so pure, that merely to err appeared like a change in existence—like an entrance into some new and unknown world, from which she shrank back, in terror, to herself.

Judge, then, if she easily habituated her mind to its present degradation. She sat, that morning, pale and listless; her book lay unopened before her; her eyes were fixed upon the ground, heavy with suppressed tears. Mrs. St. John entered: no one else was in the room. She sat by her, and took her hand. Her countenance was scarcely less colourless than Emily's, but its expression was more calm and composed. "It is not too late, Emily," she said; "you have done much that you should repent—nothing to render repentance unavailing. Forgive me, if I speak to you on this subject. It is time—in a few days your fate will be decided. I have looked on, though hitherto I have been silent: I have witnessed that eye when it dwelt upon you; I have heard that voice when it spoke to your heart. None ever resisted their influence long: do you imagine that you are the first who have found the power? Pardon me, pardon me, I beseech you, my dearest friend, if I pain you. I have known you from your childhood, and I only wish to preserve you spotless to your old age."

Emily wept, without replying. Mrs. St. John continued to argue and expostulate. What is so wavering as passion? When, at last, Mrs. St. John ceased, and Emily shed upon her bosom the hot tears of her anguish and repentance, she imagined that her resolution was taken, and that she could almost have vowed an eternal separation from her lover; Falkland came that evening, and she loved him more madly than before.

Mrs. St. John was not in the saloon when Falkland entered. Lady Margaret was reading the well-known story of Lady T—and the Duchess of —, in which an agreement had been made and kept, that the one who died first should return once more to the survivor. As Lady Margaret spoke laughingly of the anecdote, Emily, who was watching Falkland's countenance, was struck with the dark and sudden shade which fell over it. He moved in silence towards the window where Emily was sitting. "Do you believe," she said, with a faint smile, "in the possibility of such an event?" "I believe—though I reject—nothing!" replied Falkland, "but I would give worlds for such a proof that death does not destroy." "Surely," said Emily, "you do not deny that evidence of our immortality which we gather from the Scriptures?—are they not all that a voice from the dead could be?" Falkland was silent for a few moments: he did not seem to hear the question; his eyes dwelt upon vacancy; and when he at last

spoke, it was rather in commune with himself than in answer to her. "I have watched," said he, in a low internal tone, "over the tomb: I have called, in the agony of my heart, unto her—who slept beneath; I would have dissolved my very soul into a spell, could it have summoned before me for one, one moment the being who had once been the spirit of my life! I have been, as it were, entranced with the intensity of my own adjuration; I have gazed upon the empty air, and worked upon my mind to fill it with imaginings; I have called aloud unto the winds and tasked my soul to waken their silence to reply. All was a waste—a stillness—an infinity—without a wanderer or a voice! The dead answered me not, when I invoked them; and in the vigils of the still night I looked from the rank grass and the mouldering stones to the Eternal Heavens, as man looks from decay to immortality! Oh! that awful magnificence of repose—that living sleep—that breathing yet unrevealing divinity, spread over those still worlds! To them also I poured my thoughts—but in a whisper. I did not dare to breathe aloud the unhallowed anguish of my mind to the majesty of the unsympathising stars! In the vast order of creation—in the midst of the stupendous system of universal life, my doubt and inquiry were murmured forth—a voice crying in the wilderness and returning without an echo unanswered unto myself!"

The deep light of the summer moon shone over Falkland's countenance, which Emily gazed on, as she listened, almost tremblingly, to his words. His brow was knit and hueless, and the large drops gathered slowly over it, as if wrung from the strained yet impotent tension of the thoughts within. Emily drew nearer to him—she laid her hand upon his own. "Listen to me," she said: "if a herald from the grave could satisfy your doubt, I would gladly die that I might return to you!" "Beware," said Falkland, with an agitated but solemn voice; "the words, now so lightly spoken, may be registered on high." "Be it so!" replied Emily firmly, and she felt what she said. Her love penetrated beyond the tomb, and she would have forfeited all here for their union hereafter.

"In my earliest youth," said Falkland, more calmly than he had yet spoken, "I found in the present and the past of this world enough to direct my attention to the futurity of another: if I did not credit all with the enthusiast, I had no sympathies with the scorner: I sat myself down to examine and reflect: I pored alike over the pages of the philosopher and the theologian; I was neither baffled by the subtleties nor deterred by the contradictions of either. As men first ascertained the geography of the earth by observing the signs of the heavens, I did homage to the Unknown God, and sought from that worship to inquire into the reasonings of mankind. I did not confine myself to books—all things breathing or inanimate constituted my study. From death itself I endeavoured to extract its secret; and whole nights I have sat in the crowded asylums of the dying, watching the last spark flutter and decay. Men die away as in sleep, without effort, or struggle, or emotion. I have looked on their countenances a moment before death, and the serenity of repose was upon them, waxing only more deep as it approached that slumber which, is never broken: the breath grew gentler and gentler, till the lips it came from fell from each other, and all was hushed; the light had departed from the cloud, but the cloud itself, gray, cold, altered as it seemed, was as before. They died and made no sign. They had left the labyrinth without bequeathing us its clew. It is in vain that I have sent my spirit into the land of shadows—it has borne back no witnesses of its inquiry. As Newton said of himself, 'I picked up a few shells by the seashore, but the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me.'"

There was a long pause. Lady Margaret had sat down to chess with the Spaniard. No look was upon the lovers: their eyes met, and with that one glance the whole current of their thoughts was changed. The blood, which a moment before had left Falkland's cheek so colourless, rushed back to it again. The love which had so penetrated and pervaded his whole system, and which abstruser and colder reflection had just calmed, thrilled through his frame with redoubled power. As if by an involuntary and mutual impulse, their lips met: he threw his arm round her; he strained her to his bosom. "Dark as my thoughts are," he whispered, "evil as has been my life, will you not yet soothe the one, and guide the other? My Emily! my love! the Heaven to the tumultuous ocean of my heart—will you not be mine—mine only—wholly—and for ever?" She did not answer—she did not turn from his embrace. Her cheek flushed as his breath stole over it, and her bosom heaved beneath the arm which encircled that empire so devoted to him. "Speak one word, only one word," he continued to whisper: "will you not be mine? Are you not mine at heart even at this moment?" Her head sank upon his bosom. Those deep and eloquent eyes looked up to his through their dark lashes. "I will be yours," she murmured: "I am at your mercy; I have no longer any existence but in you. My only fear is, that I shall cease to be worthy of your love!"

Falkland pressed his lips once more to her own: it was his only answer, and the last seal to their compact. As they stood before the open lattice, the still and unconscious moon looked down upon that record of guilt. There was not a cloud in the heaven to dim her purity: the very winds of night had hushed themselves to do her homage: all was silent but their hearts. They stood beneath the calm and holy skies, a guilty and devoted pair—a fearful contrast of the sin and turbulence of this unquiet earth to the passionless serenity of the eternal heaven. The same stars, that for thousands of unfathomed years had looked upon the changes of this nether world, gleamed pale, and pure, and steadfast upon

their burning but transitory vow. In a few years what of the condemnation or the recorders of that vow would remain? From other lips, on that spot, other oaths might be plighted; new pledges of unchangeable fidelity exchanged: and, year after year, in each succession of scene and time, the same stars will look from the mystery of their untracked and impenetrable home, to mock, as now, with their immutability, the variations and shadows of mankind!

FROM ERASMUS FALKLAND, ESQ., TO LADY EMILY MANDEVILLE.

At length, then, you are to be mine—you have consented to fly with me. In three days we shall leave this country, and have no home—no world but in each other. We will go, my Emily, to those golden lands where Nature, the only companion we will suffer, woos us, like a mother, to find our asylum in her breast; where the breezes are languid beneath the passion of the voluptuous skies; and where the purple light that invests all things with its glory is only less tender and consecrating than the spirit which we bring. Is there not, my Emily, in the external nature which reigns over creation, and that human nature centred in ourselves, some secret and undefinable intelligence and attraction? Are not the impressions of the former as spells over the passions of the later? and in gazing upon the loveliness around us, do we not gather, as it were, and store within our hearts, an increase of the yearning and desire of love? What can we demand from earth but its solitudes—what from heaven but its unpolluted air? All that others would ask from either, we can find in ourselves. Wealth—honour—happiness—every object of ambition or desire, exist not for us without the circle of our arms! But the bower that surrounds us shall not be unworthy of your beauty or our love. Amidst the myrtle and the vine, and the valleys where the summer sleeps and "the rivers that murmur the memories and the legends of old amidst the hills and the glossy glades," and the silver fountains, still as beautiful as if the Nymph and Spirit yet held and decorated an earthly home; amidst these we will make the couch of our bridal, and the moon of Italian skies shall keep watch on our repose.

Emily!—Emily!—how I love to repeat and to linger over that beautiful name! If to see, to address, and, more than all, to touch you, has been a rapture, what word can I find in the vocabulary of happiness to express the realisation of that hope which now burns within me—to mingle our youth together into one stream, wheresoever it flows; to respire the same breath; to be almost blent in the same existence; to grow, as it were, on one stem, and knit into a single life the feelings, the wishes, the being of both!

To-night I shall see you again: let one day more intervene, and—I cannot conclude the sentence. As I have written, the tumultuous happiness of hope has come over me to confuse and overwhelm everything else. At this moment my pulse riots with fever; the room swims before my eyes; everything is indistinct and jarring—a chaos of emotions. Oh! that happiness should ever have such excess!

When Emily received and laid this letter to her heart, she felt nothing in common with the spirit which it breathed. With that quick transition and inconstancy of feeling common in women, and which is as frequently their safety as their peril, her mind had already repented of the weakness of the last evening, and relapsed into the irresolution and bitterness of her former remorse. Never had there been in the human breast a stronger contest between conscience and passion;—if, indeed, the extreme softness (notwithstanding its power) of Emily's attachment could be called passion it was rather a love that had refined by the increase of its own strength; it contained nothing but the primary guilt of conceiving it, which that order of angels, whose nature is love, would have sought to purify away. To see him, to live with him, to count the variations of his countenance and voice, to touch his hand at moments when waking, and watch over his slumbers when he slept—this was the essence of her wishes, and constituted the limit to her desires. Against the temptations of the present was opposed the whole history of the past. Her mind wandered from each to each, wavering and wretched, as the impulse of the moment impelled it. Hers was not, indeed, a strong character; her education and habits had weakened, while they rendered more feminine and delicate, a nature originally too soft. Every recollection of former purity called to her with the loud voice of duty, as a warning from the great guilt she was about to incur; and whenever she thought of her child—that centre of fond and sinless sensations, where once she had so wholly garnered up her heart—her feelings melted at once from the object which had so wildly held them riveted as by a spell, to dissolve and lose themselves in the great and sacred fountain of a mother's love.

When Falkland came that evening, she was sitting at a corner of the saloon, apparently occupied in reading, but her eyes were fixed upon her boy, whom Mrs. St. John was endeavouring at the opposite end of the room to amuse. The child, who was fond of Falkland, came up to him as he entered: Falkland stooped to kiss him; and Mrs. St. John said, in a low voice which just reached his ear, "Judas, too, kissed before he betrayed." Falkland's colour changed: he felt the sting the words were intended to convey. On that child, now so innocently caressing him, he was indeed about to inflict a disgrace and injury the most sensible and irremediable in his power. But who ever indulges reflection in passion? He banished

the remorse from his mind as instantaneously as it arose; and, seating himself by Emily, endeavoured to inspire her with a portion of the joy and hope which animated himself. Mrs. St. John watched them with a jealous and anxious eye: she had already seen how useless had been her former attempt to arm Emily's conscience effectually against her lover; but she resolved at least to renew the impression she had then made. The danger was imminent, and any remedy must be prompt; and it was something to protract, even if she could not finally break off, an union against which were arrayed all the angry feelings of jealousy, as well as the better affections of the friend. Emily's eye was already brightening beneath the words that Falkland whispered in her ear, when Mrs. St. John approached her. She placed herself on a chair beside them, and unmindful of Falkland's bent and angry brow, attempted to create a general and commonplace conversation. Lady Margaret had invited two or three people in the neighbourhood; and when these came in, music and cards were resorted to immediately, with that English politesse, which takes the earliest opportunity to show that the conversation of our friends is the last thing for which we have invited them. But Mrs. St. John never left the lovers; and at last, when Falkland, in despair at her obstinacy, arose to join the card-table, she said, "Pray, Mr. Falkland, were you not intimate at one time with * * * * , who eloped with Lady * * *?" "I knew him but slightly," said Falkland; and then added, with a sneer, "the only times I ever met him were at your house." Mrs. St. John, without noticing the sarcasm, continued:—"What an unfortunate affair that proved! They were very much attached to one another in early life—the only excuse, perhaps for a woman's breaking her subsequent vows. They eloped. The remainder of their history is briefly told: it is that of all who forfeit everything for passion, and forget that of everything it is the briefest in duration. He who had sacrificed his honour for her, sacrificed her also as lightly for another. She could not bear his infidelity; and how could she reproach him? In the very act of yielding to, she had become unworthy of, his love. She did not reproach him—she died of a broken heart! I saw her just before her death, for I was distantly related to her, and I could not forsake her utterly even in her sin. She then spoke to me only of the child by her former marriage, whom she had left in the years when it most needed her care: she questioned me of its health—its education—its very growth: the minutest thing was not beneath her inquiry. His tidings were all that brought back to her mind 'the redolence of joy and spring.' I brought that child to her one day: he at least had never forgotten her. How bitterly both wept when they were separated! and she—poor, poor Ellen—an hour after their separation was no more!" There was a pause for a few minutes. Emily was deeply affected. Mrs. St. John had anticipated the effect she had produced, and concerted the method to increase it. "It is singular," she resumed, "that, the evening before her elopement, some verses were sent to her anonymously—I do not think, Emily, that you have ever seen them. Shall I sing them to you now?" and, without waiting for a reply, she placed herself at the piano; and with a low but sweet voice, greatly aided in effect by the extreme feeling of her manner, she sang the following verses:

1.

And wilt thou leave that happy home,
Where once it was so sweet to live?
Ah! think, before thou seek'st to roam,
What safer shelter Guilt can give!

2.

The Bird may rove, and still regain
With spotless wings, her wonted rest,
But home, once lost, is ne'er again
Restored to Woman's erring breast!

3.

If wandering o'er a world of flowers,
The heart at times would ask repose;
But thou wouldst lose the only bowers
Of rest amid a world of woes.

4.

Recall thy youth's unsullied vow
The past which on thee smile so fair;
Then turn from thence to picture now
The frowns thy future fate must wear!

5.

No hour, no hope, can bring relief
To her who hides a blighted name;
For hearts unbow'd by stormiest *grief*
Will break beneath one breeze of *shame!*

6.

And when thy child's deserted years
Amid life's early woes are thrown,
Shall menial bosoms soothe the tears
That should be shed on thine alone?

7.

When on thy name his lips shall call,
(That tender name, the earliest taught!)
Thou wouldst not Shame and Sin were all
The memories link'd around its thought!

8.

If Sickness haunt his infant bed,
Ah! what could then replace thy care?
Could hireling steps as gently tread
As if a Mother's soul was there?

9.

Enough! 'tis not too late to shun
The bitter draught thyself wouldst fill;
The latest link is not undone
Thy bark is in the haven still.

10.

If doom'd to grief through life thou art,
'Tis thine at least unstain'd to die!
Oh! better break at once thy heart
Than rend it from its holiest tie!

It were vain to attempt describing Emily's feelings when the song ceased. The scene floated before her eyes indistinct and dark. The violence of the emotions she attempted to conceal pressed upon her almost to choking. She rose, looked at Falkland with one look of such anguish and despair that it froze his very heart, and left the room without uttering a word. A moment more—they heard a noise—a fall. They rushed out—Emily was stretched on the ground, apparently lifeless. She had broken a blood-vessel

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FALKLAND, BOOK 3 ***

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