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Philadelphia, October, 1838.

ADVERTISEMENT TO SCOTT’S WORKS.

AUTHOR'S

ADVERTISEMENT.

Abbotsford, January, 1829.

It has been the occasional occupation of the Author of Waverley, for several years past, to revise and correct the voluminous series of Novels which pass under that name; in order that, if they should ever appear as his avowed productions, he might render them in some degree deserving of a continuance of the public favour with which they have been honoured ever since their first appearance. For a long period, however, it seemed likely that the improved and illustrated edition which he meditated, would be a posthumous publication. But the course of the events which occasioned the disclosure of the Author’s name, having, in a great measure, restored to him a sort of parental control over these works, he is naturally induced to give them to the press in a corrected, and, he hopes, an improved form, while life and health permit the task of revising and illustrating them. Such being his purpose, it is necessary to say a few words on the plan of the proposed edition.

In stating it to be revised and corrected, it is not to be inferred that any attempt is made to alter the tenor of the stories, the character of the actors, or the spirit of the dialogue. There is, no doubt, ample room for emendation in all these points,—but where the tree falls it must lie. Any attempt to obviate criticism, however just, by altering a work already in the hands of the public, is generally unsuccessful. In the most improbable fiction, the reader still desires some air of resemblance, and does not relish that the incidents of a tale familiar to him should be altered to suit the taste of critics, or the caprice of the author himself. This process of feeling is so natural, that it may be observed even in children, who cannot endure that a nursery story should be repeated to them differently from the manner in which it was first told.
But without altering, in the slightest degree, either the story or the mode of telling it, the Author has taken this opportunity to correct errors of the press and slips of the pen. That such should exist cannot be wondered at, when it is considered that the Publishers found it their interest to hurry through the press a succession of the early editions of the various Novels, and that the Author had not the usual opportunity of revision. It is hoped that the present edition will be found free from errors of that accidental kind.

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PHILADELPHIA:
E. L. CAREY & A. HART.
1838.
THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Away from the dwellings of care-worn men,
The waters are sparkling in wood and glen.
Away from the chamber and dusky earth,
The leaves are dancing in breezy mirth;
Their light stems thrill to the wild wood strains,
And joy is abroad in the green domains.

Mrs. Hemans.

"I have planned a charming walk for this morning,—
so lay aside your drawing, and put on your bonnet," cried
Lady Norman to her young friend Sophy Ravenscroft, as
she entered the cheerful drawing-room of Selwood Cottage
one bright October day. "Dash and Rover are waiting im-
patiently at the garden gate, and it is just the weather for
one of our expeditions."

"I have been so idle since I came into Worcestershire,"
pleaded Sophy, looking wistfully at her preparations for a
diligent day's work.

"Do not disgrace our delightful rides, drives, and saun-
ters, by the name of idleness," exclaimed Lady Norman.
"Pique upon your ingratitude, Sophy!—When you came to
Selwood you scarcely knew a nettle from an ivy-bush, or a
gnat from a dragon-fly: and consider what country wonders
I have taught you during the last three months:—what
lovely landscapes I have shown you:—what striking spots!
—Instead of slaving here over your drawing-box, you
should rejoice in the opportunity of another day's study
among the Selwood woods."

"I have enjoyed so many days' study," replied Miss
Ravenscroft, "and have still nothing to show for my lost
leisure."

"You have not yet seen the effect of Tuesday's frost upon
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the beech trees. The plantations near the river are tinged with gold. My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft," continued Lady Norman, interrupting herself as Sophy's mother, a good-humored middle-aged woman, entered the room, "pray help me to persuade your daughter to her own advantage. This is the last day of my holidays; Sir Richard positively returns to-morrow, and I want to introduce Sophia to the picturesque old ford at Avonwell, while the weather admits of the excursion."

"My daughter will be delighted to go with you," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft. "I am so little able to bear her company in her rambles, that but for your kind assistance, she would have seen nothing of the neighborhood."

"If you permit me, dear mamma, I shall enjoy the walk beyond everything," cried the light-hearted girl, laying aside her occupation; "but you said last night I had neglected my drawing and music since we came to Selwood."

"I said so because Sir Richard Norman's return will deprive you of your friend's society, and throw you back on your usual avocations -------"

"To which you wished to reconcile her beforehand!" cried Lady Norman playfully concluding the sentence.---

"At least, let us enjoy this last day's expedition, for I admit that Sir Richard is apt to exact a considerable share of my time and company."

Taking her knitting from her work-basket, while Sophia proceeded to prepare for her walk, Mrs. Ravenscroft could not lint reflect in silence, that a husband so covetous of the society of his charming wife, need not have loitered three long months on the Continent on a mere excursion of pleasure.

"It is now the first week in October; and it was exactly midsummer when Sir Richard left home," observed Lady Norman, as if penetrating the musings of her companion. "I remember that we received the letter from General Trevor announcing your having taken Selwood, and introducing you to our acquaintance, the very day he determined on his journey."

"True—it was exactly at midsummer."

"Your arrival at that moment seemed an especial blessing. How tedious would the summer have been to me, but for you and Sophy! General Trevor little guessed the favor he was conferring in that introduction. Till you came to the cottage," continued Lady Norman, with earnestness, "I never knew the happiness of a female friend.—Marrying so young and living constantly at the Manor House, with bad roads, a thin neighborhood, and at a distance from my own family, I have never had even an intimate acquaintance. This is the chief cause of Sir Richard's regret at our having no family. People with young children growing up around them, never feel the want of an interest in life."

Mrs. Ravenscroft shrewdly conjectured that the want of an heir to his fine estate and ancient baronetcy might have a still greater share in the discontents of Sir Richard.

"But note all my cares are over," resumed Lady Norman, cheerfully; "you have taken along lease of the cottage, and we have fourteen happy, sociable, neighborly years in prospect. How I long to receive Norman's congratulations on the fortunate change your arrival has effected! Thanks to Sophy's instructions, he will find me so improved in singing, and such a proficient in German!"

"My daughter is lucky to find such encouragement in her favorite pursuits."

"I cannot help wondering," continued Lady Norman, after a few moments' cogitation, "how you will like Sir Richard. Our position is so very strange—so very peculiar. That two dear friends of mine should neither know my husband, nor be known to him!—From the moment of his departure, dear Mrs. Ravenscroft, we have been passing many hours of every day in each other's society. I have never ceased talking to you of him, or writing to him of you; yet you are about to meet as strangers. I shall only guess your opinion of him—his of you and Sophy, I know him well enough to anticipate. What a pleasant winter we shall pass together."

"Admit, at least," said Mrs. Ravenscroft, raising her eyes a moment from her knitting to the sweet face of her companion, "that you have done your best to make us familiar with Sir Richard Norman's good qualities!"

"You will soon acknowledge that I have not praised him too highly," replied Matilda, blushing; "yet I have more than common cause to be partial. I owe my husband gratitude, as well as love, for his choice of one so inferior to himself in birth, station, talents, and education."

"I cannot admit a man's mere preference to be a subject of thankfulness," observed Mrs. Ravenscroft—a stickler, at
all times, for the dignity of the sex. “The feeling is spontaneous, and pursued for his selfish gratification. It is only by the uniform kindness of after-life he establishes a claim on the gratitude of a wife.”

“Then I have still a right to plead gratitude towards Sir Richard Norman,” replied Matilda. “But here comes Sophia. I do not apologise for taking her away. I see you have ample amusements in store for our absence. Your marker has not advanced beyond the middle of Kirkpatrick’s ‘Nepaul.’” And the thickness of Miss Ravenscroft’s shoes and shawl having been carefully passed in review by her mother, away they went on their expedition to Avonwell.

Mrs. Ravenscroft had cause to be careful. Sophy was the only child of one of the happiest of happy marriages; commenced in cheerful poverty, prospered by courage and intelligence, and terminated by the glorious death of Captain Ravenscroft in the service of his country, bequeathing a sailor’s fame and more than a sailor’s ordinary gains to his widow and child.

Mrs. Ravenscroft, however, possessed the happiest retrospections to solace her misfortune. Amid the cares and anxieties of their early life, not an angry feeling or harsh word had disturbed their union. She had chosen to rough it with her husband through all sorts of climates and vicissitudes; and, though neither literary nor learned, had considerable knowledge of the world and insight into human character. It was a consolation to her to find in her daughter a lively and intelligent companion, indifferent to the pomps of life; and having wound up the settlement of their little fortune, Mrs. Ravenscroft retired to an agreeable habitation in Worcestershire selected by her relation, lady Farleigh, and considered herself fortunate that accident had secured them neighbors so desirable as Sir Richard and Lady Norman.

Beyond the Manor House, Selwood had little to boast in the way of neighborhood. Farleigh Castle was eight miles distant; and the vicar and his wife were valcudinarians of advanced age. But scarcely had they been settled a month at the cottage, when both mother and daughter admitted that every deficiency was compensated by the cordiality with which they were welcomed into the country by the amiable lady Norman.

The accidental absence of Sir Richard served to further the progress of their intimacy. Sympathy of sex, tastes, and pursuits, brought them readily together; and long before the period appointed for his return from France, it seemed almost forgotten among them that they had ever lived apart. For Mrs. Ravenscroft, lady Norman felt the respect of a daughter; for Sophy, the tenderness of a sister. The simple history of their lives had often received the tribute of her tears; and her own, less eventful and less touching, was frankly disclosed in return. Matilda related it without apology or comment. But Mrs. Ravenscroft’s experience of the world suggested from her simple text a thousand conjectures concerning the present prospects of her young friend, and the character and peculiarities of Sir Richard Norman.

CHAPTER II.

There, or within the compass of her fields,
At any moment may the dame be found;
True as the stock dove to her shallow nest;
And to the grove that holds it.

Wordsworth.

There was something baronial and commanding in the aspect of Selwood Manor House. Situated on the summit of a lofty hill and surrounded by sloping woods, it afforded a landmark for all the country round. The mansion was of Elizabethan date and architecture; but closely adjoining, stood the remains of an ancient keep and embankment, retaining the dignified title of Norman Castle, and connected with the high origin of the family.

It might almost be surmised that, previous to the establishment of roads and inland navigation, our ancestors possessed some preternatural facility for the transportation of stone for architectural purposes. We are told in sacred story by what means the rafters of cedar were removed from Mount Carmel for the construction of Solomon’s Temple; and it was pretty apparent that the venerable gray granite forming the walls of the Manor House was supplied
by the ruins of the ancient fabric. But by what process the stones of Norman Castle had been originally conveyed to the site was still a mystery. In spite of the means and appliances of modern mechanism, the miracle has never been renewed; and the frightful red-brick houses of that part of Worcestershire, are put still deeper to the blush by the sober hue of the noble facade of Sir Richard Norman’s family mansion.

Secured by this solidity of construction from the injuries inflicted on other manorial houses by the vagaries of modern improvement, the Manor House had suffered nothing from the High and Low Dutch innovations introduced under the auspices of the houses of Hanover and Nassau.—The windows retained their noble proportions, the doors their original entablatures, and the furniture was characteristic and appropriate. Old pictures, old arms, old carvings, old porcelain—all was quaint and antiquated. With the exception of a suite of rooms fitted up for Lady Norman on her marriage, everything remained as in the days of the first George; when the alliance of Sir Rupert Norman with a city heiress produced the partial renovation of the old manor.

The house was of liberal, but not stupendous dimensions; fortunately enough—since, even without any vast intricacy of corridors or staircases, it was gloomy and dispiriting. The disproportion of the old-fashioned panes of glass to the windows—the fretted cornices and groined ceilings—the dingy hue of the satin hangings and mahogany doors—produced an unpleasant effect upon eyes accustomed to contemplate the airy but meretricious elegance of modern taste; nor was it possible to pass a winter week under Sir Richard’s roof without admitting the hardness of his predecessors, ere the arts of lighting and heating attained their present pitch of perfection.

Considerable respect was impressed at the same time upon the guests at Selwood Manor towards a family which furnished such noble portraits to the picture-gallery, and such majestic monuments to the parish church. For a century and a half, indeed, these last had suffered interruption—the latest Norman interval at Selwood being a cavalier of the reign of Charles II; since which time, the members of the house had suffered grievous dispersion. Some were lying at St. Germain, some in Austria, some in Italy. Many had seen the light on foreign ground, and were to foreign dust returned. Even the present inheritor, Sir Richard, was receiving his education at the college of Scotch Benedictines in Paris, when the outbreak of the first French revolution sent him back to complete his studies in his native country.

In all this, and in every thing relating to the Manor, there was a certain character of the stately and aristocratic, which lingered with peculiar odor of sanctity among the Roman-catholic gentry of England. The idea of a méance on the part of the head of such a house, seemed almost preposterous. Yet such was the fact. Lady Norman was the daughter of a Warwickshire manufacturer; and what was held more heinous by the hereditary servants of Sir Richard, a heretic—the grand-daughter of a protestant minister of the gospel! They were almost resigned to the affliction that the marriage-bed of the degenerate baronet had proved childless, lest the daughter of perdition should bequeath a touch of heresy to the future representatives of his line!

From any religious scruples on the subject, however, Sir Richard Norman was free. From the period when, at fifteen years old, he was driven home from Paris, till now, when the recent restoration of peace to Europe enabled him to visit it again, the stanchness of his adherence to the church of his fathers had been gradually weakened. But catholicism was at that period an injured and suffering cause, and a sentiment of chivalry attached many of its least credulous sons to the drooping banner. The dissipations of London society, however, had done their part to diminish the respect of the gay young baronet for the abstruse doctrines so long and tediously inculcated by his Jesuitical preceptor, the Abbé O’Donnel; and Sir Richard sometimes found it difficult to fire himself up to become warmth of championshhip, when the cause of catholicism, as a political question, was discussed in his hearing at the fashionable dinner-table, with the arguments of the fashionable periodicals of that day of intolerance.

Apprehensive of alienating the affections of his opulent disciple from a cause so much in need of the support of wealth and consequence, the Abbé had been an indulgent task-master. His lessons went no further than the surface. He required from young Norman only the semblance of virtue—the renunciation of faults and frailties revolting to
the moral order of society. Egotism, the master vice of the heart, the besetting sin of the great and prosperous, he suffered to flourish unchecked; and Sir Richard grew up accordingly the slave of impulse—the creature of selfishness and pride.

Handsome and intelligent, there was little opening for the display of his talents; and the career of public life being closed against the young papist, it was in libertinism—and excess that his misdirected energies were suffered to run to waste. That was a dissolute era of the dissolute London world!—The excitement produced by the extraordinary political events agitating the Continent seemed productive of universal disorder. Every day brought tidings from afar of struggle and death; and, as if ashamed of their inaction, the idlers of London plunged at each rumor into deeper intemperance. Among the wild and reckless, Sir Richard shone pre-eminent. It was only by a certain hauteur of manner and beauty of person, that he was distinguished from the throng of the fashionable ruffians of the day.

Once emancipated from the control of guardians and tutors, there were none to interpose their counsels between him and ruin. An orphan in childhood, he was the sole survivor of his family. Of the once flourishing house of Norman, there remained only a second cousin, on whom the baronetcy and estates were entailed; who, whether as his former guardian or future heir, was an object of unqualified dislike to Sir Richard.

In that quarter, however, the ancient family seemed secure from extinction. Mr. Norman was the father of a numerous offspring, all rigid catholics, and like himself engaged in mercantile pursuits. Giles, the eldest son, was a partner in his father's bank; Rupert, the second, the head of a house of business in Trieste; a third was settled in New York; and two younger ones, destined to the same thriving career, were studying at Stonyhurst. Old Norman, who had amassed a considerable fortune in commercial life, was fond of sneering at those unprofitable members of his church who, excluded by the injustice of the country from professional distinctions, were too proud to conquer an independence by humbler means. The banker was a hard, unpolished man, ill-calculated to conciliate the regard or submission of his young relative. With the faults or follies of his ward he had never condescended to argue.

His only form of control was irony—of all coercions the most hardening to the mind of youth. In Sir Richard's boyhood, he had been sneered at for aping the vices of a man; in his manhood, for aping the follies of a fine gentleman. Mr. Norman openly predicted that his ward would never come to good—a prediction, how often the cause of its own accomplishment!

Vainly did Mrs. Norman, a being of somewhat gentler mood, represent that it might be injurious to their children to provoke the resentment of the head of the family.

"What signifies the lad's enmity to me?"—was her husband's blunt reply. "His liking or disliking will neither cut off the entail of the estates, nor divert the line of succession. Should he die unmarried or childless, I must succeed him; and should he leave children of his own, his warmest affection would not suffice to alienate a guinea from his rent-roll in favor of his relations."

Influenced by this matter-of-fact view of their connection, Mr. Norman persisted in refusing every concession required by the young baronet. During the minority, he took care that the Selwood estates should be properly administered; and on resigning his trust, troubled his head about them no more. He had more to gain by attending to the ventures of his own argosies and the fluctuation of public securities, than by speculating on the inheritance of Sir Richard Norman; and, once or twice, when (the embarrassments of the young man requiring the cooperation of the heir-at-law) the men of business of the baronet applied to the men of business of the man of business to negotiate between them, Mr. Norman's replies were not only negative, but insulting.

Such was the state of affairs between the cousins, till Sir Richard attained his seven and twentieth year; when Mr. Norman was one day suddenly reminded by his wife, that the Selwood estates should be properly administered; and on resigning his trust, troubled his head about them no more. He had more to gain by attending to the ventures of his own argosies and the fluctuation of public securities, than by speculating on the inheritance of Sir Richard Norman; and, once or twice, when (the embarrassments of the young man requiring the cooperation of the heir-at-law) the men of business of the baronet applied to the men of business of the man of business to negotiate between them, Mr. Norman's replies were not only negative, but insulting.

Agatha; for upon Mr. Norman's indulging in his usual exclamations against Sir Richard his lady answered with great indignation—"Extravagant and dissipated I admit him to be, but that might render a fortune of fifteen thousand pounds the more acceptable. Marry he certainly will; and if our son Giles is to be cut out, better by a grandchild of our own, than by the son of a stranger."
THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

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Starled by this luminous view of the case, Mr. Norman indulged in no further interjections. The project was more sagacious than he had expected to hear unfolded by his wife. He liked the thoughts of hedging his odds of the Selwood property—of insuring his venture—of underwriting his spec. The match would be an excellent one for his daughter; and in so business-like a point of view did the affair present itself to his mind, that he wrote that very day to Sir Richard, stating the amount of his daughter's fortune, proposing the connection, and inviting him to form a more intimate acquaintance with the family.

But young Norman, a wassailer at Water's and frequenter of the Argyll Rooms, was a very different being from the raw impetuous boy, whom his harsh guardian had formerly sneered into shame, or controlled by the scrape of the pen.

"Marry the beastly fellow's daughter!" was his indignant exclamation, on receiving these cool proposals from the man he most disliked on earth—"I would as soon bestow my hand upon a barmaid!"

The terms of his letter of rejection were not many degrees more courteous; and Mr. Norman's commentary on the text, that "he" deserved the rebuke, for having been willing to accept a broken-down spendthrift for his son-in-law," confirmed their mutual ill-will, and established a lasting feud in the family.

It happened that a few days after his cousin's taunt was repeated to him, (with due exaggeration on the part of the good-natured friend who employed himself as spite-bearer between the belligerents,) Sir Richard set off from the Manor into Warwickshire, to join a fashionable party at Arden Park, for the county races. Still laboring under the excitement of mind produced by his family quarrel, he was ready to listen to any foolish suggestion of his own, or other people's. The repeater of grievances, by whom his wounded pride had been thus inflamed, had already whispered, when inveigling against the arrogance and interestedness of the heir-at-law—"Marry, my dear fellow, marry, and disappoint the expectations of the family!"—and Sir Richard Norman was quite in the humor to adopt these saffron counsels.

In his immediate circle, indeed, were divers lovely ladyships and honorable misses, ready and willing to second his intentions; but Sir Richard was too well versed in the arena of fashionable corruption to risk his honor at such fearful odds. The houses of parliament from which he stood excluded, had been devoting their attention that session to half a dozen lordly divorce-bills; and with all his desire to hurl defiance at his offending heir-at-law, Sir Richard demurred.

Anxious, irritated, flushed with unnatural vivacity he accompanied Lord Arden's party to the races, and concluded the day at a brilliant ball, given in the Town Hall; and there, while surveying the oddities and uglinesses usually abounding in such heterogeneous assemblies, his attention was arrested by a fair form and prepossessing countenance, which seemed to belong to a higher sphere of society. Captivated by these attractions, he obtained an introduction to Matilda Maule; whose modesty of deportment and elegance of manners completed the charm. The delicacy of extreme youth bloomed on her cheek, enhanced by a profusion of light glossy ringlets. In the course of an evening's acquaintance Sir Richard fell desperately in love; and Mr. Norman's chance of inheritance was thenceforward scarce worth nothing.

A country town during race time, is an ark where inferior and superior animals are juggled together in undistinguishable confusion. The following day the waters subside, and the assemblage disperses itself anew over the face of the land. While Lord Arden's party, including Sir Richard Norman returned to Arden Park, Mrs. Wickset's party, including Miss Matilda Maule, returned to a stuccoed villa, within a few miles of Birmingham. For, alas! the young lovers belonged to orbits far as the poles asunder;—Sir Richard being head of a house of eight hundred years' gentility; and Matilda's father, Mr. Maule, the head of a house of business in the hardware line, extensively known as the firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset and Co.

The discovery of the young beauty's want of connection might, at any other moment, have nipped in the bud the passion of her new suitor; but to the influence of Matilda's attractions was added that of his desire to thwart the expectations of his cousin; and the first moment that he could release himself from the Ardens, he hastened to avail himself of an invitation from Mrs. Wickset to visit her at Acacia Place; and for three weeks following was scarcely a day absent from Matilda's society.
Weary of the emptiness and egotism of fashionable life—wearied of waltzing young ladies and manœuvring mammas—the gentleness and simplicity of Matilda's character completed the conquest her beauty had begun. To attach the idea of vulgarity to such a being would have been as absurd as to inquire the pedigree of the Venus de Medicis. She was a thing apart—a creature too richly gifted by nature to be weighed in any ordinary balance; and when at length he hazarded his proposals, the wealthy baronet was inspired by the only sentiment which ought to influence a lover's heart at such a moment—that it was the height of presumption on his part to aspire to the affections of a person so infinitely superior.

Matilda's answer was favorable. She referred him to her father; and Mrs. Wickset being shrewd enough to guess that Sir Richard Norman's attachment was likely to be put to severe tests by a visit to the factory, and a first introduction to the two resident partners, Messrs. Maule, Cruttenden, and Co., promised that Matilda should return home in time to shed a conciliating grace over the preliminary interview between the baronet and his future father-in-law.

Though it was one of those cases of love at first sight which seem to justify the most disproportionate alliances, she felt that it would be injudicious to fortify, by personal disgusts, the opposition which the wayward choice of Sir Richard Norman was likely to excite among his kinsfolk and acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

What is that curtsey worth?—or those dove's eyes
Which can make gods forsworn!—I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others!

Shakespeare.

Although Norman's wild adventures had beguiled him so far beyond the narrow pale of fashionable society, that he was apt to fancy the world was known to him in all its aspects, high and low, rich and poor, tatters and brocade—a new page in the heavy volume of life was unfolded to him at the factory. To have traced his beloved Matilda to a cottage, and raised her from the picturesque rusticity of hawthorns and a thatched roof to the splendors of Selwood Manor, would have been an act of poetic justice. But, alas! the sotty establishment of Messrs. Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset and Co., proved an anti-climax to every high-wrought aspiration of his soul.

Situated at the extremity of a dirty suburb, the huge ill-painted gates stood so near a tanner's yard that the fury excited among Mr. Maule's squadron of mastiffs by the sudden stopping of Sir Richard's curriele called forth the sympathetic rage of the tanner's yelping regiment of curs; and when the stranger pushed his way along an avenue formed by two lofty, dingy walls, and discovered at the close a gloomy-looking brick-house, facing an extensive range of buildings which in aspect resembled a penitentiary, and in smell, the London gas-works, his disgust was complete.

A squalid-looking individual, arrayed in paper cap, fusian drawers, and a dirty, ragged shirt, whom he beckoned from a pump; undertook to acquaint Mr. Maule that a gentleman wished to speak with him; and Sir Richard walked impatiently up and down beside a range of coal-sheds, sickened by the smell of engine-grease, and stifled with the smoke of the furnaces, till he was accosted by a square, sober-looking, brown-gaitered gentleman, whose loose and somewhat seedy coat seemed made to embrace the whole firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.; and who touched his broad-brimmed beaver respectfully to a stranger having so much the air of a customer well to do in the world.

After proceeding so far in explanation as was admissible in the open yard, Mr. Maule led the way into his dwelling-house; where Sir Richard was informed that, instead of approaching it through the respectable iron gates and sweep forming the regular entrance, he had crept in the back way, where there was "no admittance except on business." Still, the atmosphere was the same. Every thing on the premises, from the window-blinds to the hollyhocks in the garden, was blackened with soot; nor was it till, having followed his sober guide into a neat, airy drawing-room, he found himself surrounded by a choice collection of books, drawings, and musical instruments, he could bring himself to believe that such was the terrestrial paradise of the an-
gelic being by whom his soul had been “lapped in Elysium” at Acacia Place.

Neither Matilda nor her letter of explanation having at present reached her father, Sir Richard Norman had his own tale to relate; a tale so passing strange, that Mr. Maulé was obliged to have it thrice repeated to him before he could arrive within many degrees of comprehension. To learn that the gentleman before him was a baronet of high descent; with a rentroll of eight thousand a year, come to ask for the hand of his daughter, and offer her a jointure of three-thousand per annum in return, was a thing to have been scouted as an idle hoax, had Maulé been of jocular nature, or versed in the fooleries of London life.

But the manufacturer was a grave, stern man, soured by the loss of a wife who had brought him six children to provide for, and taken herself to a better world when it behoved her to stay and take care of them in this—and absorbed by the important interests of a factory employing eight hundred workmen, and a capital of fearful amount. Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co., gave their names and money to the firm, Maulé his whole time and attention. The grimy atmosphere was as natal air to him; and the clattering of wheels and stamping of beams, the natural music of his sphere. He had become almost a part of the machinery. The business of his workdays was to amass as liberal a provision for each of his six children as had been bequeathed by his parents to himself; and the relaxation of his Sabbath to secure, by a threefold attendance at divine worship, a blessing on the sixfold gains he made it his duty to heap together; justifying his over-carefulness for the things of this world, by attributing his narrow thrift to the instinct of parental affection.

To such a money-mill of a man, it was almost a disappointment that his future son-in-law made no inquiries into the amount of fortune it would be convenient to him to bestow upon his daughter, in addition to the five thousand pounds to which he fancied all the world must know Matilda to be entitled by virtue of her mother's settlement, and he had scarcely patience when the notification of his intended liberalities produced no change in the handsome countenance of Sir Richard. He began to suspect that all was not quite right with the mysterious stranger—and begged time to talk the matter over with his friends. 

"Matty was expected home every hour. On the following morning he would have the honor of waiting upon Sir Richard at the King's Arms."

Although from the moment of setting foot in the factory yard poor Norman had been chiefly anxious to bring his visit to a close, he was not altogether satisfied with this summary dismissal. He had anticipated a more cordial reception. He felt that, like a good bill, he had a right to be accepted at sight. Nettled by the coolness of Maulé, and disgruntled by the fumes of his domicile, he could have found it in his heart to order posthorses and return to the pure altitudes of Selwood Manor; for he had now been some hours absent from the influence of Matilda's charms, and was beginning to discover that in love, as in all beside, "ogni medaglia ha il suo riverso."

On the morrow, however, instead of waiting for the visit announced by Mr. Maule, he was at the factory by ten; a note from Matilda, announcing her return, having invited him to join them at breakfast. Under the presidency of the lovely girl, whose natural elegance imparted all the refinement previously wanting to the little household, the establishment assumed a different aspect in his eyes. Old Maulé, too, had become cordial and courteous. He was now prepared to shake him by the hand, to give him his daughter, to add ten thousand pounds to her fortune, and to devote her original five thousand to pay off the baronet's incumbrances, in consideration of the handsome jointure secured on the estate to the future Lady Norman. Mr. Maule's present amenity of deportment was no less remarkable than his churlishness at their first interview.

This sudden change was naturally attributed by Sir Richard to Matilda's representations in his favor, and the influence of his personal merit. So ready are we to convert the commonest incidents of life into tributes to our egotism and self-esteem! Mr. Maule's change of demeanour, was, in fact, solely produced by the coarse raillery of one of his partners.

Of the firm of Maule and Co., Thomas Cruttenden alone was a bachelor;—a man of a certain time of life—without connection, without education, raised to opulence by his own exertions—dry, whimsical and disagreeable. Deficient in the ordinary topics of discourse, Tom Cruttenden delighted in adding weight to his conversation by saying the most
unpleasant things, and enforcing their poignancy by a knowing wink. He liked Maule and his family better than any other human beings, was godfather to the second son, and a steady friend to them all. But in choosing to become an inmate under the roof of his widowed partner, he seemed anxious to be always on the spot to comment on the irregularities of the establishment, and the faults of the children. Over young Cruttenden Maule, his godson, he exercised something of partial parental authority; but as to Matilda, for many years past he had been descanting daily on the absurdity of the accomplishments bestowed upon her, and the probability that she would live to become a burden upon the family.

"What man in his senses will marry the girl?" was his nightly ejaculation to his partner, as a seasoning to the tumbler of hot Madeira negus with which they concluded together the evenings of their busy days. "What earthly thing can Miss Matty do to make herself useful?"

"She makes me happy, and that is all I require of her," replied the old gentleman.

"She makes you happy because you see her with the prejudiced eyes of a father. But what will a reasonable being of a husband say when he finds her tangling away at her harpstrings when she ought to be minding her family? But she's never likely to have a husband, reasonable or unreasonable. 'Take my word for it, Matty Maule's name is too much up in this town as a poor, helpless, make-believe fine lady, for any of our young men to think of her. Poor Matty's marked for an old maid!'"

By dint of having this denunciation dinned in his ears, Maule had at length begun to think less favorably of Matilda's attractions. The wife of his junior partner, Mr. Wickset, a kind, motherly woman, by whose advice his daughter's education had been completed by a competent governess, consoled him with assurances that, at every fresh visit of Miss Maule to her sociable house and neighborhood, new admirers presented themselves. Old Cruttenden was always ready to exclaim, on the return of the young beauty, "What! back again from the fair, Matty, with the white handkerchief still round your neck?—Can't Madam Wickset, with all her caperings and vaporings, manage to get you out of the market?—Never mind, my lass!—Come down a peg or two next fair day, and no doubt you'll fetch something handsome yet."

It was to this comfortable friend that Maule had repaired for sympathy after his first interview with Sir Richard Norman. "A baronet with eight thousand a year!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his dry chuckles, after receiving the exulting communication of his partner. "Come, come!—you don't mean to swallow such a hook at your time of life!—Baronets with eight thousand per annum don't grow on every bush!—I warrant we shall see the fellow advertised next week in the 'Hue and Cry.'"

"The 'Hue and Cry!'" retorted Maule, with some indignation. "Sir Richard Norman's manners are those of a high-bred, accomplished gentleman."

"The deuce they are!—Why, what do you pretend to know, pray, of the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentleman?—Look in the police reports," cried Cruttenden, with one of his most knowing winks, "and you will find that all these travelling swindlers have what you call the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentlemen—that is, they sport a gilt guard chain and copper eye-glass!"

"Sir Richard wears neither the one nor the other," replied Maule, commanding his temper.

"More fool Sir Richard!—Dare say he was Sir Lionel last week, at Leamington or Buxton; and may be, Sir Albert Fitz-something or other, at Cheltenham, last year!—Send a description of his person to the Clerk of the Peace, and I warrant you'll hear news of Miss Matty's precious fine-gentleman sweetheart at the Town Hall!"

"I need not go so far," replied Maule, scarcely able to subdue his irritation. "He brought me a letter from Mrs. Wickset, to whom he had the most satisfactory introductions."

"Mrs. Wickset!—ho, ho!—Why this is better than all the rest.—Now, just inform me what Jacob Wickset's good woman should know about Wurstershire baronets?—She was never thirty miles from Brummagem in her born days.—Madam Wickset would be taken in by Jowler the house dog dressed up as a dandy, provided he bowed low enough, and took care not to show his tail.—No, no, Maule! take my advice—I know something of the world!—I'm wider awake than you are!—When this humbugging chap sneaks in to-morrow morning, lock up your silver spoons, and ask him for a reference. If that don't bring him to his marrow-
bones, rely upon it the hardened wretch is returned from transportation."

"There are not the slightest grounds for suspecting him to be other than he pretends; and ——."

"Of course not!"—interrupted Cruttenden, with another provoking laugh. "You see, Maule, you've brought up that girl of yours with the notion of her making a match; and choose to take for a swan the first goose that hisses an offer. But Tom Cruttenden's not to be bamboozled with borrowed plumes. Tom Cruttenden's had his breeding in a school where fine words butter no parsnips. Tom Cruttenden don't care a cheeseparing for the cut and color of a coat, provided there's something heavy in the pockets; and I'll be bound that the weightiest thing in this Sir Thigmeee Norman's is a bunch of skeleton keys. At all events, pray don't let him into the compting-house; I wouldn't trust such a fellow with change for half a crown."

These pleasantries were wormwood to old Maule; for he possessed no means of disproof. The coarse bantering of his partner was at all times a drawback on his comfort; yet he had not courage to resent it. Habit rendered the company of the man with whom he had so many interests in common a portion of his existence; and though Cruttenden was always abusing the children—calling the boys dunces, and the girls dawdles—Maule was aware that he would cut off his right arm to do them service, and that they were likely to succeed to a large portion of the old bachelor's fortune. Still, though unwilling to come to a quarrel, it was insupportable to be thus browbeaten out of all his opinions and inclinations.

Such was the state of affairs, when Matilda arrived in triumph to secure her father's sanction to her happy prospects, and to prove him in the right—Tom Cruttenden stood defeated. Tom Cruttenden was forced to admit that the Sir Richard Norman who had been requested by the lord lieutenant of the county to open the ball with his daughter, could be no impostor; and for the first time in their lives, the senior partner enjoyed a hearty crow over his junior. He would have crowed louder, perhaps, but for the princely marriage-gift, bestowed by the eccentric Tom upon "Miss Matty," affording sterling proof of his regard for a family with whose foibles he made so free.

To detail the petty mortifications which rendered Sir Richard's courtship a period of penance, would be a task both frivolous and vexatious. Though shortened beyond his hopes by the frank dealing and despatch-of-business celebrity of Mr. Maule, there was leisure for a thousand biting jests from Tom Cruttenden, a thousand trivial irritations from the whole family.

"Every man to his taste!" was Tom's exclamation, on learning the difference of religion between the young people. "I wouldn't give my daughter to a Papist!"

"Sir Richard is no bigot," argued the father. "He allows Matilda the full exercise of her opinions; and though their sons must be reared as Roman Catholics, the daughters will follow the same church as their mother."

"About their sons or daughters I care not a jot," cried Cruttenden; "seeing that they never may have any. But when that poor lass finds herself surrounded with a set of canting priests and bigoted kinsfolk, and sees her husband telling his beads all day long, and worshipping graven images ——."

"But I tell you that Sir Richard is by no means a rigid Catholic," interrupted Maule.

"So much the worse. Since he is a Papist, better be a good 'un. If a man isn't stanch in his religion, in what, pray, is he likely to be in earnest?"—

A scruple thus raised in the conscience of old Maule, his stipulations with his son-in-law concerning freedom of worship for Matilda and Matilda's daughters, became almost offensive. Sir Richard found his religious opinions as abhorrently regarded at the factory as those of a Mahomedan; and even Matilda was rendered uneasy by the officious hints and denunciations of her father's friend. He had scarcely patience with their narrow fanaticism. He had borne with their uncouthness, their want of civilization, their purse-pride, their egotism; but he could not stand being talked at as a Jesuit on the watch to burn the whole bench of bishops at the stake, and requiring the strictest vigilance of the legislature of the country.

It was some palliation, meanwhile, of Tom Cruttenden's offence, that his snears at the growing ostentation of the family determined old Maule to solemnise his daughter's wedding with modest privacy. In spite of Mrs. Wickset's indignation, and the outeries of the little Maules, not a creature was invited. Sir Richard's venerable preceptor, the
Abbé O'Donnel, officiated with deeply-wounded feelings in the Roman Catholic service that united his pupil to a Protestant; while Cruttenden's contempt for drawing-room altars and special licences caused the Protestant ceremony to be solemnised in the parish church, after which, the happy pair emerged from the sulphurous atmosphere so ill adapted to the filmy wings of Cupid, and set off for Selwood Manor.

Even on the eve of the great event, with the settlements signed, the family diamonds accepted, and Matilda's wedding clothes packed in the imperials of the new travelling carriage, Sir Richard felt half inclined to break off his ill-assorted connection. Though Matilda was dearer to him than ever, he could scarcely surmount his disgust at the coarseness of mind of those with whom she was associating. The spotless feathers of the dove contract no defilement from the rude materials of her nest, and Matilda had escaped as by a miracle the slightest tinge of vulgarity; but he could not help fearing that she shared in some slight degree the misgivings and mistrusts of her father. At some moments it was with difficulty he forbore exclaiming, "If you consider me a monster of cruelty and deceit—if you think that I shall not only deal harshly by you but prevent your disclosing your wrongs to your family—it is not yet too late. I am ready to break off our engagement."

But the angelic expression of Matilda's eyes arrested the words upon his lips. A life of peace and happiness was unfolded in the serenity of those lovely features; and he felt that it was his duty to bear much, in gratitude for the affection of so sweet a wife. Already he had enjoyed the triumph of announcing to the Norman family his approaching marriage with a beautiful girl of seventeen, with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds; amassed, indeed, in trade, but subject to no reproach on that score from the banker of Lothbury. They knew that young Norman was not to be Sir Giles, or Miss Agatha, Lady Norman; and had given forth from their strong closet, at his order, the precious family diamonds, heirlooms long marked as their own. This was almost compensation for the nods, and becks, and knowing smiles of Tom Cruttenden, and the austerer reserve of old Maule; and added new raptures to his wedding day.

On passing, however, for the last time through the dingy toll-bar adjoining the factory of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co., Sir Richard secretly protested that his lovely bride should return no more to that city of soot and calculation. Her brothers were at school; her sisters still in the nursery. She had no bosom friendships to attach her to the place—no ties of kindred or sentiment. Henceforward, his idolised Matilda must forget her own people and her father's house—forget the sound of the factory bell, its squalid population, its malevolent exhalations—and become exclusively, for better or worse, Lady Norman of Selwood Manor.

Could there be a stronger proof of the inappropriateness of the connection, than that the first resolution to which it gave rise was an outrage against the first and holiest duty of our nature.

CHAPTER IV.

What! will the line stretch to the crack of doom? Another yet?—a seventh?—I'll see no more! Shakespeare.

Years passed away with their alternations of joy and sorrow—day and night; and Sir Richard still admitted himself to be, according to common parlance, the happiest of men!

It was amazing with what facility Matilda had glided under his authority into the social duties of her new vocation. At the close of a few months, no one could have suspected her of having moved in any lower sphere than that of the Manor House. Her doctile nature instinctively adopted her husband's habits and pursuits; and when they occasionally joined the convivial meetings of their thin and scattered neighborhood, the simple unpretending elegance of Lady Norman's manners was even more applauded than her surpassing beauty. Lord and Lady Farleigh invariably cited her to their London friends, as the most distinguished ornament of their county.

Sir Richard, meanwhile, had evidently exhausted his
taste for frivolous dissipation. Happy in his home he devoted himself to the cultivation of his estate, to study, to field-sports. Cheered by the lively society of his young wife, there was no occasion to forfeit his self-consequence by jostling in the tawdry mob of fashionable London. By mutual consent, they abjured all connection with the metropolis.

It was but natural that Sir Richard’s disappointed heir presumptive should attribute this secession from the world to consciousness of having formed a mésalliance. But the Normans were mistaken. Sir Richard had ceased to regard Matilda as aught but a portion of his aristocratic self; and, as his wife, she was entitled to her share of worldly honors. The susceptibilities of his self-love were suffering from a wound of a very different nature.

The Catholic cause was just then at its lowest ebb. Long reduced to insignificance in the court and councils of their sovereign, the Catholics had been recently compelled to withdraw their trust from the Regent. Their prospects were narrower than at any preceding moment; and in proportion as hope declined, the ardor of their fraternisation became more vehement. Sir Richard redoubled his contributions to their funds, became a member and correspondent of their societies; and fought over the question of emancipation every evening with a worthy neighbor named Mandeville (the original possessor of Selwood cottage,) till Matilda became a political, if not a religious, convert.

Once in every year, on his way to town for the annual settlement of the affairs of the firm, Mr. Maule visited the Manor House, to rejoice in his daughter’s happiness and gratify his pride by the sight of her prosperity. His parental hortatives to Lady Norman were brief but comprehensive—“Not to forget her Maker, not to forget herself,” and though he declined trusting his little sisters on a visit to the Manor, within grasp of the Abbé O’Donnel, never presumed to trifle with the religious or political prejudices of his son-in-law, after a first visit to the picture gallery and chapel of Selwood Manor. He seemed to understand that the Catholicism of the Normans was a legitimate portion of their inheritance.

All went smoothly among them till one unlucky day, when (an auspicious letter from his illustrious friend Mr. Grattan having put Sir Richard into unusual spirits) he was rash enough to suggest an invitation that Tom Cruttenden should accompany his partner, on Mr. Maule’s ensuing periodical journey; and though indignant that the invitation should have been so long delayed, the old gentleman’s desire of once more beholding “poor Matty’s pretty face,” induced him to array himself in a new snuff-colored suit with brass buttons, and ensconce himself in a corner of his partner’s postchaise. But alas! before he had been half a day in the house, there was no longer peace in Israel; and Matilda trembled for the sequel. The jocose old gentleman had discovered that even at Selwood there existed a reign on which his whips and scorns could be made to fall with agonising force; and to spare was an effort beyond his generosity. The Normans had been eight years married, and had no family. What a triumphant opportunity for a licensed jester! Old Tom was never weary of inquiring, with a knowing wink, in what part of the house the nursery was situated:—where was Master Norman’s rocking-horse, and little Miss Matty’s doll; till Matilda, who had hitherto resigned herself patiently to the want of children, could scarcely restrain her tears.

Nor was he less jocose with Sir Richard, on the barbarity of moping up his pretty wife in a tumble-down old country house, “which, to say the best of it, was as deadlv lively as a house of correction.”

“I recollect when you was at the factory before your wedding,” said the spiteful old bachelor, “we thought it vastly pretty of you to present poor Matty with a parcel of diamond necklaces and gimcracks, in which we fancied you meant her to figure away at court.—Who’d ever have thought after all this, of your making her a state-prisoner!—Why, she led a merrier life at Brummagem, taking her pleasures with Mrs. Wickset; to say nothing of Christmas hops at Mr. Blowpipe’s up at the foundry.”

“I have lost all inclination for balls and races,” interrupted Lady Norman, growing uneasy; “I am growing old.—You forget that I shall be seven and twenty next birthday.”

“Indeed I don’t, Matty. Nobody can look in your face and forget that! All your fine bloom’s gone, child. Your best days are over; and that’s what frets me at your having moped away your youth in this out-of-the-way place; with nothing to show for it. If you’d been nursing a fine family of spanking boys all these years, I’d say something to you.
I meant you, my lady, to supply me with a second godson. But I find your brother Cruttenden's to remain my sole heir; just as your title and fortune, it seems, must go to a distant relation, because you've been too lazy to furnish us with a young Master Dicky of your own."

The five hundred pounds placed by the old gentleman next day at parting in Lady Norman's hands, "to make threadpapers of," formed a poor compensation for the wounds inflicted by this ill-timed raillery. For two days after his father-in-law's departure, Sir Richard was thoroughly out of sorts. Never had he seemed so sensitive to the mortification of seeing his inheritance descend to "an unhallowed hand—no son of his succeeding;" and, as if in express aggravation of the grievance, the Morning Post announced that week among its memorabilia, the birth of, "At Grove House, Herts, the Lady Catherine Norman of a SON AND HEIR."

It was scarcely a year since the same authority had put forth intelligence of the marriage of "Giles Norman, Esq., jun., to the Eldest daughter of the Right Hon. the Earl of Roscrea;"—and already the junior branch was germinating! Henceforward, Lady Catherine Norman and her son and heir were to be thorns in the side of Selwood Manor. Before master Norman could run alone, a portrait of the young gentleman and his cockade appeared in the exhibition; and having been transferred to the engraved gallery of the buds and blossoms of our aristocratic Eden, was disseminated throughout Great Britain. Sir Richard affected to laugh at the vanity of the parents; but his laughter was lip-deep—there was pain and grief in his heart.

It was noticed by Matilda that the Baronetage and Red Book of 1812 (in which was inscribed, in addition to the particulars of his own birth and marriage, and the usual "HEIR PRESUMPTIVE, Giles Norman, Esq., of Grove Park, Herts," the birth among the collateral branches of the family of Giles, the son of Giles Norman, Esq., by Lady Catherine, daughter to the Earl of Roscrea,) was suffered to lie with uncut leaves on the library table. Nay, the plans previously sent in by his architect, for two fine new lodges to his park, were rolled up, knotted with red tape, and permanently laid on the shelf. To the great disappointment of Mr. Stucco, the baronet's zeal for the improvement of his estate had suddenly subsided.

Mr. Mandeville, the neighbor at Selwood Cottage who had hitherto shared with her the ebullitions of her husband's ill-humor, was compelled to quit Worcestershire and reside upon his Irish estates; and in the course of that solitary, taciturn, peevish winter, she began, for the first time, to suspect that the sun of her happiness might be overclouded. She began to dread Sir Richard's return home from his morning's sport; to fear that the family at Farleigh Castle might notice how often his cutting remarks brought tears into her eyes; and just before the next annual visit of her father, became so alarmed lest her husband's moroseness should attract his attention and draw down the animadversion of Tom Cruttenden, as to invent some trifling pretext for evading the visit of Mr. Maule, pretending to have formed engagements from having mistaken the date of his arrival.

But Matilda was an unpractised and a bad dissembler. Tom Cruttenden, seeing through her shallow excuses, insisted that her father should proceed to the Manor House as usual, and ascertain the motive of her deceit; and there, according to their anticipations, Lady Norman and her husband were detected—without guests or engagements! Old Maule scarcely waited to be alone with his daughter, to reproach her bitterly with her disingenuousness. "When you were a young child, Matilda," said the old gentleman, you would have died rather than utter an untruth. Is it because you are a baronet's lady, that you think yourself privileged to bear false-witness to your poor despised tradesman of a father?—Equivocation, Lady Norman, is a lower and meaner thing than the lowest of callings!—A falsehood returns sooner or later to the bosom of him who utter it, like a viper flung into his face!—But as my friend Cruttenden was saying to me the night before I left home, 'All this was to be expected. Matty's been taken out of her own condition and creed, and what good was like to come of it? Isn't she under the control of an old Jesuit of a priest?—Isn't she already half a Papist?'"

Matilda was unable to repress an impatient movement of dissent. "I don't say that you attend chapel, or tell your beads, or believe in transubstantiation," cried the old man, repeating the words of the oracular Tom Cruttenden; "but you have learned to say one thing and think another; and if
that's not the true meaning of being a Jesuit, I don't know what it is."

Again Matilda remonstrated, but her father was not to be propitiated. He came in mistrust, and quitted her in anger; professing that her sister Beissy, who had now almost attained to womanhood, should never incur the risk of contamination by becoming her sister's inmate at the Manor.

And thus, in proportion as Matilda stood in need of the countenance and affection of her family, was she fated to estrange their regard. She had only to resign herself to a dreary perspective of seclusion and isolation; enjoying her happiest moments when she could persuade her husband to enliven his monotonous life by a trip to town, which secured her for a time from his irritability.

So stood matters at the Manor House when, ten years after the celebration of Sir Richard's childless union, the sudden downfall of Napoleon gave rise to the unexpected pacification of Europe. Eager to revisit the religious community from which he had been so long estranged, the Abbé O'Donnel immediately determined on an excursion to Paris; when Matilda suggested to her husband that it might interest him to review the scenes of his boyhood, and take a glance at the long-closed city of revolutionised, republicanised, and reroyalised France.

Weary of home and the inactivity of his aimless existence, Sir Richard Norman needed little persuasion to comply with the suggestion. At that moment arrived General Trevor's letter, announcing the Ravenscrofts as likely to become most desirable neighbors; and finding his wife thus opportunely provided with companionship for the summer, he had no longer any scruple in taking his departure, or prolonging his absence. He went — the Ravenscrofts came — and Matilda grew contented and happy. A new existence dawned upon her in the society of such kind and conciliating friends. Sir Richard's return was again and again deferred; and she was careful to find no fault with the postponement. Attributing to the false position in which he was placed by his disproportioned marriage, the friction into which he had latterly degenerated, she felt convinced that change of scene and society would restore him to his happier self.

The prolongation of his absence, however, gradually softened, and at length obliterated all recollection of his harshness. At the close of three months' absence, she remembered him as the impassioned lover of her youth—the affectionate husband of her early domestic life; not as the angry man resenting upon herself the irritating jokes of Tom Cruttenden. To the Ravenscrofts, therefore, she described him in glowing colors. His portrait announced him to them as one of the handsomest men in England; and Matilda protested that the merits of his character more than rivalled those of his portrait.

Their interest thus excited in his favor, the strangers grew almost anxious at the frequent postponement of his return; more especially as, whenever his long absence was alluded to at Farleigh Castle, a significant glance was apt to pass between Lady Emily and her brother, Lord Selston; the meaning of which was a mystery to the new comers. Again and again did the baronet announce his immediate arrival, and again and again disappoint them. Sophy Ravenscroft often started up from her drawing and ran to the window, in the notion that his travelling-carriage was passing the cottage palings, on his way to the lodge-gate of the park; and when, on the day succeeding her ramble with Lady Norman to the ruins of the forge at Avonwell, no Sir Richard made his appearance, they became alternately alarmed and indignant. Sophy felt sure some accident had occurred; Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehending mischief still more serious, shook her head and said nothing; and on learning the following evening that Lady Norman was still alone, walked up kindly with her daughter after dinner, to drink tea uninvited at the Manor.

On their arrival, Matilda was in tears. Like themselves, she had begun to apprehend that something was amiss; and finding her so thoroughly discouraged, the Ravenscrofts made it their duty to cheer her spirits by reassurances. An equinoctial gale was blowing so boisterously as to render it probable that Sir Richard was delayed at Calais, and necessary that Lady Norman should order her carriage to be in readiness at eleven, to convey back her friends across the park; and the inclemency of the weather without had its usual effect within, of inducing them to close sociably round the fire. Immediately after tea, Sophia was persuaded to take her seat at the piano; Mrs. Ravenscroft drew forth her ever ready knitting; while Matilda placed herself for a mo-
ment on a low ottoman before the fire, to caress a favorite pointer which was basking in the warmth of the hearth.

It happened that between the waltzes and marches with which she was amusing them, Miss Ravenscroft paused to relate a lively anecdote connected with one of the pieces; and her companions were vying with each other in applause and laughter at the mimicry with which the gay girl enlivened her narrative, when, lo! unobserved by any of the party, the door flew open; and there, folded in his travelling cloak, stood Sir Richard Norman, an unnoticed spectator of their mirth!

CHAPTER IV.

Churlishness is a spurious kind of freedom.
Tacitus.

It is a trying thing, even to a good-tempered man, to arrive at home from a cold, hurried, hungry journey, and find every thing proceeding there as if the master were forgotten—nothing in readiness for him—nothing distressed or disorganised by his absence.

But Sir Richard Norman was not a good-tempered man. Rendered arbitrary by early independence, selfish by subsequent indulgence, and fretful by the reminiscences of a wasteful, dissolute youth, he had now his family disappointments to aggravate former defects. He had scarcely patience to conceal his indignation at finding his wife indulging in the silly levity of a school girl, when his protracted absence ought to have filled her with grief and consternation. Her recent letters to Paris had described her as all anxiety for his return; yet he was evidently not cared for—not expected—not welcomed—as became the allegiance of a loving wife.

As these reflections passed rapidly through his mind, he was half-inclined to re-enter the carriage, and return to the place from whence he came. But the square form and grave countenance of the Abbe O'Donnel met his view as he turned to quit the room; and immediately recovering his self-possession, he advanced majestically into the circle, and claimed the greetings of the astonished party. Too well-bred to exhibit his dissatisfaction in presence of strangers, he received with courtesy his introduction to Mrs. Ravenscroft and her daughter; but already he had conceived against them a sort of jealous antipathy. They were more familiar than himself with Lady Norman—more at home than himself at Selwood Manor.

The Ravenscrofts, meanwhile, were thoroughly embarrassed by knowing themselves to be in the way. Some time must elapse before the carriage could be ready to take them home; and the constraint of manner arising from feeling themselves de trop, was considered by Sir Richard as intended to mark the gêne inflicted upon the happy little party by his presence.

Delayed by adverse winds, the travellers had been in some peril, much perplexity; and in the fear of inflicting further uneasiness on Lady Norman, had come direct from London without even pausing for refreshment on the road. Supper was to be prepared in haste; when, as one footman was busy carrying up Sir Richard's baggage, and another conveying a message to the stables to hasten the carriage, the butler took care to be as long and awkward as possible in the removal of the tea-things, to mark his sense of injury at the labors thrust upon his unaccustomed shoulders.

Matilda, meanwhile startled out of all self-possession by the unexpected arrival of her husband, found the words of welcome faltering, between laughing and crying, on her lips. One moment she was about to give way to her spontaneous delight in welcoming home her beloved husband; the next, she was chilled back into reserve by the clouds she beheld gathering upon his louring brow.

Meanwhile but for a conversation got up between Mrs. Ravenscroft and the Abbe, the least embarrassed of the party, a dead silence must have ensued; and it was a relief to Matilda when the carriage carried off her friends. Sir Richard had already retired to his room to change his damp dress, leaving her leisure for the recovery of her spirits. But, alas! further mishaps were in progress! All expectation of his arrival having ceased at so late an hour, no preparations had been made for the travellers. The only fire burning was in the small bed-room in which, during his absence, Lady Norman had taken refuge from the vastness of their state apartment; and accepting this accidental circum-
stance as an intimation that he was to inhabit it alone, he turned indignantly away, and ordered the camp-bed in his dressing-room to be prepared for his use.

Deeply mortified by the coolness of his reception, which he attributed to suspicions and resentments such as had never entered the candid mind of Matilda, he snatched up the gauntlet he supposed to have been thrown down to him and prepared to act on the defensive. After supping tête-à-tête with the Abbé in the chilly dining-room, where the fire had been so imperfectly rekindled, that he rejected Lady Norman's proposal of bearing them company, he retired to his chamber for the night; and Matilda, after waiting some time for his return to the saloon, took refuge silently in her own. Before morning, the husband and wife had taken their resolution.

"I understand the terms on which she has vouchsafed my pardon!" mused Sir Richard. "She knows all—probably through the tale bearers of these Ravenscrofts; and, too politic to resent, is too much of a woman to pardon nobly. Be it so!—I will not stoop to entreat a more generous extension of her forgiveness."

"Absence has completed the alienation commenced by indifference!" was, on the other hand, Matilda's mournful meditation. "It is something that he has deigned to return home, and is disposed to live with me as a friend. I will not aggravate his dislike by vexatious explanations."

This feeling of mistrust was now powerfully renewed. Sir Richard, after passing some months abroad in the company of the Abbé, had returned more cold, more care-worn than ever. Involuntarily she recalled to mind Tom Crutenden's remark at his last visit to the Manor—"Mark my words, Matty, that you will repent keeping that Jesuit about your house, like a pet rat or tame snake. I tell you, child, he would drown you in the Severn to-morrow, if heretics could be made away with without chance of a judge, jury, and condemning cap. I tell you to beware of Father O'Donnel."

To resist or resent the Abbé's influence, however, either now or at any other time was she knew impossible; and Matilda, with patient humility, resigned herself to coming evil as to evils past. She subdued her feelings sufficiently to appear at breakfast the following morning, with smiles upon her countenance that sat upon her conscience like hypocrisy; and tried to talk away her embarrassment by a thousand unmeaning inquiries to the travellers, concerning the diversions and habits of the continent.

"You will shortly see and judge for yourself," said Sir Richard abruptly, in reply. "Unless you have some reasonable objection to urge, I intend to pass the winter on the continent."

Matilda's first emotion at this startling announcement was grief at the idea of a separation from her friends; but she mastered it sufficiently to reply, in pursuance of her system of conciliation—"Pass the winter abroad?—It will give me the greatest pleasure!—Where do you think of settling?"

"In about a fortnight—as soon as I have completed my arrangements here for a long absence. I wish to fix myself at Paris; but I would not engage a residence there till I had consulted your wishes on the subject."

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Had Matilda at that moment glanced towards the Abbé, whom she was secretly accusing as the author of the plan, she might have discerned, from the amazed and displeased expression of his countenance, that this was his first intimation of the intentions of Sir Richard. But her attention was riveted by the unexpected courtesy of her husband's last remark.

"How kind of you," said she, "to make my wishes a consideration!—I am delighted at the thoughts of visiting
París; and, at the time you have fixed, shall be quite at your disposal for the journey."

The Abbé was almost provoked by this ready acquiescence—Sir Richard almost disposed to think her submissive tone must be ironical. After finishing their breakfast in silence, the rest of the day was devoted by the baronet to visiting his estate, and inquiring into the state of affairs during his absence; while the Abbé set off into Lancashire on a journey connected with his professional duties. Gladly would Matilda have accompanied her husband on his round of the farms to contribute her mite to the intelligence afforded by the bailiff. But she hesitated to make the proposal till his horse was brought to the door; and having received no formal invitation to ride with him, fancied her presence might be importunate, and announced her intention of setting off to visit the Ravenscrofts.

"She might at least have spared me this one day," thought Sir Richard, who, having expected her to propose riding, concluded that she disdained even to affect an interest in his pursuits. "She has been meeting these detestable people hourly for the last three months, yet cannot withdraw her attention from them a single morning in favor of her husband!"

All the contrition which had been softening his heart on his way back to his long neglected home, hardened into adamant as he came to the conclusion that Matilda had no heart; that she neither resented injuries, nor was sensible to the concessions of repentant affection.

Meanwhile, the startling intelligence conveyed by Matilda to Selwood Cottage, was of a nature to dispel the awkwardness anticipated by the Ravenscrofts, in having to satisfy her curiosity respecting the impression produced on them by her husband. Her sudden departure was an affliction too overpowering to leave them leisure for embarrassment.

"Our arrival in Worcestershire, my dearest Lady Norman, seems to have driven you out of the country!" cried Mrs. Ravenscroft, sympathising with the tears which were already falling profusely from the eyes of her daughter.

"To think that you should have remained quietly stationary at Selwood for the last eleven years, and take your departure the very first winter of our arrival!"

"It is indeed provoking," replied Matilda, "I admit that, had Selwood borrowed no attraction from your settling so near us, I should have been enchanted at the prospect of my tour. But as it is—My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft," cried she, suddenly interrupting herself—"supposing you were to follow our example, and meet us this winter at Paris?—Sir Richard assures me that nothing can exceed its brilliancy at the present moment; full of foreign troops, foreign princes, foreign tourists; full of movement, life, amusement, and excitement!"

"Too full, I fancy, for the prudent mother of a giddy daughter," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, with a smile. "Two helpless women, like ourselves, are best and safest in the quiet seclusion of Selwood cottage—I should not feel justified in so capriciously abandoning the home which it has cost me both money and pains to adjust to my liking."

"If my indiscretion be the chief obstacle, dear mamma," cried Sophy—who would willingly have spent the winter in Nova Zembla, for the sake of passing it with her friend—"I solemnly promise not to urge you into expense or dissipation—not to fall in love with a foreigner, or—"

"My dear, it is wholly out of the question," interrupted Mrs. Ravenscroft, in a tone to silence all further discussion; for she had already seen enough of Sir Richard to feel persuaded that such an addition to his family circle would be altogether unacceptable.

"At all events," persisted Matilda, satisfied by this positive assertion that she had no chance of beguiling her friends into an excursion to the continent, "let me see you every day till my departure, or you will have no opportunity of forming an acquaintance with Sir Richard. You must come and dine with us to-day."

"I fear it will not be in our power."

"Oh! pray do not refuse me, now that I have only ten days or a fortnight to remain in Worcestershire. Pray come and dine with us."

"My dear young friend," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, who, seeing in Matilda in spite of her eight-and-twenty years a young and inexperienced creature, could not refrain from treating her like a daughter of her own—"your company belongs this day exclusively to your husband. After so long a separation, you have no right to withdraw your attention just now from Sir Richard Norman."

Matilda blushed deeply at this admonition. She had too much delicacy to reveal the estrangement arising from
her past and present conjugal differences. The subject was too sacred to be made a matter of feminine confidence. She dared not admit how much she dreaded a tête-à-tête with Sir Richard, or how deeply she had been wounded by his ungraciousness. Matilda was of opinion that the anguish of spirit experienced by an injured wife is to be entrusted only to Him from whom no secrets are hid.

All that remained, therefore, was submission. She returned home more dispirited than ever, and sat down to dinner, almost trembling, with one whose deportment, instead of being improved by his sojourn in the city of the Graces, afforded a strange example of the courtesy and high-bredling she had been vaunting for the last three months to her friends at Selwood Cottage.

"Did you go much into society at Paris?" she inquired, some minutes after they had taken their seats at table, lest their tact and dexterity should provoke the comments of the servants.

"I was seldom alone," was Sir Richard's evasive reply. "But, did you attend any of the splendid entertainments given by the Duke of Wellington, or the foreign princes?"

"I believe I enumerated to you in my letters nearly all my engagements."

"It must have been highly interesting to you to visit your old college? Did you find any person surviving who was there in your time?"

"Twenty years added to the lives of men of twenty or thirty is no such awful lapse of time," replied Sir Richard. "You seem to consider me a very venerable personage?"

"I ought not to do that," replied Matilda, "since I am not much more than ten years your junior."

"I have not forgotten that you are ten years younger than myself," said Sir Richard, sneeringly. "There was no occasion to recall the circumstances of my recollection.

Matilda colored with shame and confusion at so unjust an inference. To disguise the annoyance of her feelings, she recommenced her inquiries concerning Paris.

"Did you find the public buildings much handsomer than those of London?"

"That is a point so universally conceded," replied her husband, still more ungraciously, "that it is scarce worth bringing anew into discussion."

"The French ladies, then," demanded Matilda, taking refuge, with deepening blushes, in the first topic that presented itself; "are they so very superior to my own countrywomen as I have heard them represented?"

Sir Richard examined her a moment in silence with a severe and scrutinising eye. "Decidedly superior," was his stern reply, conceiving himself to be subjected to a process of premeditated cross-examination. "Not in mere features, or complexion;—but they exercise their charm of manner and character too potently to leave leisure for critical examination. Refined in soul as in deportment, they are as companionable in private life as brilliant in public. A dull or ill-bred Frenchwoman is as great a rarity as a well-bred or conversational Englishwoman—as you will shortly see and judge for yourself."

Matilda was silenced. There was nothing in her husband's words that conveyed absolute reproach to herself; but his looks and manner gave personal significance to them, as an attack upon her own uncompanionableness—her own want of refinement. She saw that she had given offence. It would be better to avoid all further allusion to Paris. But in flying from Scylla, she stumbled of course upon Charybdis.

"I sat some time with the Ravenscrofts this morning," said she. "I tried to persuade them to join us at dinner, but they would not hear of it."

"I am sorry to have been the means of frightening your friends out of the house," replied her husband. "They seem to have been passing the greater part of the last three months under my roof; and the day of my return hastened for the first time to decline your invitation."

"Mrs. Ravenscroft fancied you might have more to say to me, after being so long away, than you would like to communicate before strangers," said Matilda, in a faltering voice.

"Indeed?" rejoined Sir Richard with another scrutinising glance. "The old lady seems to be an adept in the mysteries of human nature. I must be on my guard."

"My friend Sophy is inconsolable at the thoughts of our leaving Worcestershire. Our absence this winter will make a sad difference at Selwood," observed Lady Norman, after another awkward pause.

"It was judicious to select Selwood, if they were looking for a sociable neighborhood," cried Norman, with a sneer. "If they wanted balls and card-parties, why not settle at Cheltenham or Bath?"
"I tried to persuade them to an excursion to Paris."

"To Paris?—But they have no idea, I suppose, of any such wild goose expedition," rejoined Sir Richard, in a tone plainly indicating an intention to remain at the Manor House, should her answer be affirmative.

"None whatever. Mrs. Ravenscroft does not think it prudent to leave home so soon after settling here. Besides, she will not be quite solitary. There are the Lynches; there is Farleigh Castle ———"

"With eight miles of bad road intervening, Farleigh Castle is likely to be a vast acquisition to Selwood Cottage."

"The Ravenscrofts do not regard the distance. I could almost fancy it less than formerly. I have dined four or five times this summer with the Farleighs."

"They must have thought it singular that you, who invariably make excuses when I am here, should seize the opportunity of my absence to be so vastly intimate!"

"Lady Farleigh probably concluded that, finding my home less attractive, I was glad to seek amusement elsewhere."

"A flattering interpretation for her, certainly," cried Sir Richard, overlooking the interpretation so flattering to himself.

"Besides," continued Matilda, assuming some spirit when she found herself systematically browbeaten, "I was only prevented by my natural shyness from visiting at Farleigh Castle; and my terrors of Lady Farleigh's hauteur and Lady Emily's reserve vanished the moment I found myself familiarised in the house by accompanying the Ravenscrofts. Mrs. Ravenscroft you know, is nearly related to Lady Farleigh."

"I should not have imagined that Lady Norman of Selwood Manor needed the patronage of a Mrs. Ravenscroft to render her company acceptable," said Sir Richard, haughtily. "My father and grandfather were the intimate friends of those of Lord Farleigh, and your indolence has alone prevented my keeping up an intimacy with the family. You used to complain so bitterly of the coldness of Lady Farleigh and Lady Emily."

"Till lately, I misunderstood their characters. The cordial, unreserved manners of my own humble sphere had not prepared me for the undemonstrative calmness of theirs. I fancied them indifferent and repulsive when they were showing me the quiet kindness habitual to them. Mrs. Ravenscroft taught me to see all this."

"You consider Mrs. Ravenscroft, then, better skilled than your husband in the habits of good society? — You never condescended to ask instruction of me!"

"I might not wish to remind you of my unfitness to appear in the world as the representative of your honors."

Sir Richard's silence seemed to reject every occasion afforded him by his wife to interpose some conciliating word.

"You were aware when you married me," she continued, stung to courage by his unkindness, "that I had never lived in what you call the world. The sphere into which you introduced me was full of mysteries and perplexities to my simple comprehension. All you wished me to understand, I thought you would explain unasked."

"I am sorry, then, to have left so heavy a task of instruction to Mrs. Ravenscroft," said Norman, with a contemptuous smile.

"There are some lessons which a woman learns more readily from a woman," said Matilda; "particularly those which she considers beneath the dignity of a man."

And the vexation of having to defend herself thus vehemently, suffused the usually delicate cheeks of Lady Norman with so radiant a tinge, that her eyes borrowed fresh lustre from her bloom; and as she shook back the clustering ringlets from her face, Sir Richard was struck by the extreme loveliness of her countenance. Renovated by a cheerful summer of exercise and independence, Matilda looked younger and more captivating than ever to eyes recently habituated to the olive-hued charms of the French ladies, and the mahogany complexions of the peasantry.

When she quitted him to order coffee in the drawing-room, Sir Richard sat musing uneasily over the probability that she had been much admired at Farleigh castle, and the certainty that she would command the worship of the brilliant coteries of Paris.
CHAPTER V.

The time was, once, when thou un urg'd wouldst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing to thine eye,
That never touch well-welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savor'd to thy taste,
Unless I spake, look'd, touch'd, or ear'd to thee.

How comes it, then, my husband, oh! how comes it,
That thou art thus estranged from thyself?

Conscious, perhaps, of the ungracious part he had borne
in their dinner colloquy, Sir Richard, on repairing to the
book-room, where they were accustomed to pass their win-
ter evenings, affected a vehement anxiety to examine two
numbers of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, which
had appeared during his absence, containing valuable arti­
cles upon Emancipation, from the leading dialecticians of
the day.

He could not, however, pass over without an ironical
compliment to the literary taste of Lady Norman the fact
that their pages were still uncut. Then, having taken the
folder in his hand, he ensconced himself in his reading-
chair beside his reading-lamp, with his foot on his reading-
stool, and justified her indifference by dozing through the
first half-dozen pages of the first article, and falling sound
asleep over the remainder!

The moment Marilda became convinced by his attitude
that he was really lost in slumber, she laid down the work
with which she had been striving to beguile her uneasy
thoughts, and gazed unembarrassed upon her husband. It
was the first time she had steadily contemplated Sir Rich­
ard since his return; and she was struck by the havoc which
three short months had effected in his appearance. There
were lines of age about the eyes, a certain hollowness of
brow, and gray hairs scattered among the raven tresses
shading his temples, which she had never noticed there be­
fore. Though advancing towards forty, Sir Richard had
hitherto preserved a singularly youthful appearance. There
was now a cast of care and anxiety in his face. It was
impossible to look upon him without perceiving that
the time of his absence must have been an unquiet one.

Persons more experienced in the world might have detected
the withering touch of remorse in those premature indica­
tions. But Matilda had a soul above suspicions; she knew
that other men had their vices and foibles; that gambling,
libertinism; or intemperance, might impair their fortunes,
their reputations, their peace of mind; but nothing of this
kind, she fancied, could affix a stigma upon the noble name
of Sir Richard Norman!

Few women, however sagacious, however versed in the
ways of the world, bring their knowledge or experience to
bear upon the incidents of their married life. Elsewhere
shrewd and farsighted, there they are invariably dupes!

For the happiness of the world, it is ordained that the heart,
rather than the mind, shall instigate our judgment of those
with whom we live in intimate communion.

Still, there was sufficient to distress the gentle heart of
Lady Norman, in the supposition that her husband had been
unhappy. The moment such an idea entered her mind,
she would willingly have entreated his pardon for even the
slight show of resentment she had hazarded in reply to his
animadversions. She longed to creep to his side as for­
merly, to watch for his awaking; then entreat to know the
subject of his griefs, that she might divide the weight of
the burden. But some womanly instinct warned her to
forbear! The peculiar position in which they stood for­
bad on her part, all advances. She must wait patiently
till it pleased him to vouchsafe his confidence.

Her patience, however, was fated to be put to the test
Day followed day, but not a step towards the restoration of
a better understanding! Her time was passed between so­
facing the affliction caused at Selwood Cottage by her ap­
proaching departure, and concealing from the observation
of her friends the surmise of the man she had been so long
vaunting to them as a mirror of intelligence and amiability,
who had returned; home only to break up the comfort of
the little party.

It was impossible, however, for the Ravenscrofts to de­
ceive themselves as to the unavowed uneasiness of their
charming friend.

"So we are to lose our neighbors at the Manor House
this winter?" said Lady Emily Farleigh, when visiting the
cottage with her brother, after riding over to offer their adieux to the Normans. "You will miss them sadly; but we shall profit by their absence; you will be obliged to have recourse twice as often for society to the Castle."

"I should deeply regret their departure," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, "but that Lady Norman will benefit by the change. Poor thing!—she has seen too little of the world to be immured for life at the Manor."

"And with that sullen disagreeable man," added Sophy, breaking off the conversation in which she had been engaged with Lord Selsdon. "I am convinced she leads a wretched life with him!"

"Never pronounce hastily upon the domestic secrets of married people," remonstrated her sager mother. "Matilda could not be so strongly attached to a man who was permanently unkind to her."

"Norman is a fine, gentlemanly fellow," added Lord Selsdon; "a little reserved and stately, but full of honorable feeling."

"Never pronounce hastily upon the private life of a man you know only at battues and justice-meetings!" cried Lady Emily, parodying with a smile the lesson of Mrs. Ravenscroft. "Till you arrived here, she added, turning towards her friends, "and drew out the real disposition of Lady Norman, we had totally mislaken her. Everything at the Manor was so dull, so insipid, that we set her down as either a stupid or a selfish woman. All the faults of the house were imputed to the parvenue wife!—But now we have discovered how pleasant she can be in her husband's absence—how sociable—how ingratiating—we are beginning to see where the fault lies, and to fear she must lead a miserable life!"

"Miserable, indeed!" reiterated Sophy, with the deepest sympathy. "A husband absorbed in his own pride and self-consequence!"

"Pride is often used as a more civil word than ill-temper," said Lord Selsdon, laughing. "My father is a proud man in the vulgar sense of the word; but there is not a better tempered in the kingdom. Not a member of his family or household ever heard an angry word from his lips. Sir Richard Norman is not proud, or he would not have married a manufacturer's daughter; but I think him likely to be a cross husband, and overbearing master."

"Did Lady Norman tell you how long they think of remaining on the Continent?" inquired Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehensive that her daughter, thus encouraged, might give vent to her feelings of dislike towards Sir Richard.

"We had very little conversation with her. At first, Sir Richard was present, who is always a restraint; and before we had been ten minutes in the house, her father arrived on an unexpected visit, when we left them in haste, not to be an interruption to the interview. We felt that she must wish to be alone with her father."

Little did Lady Norman's young friends suspect that her interviews with her father were becoming almost as unsatisfactory as those with her husband. Shrinking from the interrogations suggested by old Cruttenden to Mr. Maulé. Matilda's natural timidity (magnified into a foible by the despotism of Sir Richard) rendered all social intercourse a tax upon her sincerity. The old gentleman's unexpected journey proved to have been, as usual, suggested by the injurious meddlesome of his partner.

"Ay, ay, I knew how it would be—I thought it would end so,"—was Tom's exclamation, on learning from Mr. Maulé the intended departure of the Normans for the Continent.

"No one can have foreseen any thing of the sort," replied the old gentleman, fractiously. "No one would have scouted the idea more than yoursçlf, had I predicted to you last winter that peace would be restored to Europe within twelve months—Nap caged up in the island of Elba—and the English free to come and go in foreign parts."

"I wasn't thinking of Nap—I wasn't thinking of the island of Elbow—my thoughts were nearer home,"—replied Cruttenden. "I was recollecting that, when you first told me of this precious son-in-law of yours being a Papist, I saw, as plainly as I see it now, that poor Matty was fated to be perverted out of her religious principles."

"Matty perverted out of her religious principles?" cried Maulé, lowering his spectacles, and peering over them in amazement. "What can have put such a dreadful suspicion into your head?"

"If the thing an't done already, 'twon't be long a doing. When the poor lass gets smuggled over to France, and finds herself surrounded by nothing but Capuchins and Jesuits, a-telling their beads all day long—smothered with incense..."
—and bothered out of her right mind—what chance is there of her resisting?—I’ve heard tell of the most awful means being used to convert poor, weak women, who thought proper to adhere to their own church.”

“Centuries ago, perhaps,” interrupted Elizabeth Maulé, who was presiding at the tea-table of the partners. “But the days of persecution are past; or if they still exist, surely the Catholics have as much cause to complain of the Protestants as the Protestants of the Catholics.”

“Ay, ay, in this country, thank God, the church has still the best of it!” cried Cruttenden, with one of his knowing winks. “We take care to keep the beggarly priests where they ought to be.—No sneaking Jesuits ruling the state, and devouring the substance of old England.—Church and king and Protestant succession, say I.”

“With respect to keeping you quietly at home when you want to be gadding, Miss Betsy,” replied old Tom, in wrathful indignation, “I admit that I have taken more pains to keep you out of mischief than you are likely to thank me for. But as to standing by unmoved when I see poor Matthy about to be carried off to pass the rest of her days with that villanous nation of cut-throats, the French, I can’t reconcile it to my conscience.—There’s no saying what may happen to her when once she gets immured among the Papist wretches the other side of the water.—”

“This is really too absurd!” cried Elizabeth, perceiving that the old gentleman was ready to hazard any extravagant accusation to stir up the wrath of her father against Norman.

“But this is my duty as an honest man to put your father on his guard. If once his daughter settles in Papist parts, there’s an end of poor Matthy. I dare say Sir Richard means no harm beforehand. I dare say the journey is only one of the blessed economy-schemes which cause people of quality to starve abroad upon soup meagre, and fancy they are living cheap. I’ll tell you how we’ll settle it, Maulé. You must come down with something handsome, and post over to Selwood to make them give up the plan; and as far as a few hundreds of my own will help the matter, they’re heartily
at Matty's service. 'Twill only be so much the less in young Crutt's legacy duty hereafter.'

Such were the judicious motives which had brought Mr. Maule unwillingly to Worcestershire; and having no time to waste in circumlocution, he came straight to the point with Sir Richard Norman.

'’I don't like the thoughts of Matty's going to settle among Papists and foreigners,” said he, abruptly. “Tom Cruttenden's of opinion, Sir Richard, that, may be, you are aging out of the kingdom in such a jiffey only for want of a little ready money. If that's the case, name the sum you mean to economise in the course of the next twelve months, and here's a blank cheque on my banker ready to be filled up with the amount.”

'There are other motives in the world, sir, than pounds, shillings, and pence—whatever you may think to the contrary?’—cried Sir Richard, justly indignant at the liberty taken with his proceedings. “I trust I am free to regulate my family affairs, without reference to the whims of Mr. Cruttenden, of whose name I hope to hear no further mention in my house. It is my determination, meanwhile, that Lady Norman shall embark with me next week for the continent; and reside with me there so long as may suit our mutual convenience and pleasure.

Fortunately for old Maule's forbearance, Sir Richard quitted the room after giving utterance to this terrific denunciation; and it was to Matilda alone that the father unfolded the tale of his terrors, and poured forth his vials of wrath.

'There is no longer peace or confidence under this roof, Matty,” said the old gentleman, in a piteous tone; “such glances never passed betwixt m-e and your poor, dear, dead and gone mother, as I saw cast at you just now by Sir Richard Norman. God send you safe through it all. If the marriage were to do again, Joseph Maule would cut off his right hand sooner than give you to that hard-hearted, arrogant man.”

'Then you would be guilty of an act of cruel kindness,” cried Matilda, distracted between the fury of her husband and the resentment of her father; “for of all men living, Norman is the only one I could regard with the affection and duty of a wife.”

“You are telling a monstrous untruth, either to me or yourself, child,” exclaimed old Maule, with indignation.

“Accustomed to deceive others, you have begun to deceive yourself. I remember the day when a falsehood would have expired upon your lips. But times are sadly altered now, Matty—times are sadly altered; and, as Tom Cruttenden says, there'll be a worse before there's a better. I'd fain have had you meet it here, among your own kith and kin. But 'twas not to be. You must take your own way. You've deserted your father's house, your father's faith; you must now desert your father's country. My blessing will go with you, Lady Norman, wherever you be. But mark my words at parting—you will live to repent in sackcloth and ashes the day you gave yourself up to the influence of one whose heart is as hard as a stone, and whose soul the property of his priest.”

Matilda trembled as she listened. There was an earnestness in her father's manner which she had never noticed before. She almost fancied that the old man's eyes were suffused with tears. In vain did she strive by the tenderest protestations to soothe his irritation and compose his spirits; the main cause of his anxiety was not to be removed—she would not undertake to dissuade Sir Richard from passing the winter abroad.

“In that case my errand here is at an end,” was the old gentleman's fretful reply. “I have fulfilled my duty as a father; a daughter's duty seems to concern you no longer. Farewell, Matty!—farewell, my unhappy child!—Let us hear of your welfare; your sisters will take care that you hear of ours in return.”

The old gentleman departed in his ire, and Matilda resigned herself to her sorrow. Brief as was his visit, it had served to aggravate the troubles of his daughter. Everybody seemed league against her. The Ravenscrofts embittered her departure by their tenderness; Sir Richard and her own family by their cruelty. She was glad when the day arrived for a change of scene, air, and reflections,
CHAPTER VII.

N'est on pas las d'ambitions vulgaires,
De sots pares de pompeux sobriquets,
D'abus, d'erreur, de rapines, de guerres,
De laquois-rois, de petiples de laquais?

Béranger.

Various are the sonnets that have been indited by the home-sick and muse-sick of these metrical times, in honor of the cliffs of Dover, and the emotions to which their aspect gives rise. It may be doubted, however, whether, of the favored few not overpowered in quitting their native land by sickness of a less poetical description, there exist many who experience any other feeling than satisfaction in quitting England for the Continent.

Lady Norman, at least, was one of the fortunate majority, whose cares seem to diminish with every mile of the onward journey. Sir Richard became less irritable from the moment of quitting home. The estrangement between him and Matilda was less apparent to themselves and others; and on perceiving that the delight expressed by his wife in the succession of novel objects presented to her view was genuine and unaffected, he resumed his ease in her presence. Naturally light-hearted, Matilda, in the midst of new scenes and strange faces, regained the exquisitive joyousness of her better days; and satisfied that she was not acting a part, he too ceased to be an actor.

They arrived in Paris, cheerful in each other's company, prepared to be amused and to amuse. A gay little hotel, "entre cour et jardin," was engaged for them in the Rue de Provence, where a separate suite of apartments being assigned to the Abbé O'Donnel, Lady Norman was to be relieved from the constraint of his presence. Paris abounded that winter in gay society, called from the wealthy of every aristocracy in Europe; and independent of Sir Richard's high connections among the Roman-catholic nobility, of whom numbers had hastened to the Continent, Matilda was furnished with a variety of letters of introduction, by the Countess of Farleigh, to French families of distinction with whom she had formed an intimacy during her visit to Paris after the Peace of Amiens.

Her ladyship's friendships, however, lay chiefly among the legitimate nobility of the ancien régime and the Normans, considered themselves fortunate that accident had secured them another avenue into circles wherein the setting sun of the glory of Napoleon still cast a refulgent reflection; and from which the English, as his fiercest enemies, were scrupulously excluded. A letter from Mrs. Ravenscroft to Admiral Guercnant, who, as prisoner of war to her gallant husband, had incurred obligations to the family, ensured a cordial welcome to Matilda. Under the auspices of the Admiral's excellent wife, she was as frankly initiated into the most secret sanctuaries of Bonapartism as under the hand and seal of Lady Farleigh into the clique of ultras and noble emigrants regilding the tarnished royalty of the château.

On all sides, the Normans, rich, young, handsome, and agreeable, were hailed as additions to society. The English were still novelties in Paris. They had not yet worn out the patience of their hosts by the ostentation of their pomp and vanities, their vast superciliousness, their narrowness of mind; and among the London beauties and celebrities contending that winter for distinction, not one obtained a more heartfelt tribute of admiration from the French, than the fair, gentle, unpretending Lady Norman.

Matilda had none of the hard, repellent, self-sufficiency of a woman of fashion—no strong prejudices, no personal conceit; and her readiness in adopting the hours, customs, and fashions of a society (the first of any magnitude in which she had moved) passed for a virtue with the Parisians. She was simplicity itself; simplicity, which, of all qualifications, is the most acceptable to persons highly artificial; and just as the plaudits of the world are known to develop the talents of a timid actor, the favor with which she was received tended to heighten the charms of her manners and conversation. Even Sir Richard was startled at the display of youthful loveliness to which habit had lately rendered him insensible, enhanced as it was by the elegance of a Parisian toilet, and animated by the rapturous admiration of Parisian society. The English beauties were amazed to find their pretentious charms eclipsed by those of a person so obscure. Already, she was exciting jealousy among those accustomed to excite the jealousy of others.
"What a lovely creature is that Lady Norman!"—observed Lady Arthur D. to Lady Dawlish—one of the most exclusive of English exclusives, just then established in all the pride of Tory favor at the Tuileries, in rivalry with the Grammonts, Polignacs, Duras, Blacas, and all the other as-sets returned from emigration to renew the odiousness of favoritism in the eyes of the nation.

"Lady Catherine Norman, you mean—my cousin Roscrea's daughter!"

"No—I mean simply Lady Norman."

"What Lady Norman?"

"The wife of a Worcestershire baronet. Did you not notice her last night, at Madame de Montmorency's ball? So much delicacy of complexion—so much freshness—so much taste!"

"Never heard of the woman in my life."—

"But you have seen her, my dear Lady Dawlish.—Your son was trying to persuade her to waltz last night——"

"Frank Villiers try to persuade anybody to do anything!—"

"—when the duchess came and carried him off in triumph."

"I remember seeing something fair in a white satin dress, that looked like an Englishwoman, to which Villiers was smiling and showing his teeth; but her face was new to me, and I asked no questions. New English faces do not suit me, unless of giris in their first season. One knows every one one ought to know—"

"Lady Norman, I assure you, is particularly worth knowing. *Elle fait fureur*!"

"Exactly—that is just the sort of thing one hates—an effort, a scene, an event. In my opinion, everything out of the common way is a supplice."

"There is nothing out of the way in Lady Norman. She would be a great acquisition to your clique."

"It is my rule to make no new acquaintance. Where can she have lived all her life, that one never heard of her?"

"In an old family seat in the country—a very different thing, you know, from moving in a bad set in town!—"

"They are people of family, then?—What relation to the man who married my relation, Lady Catherine?"

"Cousin, or something of that sort, I suppose; for they are all Roman Catholics together."

"Catholics?—Indeed!—Persons of some standing, perhaps, in their way. I had a vague sort of unfavorable impression about a Sir Richard and Lady Norman. I fancied there was something of *parencu* in the case. However, my dear Lady Arthur, since they are connected with Lady Catherine, and you are good enough to interest yourself about them, you may bring them to my Thursday evenings."

"They are not the sort of people to be *taken* anywhere. Sir Richard is armed cap-a-pie in the punctilious pride of a country baronet. The first time we all meet at the Château, I will present Lady Norman to you; you can send cards, et c'est une affaire faite."

"They are not worth half so much trouble," replied Lady Dawlish, listlessly; "but just as you please. One likes to have a few decent English faces at one's house, to show to the French by way of apology for the monstrous creatures calling themselves our country people, who beset their streets and galleries."

Little suspecting on what terms her acquaintance was accepted, Lady Norman submitted to be presented to the fashionable Countess by Lady Arthur D., to whom she had brought a *billet* of introduction from Lady Emily Farleigh, and, thus stamped current among the *élite* by being seen in conversation for some seconds with a woman who, like a drum, made a noise in the world proportionate to her holowness and emptiness, she was courted on all sides by her compatriots.

It was surprising, meanwhile, with what readiness Sir Richard—at home so reserved—lent himself to the tide of popularity and distinction now setting in upon them. Every night, save those devoted to the Italian opera, they joined some brilliant assembly. He encouraged her to gaiety and dissipation. He reminded her that, in Paris, she was deprived of the fireside comforts cheering the seclusion of Selwood Manor; and needed no reminding that, in Paris, he was safe from the mortifications arising from his political annihilation.

Between breakfast and dinner, the Normans seldom met. Sir Richard probably devoted his mornings to literary researches or the public monuments of the capital. But Matilda had many intimate associates to beguile the moments of his absence; among whom were his relations, Mrs.
Lockwood, a fashionable beauty on the wane, devoted to the mysteries of the toilet; and Madame la Comtesse de Montrond, a fashionable intrigante on the ascendant, devoted to the mysteries of the state. By the former she was constantly compelled to consultations with Leroy and Victorine, Herbaud, Labin, or Nattier; by the latter, pinned mercilessly down, to be cross-examined for the political on dit, which it was the honorable cue of Madame de Montrond to gather from the distinguished foreign circles in Paris, for the benefit or recreation of Louis le Gros.

While saluted by the fashion-mongers of the Faubourg St. Honoré as la perle des perles—la blonde des blondes—the darling of all hearts and eyes—Matilda's merits obtained higher favor amid the dignified sobriety of the Faubourg St. Germain, than those of her pseudo-patronesses, Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur D. Matilda could converse which the latter could not; Matilda could listen, which the former could not;—she was a more welcome companion than either in a society, in which la causette is the leading business of life.

But though dazzled for a time by the glancing of the fire-flies of fashion, and the out-spread peacock-tails of aristocratic grandeur, Matilda was often glad to escape from both, to the old-fashioned hotel in Place Royale, to which Admiral Guerchant had retired, on the downfall of the Emperor and the cessation of his ministerial functions, with his homely parents—the type of his original obscurity—his worthy, active, intelligent wife—the type of his energetic career—and his accomplished children—the type of the honors to which it had elevated his old age. Though suffering deeply from the ruin of their cause and prospects, the Guerchants maintained their habits of cheerfulness and modest hospitality. Matilda found collected round their fire-side, the political, military, and literary celebrities of those gorgeous times; the savants, whose efforts had been fostered by the liberality of Napoleon; the artists and heroes, whose achievements had been crowned by his hand; rays still emanating from the brightness of his glory. She rejoiced in meeting these people, in hearing them converse, in finding them render the tribute of honor and affection to the fallen man, whom it was the pithful policy of England to vilify and depreciate; and, whether as regarded its exemplary domestic union or its attraction as a rendezvous of the illustrious, the Hotel Guerchant was a spot from which Lady Norman never returned without interest and edification.

It was there only that she heard Frenchwomen converse without affectation, and saw them obtain from the opposite sex the respect due to rational beings. It was there only she beheld the sober interests of a progressing intelligence, exalted above the trivial distinctions of society. She was not, however, blind in her partiality. Vanity, ambition, and egotism, existed as much among the partisans of the imperial as of the royal crown of France; the same lust of place, the same hankering after an inch of ribbon, or an ell of emblazoned parchment. The worshippers of the God Fo were nearly as idolatrous as those of the God Fum.

But the ermined skirts of the new aristocracy were still radiant with the glories by which they had been ennobled. The laurel-crowns to which she rendered homage, encircled the very brows they had been woven to illustrate. The honor and glory were immediate and identical, not legendary—not traditional—not to be taken upon trust.—The waters were fresh from the sacred fountain—not drivelled through centuries of drought and stagnation. The swords were scarcely sheathed which had carved these records of fame—not rusted through ages of inglorious sloth. At the Tuileries, her respect was demanded for dukes and field marshals, because their ancestors had fought with Bayard, or legislated with Sully. At the house of Admiral Guerchant, her respect was willingly conceded to dukes and field-marshals, by whom kingdoms had been conquered or pacified, and England itself condemned to burn its midnight oil in privy councils and public debates.

The greatest charm, however, of the admiral's fire-side was its unpretending family affection. The sacred charities of domestic life had been fostered both by the precept and example of Napoleon; and immorality, driven discomfited from his court, had only lately found time to uplift her head from the mire, adorn it with paint and perfume, and amble her way back to the luxurious saloons of the great. Matilda delighted in the simple old peasant-mother of the admiral, reversing the laws of nature and venerating her excellent son; in the cordial wife, the graceful daughters. Nor was the unaffected admiration of the young Englishwoman commended to their regard by the widow of the gallant Ra-
venscroft without value in their estimation. Elsewhere, Lady Norman commanded homage; at the Hotel of the Place Royale, she obtained personal regard.

What a change in all these varied scenes and societies from the obscurity of Selwood Manor!—What a difference between this triumphant career, and the tea-drinkings of Selwood Vicarage, or an occasional formal dinner-party at Farleigh Castle!—Matilda had not courage to relate the history of her daily and nightly enjoyments to Sophy Ravenscroft, lest her letters should render her young friend discontented with her monotonous seclusion. She admitted only that she was supremely happy; without stating how much of her felicity was owing to the altered demeanor of Sir Richard, (who now seemed only anxious to alone for his past harshness by the obsequiousness of his attentions;) or how much to the absence of the Abbé O'Honnel, who had suddenly departed for Rome, on a mission to the Propaganda from the community in which he had recently re-inrolled himself.—She did not even attempt to excite the interest of Sophy by describing the wistful looks of compassion she had detected in the eyes of the old man, when he bade her adieu. Perhaps the Abbé fancied that he should see that young and lovely face no more;—or perhaps he experienced a remorseful pang of fatherly pity, in beholding a being so fair, so guileless, so inexperienced, surrounded for the first time by the snares of a flattering and deceitful world.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now hoist the sail and let the streamers float
Upon the wanton breezes. Strew the deck
With lavender, and sprinkle liquid sweets,
That no rude savor maritime invade
The nose of nice nobility! Breathe soft,
Ye clarionets, and softer still, ye flutes!
That winds and waters, lulled by magic sounds,
May bear us smoothly to the Gallic shore.

Cowper.

It was now the carnival. Paris was alive with one of those fever fits of excitement which render the Parisians such ready tools for a revolution, such ready fools for a masked ball. The courtiers of the Tuileries, laying aside for a time their vain glory—the partizans of the petit corps, forgetting for a moment their despondency, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of balls masques and carnival adventures. Every night had its ball or fête.—English dukes, foreign ambassadors, Russian princes, Turkish envoys, vying with each other in the splendor of their entertainments. Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur promenaded their ennui listlessly through the brilliant throng; Mrs. Lockwood lived in a perpetual course of cosmetics; while Madame de Montrond, who fancied that momentous reports for the king's cabinet were to be gathered in those temples of echo where English lords and magnificos of Muscovy lounged together over their sorbets, (discoursing of Merino sheep, prize-fighting, fox hunting, sledging, opera dancers, and rouge et noir,) carried her diamond tiara from ball-room to ball-room, glittering over the emptiest head that ever aspired to diplomatic renown, from the Neuskoï Prospect to Stable Yard.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard Norman, flattered by the triumphs of a wife to whom such triumphs were indifferent, took care that the splendors of Matilda's appearance at the court-fêtes, should not be eclipsed by those of the most gorgeous of her country women. But except when they repaired together to these scenes of diversion, the Normans saw little of each other.

His mornings were devoted to researches among the public archives and manuscripts of the royal library, for important documents which he wished to recover connected with the interests of his family and church; while hers were trifled away by the intrusions and encroachments of her fashionable friends.

Escaping one day (after a night spent au bal de l'opéra, en partie fine with fifty of the most talkative gossips of Paris) from her crowded saloon, Lady Norman directed her coachman to drive to the Place Royale. Her evening engagements had lately detained her from the Guerchants' pleasant circle; and she wished to prove to her kind friends that she was not forgetful as well as negligent. To her surprise, an air of unusual gaiety seemed to animate the dreary old Hotel. Remote from the fooleries of the carnival, neither maskerade nor beuf gras could be the origin of
its mirth;—yet the tone of both the Admiral and his lady seemed inspired by some unavowed good fortune. Matilda sympathised with their cheerfulness without troubling herself to divine the cause; and was gratified when the Admiral, on leading her back to her carriage, thanked her, with cordial courtesy, for having remembered her obscure friends among the engagements of so gay a season.

"A time may come," said he, as he pressed her hand at parting, "when my devoted services will prove how highly we esteem the friend of our English captain's widow for his sake, and how truly we love her for her own."

There was something unaccountable to Lady Norman—in this effusion of sentiment on the part of the rough old commander, the strong-minded old statesman; and she leaned back in a corner of her carriage, as it wound rapidly along the crowded boulevards, revolving the origin and intention of the Admiral's affectionate apostrophe.—When, lo! just at the junction of the Rue Cerutti, a sudden crash startled her from her reverie, and she found herself in close contact with a plain dark chariot, in which, the blinds being partially drawn down, she was enabled by her reclining position to discern the person of her husband.

How slight the incident—yet how mysterious!—Sir Richard—like most men of his age, an abhorrer of closed carriages—driving in a stuffy chariot along the Boulevards, at a moment when he had announced himself pledged to attend an interesting debate in the Chambre des Députés!—What could be the meaning of this?

"What business had he there at such a time?"

To catch a second glimpse and place her suspicions beyond a doubt, was out of the question. Much as she longed to ascertain whether the companion with whom he was engaged in eager discourse, were male or female, it was impossible. The chariot had the start of her by fifty yards, and, though her heart was bursting with impatience, she thought it beneath her dignity to issue orders to quicken their pace;—the servants having, perhaps, been as quicksighted as herself in detecting their master.

Resolved, however, to keep the mysterious chariot as long as possible in sight, and perceiving that it was proceeding towards the Place Louis XV., she desired the coachman to drive to the Champs Elysées; where, as she was in the frequent habit of alighting for a quiet walk, her presence would excite no surprise.

Poor Matilda's project was successful. So far as the Avenue de Neuilly, she kept the carriage in view; nothing doubting that it would pursue the road to the Bois de Boulogne, whither she could still follow without provoking comment or suspicion;—when, just as they reached the turning towards Chaillot, her carriage stopped suddenly, and the ever-smiling face of Lady Dawlish's Coxcombical son, Colonel Villiers, presented itself at the open window, from which she had been watching the equipage of the delinquent.

"Good morning, Lady Norman," said he. "Seen my mother to-day?—Hope you are not going to the Bois—eh?—Just come from riding there with the Lockwoods. An east wind cuts like a carving knife!"

"Miladi veut-elle bien descendre faire sa promenade?"—demanded the footman, opening the opposite door, on conceiving (as it was natural for a Parisian lackey to conceive) that Miladi, having met her handsome young countryman, had accomplished her rendezvous, and was ready for a walk.

"Going to walk, eh?"—said Villiers, giving his horse to his groom.—"A most unexpected pleasure?—Fortunate that you happened to meet me, eh?—Quite right to prefer the Champs Elysées to the Bois!—Bois detestable in windy weather, eh?—Bois always excruciating, either from mud or dust.—"

Provoked to be thus pestered with a popinjay, Lady Norman had no patience to reply. But Colonel Villiers, who was blest with the tongue of a ready talker, shuffled on by her side, without the slightest intermission of gossip. He could converse, as the ropewalkers work, backwards or forwards with equal facility.

"Charming ball at Madame de Goutaud's last night, eh?—Not charming?—No! Quite agree with you.—A horrid mixture, eh?—Parquet waxed to a fault. Slippery as the Mer de Glace!—Might as well have waltzed upon enamel, eh? First dance, quite a collar-bone run, eh?—Three purls in ten minutes! Only one?—True; I fancy there was but one. Should be an ordonnance against the English waltzing!—So used to their own cursed vulgar chalked
floors, that they can't make out a parquet, eh?—Not ten oak-floors in London, eh? Obliged to daub their half-planed deals with chalk to hide the nakedness of the land, and waltz like snails in a lethargy, to prevent stumbling over the boards, eh?—Wonder whether French dances will ever take at Almack's, eh?—Lady Hampden tried them to amuse the Regent, and they were coughed down. Do you costume yourself for this thing at the Due de Berri's, eh?—Not a bal masqué?—True, a carrousel de salon, I fancy, with pasteboard horses and daggers of lath?

As Colonel Villiers waited for no replies to his vocable notes of interrogation, it was easy for Matilda to give her thoughts to her cares, while she seemed to listen to his rapid chitchat; and every moment her wonder increased concerning the motives of Sir Richard's self-concealment. With a sudden impulse of jealousy, she passed in review the whole catalogue of her female acquaintance, without calling to mind a single one to whom her husband had devoted marked attentions. He was not, in fact, a lady's man. Whatever the course of his fiery youth, his middle age was manifestly too wayward for silken bondage. Sir Richard Norman was one of the many Englishmen uncivilised enough to prefer political argument to even the largest small-talk, and a glass of claret to the sweetest eau sucrée. He was addicted to field-sports, agriculture, argumentation, and a meerschaum—the man least qualified on earth to caper nimbly in a lady's chamber, and the least likely to devote a chilly January day to turtle-doveship among the leafless groves and windy alleys of the Bois de Boulogne.

"Horrid sight! Poor Madame de Rohan last night, in her spangled turban, eh?"—continued Villiers, not noticing her pre-occupation, and, hearing nothing but his own voice, he decided Lady Norman to be an agreeable conversational woman. "Poor soul thinks it right to remind the château of the length of time she was excruciated in emigration, by affecting to speak broken French, and adhere to the vulgarisms of Grosvenor-square, eh?—Delightful to hear the Faubourg shriek out when they see her attired in the style of Gyngell's figurantes—Ah! cette chère Madame de Rohan! Voquez un peu tout ce qu'elle a du souffrir en Angleterre!—ça fait pitié de la voir promener ses martyres!—"" At that moment, Matilda, who was pacing on unheeding,

absorbed in her own reflections, found her steps suddenly impeded by the struggles of a child, a fine little boy, with whom she had come in contact as he was sporting along the causeway.

"Poor little fellow!—I trust he is not hurt!—cried she, lifting him up before the bonne, who was at some distance, could approach them. "Tu ne l'es pas blessé, n'est ce pas, mon petit chéri?"—she continued, attempting to embrace the child.

"Put me down—Don't kiss me—Don't talk French to me—I am English!"—cried the sturdy little fellow. And Matilda, perceiving that his lip was cut by the fall, could not but admire his spirit and energy, and envy the mother of so promising a son.

"Noble boy, 'pon honor!" exclaimed Colonel Villiers, surveying him through his glass. "I present you with my cravache, my little man, as a reward for your heroism—eh?"

"I don't want your whip," retorted the child. "Mamma says I am not to accept presents from strangers."

"And what is your name?" inquired Matilda, perceiving that the nurse, who had now rejoined them, was a foreigner.

"My name is Norman."

"A namesake of your ladyship? A monopolizer of excellences!" said Villiers, with an ineffable smile; and as he stooped forward to bestow a condescending caress upon the boy, Lady Norman suddenly found her husband by her side!—Confused by such a startling succession of incidents, she colored deeply; nor was her distress diminished on noticing the indignant expression of his countenance.

"How are you, Norman?—demanded the graceful Colonel, unobservant of their embarrassment. "Just run down a little namesake of yours, whose beauty does honor to the family—eh?—"

"A namesake of mine?" inquired Sir Richard, regarding the noble child with a degree of admiration that for a moment overmastered his displeasure at finding Matilda tête-à-tête with the Colonel of many conquests.

"Will you kiss this gentleman?" demanded Lady Norman of the child, relieved from the suspicions she had momentarily entertained.

"Nu!—I don't like him—Let me go to my nurse. Hallo!" cried the child, interrupting himself, as he caught sight of
Lady Norman’s equipage, drawn up beside the path—
"Manette! Voilà ma voiture qui m’attend. Montons!—"

"It is not your carriage, sir!—Run on, and do not trouble the lady," replied the attendant, in her native language.

"I tell you it is mine, or my papa’s," persisted the boy.

"Whatever you see, Manette, marked with those two pictures upon it—a golden star, and a soldier’s hand with a battle-axe—belongs to us. Mamma told me so the other day. This is our carriage, and I choose to get into it; I am tired."

"And who is mamma—eh?" inquired Colonel Villiers.

"What is that to you?" demanded the arrogant little peacock, so early trained in the vainglorious paths of heraldry.

"Madame s’éonme milédi Cathérine de Norenmann," interrupted the bonne, scandalized at the ill-manners of her charge, whom she now bore away undetained, for both Sir Richard and Matilda had received a shock not readily to be overcome.

"It is too cold to walk!" said he, turning towards the carriage; and having hastily handed in his wife, he followed, kissing his hand in abrupt adieu to the gallant Colonel, who had no alternative but to remount his horse, and ride off.

For some minutes, silence prevailed between the parties; but as they retraversed the Boulevards to return home, Matilda could not refrain from remarking—"I fancied I met you here, an hour ago, in a chariot with the bloods drawn?-------"

"He met with an accident through my heedlessness, and was too brave to complain. I never saw a finer little fellow!"

"Damn him!"—muttered Sir Richard, with a degree of bitterness such as he had not betrayed since his departure from Selwood Manor. "No doubt that cursed prying woman of a nurse will go home and tell the Normans that we have been cross-questioning the child. A fine triumph for them!—A pretty history they will make of it!—and that puppy Villiers, too, standing by, pretending not to know the child—his own cousin, and dining constantly, as he does, with the parents!——"

"Rely upon it, Colonel Villiers knows and cares nothing about Mr. Norman’s prospect of succeeding to your estate," said Matilda by way of consolation. "I dare say he thinks we have a nursery full of children of our own; or, more probably still, thinks nothing about the matter.—"

"I am not ass enough to imagine, as you would insinuate, that the whole world is interested in my family affairs!—cried the irritated Sir Richard. "But that Giles Norman does make the heirship presumptive of his son to my estate a subject of perpetual vaunt, I have good reason to know. Giles Norman is a vulgar-minded fellow, inflated with notions of his family consequence; and I entertain no doubt that Villiers is at this moment enjoying a laugh with him over our mortification!"

"The ineffable Colonel Villiers would be shocked at the idea of enjoying so barbarous a thing as a laugh," said Lady Norman, unwilling to see her husband’s vexation in a serious light. "I dare say he has returned to escort Mrs. Lockwood through that wilderness of monkeys, the Bois de Boulogne, without troubling himself further about us."

But her husband would neither smile nor be appeased. All that evening, he resembled the Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor; far more than the Sir Richard Norman of the Pavilion Marsan, or the Salle des Maréchaux.

But his self-love had deeper mortifications in store. Sir Richard, on his arrival in Paris, had been elated—more elated, perhaps, than became his honorable descent—by the distinctions vouchsafed him by the royal family, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries of Paris. And lo! the very next time he had the honor of an invitation from the Cardinal Archbishop, he found, on entering the dreary apartments of the palace, that Mr. Norman was also among the guests; nay, that as a kinsman he had been invited to do especial honor to the new comer!

To enter into the pitiful detail of his family differences to his eminence was impossible. A Judas-like bow of courtesy was accordingly exchanged between the cousins; and the august prelate took occasion, in the course of the evening, to express to Sir Richard his satisfaction in having made the acquaintance of so distinguished a member of the Norman family, and the Catholic church, as his cousin Giles.
Next night, Matilda and her husband were included in one of those select parties at the Château which, as they comprehended twenty foreigners to a single Frenchman, were already beginning to make the restored family unpopular with their own party; the King being perpetually surrounded with English, Russ, or Prussian uniforms—the Duchesse d'Angoulême with London exclusives, or the ex-devinities of Alexander the Little. Distinguished on all occasions by the notice of Madame, Matilda, after the usual compliments of reception, found herself wistfully congratulated by the Dauphinless Duchess, upon the extreme beauty of her children; who had attracted the notice of His Majesty some weeks before, while playing in the park of St. Cloud. Painful as it was to explain in presence of the silent circle, and still more in presence of Sir Richard, the real state of the case, Matilda faltered with a blush that "she was not so fortunate as to be a mother; and that the children to whom her Royal Highness alluded were those of a distant relative."

"Ah! you have relatives, then, in Paris?"—said the duchess, grieved to have inflicted pain on such a subject. "You must do me the favor to make them known to me, the earliest opportunity."

Fortunately, Madame de Montrond was at hand to explain, with the eternal smile and universal knowledge of a lady in waiting, that milédi Catherine Normann had already been presented "aux bontés de la famille royale par Madame la Comtesse Dollish." Nothing remained for the duchess to suggest, but that she trusted the next time milédi Normann visited the Château, she would be accompanied by her "aimable parente, milédi Cathérine."

The Heir of Selwood.

CHAPTER IX.

Son superbe dégout,
Ses fiers dédaïns, fuïaient et blamaient tout;—
On l'appelait la belle impertinente.
Or, admirez la faiblesse des gens !
Plus elle était distraite, exigeante,
Plus ils tâchaient par des soins complaisans
D'apprivoiser son humeur mèprisante.

Voltaire.

The natural timidity of character arising from her inexperience of the world being hourly increased by the morbid sensitiveness of her husband, Matilda fancied that Lady Catherine Norman would be as much annoyed as herself by the awkward position in which they were placed by these misunderstandings.

But it would have required some wholly unprecedented event to disturb the self-possession of the confident, dashing Lady Catherine Norman. Everything Lady Catherine said or did, was hard, or hardened. She rode hard, she looked hardened; her handsome person and aquiline nose seeming to afford her a privilege of hardihood and dictation beyond the charter of her sex. Instead of being embarrassed, she was amused at being thus brought into contact with the Normans of Selwood Manor. Her husband's heirship to their title and estate had been one of his chief recommendations to her favor; and having been informed by him that the baronet had originally quarrelled with her father-in-law for not choosing to sanction his marriage with a young woman of inferior condition, she prepared herself to look down and talk down the presumptuous parvenue, whenever they should be thrown together.

Lady Catherine's parents, the Earl and Countess of Roscrea, were Tory grandees of the first class—bigots in religion, politics, and the ethics of social life. Accustomed to hear the law laid down from the petty throne of her mother's drawing-room, till she fancied herself entitled to lay it down in her turn, Lady Catherine had assumed the right to pronounce upon administrations and hierarchies, and as audaciously as if any syllable she uttered were deserving the attention of a reasonable being.

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Nevertheless, her august proportions and personal presumption, backed by connections equally presumptuous and lofty, imposed upon the multitude. The well-bred bowed assent to her verbose harangues—the patient bore with her absolutism—the timid shrunk from her impertinence—till by degrees she came to fancy herself oracular!—To repay her own concession in allying herself with an anathematised Papist, she had exacted the retirement of Giles Norman from commercial pursuits; and their prospects in life thus destroyed, they had been living ever since their marriage on the allowance made him by his father and the interest of her ladyship's ladyship-like fortune—an income that exactly sufficed to defray their dress, equipage, and opera-box, leaving the necessaries of life to chance and post obits. Nevertheless, as the Normans made an excellent appearance in the world, and the world was delighted to enter them on its lists of friends, they formed a brilliant variety in the insect tribes volant in London, and became exclusive among the exclusives.

Inexplicable is the force of certain filmy bonds which society has been pleased to enweave, as if expressly for its enthralment! The silly bird is not more easily charmed in an imaginary circle, than the English beau monde by any glibberish incantation which impostors of a certain standing are bold enough to pronounce. Lady Catherine Norman belonged in London to what was termed "Lady Dawlish's set," and there was nothing indecorous, vulgar, or unfeeling, which "Lady Dawlish's set" had not privileged itself to do with impunity. They had decreed themselves infallible, and society submitted to the decree. It was useless for people of higher rank, fortune, sense, accomplishments, or beauty, to say, "I am not one of them, but I am something more!" The knowing ones had surrounded their lists with impregnable barriers, against which the excluded were constantly pressed forward, and by which they were constantly driven back; and before the close of the season, the insurgents invariably owned themselves defeated. Lady Dawlish sat omnipotent on her throne; while Lady Catherine, stationed as Lady Chamberlain at her side, looked down, wand in hand, upon the fruitless struggles of the disaffected courtiers!—

The triflers thus self-erected into a tribunal, naturally imagined that the power so absolute in that favored spot of earth whose dust is weighed by golden pennyweights, and whose area measured by a twelve-inch ivory rule, must maintain universal authority; and Lady Catherine arrived in Paris believing that her sneers were to tarnish the renown of statesmen, and her averted glances to drive some unoffending woman from society, as in supercilious, superficial, hyper-fashionable London!—But at the first wave of her wand, she discovered that its virtue was departed.

On giving utterance to one of her incoherent political rhapsodies, oracular in Grosvenor Square, she was entreated by the intelligent French auditors to whom it purported to dictate, to condescend to explain the meaning of her words;—and when she asserted to a lofty coterie in the Faubourg Germain, that Lady Norman was "a person not in society—a person whom nobody knew," she was answered with naïf simplicity that "the Lady Norman she stated to be her distant connection, might not be in society; but that their Lady Norman—was the most charming of women, received at the château, and honored with the favor of Madame."

To throw a chill over this misplaced enthusiasm, Lady Catherine tried the effect of one of her icy sneers; surveying the offenders over her lofty nose, as though its shade were to regulate the world, like the gnomon of a sun dial. But it would not do. The élegantes, instead of being transfixed to stone, whispered among themselves that the air of the tall miladi was emprunté; and, deciding her to be very gauche and a little deaf, they turned round to welcome Matilda, who came among them gentle and unpretending, talking in a strain they could understand, and as easy to conciliate as she was conciliating.

This failure was wormwood to Lady Catherine. Her sting was extracted—her arrows rendered pointless. She commanded no sympathy, unless from her husband; who had fancied that, in allying himself with a ladyship, he should astonish the world as much as he had astonished himself. He was indignant to find that he could no longer maintain his importance in society by leaning against the wall with a fastidious countenance, holding his tongue, hat, and cane—too well-dressed to walk, too well-informed to talk, on any ordinary occasion. The empty airs by which the slavish world of London had been astounded, passed altogether unnoticed in Paris; and he was required to show cause why he was to be attended to.
“It may do so still. We have, I trust, Matilda, years of happiness in store. I feel that we have hit upon the only expedient likely to confirm their perfect enjoyment.”

On parting for the night, her husband embraced her with a warmth of tenderness such as, for many months, had ceased to soften his demeanor towards her; and on the morrow, met her again at breakfast, in the highest spirits. A new life seemed dawning to his expectations. Joy sparkled in his eyes, and flurried his manner. Never had Matilda beheld him so elated.—He proposed a ride; he proposed a walk.—They dined tête-à-tête and all that evening he remained a fixture, and a most welcome one, in Lady Norman’s opera box, full of chat, gallantry, and animation. He seemed desirous to thank her every moment for her concession to his wishes. A parure of rubies, which a few days before she had admired at Fossin’s, in presence of Mrs. Lockwood, was lying on her toilet-table at her return from the opera; nor would he accept her thanks for the costly gift. “You are indebted to Mrs. Lockwood,” said he, “who reproached me last night at the Tuileries for having neglected le jour des étrennes, so carefully noted by the wives of Paris. You owe me nothing but a kiss of peace.”

For many succeeding days, Matilda was supremely happy. How different the effect produced upon her feelings by the vague adulation of the coteries of Paris—the homage of what she had justly termed “the wilderness of monkeys”—compared with the heart-soothing kindness of her husband. Instead of passing three-fourths of the day away from her, Sir Richard was now scarcely ever absent from home; and when he chose, who could be such an agreeable companion as Sir Richard Norman?—Even when she drove out he managed to accompany her by proposing an expedition to the bric à brac warehouses of the Quai Voltaire, where at that time the most valuable antiquities, the spoil of military booty in all the countries of Europe, were heaped together almost without consideration. He chose to have her opinion in the choice of a fine bronze candelabra, which he was selecting for the hall at Selwood; and insisted upon presenting her with an exquisite panelling of Florentine mosaic for her favorite boudoir. He seemed chiefly intent upon the adornment and restoration of the Manor House.
"Monsieur votre mari seems to consider that the prospects of the great question are brightening in England!" observed Madame de Montrond, after having made her way for a morning visit through the encumbered vestibule of Matilda's hotel.—"This will be charming news for the King!"

"It is long since I heard Sir Richard allude to the subject," said Lady Norman. "Since the Abbé's departure, he has interested himself little in politics."

"But do you imagine that, unless the Emancipation question were safe, he would indulge in all this expense for the enrichment of his estates?"

"Indeed, I think he would."

"I grieve to hear it!" cried Madame de Montrond, "for in that case his hasty purchases must arise from a suspicion that the state of affairs here is not permanent—that the English have not long to remain in Paris. This will be sad news for the king. His Majesty relies implicitly on the political intelligence of foreigners of a certain rank."

"Not, I trust, including Sir Richard?" said Matilda, to whom the paltry jargon of an intrigante was almost unintelligible. "My husband is wholly indifferent to politics, foreign or domestic."

"Ne vous y fiez pas!"—cried Madame de Montrond, arranging the paintings of her dress. "No man in his right senses can be indifferent to politics. Politics involve our whole existence—that influence the very air we breathe—our eating, drinking, sleeping, loving, hating—the universal tenor of our lives!"

"Sir Richard's life, believe me, runs smoothly on, without a thought about the matter," persisted Matilda, with a smile. "He leaves the affairs of Europe to the providence of the Congress."

"My dear Madam, I happen to know beyond dispute that he is intimately connected with personages of importance attached to the cause of the usurper," whispered Madame de M.

"With Admiral Guerchant, I admit. But our intimacy has not the slightest political tendency."

"We do not trouble ourselves about the Admiral. The Admiral is a very honest man; but a ganache—a nullité—of whom we entertain no apprehension," cried the lady of the bed-chamber.

"So much the better, for he is the only Bonapartist with whom we are acquainted," replied her companion, firmly. "Your ladyship must excuse me. I allude simply to Sir Richard Norman."

"We frequent the same society."

"No woman moves in precisely the same society as her husband. There must always be liaisons in which she cannot participate."

"In Sir Richard's case, these lie entirely among his own countrymen. I often meet him riding with strangers; but they are Englishmen."

"Englishmen!" retorted Madame de Montrond. And the silence with which that emphatic concluding syllable was received by Matilda, convinced her that the seeming artlessness of Lady Norman was only a piece of acting more consummate than her own.

Nevertheless, when the cabinet-council of the Bourbon court departed, leaving her to her meditations, Matilda could not but recall to mind the significant tone in which she had pronounced the word liaisons!—The peculiar smile of Madame de Montrond convinced her that Sir Richard had connections of a nature not to be revealed to his wife; while her own experience assured her that they included a chocolate-colored chariot, and a figure enwrapt in a cloak of richest sables. Her previous uneasiness on the subject returned. Her heart sank within her when she reflected how unstable is the happiness based upon the sandy foundations of man's fidelity!—

The recent change in Sir Richard's deportment towards herself, induced her to hope that either her fears outstripped the truth, or that the indiscretions he might have been entangled in were giving way before the sacred influence of legitimate love. She determined not to discourage by petulance the returning steps of the wanderer. It would be her own fault were she to disturb by jealous resentments, the happy footing to which they were almost restored.

Since the night on which the project of adoption had been discussed between them, Sir Richard had reverted to it no more. But the solemn manner in which on that occasion he exhorted her to secrecy, even with her nearest friends, convinced her that he was not likely to abandon a scheme which he regarded so seriously. Alive to the delicacy of the subject as regarded herself, he was perhaps un-
willing to pain her by allusions to it till his plans were matured. Accustomed to make his will her law, she determined to wait in silence till it was his pleasure to take her into his confidence.

Meanwhile, her domestic tranquillity remained unimpaired, even by the insinuations of Madame de Montrond. Sir Richard was her constant companion; and it was evidently his desire to withdraw Matilda as much as possible from the brilliant vortex in which she was engaged. He was always suggesting excuses to detain her at home; nay, she sometimes fancied him annoyed at the homage with which she was beset by the fantastical Colonel Villiers.

The national habits of Paris were at that period disorganised by the strange innovations introduced by the wealthy and insolent of all nations; who, following in the van of the conquering army, had taken up their abode in its princely hotels, scattering their barbaric gold on all sides, and introducing customs which were those neither of their own country nor the country submitted to their usurpation.

One of the whims of the fashionable English was to make dinner-parties au cabaret. Having noticed that the more eminent restaurants abounded no less in well-dressed ladies than well-dressed dishes, they chose to assume that the salons of the Frères Provengaux, the Rocher, Véry, and Bouvilliers, were the resort of the best society; and thus created a custom which they fancied to be that of the country.

"Lady Dawlish wants us to dine with her to-morrow, at the Rocher de Cancale," said Matilda one morning to her husband. "Colonel Villiers will call in an hour for our answer."

"I detest those vulgar cabaret dinners," cried Norman. "One has to play audience all the time to Villiers's and Amboise's criticisms on the new entrées—their wit being a stale réchauffée from the Almanach des Gourmands. Pray make some excuse."

"I find that, in compliment to us, Lady Dawlish declined including Lady Catherine and Mr. Norman in her party."

"What then?—Villiers prefers your company to that of the impertinent Patagonian. Lady Dawlish, however, had better stick to the Normans. They belong to her own school of egotism and self-conceit. For the love of mercy, dear Matilda, let me not see you enrolled among the exclusives."

"Do not alarm yourself. Their art is not so easily acquired. Lady Dawlish's listlessness, which appears so natural, is a chef d'œuvre. When other women affect that sort of well-bred inanity, they do it in a fussy, vulgar manner, that betrays itself to be art. Nothing is more difficult than to pass the day in doing and saying nothing, which from the manner in which they are said and done, appear to be somethings."

"Waste not your genius in the attempt; and at all events oblige me, my dearest Matilda, by giving up the Rocher dinner party."

The next sacrifice requested of her was to relinquish Lady Dawlish's Thursday soirées; where, though nothing was provided for the amusement of the guests, the surface of the society was so smooth and brilliant that people quitted the house fancying they had been amused. After renouncing the pleasant réunions of Lady Dawlish, it was easy to resign the whispering parties of Madame de Montrond. Than these political sub-parliaments, nothing could be more "forcibly feeble," more emphatically dull;—but it was considered de bonne compagnie to go and whisper away an evening, once a week, in the countess's apartments at the château; where the beau monde glided in mysteriously, and mouthed its nothings by whispering in couples on the divans round the room, as if intercommunicating the most important and confidential intelligence.

Even the livelier Thés dansants of Lady Arthur were soon tacitly interdicted; for Matilda, who had emerged into the brilliancys of the world solely in accordance with the caprice of her husband, was easily persuaded to retire anew to the domestic seclusion in which he appeared to discover new sources of enjoyment and affection.

By degrees, Sir Richard's purpose was accomplished. She withdrew from general society; she weary'd out the assiduous solicitations of Colonel Villiers, and even avoided all public amusements, unless when enabled to enjoy, at the theatre, tête-à-tête with her husband, the piquant sallies of Mars or the elaborate classicality of Talma. At the opera, at Feydeau, at the Théâtre Français, the Normans sometimes appeared together. But they were no longer seen apart.
Be well advis'd—toll o'er thy tale again!
It cannot be—thou dost but say 'tis so.
I trust I may not trust thee; for thy breath
Is but the vain breath of a mortal man.
Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me.
Then speak again!

Shakespeare.

Candid as was the disposition of Matilda, her intercourse with her family had long been tinged with reserve, by desire to withhold from the resentment of her father and the exulting comments of Tom Cruttenden, the secret of her domestic disquietudes. Her letters, both to her sister and the Ravenscrofts, glanced as lightly as possible over her recent brilliant introduction to society, which could not be detailed without involving the admission of her personal triumphs.

"Ay, ay, poor soul!"—cried Cruttenden when Elizabeth read aloud to the fireside circle the joyous letters in which her sister now described her cheerful home, or quiet excursions with Sir Richard. "I knew that account we read in the 'Herald' of her opening the Duke of Berri's ball, would turn out mere newspaper fudge.—Sir Bluebeard mews her up in Paris, you see, just as he did at his old rat-hole of a country seat!——"

"What motive could the London papers have for inventing their statement that Lady Norman has been one of the most brilliant ornaments of the court of the Tuileries throughout the winter?"—remonstrated Elizabeth.

"Motive, indeed!—As if the penny-a-liners wanted a motive for their fabrications!—As if your sister would seem so proud of spending her evenings at the playhouses along with her curmudgeon of a husband, if she'd the privilege of flouting away in tiiffany and beads at their make-believe French court?—However, there's one comfort!—the English ninny won't be able to flaunt there long.—The French can't abide King Log now they've got him; and take my word for it, they'll soon have their peppery little artillery captain back among 'em again;—and then, my ser-

vice to British tourists!—The devil or Nap will take the hindmost."

"Matilda's letters do not allude to any such apprehension."

"Matilda's letters allude to just such flimsy, cobweb, polite-conversation nonsense, as young ladies love to write about. But the price of stocks alludes to it, Miss Betsy; and I take the price of stocks to speak more to the purpose than half the clap-trap speechifiers in parliament. And you may tell Matty from me, in your next epistle, that if she don't look sharp and persuade Sir Richard to make the best of his way home afore the rain falls in earnest, they'll be wet to the skin afore they can get up their umbrella. Tell her I've private information that Nap will be out of quod afore his year's up!——"

Elizabeth Maule was too prudent to give more than a hint to her sister of this admonition. But it sufficed to startle Matilda; and she was not backward in confiding her alarms to her husband.

"Mr. Cruttenden must be an admirable judge of the state of French politics!"—replied he, with an incredulous smile. "For my part, I have no anxiety. I was at Guerchant's yesterday. The circle was crowded with the most ardent partisans of Napoleon, but not a word of politics! Literature, science, and the drama, exclusively occupied their attention.—Could they have been talking so enthusiastically of arts and academies, had their party been on the eve of a great movement?"

Without pretending to the tact of a Madam de Montrond, Matilda thought otherwise; but she did not presume to oppose her opinion to that of her husband.

"At all events," resumed Sir Richard, "since a doubt has been raised on the subject, it will be better to give up our journey to Italy."

"To Italy?"—exclaimed Matilda, who entertained as much idea of such an expedition as of a journey to Tobolsk.

"Did you intend to go to Italy this spring?——"

"What better can we do with ourselves? We are both heartily tired of Paris; and, on quitting Selwood, I made arrangements for a year's absence."

Matilda was silent. She waited to be told of what else she was tired, and where else she intended to go.

"Nothing can be more insupportable than Paris during
Lent, said he, "particularly to a moderate Catholic like myself, who am tied down against my conviction to certain observances. Our best plan would be to engage one of the fine seats near Paris, which are to be let at this season. We should pass a pleasant summer, and be on the spot to observe every variation of the political atmosphere—temporary seclusion being, of course, indispensable to our project."

"Our project?" reiterated Matilda.

"Our project of an adoption," replied Sir Richard, in a lower voice.

"You think, perhaps" said Matilda, "that the little creature would familiarise itself with us more readily, if excluded from the sight of other people?—"

"Infants familiarise themselves readily enough with any one," said Norman, carelessly.

"I have been considering," said Lady Norman, "that perhaps we should be prudent in selecting a child of more advanced age; the health and intellect of an infant are so little to be relied on!—Whereas, at an age more developed, one forms some surmise of future character."

Sir Richard turned upon her with an inquiring look; but the sweet serenity of Matilda's face reassured him that she intended no sarcasm. "Of course," she pursued, unabashed, "our chief hope of comfort in the child must depend on its disposition."

"Our sole hope depends upon its inheritance of my property," answered Norman, firmly.

"Your property?" interrupted the astonished Matilda.

"An object to be secured only by the selection of a young infant, and your temporary seclusion from society," continued he. "The world, and those cursed Normans, will otherwise never believe the child to be our own."

"But you surely do not intend them to believe it?"—dемanded Matilda, turning very pale.

"For what other purpose do you suppose me desirous of adopting a child, which may live to be the plague of our lives? I want to become the comptroller of my own fortunes, my dear Matilda. I want to feel myself master of my own house—the house of my forefathers. Providence has denied us children. Let me, at least, secure myself an heir!—"

"I fear I did not exactly understand your views, when I pledged myself the other night to——"
humiliated by the mockery of her own position as a childless wife; for the mere sound of that groundless announce-
men stirred her soul with emotion. He had announced,
that she was likely to be a mother!—It now occurred to
her that, within the last week, several of their intimate asso-
ciates had regarded her with an air of deeper interest, and
been more careful and attentive to her movements. But
she also recollected the affectionate deference with which
she had been treated by her husband; and instead of hailing
it as a testimony of rekindling love,'was compelled to ad-
mit that his attentions to her in public were a scene of dis-
semi ling, intended to mislead the opinion of the world.
He was deceiving others, as well as inducing her to deceive
them.—But, alas! it was already too late to throw off the
mask. She had not courage to defy the world's dread
laugh, by admitting that they had plotted an imposture, and
lacked energy to carry it into execution.

While thus ruminating on the painful perplexities of her
position, the tears rolled silently down her cheeks; and com-
passionating her distress, Sir Richard, with more sympathy
than she had expected from him, affectionately took her
hand.

"Do not afflict yourself thus, my dear Matilda!" said
he. "Since you feel irrevocably averse to the thing,
my wishes shall be sacrificed without a murmur. I fancied
we understood each other. I fancied we were acting
in concert; but since it is not so, do not hesitate to
withdraw your concurrence. I own that your concessi-
ion would have imparted to our middle age that seal of
domestic felicity, of which offspring are said to be the sole
security. By taking the part of a mother towards my adopted
heir, I should have fancied you so in earnest, and cherished
a proportionate fervor of love and gratitude. But let not
this inducement mislead you from what you consider to be
your duty. The spotlessness of your conscience, my dearest
wife, has a claim superior to the wishes and prayers of your
husband; and whatever may be your decision, I will neither
reproach you for the false hopes you permitted me to form,
nor love you the less for this second and most bitter disap-
pointment."

The unusual tenderness of his tone and manner drew
fresh tears down the cheeks of Matilda. She wanted the
moral courage to fulfil what she knew to be her duty. She
wanted firmness of mind to control the gentle impulses of
her affectionate heart. The delight of imparting happiness
to her husband proved irresistible!

"I have no right to oppose obstacles to your plans," she
falter ed,—"Your judgment ought to decide me, your
will to be my law. Whatever course you choose to take
in this matter, shall have my utmost support."

"My dearest Matilda!" exclaimed Norman, pressing her
hand with rapture, "this compliance renders me the hap-
piest of men. If you could imagine how those detestable
Normans have latterly embittered my existence—if you
could guess what gloomy thoughts have been passing
through my mind!—But all my vexations are ended by
your amiable self-sacrifice. I am convinced that the true
happiness of our life is now beginning. We shall see every
thing in a different light the moment we invest our pros-
pects in the destinies of a little being who will grow up
under our eyes, fashioned by our opinions, and attached by
our tenderness."

"Though cheered by the ciation of her husband, Ma-
tilda did not inwardly share his enthusiasm. She could
imagine these ecstacies arising for a child of their own,
but not for an alien.

"My plan is," resumed Sir Richard (resolved not to let
the courage of Matilda cool a second time,) "to select an
infant at the hospital of the Enfans trouves, and make it
mine by legal adoption. Five or six sometimes a dozen
wretched babes are daily received there; so that at any
moment the choice will be easy. You have however
been so much seen and admired here, my dearest wife, that
several months ought to elapse before your pretended ac-
couchement takes place. This period we must pass in
retirement, no matter where. In May, we can return to Paris,
and accomplish our scheme."

"But all this cannot be done without taking others into
our confidence," said Matilda; her heart sinking at the pros-
pect of the load of hypocrisy she was about to assume.

"Certainly not. But such things are by no means un-
common. Money will secure me the co-operation o
nurse and physician, who need know nothing o
name and rank in life."

"With the exception of your personal attendant, it will
be easy to deceive them. Mrs. Vaux you must continue
to dismiss, and send home."
"That will be very difficult.—Vaux is such a faithful attached creature! She has been with me ever since my marriage," pleaded Lady Norman.

"An excellent plea to propose her retirement on a pension. She has some marriage engagement, if I remember?"

"To your head keeper at Selwood."

"Tell her then that, as we are about to travel, you will require the services of a foreigner. I will pay her expenses home, and secure her an annuity of twenty pounds a-year."

"Poor Vaux!" sighed Lady Norman.

"My dear Matilda, she would not under any circumstances have remained with you long; and depend on it, the poor woman will be enchanted with her change of prospects."

But even the certainty of becoming Mrs. Ghimes ten years sooner than she had expected to be rescued from the odium of spinsterhood, did not reconcile poor Vaux to so sudden a parting from the kind mistress to whom she was attached. Lady Norman's sweetness of character was eminently displayed in considerations for her servants and dependants; and though the waiting-maid was too well acquainted with the arbitrary temper of Sir Richard to hazard opposition to a decree emanating from her master, she departed with secret indignation rankling in her heart, that she should have been superseded by a "vile, artful, designing, intriguing, Italian," in whose service to my lady, Mrs. Vaux predicted to all at Selwood, that no good was intended.

Matilda's task of deceit was now beginning in earnest. Sir Richard required her to make to her family and friends the announcement which he undertook to circulate among her Parisian acquaintances; and though Matilda found it easy to loiter at home in an invalid cap and loose morning-wrapper, with Norman for her constant companion, and an endless supply of new books, music, and works for her recreation, she recoiled from the office of deliberately insinuating a falsehood to the Ravenscrofts and her father.

Nevertheless, it must be done. Sir Richard assured her that the step was indispensable; and at the close of one of her lively letters to Sophy, she accordingly added, "I look forward with delight to my return next autumn to dear Selwood; and do not be surprised if I bring you a little stranger, to claim a share of the fondness which you have often told me you feel for the infant species, before they grow old enough to be troublesome."

By this equivocation, Matilda hoped to satisfy her conscience; yet when the implied untruth was written, she closed her letter with a burning blush, without hazarding a re-proof: "look on't again she dare not!—"

Towards her father, the task of dissimulation was still more difficult. By Mr. Maule's desire, she corresponded with him from time to time; but her sister Elizabeth was the person charged with answering Lady Norman's letters. Now Elizabeth was almost as straightforward and downright as her father. With the delicacy and warmth of feeling becoming her age and sex, she united a degree of high moral principle, which her seclusion from the ways of the world had maintained without spot or blemish. To her honest-hearted, plain-worded family, therefore, Matilda felt that even the whitest of lies was far more difficult to insinuate, than it would have been to bestow the blackest upon a Lady Dawlish or a Lady Arthur D—

The hint which was to convey the intelligence of her prospects of a family was, however, at length written and despatched; and Matilda's spirit sank rebuked when the answer arrived, not in the handwriting of Miss Maule, but of her exulting father. The old man's elation knew no bounds.

The prospect of being grandfather to a young baronet of large estate, was a vision of glory he had long relinquished; and his delight appeared to his daughter almost puerile.

She no longer thought it childish, however, when she reached the close of the epistle, and perused the solemn prayer and benediction bestowed upon herself and her expected child. He told her that he and his would intercede with Heaven in her behalf in her hour of peril; and Matilda's lips grew white with terror at the idea of the imposition she was presuming to practise in the sight of Heaven, upon the father who so honored its commandments, and whom its commandments enjoined her to honor.

She was recalled to herself by a postscript in Tom Crotenden's handwriting. After divergent jocular comments on her laziness in wasting twelve years on a performance which reasonable women complete within one, he informed her that if she chose to return to England, and have the little stranger born as became the son of English parents, on English ground, he would endow it, if a boy, with a
godfather's token of ten thousand pounds. But alas! though Matilda knew that it would be a boy, she felt pleased that the necessity for perpetrating her fraud in France, would secure her from imposing upon the generosity of the eccentric friend of her childhood.

CHAPTER XI.

It is one thing to know the rate and dignity of things; and another to know the little nicks and springs of action.—Seneca.

Towards the close of February, the Normans took possession of the fine old Château of St. Sylvain, a short distance from the archiepiscopal palace of Conflans, on the banks of the Seine, and within ready reach of Paris.

"Frank Villiers and his set will ride down to see us here," said Sir Richard, "and Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur visit you, and report you on their return to be on the sick list. A lounging-chair and wrapping-dress will suffice."

"Would that it were all over," replied Matilda with a sigh. "The caresses of a dear little creature brought up to love me as its mother, may reconcile me to this duplicity; but the preliminaries are indeed odious."

Apprehensive that her patience might fail in the tediousness of the trial, Sir Richard now rarely quitted her side. Every day brought down from Paris some costly trinket or interesting work for her amusement; while the bitter envy of Lady Catherine was excited by the exhibition at Minette's of a splendid layette, and at Lesage's of a barcelonnette of the richest materials, for the use of the expected heir of Selwood Manor.

One morning, about a week after their instalment, Sir Richard, having ridden into Paris to execute some trifling commission for his wife, a calèche containing Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish drove into the courtyard; and Lady Norman's hospitalities were claimed for the day.

"We know you must be ennuyée à périr here," cried Lady Arthur, "and intend to spend the morning and dine with you." And though a bright March sun was glittering upon gay parterres, bright with hyacinths, tulips, and anemones, the two fine ladies would not be enticed out, but drew towards the fire to enjoy a long day's chat with the pretended invalid.

"How on earth do you get rid of yourself in this impossible place?"—cried the affected Lady Arthur, looking round with an air of compassion.

"On laisse passer le temps!" replied Matilda, with a languid smile.

"Triste resource!" observed Lady Dawlish, shrugging her shoulders; "but of course you intend to return to Paris for your confinement?"

"I—I—hardly know—"

"Not know?—and next month so near?—Quite a heroine, I protest!" said Lady Dawlish, with a sneering smile. "I suppose your Bonapartean clique have persuaded you to have Errat, Dubois, or some other wretch belonging to the household of Josephine or Marie Louise?"

"I really cannot say. I leave all such matters to the choice of Sir Richard."

"Of Sir Richard!" ejaculated Lady Dawlish,—"and with all your pattern propriety and delicacy of feeling?—Surely you had better consult Madame de Montrond as to whom would be appointed for such an office, were Madame to delight us with an heir to the throne?"

"I cannot fancy those who are so recently returned from emigration, better skilled than ourselves to pronounce upon the professional eminence of Paris," replied Matilda, as calmly as she could.

"People in a certain station of life are informed of everything," persisted Lady Dawlish. "Nothing, for instance, escapes the knowledge of the château."

"Nevertheless," remonstrated Lady Arthur, "I was the first to mention last night to Madame de Montroind the report generally prevalent of Napoleon's escape from Elba. He promised, you know, to be back in Paris with the violets."

"The violets are here already," said Matilda, pointing to a vase of fresh-gathered Parma violets on the guéridon standing near her sofa.

"And the petit Caporal, they say, not far distant," added Lady Arthur.

"Absurd!" retorted Lady Dawlish. "As if the people,
permitted to enjoy once more the decencies of legitimate monarchy, would ever for a moment tolerate again the tyranny of an upstart!"

"Madame de Montrond did not seem to think it by any means absurd."

"Why, what did she say on the subject?"

"Nothing! or she would have taken her course of lessons from Talleyrand to very little purpose. But she dismissed her whisperers an hour earlier than usual, and scudded off along the galleries towards the back stairs."

"To alarm the king?"

"As if anything short of the probability of a national famine could rouse up ce cher gros papa de roi! When Napoleon is within an hour's march of Paris, the king will perhaps think of packing up the royal casseroles and come­tibles, comme Pierrot, qui a toujours peur et toujours faim!"

"How can you condescend to retad the mauvaises plaisanteries of the newspapers!" said Lady Dawlish, yawning. "Napoleon is as likely to be within a day's march of Paris, as you and I a day's journey of Pekin!—"

"Nous verrons!" replied Lady Arthur, with similar sang froid, while Matilda trembled as she listened. The return of Napoleon must necessitate the flight of the English from Paris; and in her own country, how painful, how impossible, to persevere in the imposture to which she had been pledged by her husband! To her ears, the reports so vaguely cited by Lady Arthur D. were of terrible import; and as the day wore away, the necessity of entertaining her two languid guests while her thoughts were thus grievously pre-engrossed, wore down her spirits. Never had she so eagerly longed for the return of Sir Richard; and when the dusk drew on, she dreaded lest lights should be brought and reveal to her companions the changes of her countenance.

The sounding of the hall bell at length announced the return of her husband; and starting from her sofa, regardless of the presence of her visitors, she rushed to the door to receive him and gather from his lips the tidings so momentous to her happiness. But lo! the hand she seized, in addressing the tall figure she imagined to be that of Norman, responded to her grasp by a cordial hearty shake; while an unfamiliar voice saluted her with—"Here's a surprise, Matty!—Who'd have thought of us two meeting among the parleyvoos! But I warrant I'm grown out of your recollection?—"

The candles at that moment burned before Sir Richard Norman, which revealed to him the inopportune presence of Matilda's fashionable visitors, displayed to Matilda the gaunt figure of an uncouth young man, whom she had little difficulty in recognising as her brother, Cruttenden Maule; and while her husband hastened to offer a hollow welcome to her two friends, Lady Norman was grieved to feel that her own reception of her brother was scarcely more sincere. Her conscience reproved her that she regarded in the light of a serious evil this interview with one of her nearest kindred. But Master Crutt., the spoiled child of the whimsical old torment of her youth, was too self-satisfied a person to take heed of her embarrassment.

"I fancy I have given you a surprise, eh! Matty?"—cried he, taking a place on the sofa by her side. "Sir Richard tells me you never got Betsy's letter announcing my visit. Well, a pleasure's all the greater for popping on one unawares!—I took up my quarters last night at your place in Paris, not knowing you was moved; and, by good luck, Sir Richard looked in to-day, and gave me a lift down here in his cab."

"It was very kind of you to come so great a distance to see me," said Matilda faintly, perceiving that the eye-glass of Lady Dawlish was fixed wonderingly on her brother.

"To see you?—Come, that's a good 'un!—As if my father would have spared me from business for ten days, if there hadn't been two birds to be killed with one stone. Not so soft as that, I take it!—Father keeps as strict a hand on us as ever."

"I never found him otherwise than indulgent," said Matilda, in a low voice.

"In your time, may be; but folks grow grumphy as they get in years. Old Crutt.'s always putting it into father's head that I'm wilder than other young fellows of my age—that's Tom's way of showing kindness, you know. The greater the favorite, the greater his pains to plague one out of one's life."

"And was it Mr. Cruttenden, then, who suggested your journey to Paris?" inquired Matilda, dreading lest a pause in Sir Richard's conversation with Lady Arthur should expose to their criticism the coarseness of her brother's tone and manner.
“Why, for once father and he were of a mind!—You see, the firm happened to have the luck of a great order from a wholesale house in Paris, so they thought I’d better come and have a peep at the secundes before the goods were made up. Brother John, you know, sports fine, and won’t have anything to say to the business—John’s going to take orders. (Old Crutt. says his orders will never bring him in the value of ours!) Father’s just bought him a fine living in Yorkshire.”

“And William?”

“Bill’s got his head turned t’other way!—Bill’s all for soldiering; and he’s persuaded father to lodge money at Greenwood’s for the purchase of a cornetcy for him. I’m the only one of the family that sticks to the main chance. I never had the least spice of the book-worm in me, like John; or the least taste for sporting copper-lace outside my jacket, like Master Bill. Business is my mark; it comes as natural to me as Burton ale after Cheshire!—Tom Crutt. wanted to send me to college with John, when we left Rugby; but I thanked him for nothing, and said I’d as lief go to the treadmill. So Fin to be taken into partnership next year, and when father and old Cruttenden drop, may be I shall buy out Vickset, and have the whole thing to myself. There’ll be a go, eh! Matty?—Cruttenden Maulé will look a plaguy deal more knowing, painted on the wagons, and copper-plated at the head of a folio, than Maulé, Cruttenden, Vickset, and Co.—No ‘Co.’ for me! I’ll be my own master, or nothing—a man or a mouse.”

“Do you think of remaining long in Paris?”

“Can’t justly say till Sir Richard has stepped up with me to the Marry as they call it, where these parleyvooing rascals have their compting-house. There’s few of ‘em, I find, can speak plain English, like reasonable beings; and I don’t pretend to understand their outlandish lingo. However, when Sir Richard’s brought us to a deal, if I find the parties good men as they pretend, the sooner I’m out of their filthy city of holes and corners, the better. Old Crutt. said at parting he’d warrant I wasn’t the chap to waste my time and money among lantern-jawed pickpockets of Frenchmen; and I mean to prove his words.”

Matilda’s satisfaction at the assurance was damped by finding that her fastidious friends had been attentive auditors to this ill-timed exposé of her family affairs. Nor could she refrain from grieving that, instead of being able to present to them her mild, intelligent, well-mannered, elder brother, she was compelled to see their wonderment excited by the ill-bred familiarity of the adopted darling of Tom Cruttenden. The contrast between his unformed, ungainly person, and the flashy style of dress sported by the provincial buck, produced a ludicrous effect; and when, on being offered by the maître d’hotel, at dinner, an entrée, one of the chef d’œuvres of Sir Richard’s eminent chef de cuisine, he exclaimed in an audible voice, “Oh! hang your messes!—Give me a cut of mutton and a potato, and I won’t trouble your hashes and kickslaws!”—Lady Arthur could no longer repress her laughter.

“I trust, Mr. Maulé,” said she, maliciously singling him out for conversation, “that although you profess not to understand the language of the country, you meet with no difficulties on the road?”

“None in the least, my lady,” replied Crutt. with a knowing smirk. “Folks must get up early in the morning who manage to take me in; and I was put up to sniff before I set out. I kept my valet, as they call it, in my hand, every place we stopped at, and managed to arrive without losing a rag. If it wasn’t for the plague of the custom-house (where the shameful smuggling of the English quality makes ‘em deuced sharp,) I should have had no hindrance to complain of.”

“Were there any letters for me in Paris?” inquired Matilda of her husband, having already obtained from him a vague assurance that no political news was stirring confirmative of Lady Arthur’s intelligence. “Any visits—any cards?”

“Guerchant has been several times there, and having taken down our address, intends, I suppose, to pay us a visit.”

“Guerchant!—one of the camille of Bonaparte?” said Lady Dawlish, drawing up.

“Admiral Guerchant—a peer of France and a most distinguished man,” observed Sir Richard, gravely.

“A peer!—you might as well talk of the peerage of a Scotch lord of Session!” persisted her ladyship, with undisguised contempt.

“Why, you don’t mean, Matty, that you meddle or make with folks that ever belonged to the natural enemy of your
country—the worst wretch that ever was sent on earth for the punishment of mankind!”—vociferated Cruttenden Maule, speaking rather thick, after his third glass of champagne.

"Sir Richard, you know, is liberal in his politics," observed Matilda, watching him with anxiety.

"Oh, he's liberal, is he?" said her brother with a boisterous laugh. "Old Crutt. swears tiere is a greater joke in nature, than the liberalism of the English quality!—A liberal lord's much the same as a warm frost!" says Tom. 'Great cry and little wool among 'em, as the barber said when shearing Solomon's pigs—There's our Sir Richard," says Tom, 'fancies himself a liberal, 'cause by sticking to the whigs he hopes to carry the Cartholic question; but in every thing else,' says Tom, 'Sir Richard's as stiff a tory as Queen Elizabeth! Why fit stands to reason, that people in his situation of life must be for the maintenance of all outstanding abuses—pension-lists, and place-givings; 'cause, sooner or later, he may be the better for 'em. And as to expect a baronet with a fine rent-roll to help and pull down hereditary rights, 'lisn't a thing in nature!—Sir Richard's as olear a case of conservative,' says Tom, 'as ever I clapt an eye on."

"Bravo; Mr. Maule, bravo!" cried Lady Arthur, greatly entertained by his eloquence. "Thanks for your announcement of so valuable an addition to our party!"

"Your party?"—rejoined the young orator more bemused than ever and indignant at the presumption of a giggling woman with a painted face pretending to political entity.

"I suppose your ladyship's party means a tea-party—or a card-party, eh? We've smoked out the she-politicians in our town!—Bless you, they went and held a meeting one night at the King's Arms, to petition parliament, neither they nor any one else understood for what; so we gave 'em a touch of the marrow-bones and cleavers to bring 'em to their senses."

Cruttenden Maule had the pleasure of enjoying to himself the laugh with which he closed his harangue. No applause followed this coarse attack.

"I cannot help fearing," said Matilda, red with shame and vexation, "that Admiral Guerchant's frequent visits to our Hotel corroborate the report of Napoleon's disembarkation in France."
you," said Sir Richard, heartily wishing him at the anti-

podes. "A glass of Mouton after your drive!"

But Villiers was too deeply engaged in inquiring after

the health of Lady Norman, and marveling whom the un-
couth savage by her side could be, to reply to the invita-
tion.

"Do you bring us any news?" inquired Matilda.

"Nothing since five o'clock. The telegraph is, of

course, dumb at this hour."—

"The telegraph!" cried Cruttenden Maule, gazing with

open eyes on the slender young gentleman so much at ease

with himself and the world.

"Napoleon is at Lyons, and the Tuileries off for Gand,"

added Colonel Villiers, with perfect sang-froid, nodding to

Norman over his wine.

"Authentic?"—demanded his mother.

"Beyond dispute. Old Tal. left Paris for Belgium five

hours ago."

"Then all is lost!" replied Lady Dawlish, with her

usual listlessness. "Relapse is worse than disease. These

wretched French will never a second time submit to

the restoration of the Bourbons!"

"Restoration of the Bourbons!"—ejaculated Cruttenden

Maule. "Who the devil cares for the Bourbons!—What's
to become of us?"

"I beg you will be under no apprehension, Lady Daw-
lish," said Villiers, addressing his mother; "I have sent

off a courier to secure horses for you to Brussels, and apar-
tments at the Belle Vue."

"But why not secure horses towards England at once?"

"Most of our set are going to Brussels. As well to have

the air of accompanying the royal family eh?"—replied the

Colonel.

"Shall we be in any danger then, sir, by staying in

Paris?" demanded Maule.

Villiers looked amazed to find himself addressed by the

anonymous savage; but answered not a word.

"I asked whether you thought we should get into any

scrape by remaining a day or two in Paris?"—again de-
manded young Crutt.

"We have secured horses to Brussels," replied Villiers.

"So I heard you say. But me, and Matty, and the rest

of us ——?"
her with a cool "à revoir!"—as if they were engaged to meet again the following night at the opera, rather than to part to encounter the terror of civil war—Sir Richard accompanied them to Colonel Villiers's dormeuse, and instead of returning immediately to the drawing-room, gave circumstantial orders to his confidential English servant to accompany Mr. Maule back to Paris, and accelerate as far as possible his preparations for departure from the country.

"Your arrival here still seems like a dream," observed Matilda, when at length she found herself tête-à-tête with her brother.

"And a deuced ugly dream it's beginning to be!" cried Crutt, taking possession of the fireplace, and rubbing his legs.

"Surely you will remain till to-morrow morning!" resumed his sister, kindly.

"If you'll engage to set off back with me to England!"

"Impossible! We have innumerable arrangements to make, previous to taking such a step. But I want to ask you a thousand questions about my father—about my sisters and brothers—about home. Surely you might remain till to-morrow morning?"

"And be snapt up before I know what I am about, till the next peace!—No, no!—I tell you, Matty, I would be the ruin of the business and the family if anything was to happen to me. I was loth enough to come, only father and Tom Cruttenden would make me. The truth is," he continued, lowering his voice, and looking suspiciously towards the door, "they've got it into their foolish heads that you're not so happy as you pretend to be, in foreign parts, and that you are not at liberty to say so. So knowing me to be pretty sharp, old Tom proposed my making a pretence of the deal we'd got the offer of, to start for Paris, and see how the land was lying; and father bid me say that if you'd the least mind to come back, and money was the obstacle, to make no bones of drawing upon Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset and Co. for whatever was wanting. Money ought not to be a hindrance, Matty, to any whim you may take just now!"

"Believe me, pecuniary considerations have nothing to do with the case," said Lady Norman, coloring deeply.

"So much the worse—so much the worse!"—cried young Maule—the kindly warmth of his uncouth nature becoming apparent the moment he began to anticipate evil for his sister; "for so long as there was hope that matters might be mended by the ready, no fear of things turning out cross, so long as Cruttenden Maule acts as cashier to the concern!—But mum! for here comes Sir Richard!—Not a word to him!—only, whenever the wind wants raising, for your own wants or wishes, please to remember which way it sets."

A hearty shake of the hand concluded the unpolutched harangue; and the tears which Matilda had with difficulty restrained throughout the evening, fell profusely at this demonstration of the untiring affection and liberality of her neglected family. Poor Maule, meanwhile, attributing her emotion to the grief of parting from him so abruptly, bad her cheer up, and not be down-hearted on his account; that he would write from Paris—Calais—London—Dover—his home—to satisfy her misgivings on his account.

At that moment, Sir Richard re-entered the room. The stifled sobs of his wife, and the earnestness with which her brother was attempting to console her, instantly excited suspicion in his mind, and threw an additional shade of loftiness into his adieus to the untutored lad, who had come so far, to a country he abhorred, and of whose very language he was ignorant, on an errand of Service to the alienated daughter of his father's house!—

CHAPTER XII.

Valiant! Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear!—You may as well say that's a valiant flea that dares eat his breakfast on the lip of a lion!

Shakespeare.

Though aware that her husband's eyes were fixed upon her in surprise and displeasure, Lady Norman gave free course to her tears when the carriage containing her brother rolled from the gates of the château. The quickly following events of that harassing day had overcome her. The visit of her inquisitive friends, the arrival of her brother, and, above all, the great incident, bringing with it so
vast a train of evils and perplexities, filled her with emotion.
Could it really be the intention of Sir Richard to expose her, for the furtherance of his guilty projects, to dangers which were driving from Paris the rest of his countrymen?
Perplexed by misgivings touching the motives of such singular obstinacy, she sat concealing with her hands her tearful eyes and throbbing brow. Unmindful that he was pacing the room with hurried footsteps, she took no note of his presence, till she found one of her hands suddenly snatched with an agitated grasp, and saw that Sir Richard was kneeling beside her chair.

"Matilda!" said he, in a altering voice—"these tears, these murmurs,—are a reproach greater than I can bear!—Notwithstanding your exemplary resignation to my wishes, I discern all your terrors, all your griefs;—and my remorse is indeed bitter!—I have involved you in a maze of difficulty and deceit.—I have plunged you into anxieties, how little to have been apprehended at such a moment, your own judgment must assure you.—And it is too late to recede!—Believe it, on the attestation of the anguish that now distresses my mind, dearest, it is too late to recede.

"I have justly calculated on the weakness of my nature," said Matilda—voluntarily restoring the hand she had mechanically withdrawn.
"Say rather on its generosity!" interrupted Norman, in a depressed voice, pressing it to his lips. "You are kinder to me than I deserve."
"I make no demands upon your confidence," resumed Matilda, vexed by a demonstration of tenderness which she regarded as hypocritical. "There are mysteries upon which, perhaps, even a wife has no right to encroach; but, while admitting the insufficiency of our privileges, I claim at least justice at your hands. If I renounce for your sake the susceptibility (or—let me do myself justice—the sensibility) of my sex, lay aside in your turn the reserve with which you deteriorate the happiness I should otherwise find in rendering you service.—Do not exact from me the sacrifices of a friend, and treat me with the mistrust due to an enemy. Do not again expose me to the sneers which my incertitude with respect to our plans, drew this morning from Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish. Let me know definitely what I am to do—say—suffer—and it shall be suffered, done and said. In one word, are we, under every possible contingency, to remain here?"

"We are."

"'Tis well!—Such then shall be my answer should the Guercants visit St. Sylvain, as you anticipate. And next, what motive am I to assign for my resolution?"

"Your own choice," replied Sir Richard, in a less assured voice—"your disinclination to hazard a removal at such a moment."

"And when do you intend the event to take place which is to set us at liberty?"—demanded Matilda—an involuntary accent of scorn mingling in her usually gentle voice.

About the middle of April. I have made every arrangement to that effect. Madame Gervais (the woman I have engaged to attend you according to the custom of most French ladies of your rank in life) has been placed in confidence, and secured by a considerable bribe. At the period specified, she will arrive here late one evening, with an infant selected for the purpose at the hospital of the Maternité, or Enfans trouvés, where my man of business undertakes the legal act of adoption without compromising my name. The following morning, it will be announced to the family that you are a mother; and the infant furtively introduced into the house by Madame Gervais, will thenceforward pass for your own.

"Thanks!"—replied Lady Norman, unconscious of the air of bitterness infused into her tones and glances. "I have now learnt my lesson, and am content.—It is some years since I placed my happiness in your keeping, and resigned my will to your disposal. May this second and gratuitous act of submission bring forth the good fruits you promise!"

"Forgive me" cried Norman, "if, instead of grateful acknowledgments ever unworthy the extent of my obligations, I further ask of you an avowal which may be painful to your feelings: was this extraordinary visit of your brother prompted solely by its ostensible motive?—Do I not rightly guess that your family entertain some suspicion of the truth?"

"You wrong them," replied Matilda, calmly. "Rude and uncivilized, you may have a right to consider them; but there is not one among the inmates of my father's house capable of imagining so vile a proceeding as that in which we are engaged."

Sir Richard's usual irritability suffused his cheek for a moment. But he was in no position to hazard provocation. He felt, at that moment, with grievous consciousness, the superiority over himself with which he had been forced to invest his wife.

"But to deal with you as candidly as I have required you to deal with myself," resumed Lady Norman, "my brother's journey to France had other motives than the one avow'd. My family, more tender of my happiness than I deserve, fear that I am detained here against my will;—that my heart, on the eve of the event I have falsely announced to them, may be yearning after home—friends—comforts—affection;—and accordingly despatched my brother to offer me the means of returning to the security of Selwood Manor, in case that motives of economy detained us abroad. You must forgive my father," continued Lady Norman, in a faltering voice. "My father is an unexperienced, uneducated man.—He has been led to believe that France is a place of peril to his daughter.—He does not reconcile himself to the idea of her encountering the hazards of childbirth among strangers and enemies.—You must forgive my poor old father!—"

Subdued by the peculiar tone assumed by Matilda, Sir Richard contented himself with replying—"But after I had so positively assured him that pecuniary interests had no share in my proceedings!"—

His anxiety on his child's account induced him, I suppose,
to fancy that you were deceiving him," replied Matilda; and Norman dared not, as he would have done at any other moment, burst forth into a defence of his own honor and integrity—the words being scarcely silent upon his lips which conveyed a lesson of deliberate duplicity to his wife.

The following morning, before the breakfast things were removed, Admiral Guerehant was with them in all the elation of perfect triumph and happiness. Matilda could scarcely recognise her cheerful but composed old friend of the Place Royale in the sparkling, excited, rejuvenised man who came to tender the performance of his recent engagements to the stranger in the land.

"How I longed to give you a little hint of what was in the wind, the morning you called upon us!—Do you remember that last morning you called upon us?"—said, he addressing Lady Norman. And a pang of reminiscence almost induced her to exclaim, "Alas! how can I forget!—It was the first dawn of the agonising suspicions which have since encompassed my dwelling with the hedge of thorns!—"

"All was even then en train," resumed the Admiral; "and both Madame Guerehant and myself burned to assure you that the offer of our services was no idle vaunt. You are determined, however, to rise superior to the vulgar terrors of your countrymen, and put your trust in the emperor's justice?—You will not fly from Paris, like all these moths and butterflies of the Wellington coterie?—"

"We have no intention of leaving France," said Sir Richard, in a constrained manner. "We intend to remain quietly here at the Château de St. Sylvain," added Matilda.

"The château?—Pardieu, I don't know that I recommend that!"—cried the Admiral. "Come back into Paris, if you will. Your term in the Rue de Provence is not yet expired?—"

"The hotel belongs to the Duc de Vergnies," said Norman, "who, resuming his functions at court, will of course require the use of his residence in town."

"You conceive, then, that the emperor's field-marshal and grand officiers de la couronne will come down, main basse, upon everything they can lay their hands on?"—demanded the admiral, with a hearty laugh. "No, no—law is law, the code, the code,—whether an N or an L be en-
twined among the vignettes of the golden cornice at the Tuileries!—If you have a lease of Vergnies's house, it will stand good, even were he prime-minister, and yourself the second in command to Villot, or secretary to Castelri."

"I have already received this morning, and answered in the affirmative, a polite request from the Duc de Vergnies that, as we are not occupying his house, I would cede it to him for the remainder of the term. I could not without ungraciousness refuse his request."

"Let that be no obstacle," cried the good Admiral. "I am about to remove to the Hôtel de la Marine. The Emperor honors my faithful services with a ministerial portfolio, and in the interim, my humble home in the Marais is thoroughly at your service; unless, indeed, Lady Norman will still further favor us, and, by becoming our inmate at the Admiralty, procure to my good wife the satisfaction of presiding over the birth of your expected son and heir. 'Tis a ceremony, you know, in which my half-dozen married sons and daughters afford her annual expence."

"Thanks, thanks—a thousand thanks!"—cried Matilda, compassionating the embarrassment of her husband. "But I have made up my mind to remain here. My preparations are completed. I love the quiet of this place: and, above all, should fear the confusion of a ministerial residence. You do not reflect, my dear good Admiral, that were any popular tumult to occur, your house would be one of the first to be attacked!—"

"We don't intend to have any popular tumults;—and my house, private or ministerial, has not a chance of being attacked!"—cried Guerehant. "The Parisians are for once unanimous in their welcome to the emperor. The whole city is in a tumult of joy; and under every possible vicissitude its good will has attended me. The badauds have a personal liking for the old man, who has advanced their glory with his blood without opposing their interests in the senate."

"Still, you will admit that the versatility of their character renders them uncertain allies," pleaded Matilda, with a smile.

"I admit everything asserted by a fair lady," said the old man, gaily; "but she must believe in my assurance, on the other hand, that, though perfectly secure in Paris, (where, should she choose it, I will obtain her a piquet of
gendarmerie as her body-guard,) she may not be so well off here.—The peasantry are little to be depended upon.—They entertain a deep-seated abhorrence of the English.—Already, they have evinced an intemperate spirit against the allies of the Bourbons, whenever an opportunity has presented itself. If by chance, since your sojourn here at St. Sylvain, that Madame de Montrond of yours has paraded her way down to you in one of the royal carriages, the villagers have already marked you as royalists, and will insult, if not otherwise molest you!"

"I am not afraid,"—said Matilda, with a fainter smile.

"Believe me, I am not afraid—"

"Like the Emperor, you trust too largely to your star," replied the Admiral.

"She trusts to the influence of her own good deeds," interrupted Norman. "Since her arrival here, Matilda has done twice as much for the village, as the proprietors of St. Sylvain during the last ten years. The people are disposed to worship rather than insult their benefactress."

"You don't know the French peasantry!"—cried the Admiral. "Their prejudices are ferocious. They possess a peculiar faculty for hating. Were your Duke of Villain or your Castelri, to spend fortunes in converting their hovels into palaces or in mending their roads with golden ore, it would not prevent them from mixing poison in his cup, should he ask a draught of water in return!"

"You are doing your utmost to alarm me, I see," said Matilda, with an unchanging countenance, "but I am not to be frightened from my purpose. Be it courage—be it obstinacy—I am resolved to remain at St. Sylvain. Remember," said she, turning towards her husband with a significant glance, "remember, I charge you, do not let Admiral Guerchant dissuade you from acceding to my wishes."

Norman thanked her with an eloquent look.

"I wish I had more time to devote to the task of persuasion," cried the Admiral, rising to depart. "But my horses' heads are turned towards Auxerre, where I am to meet the Emperor, and assist in escorting him into Paris, and never bridegroom so longed to look upon the face of bride, as I (God bless him!) upon Napoleon's! Tis twelve months since I parted from him at Fontainebleau.—Even now, I seem to feel the grasp of hand with which he bade me a silent adieu. He would not hear of my accompanying him to Elba.—He knew the force of family ties upon my heart, and was too generous to hazard the safety of the old tree by rooting it up.—But I knew that we should have him here again;—I knew that the wishes of a whole people would not be in vain;—I knew that the sceptre of an indolent selfish voluptuary was not for the energies of France!—I was as sure of feeling that grasp upon my old hand again, as I was of life; or never could I have supported the weight of the last eleven months of humiliation!—And before night, I shall shake hands with him!"—cried the Admiral, tears glistening in his enthusiastic eyes at the thought—"with him, who was the making of me and mine—with him, who knew how to create loyal servants and glorious actions, for he knew how to reward them!—Sucratity! how I want to hear his voice again—even if inflicting one of those reprimands which he could render so terrible!—But I am running on, and neglecting my duty elsewhere, without compassing any advantage here," he continued, rising and kissing Matilda's hand as a signal for departure.—"I shall be a proud man, fair lady, when I see you again; but I trust it will be under my own roof, where I leave it to Madame Guerchant to determine you to take up your abode."

CHAPTER XIII.

Sick minds are like sick men that burn with fevers, Who, when they drink, picase but a present taste, And after, bear a more impalient fit.—Ben Jonson.

Though aware that it was impossible to accept the generously offered hospitality of the Guerchants, it was a comfort to Matilda to feel that she had still such friends stationary in Paris. Her brother had noticed to her his departure. The English had fled the city, many in real alarm and consternation, others making it a political virtue to demonstrate their attachment to the tory banner floating over the heads of the fugitive Bourbons—an emblem, at that period, of victory and victory's fruits.

The Whig baronet had a plausible pretext for not follow-
ing the flying footsteps of the satellites of Toryism; and Matilda had the comfort of finding the Admiral's prognostications fallacious as regarded the peasantry of St. Sylvain. Flattered by the confidence reposed in them, and the determination of the opulent English family to remain in France when such legions of their country-people were flying in all directions, they seemed desirous to make proof of their respect towards the inhabitants of the château; as towards hostages deposited in their hands. A week had not elapsed after the triumphant re-entrance of Napoleon, before Lady Norman felt perfectly at ease. Her chief regret arose from the anxieties which she knew would be experienced in her behalf by her friends at home and in Worcestershire. But though at ease on her own account, she was not altogether satisfied, when, instead of giving her credit for self-command, Sir Richard chose to make the position of public affairs a theme for exultation, proclaiming his satisfaction in any change of circumstances which secured them from the intrusions of "Lady Dawlish's set" and the espionage of the Normans. She could not refrain from secretly taxing him with indifference towards her feelings and comfort and the welfare of his native country.

So long subdued in spirit, passive and indulgent, Lady Norman scarcely recognised herself note, when, pacing up and down her vast apartments in solitary perturbation, she reflected on all that had been exacted of her, and all the exactions still to come. Conscious of being a puppet in the hands of her husband, she felt that not even the ennobling motive of affection, which rendered her so docile in his hands, could excuse the blindness of her devotion. He had promised that the happiness of her future life should repay her subservience. But her subservience was guilt—falsehood—hypocrisy—meanness—guile—and these, what could repay?—Was she not doubly degraded by his admission that there existed a secret in which she must not participate?—That he had other motives for choosing to remain in France than the mere desire to impose upon the world the adoption of a supposititious child?

It was impossible for the mind of woman, even if endowed with a far stronger frame of philosophy than that of Lady Norman, to abstain from pondering upon these mysteries whenever she found herself alone. Her self-command scarcely availed to desist from questioning Sir Richard when they were together. To renounce the dear delight of dwelling upon the past, and reviewing again and again his conduct and declarations, was beyond her power. His own word had now confirmed the vague insinuations hazarded by Madame de Montrond. He had avowed the existence of liaisons in which she did not participate. What needed there more to bring the life-blood throbbing to her agitated heart—the rising moisture to her troubled brow—when she reflected how far she might have been betrayed by him to whom her life was so generously devoted!—Serene as was her natural character, there was something in all this to stir every stagnant pulse, and agitate almost to distraction the feelings that were not to be confided to any living soul—to any guardian spirit of peace!

Never-theless, amid all her anguish, there abided consolation. Matilda's perceptions had been stimulated by the last year of observation, till every change of Norman's countenance became a source of revelation; and they had not long been inhabitants of St. Sylvain before she felt convinced that, whatever might be the nature of the mysteries involving her husband, his affection for herself was gradually returning. It was neither pity nor policy which prompted the glances she occasionally delected in his countenance, and the thousand nameless kindnesses which arise only from the fulness of affection. Policy might determine him to the companionship with which he chose to lighten the dull and cheerless hours of her probation; or compassion towards the wife he was wronging, instigate him to lighten the burthen of her cares. But there are looks and movements, the instinctive impulses of tenderness, not to be mistaken by a woman's heart; and these were often manifest to Matilda in the demeanor of her husband. She surprised him gazing upon her with self-reproachful admiration. When referring in conversation to the conduct of other women, whether traditional or as regarded the examples of daily life, she observed that his commendations were reserved for the mild domestic beings of character analogous to her own; and that he praised her by inference in praising the virtues which she practised. He grew impatient if the slightest of her commands were neglected by the household; and seemed to live for the promotion of her comfort. And all this was done without forfeiture of the air of graceful superiority peculiar to Sir Richard Norman, and pecu-
liarily attractive in the eyes of his timid wife—it was done as if he felt aware that his services were unworthy her acceptance.

One day, when she saw him disposed to pass the morning sauntering with her among the fine avenues of chestnut trees sloping from the château to the Seine, and dignified with the name of park, she could not forbear reproaching him with his want of curiosity in not having visited Paris since the re-inauguration of the Emperor; for, though Admiral Guerelant had counselled him to avoid, in the first instance, exhibiting himself as an Englishman in any public place, the interdict was now withdrawn—the Ministre de la Marine having not only mentioned to the Emperor the motive of Sir Richard and lady Norman's sojourn in France, but placed them under the especial protection of the police.

"I have, as you accuse me, very little interest in the subject," he replied. "Napoleon is in my eyes neither the demi-god worshipped by his partisans, nor the monster vituperated by the English press. I look upon him in the light he is defined by the Abbé de Pradt, as a Jupiter Scapin!"

"Still, Jupiter Scapins have not often fallen in our way. The Scapins one usually sees, are intriguing valets," said Matilda, playfully. "A Scapin holding a thunderbolt, is a curious variety of the species."

"But to me not an interesting one."

"If you will not take a peep at him to gratify your own curiosity, at least satisfy mine," pleaded Matilda.

"No!" replied Norman, decisively; "I have made up mind not to visit Paris."

"Say at once that you have pledged yourself not to go," said Lady Norman, incausiously.

"I should think, Matilda, you might have discovered by this time that I am no great maker of promises," he resumed, more gravely, "even to you who have a right to require them of me;—and what other human being has a claim upon my word?"

"In short, for obstinacy sake, you are determined not to go?" returned Lady Norman, feeling that she was proceeding too far, "and I must resign myself not to torment you further on the subject."

But to adhere to this promise was easier than to refrain from tormenting herself—for the mystery was constantly uppermost in her mind. Though Sir Richard had admitted himself bound by some mysterious tie to remain in France, he held communion with no living soul beyond the precincts of the château. He received no letters—he paid no visits—he maintained no further intercourse with the capital. Of what nature, then, were the bonds that hung upon him thus loosely?—Neither love nor friendship admits of utter neglect. Neither friend nor mistress would support with patience such total forgetfulness. Yet what but love or friendship has power to excite emotions such as Matilda had seen convulse the very soul of her husband?—

His dejection of the Normans could not surely suffice to determine him to all this risk; or to distract his mind with the anguish to which she had seen him a prey?—

A sudden thought occurred to her, (and with what transport did she welcome the conjecture!) that his engagements might be of a political nature. Recalling rapidly to mind the ardor with which, for two years previous to his visit to the continent, he had involved himself in the intrigues of the catholic cause—his laborious correspondence—his princely liberality; and, connecting his own sojourn at Paris with the sudden departure of the Abbé for Italy, she became convinced that Madame de Montrond's suggestions were correct; that in spite of pretended indifference, he did deeply interest himself in political intrigues, not as regarded the state of France, but the Church of Rome!—

Her soul brightened in a moment. True to her own faith and modes of worship, she had never seen cause for reproach in the devotedness of her husband to his suffering church; and now, with a degree of fervor that Tom Crutenden would have trembled to behold, she rejoiced in the idea of his being a secret emissary of the Jesuits!—She saw all in the clearest light.—Sir Richard had doubtless pledged himself to the Abbé to be on the spot as his intermediary agent with England, in too sacred a manner to admit of succumbing even to the unexpected force of public events. The only letters that reached him at St. Sylvain were in the Abbé's handwriting; and after perusing them, the mind of the baronet was invariably disturbed and preoccupied for the remainder of the day. It was doubtless some religious scruple which prevented him from taking a Protestant into his confidence;—a scruple which she had no desire to overcome; regretting only that a mystery so valueless in her eyes as a political or ecclesiastical intrigue,
should have induced her to distress herself, and wrong her beloved Norman with even momentary mistrust.

This fact once established in her mind, the spirits of Matilda rose in a manner wholly inexplicable to her husband. Much as she longed to seek his pardon for her previous injustice, she dared not injure herself in his eyes by avowing the preposterous suspicions she had, even for an instant entertained. She contented herself therefore with redoubling her submission, her kindness, and cheering his pre-occupation of mind by incessant smiles and devotion. She now so far surmounted her repugnance to the project in which she had promised connivance, as to allude frequently to her anticipations of delight in the acquisition of the little stranger who was to be unto them as a son. She spoke of it as though she felt that it was almost to be a child of her own; nay, even appealed to his tenderness in its favor, as though pleading for her own offspring.

"Remember," said she, as they were sauntering together in the park of St. Sylvain, one fine April afternoon, watching the progress of the chestnut buds as they glistened and expanded in the sunshine till the pale green leaves peeped out between the glossy scales—"Remember, I must have no impatience, no ill-humor with my boy!—I put up sometimes with your pettishness on my own account, because I know that I am troublesome, and that you have had much to try your patience in my inexperienee of society and ignorance of the world. But we are responsible for the faults of the little creature we shall have dragged out of its natural sphere; and I insist upon your being as kind and forbearing towards it as the tenderest father in the world."

"You do not surely consider me such a monster as to ill-use it?"—demanded Sir Richard abruptly.

"God forbid!"—replied Matilda, in an earnest tone.

"But there is a wide difference between ill-usage and the kindness I shall exact for my child. Without exactly rendering myself as ridiculous as Lady Catherine, I shall, I fear, become a very doting mamma;—and I wish to prepare you for my weakness."

Involuntarily Sir Richard pressed to his side the arm that was locked within his own!—Something of the spirit of old times was arising between them. Matilda's nature was so frank, that just as impossible as it had been to mistake her previous pique and bitterness, was it now to misconstrue the joyousness which took possession of her breast from the moment of deciding that the mysterious figure in the dark chariot was a Bishop, or perhaps a Cardinal, residing incognito in Paris as the accredited agent of the Propaganda!

In this happy frame of mind she awaited the arrival of Madame Gervais and the promised babe. Relying upon the prudence of Sir Richard for the disposal of every arrangement, she made it her sole request, that Ghitla, the Italian waiting-maid whom she found to be in his confidence, might never be permitted to confer with her on the subject. There was something of latent scorn occasionally visible in the woman's countenance, which, in spite of the obsequiousness of her deportment, rendered her service peculiarly unwelcome to Matilda, after the warm-hearted alacrity of Vaux; and she felt that she should have no patience with the woman if emboldened by the office of a confederate. From the first she had been her custom to wait upon herself, in preference to summoning Ghitla to her aid; and so strict was the silence still maintained towards her by the woman concerning the approaching event, that it was clear she was obeying the instructions of Sir Richard.

Meanwhile, the middle of April arrived, and expecting that the nurse and child would soon make their appearance also, Lady Norman confined herself chiefly to her apartment. She amused herself with examining the splendid preparations for the little stranger; the lace, the cambric; the cups of vermeil, the rosewood rockers, the fringed curtains of cachemire and India muslin;—and though a sigh often escaped her that this cost and care were for an alien, and that she was guilty of a heavy fault in conniving at an imposition, there was enough of the frailty of human tenderness in her heart to sink all other considerations in the triumph of being freed from her jealous cares, and the hope of being once more united, heart and soul, in uninterrupted affection with her husband.

On the 18th of the month, however, no tidings having reached them from Madame Gervais, Sir Richard, apprehensive perhaps of some misunderstanding on the part of his emissary, entered Lady Norman's room at an early hour, and with some perturbation of manner announced that he should proceed that day to Paris to ascertain the exact intentions of his confederate. The project was warmly applauded by Lady Norman. But at that moment, the
countenance of Ghita, who was arranging the glossy tresses of her lady's hair happened to be revealed to Matilda's observation in the glass before which she was sitting; and it was impossible to mistake the smile of contempt with which, as she conversed with her husband, she saw herself contemplated by the Italian.

Startled and indignant, Lady Norman was on the point of reprehending her insolence; when, alas! the sense of her own perplexing position reduced her to silence; and she covered her embarrassment by renewing her advice to Sir Richard to lose no time in repairing to Paris. Again, though she still spoke in English, a language which Ghita affected not to understand, the same insolent glance of disdain sparkled in the eyes of the soubrette.

So affected was Matilda at the moment by this disagreeable incident, that she had not leisure to take note of the agitation of her husband. Even when he was gone, she sat alone in her chamber musing upon the annoyance of being compelled to accept the services of a person who regarded her with undisguised contempt.

The day wore slowly away. The weather was genial as summer; but in anticipation of the events the evening might bring forth, Lady Norman felt almost guilty of an indiscretion when, in spite of Sir Richard's absence, she ventured on her usual stroll in the park; and, accompanied by her Selwood favorite, her faithful Rover, proceeded so far as the fine alley of lime-trees, now almost covered with their spring verdure, which shaded an extensive terrace of turf overhanging the Seine.

The air was fragrant with a thousand violets. Spring breezes swept invigoratingly from the river. It was a moment for happy thoughts could Matilda have given free course to her innocent gaiety of heart in company with her friends the Ravenscrofts, or her own cheerful, chatty sister Elizabeth. But her spirit recoiled upon itself when she reflected upon her isolation as the compulsory inhabitant of a foreign country; surrounded by strange servants—attended by an insolent Italian—and on the brink of an action which, if exposed, must sink her in the estimation of every friend—which, though secured from detection, lessened her immeasurably in her own. But for the ever-ready sophistry of love whispering consolation in the plea of a benefit conferred upon her husband, Matilda would, at that moment of excitement, have given herself up to misery and despair!

Overpowered by her reflections, she threw herself down to rest upon a moss-grown stone-seat commanding the river; and, at some distance along its windings, the ruins of the once sumptuous palace of Choisy-le-Roi, a century ago the high altar-stone of the temple of voluptuousness. Glancing towards the shattered fragments of its white arcades, Matilda involuntarily thought of the lovely Duchesse de Chateauroux—her struggles, her fall, her penitence, her early death—and a strain of remorseful meditations arose in her mind upon the insufficiency of even love itself to embalm and sanctify a cause abhorrent to the dictates of virtue and morality.

"The time may come," thought she, fixing her eyes upon the sparkling current of the river, "when he for whose sake I am sacrificing my consciousness of duty, will revile me for the weakness of having ceded to his wishes. Should the imposture be detected, or should the poor child turn out unsatisfactorily, it is upon me Norman will turn with the reproach that I ought to have opposed his guilty scheme."

Her contemplations were at that moment suddenly interrupted by the fall of a stone flung with some violence from the river, and evidently impelled towards her with a view of attracting attention, not of inflicting injury. The spaniel crouching at her feet instantly darted forward with a growl, and began rolling over and over the missile, as if an object of some peculiar interest. It was in vain she called to Rover to desist. The intelligent animal would not relinquish his efforts till Lady Norman, stooping down to fling the stone back again into the river, perceived that a paper was attached to it, bearing her own superscription.

With an instinctive movement of surprise and terror she glanced hastily round, to ascertain from what quarter, or by whom, the stone could have been thrown. But not a creature was within sight; the trees were still too imperfectly clothed with verdure to admit of any person being concealed among the branches. Not so much as a boat or a barge was perceptible on the stream. Nothing was to be seen but one of the long trains or rafts of wood, floating from Burgundy towards Paris, to be broken up for firing, and the peasants who were steering its course from the opposite shore, out of reach of the territory of St. Sylvain.

It occurred to her, however, that the bank of the river below the terrace was in many places hollowed by the action
of the current; so that any person, having attained the spot from the river, might remain concealed among the ledges of shrubby ground below. From such an ambush, it would be as easy to clamber up towards the spot where she was standing, as to launch the fragments of stone; and Matilda expected every moment to see emerge from the overhanging bank some strange and menacing figure. Yet she had not courage to fly. She stood rooted to the place, holding the slip of paper she had detached; on which was inscribed in English, in a strange handwriting—"Beware!—Submit not to be the dupe of a dupe."

From the paper, Lady Norman glanced towards the bank—"from the bank to the paper—incapable for some moments of thought or action. The dog still went sniffing along the shore; and at length Matilda took courage to follow in the same direction, and peer down with anxious eyes among the matted weeds and brambles. She determined to accost, if possible, the person from whom she had received so singular a warning, and insist upon further explanation. But the effort with which she formed this resolution was thrown away.—No human being appeared. The dog, a sure indicator, abandoned his pursuit; and after sundry snortings and sniffings, disposed itself to follow Lady Norman. There was not even a trace among the bushes of recent passage;—no boat moored below—no indication of any kind to guide her conjectures; and more distressed than ever, she hastened homewards, and took refuge in her own apartment.

For the first time her heart sickened at the sight of the beautiful cradle established in her dressing-room. When equipping herself for her walk, she had glanced towards these preluratives with a smile of delight at the idea of the enlivenment and solace her isolated existence was about to attain in her expected little companion. But she longed no more for the stir and bustle of the nursery. The word "dupe" filled her with dismay, re frigating even her womanly kindness towards the child.

All her perplexities were returning. Ghita's air of impertinence that morning, her husband's embarrassment, and now, this mysterious admonition, seemed linked in tormenting significance. Had Norman been in the house, she would have resigned herself to the impulse of her feelings, and insisted upon a definite reply to every question she felt inclined to address him. But he was absent. She had only her own heart, her own memory, to interrogate; and the one upbraided her weakness, while the other eluded her demands.

How early that morning—that day—that evening—dragged along!—Sir Richard did not return; and, obliged to confine herself to her room to escape the observations of the household, she attempted to beguile the tediousness of the time by the perusal of a new work. Every moment, however, she kept starting up, and going to the door to listen; or to a small window in her ante-chamber, overlooking the court yard, in the hope of his husband's arrival. Still, at each succeeding attempt, she was disappointed. Sir Richard did not make his appearance; and again and again, she was obliged to have recourse to her book to get rid of the thronging thoughts that caused her pulses to beat and her burning cheeks to tingle. If, as her anonymous monitor asserted, she was a dupe, she was the dupe of Norman—of her husband!—And what treachery could equal his, in practising upon one who excess of affection chained in bondage at his feet;—one who renounced her very reason and judgment to become his instrument;—one who lived but in him and in his happiness!—

Poor Matilda could scarcely believe in such cruelty. She determined to suspend all judgment on the subject till she had thrown herself into Sir Richard's arms, and, clinging to his bosom, demanded the truth—the whole truth—from his lips.

The book which accident had thrown in her way to beguile the hours of that eventful morning, was "Adolphe,"—a story that, because incomprehensible, to those whose feet have trodden only the monotonous paths of common life, but to the impassioned, the unhappy, the forsaken the breviary of a religion of love and sorrow.—It was the very book to stimulate her to a more curious examination of her griefs and causes for grief.

As the time wore on, however, Matilda's suspicions gave way to acute anxiety. The usual dinner hour was long past, and no Sir Richard!—Her meat having been served in her own apartment, she at length sent down to desire that Monsieur might be no longer expected. But the dismissal of the servants' preparations did not render her mind more easy. Sir Richard's habits of life were punctuality itself.
Unless at the period of his prolonged absence in France, Lady Norman had never seen him otherwise than exact to his appointments; and he had volunteered the promise of being back to dine at St. Sylvain.

That he might be detained by some dilemma connected with the conveyance of the infant into the Château, was far from improbable; and impressed with this idea, Matilda would have subdued her disquietudes but for that mysterious warning. Might not Sir Richard's absence at that moment constitute the treachery to which she was a dupe?—Might he not be gone from her—perhaps not to return for a length of time—perhaps to return no more?

A general shuddering seized her frame at the surmise of such an iniquity!—But no, it could not be!—She had no right to think thus hardly of him at the suggestion of some nameless enemy. It was far more probable that she was herself the dupe of a delusion wantonly created; that the scroll so incomprehensibly conveyed to her was a thing devised by the enemy, a deception practised on her credulity by the Normans. Sir Richard was, perhaps, detained from her by some personal misadventure—some blundering persecution of the Imperial police—some sweeping measure directed against British residents in France. She half determined to despatch a messenger to Admiral Guerchant entreating him to institute inquiries. It was only on recalling to mind that, should her alarm prove premature, it would be most injurious to Sir Richard's plans to direct towards his abode at such a moment the vigilant eyes of the police, that Lady Norman was prudent enough to refrain.

There was nothing for it but patience!—Fixing her eyes upon the gorgeous pendule that graced her mantel-piece (which had recorded the sad or joyous moments of the noble inhabitants of St. Sylvain from the days when Choisy was a royal palace, and Louis XV. a king,) she counted minute by minute, the cheerless hours, till it became time to close the Château for the night. Though the vicinity of the house to a navigable river, as well as the constant transit of troops through the country, rendered it highly undesirable to leave its avenues undefended after midnight, Lady Norman insisted that the servants should keep watch till one o'clock, not suffering the huge mastiffs, the usual guardians of the domain to be turned out.

At the appointed time, however, on hearing the great bars and bolts of the hall doors drawn upon her, and remembering that Sir Richard was still away, and that she was pronounced to be a dupe, she threw herself despairingly upon the sofa, to bewail the miserable destiny which had thrown her, helpless, and friendless, into the mercy of a wayward tyrant, far from the home of her youth and the domestic sanctities of her native country.

CHAPTER XIV.

Here's a sight! look thee; a bearing cloth
For a squire's child!—Take up, take up the babe!

Shakespeare.

All was still as death in the Château.—Ghita, after her usual offers of assistance, had retired for the night; and Lady Norman lay watching, in indescribable anguish of spirit, the flickering of the veilence burning at the foot of her sofa. The figures reflected by the light through its vase of painted porcelain, seemed dancing fantastically on the opposite wall. The lofty alcove of the state bed looked dim and solemn, as it had never looked before. It was only by burying her face in the cushions of the sofa that she could shut out these unwelcome omens. She dared not commit herself, according to her nightly habit, to the protection of Providence!—On the eve of so enormous a breach of integrity, so gratuitous an act of false witnessing, there would be crime in the attempt. She must bear up against the force of her terrors, and the sense of helplessness that besets the guilty. She almost longed to call back the woman she detested, to preserve her from the self-communing of solitude!

At length, the beneficent Power to which she dared not appeal for protection, had pity on her sufferings. Wearied by the agitation of the day, she slept;—slept and dreamt of home—of old familiar faces, old familiar rambles with her brothers and sisters among old familiar fields—where she was loud, and wild, and happy, without care or ambition to rise beyond the obscure condition of a manufacturer's
daughter. The coarse, rude laugh of Cruttenden mingled in her dreams;—the approving laugh he had been wont in other days to bestow upon the gambols of his partner's children. But of a sudden it changed to a tone of mockery, a tone of contemptuous accusation; and he was reviling her in words half jest, half scorn, for having defrauded an honest man's family in behalf of a foundling, when, waking with a sudden shiver, she found the gray light of morning stealing into the room, and her husband standing beside her.

"Ha! you are come at last?"—said she, starting from the sofa, and trying to compose her bewildered senses when the surprise of finding him at that hour in her chamber, and a certain expression of wild delight irradiating his countenance, induced her to exclaim, "But how did you make an entrance here?—I fancied I had secured the door."

"You had;—but I have a passe-partout. I entered the Château without even the porter being aware of my arrival. How soundly you were sleeping, dearest Matilda, that you did not hear my approach!—"

"Soundly, but not composedly," answered Matilda, as she gradually recovered her self-possession. "I have been dreaming painful dreams.—I lay down in misery.—Why did you not return last night?—What detained you in Paris?—Why not prepare me for the disappointment?"

"I did not know that you would feel it a disappointment," replied Norman, taking her hand between his, and gazing upon her with a still more rapturous expression of joy; "but if my absence made you uneasy, I am indeed to blame for playing truant."

"But what can have occupied you so long in Paris?"

"In the first place, the brilliant preparations for the Champ de Mai; which induced me to idle away my morning among other gaping loungers. Having met Guerchant, who was superintending the labors of the engineers in the Champ de Mars, he induced me to return home and dine with him."

"Then I am convinced you did not tell him you were expected back at St. Sylvain," cried Lady Norman. "The Admiral is a man of too much gallantry to do anything tending to keep me in such harassing suspense."

"I confess I thought that, with your books and garden, and the fine weather, you would scarcely have leisure to note my absence. In this persuasion, after settling with Madame Gervais that night would be the most propitious moment for her entrance here, I determined to prolong my stay by a few hours, and avoid a second journey."

"You saw Madame Gervais, then?"—demanded Lady Norman, her heart sinking at once from the momentary elation produced by her husband's presence, and resuming the careful looks produced by the event of the preceding day.

"I did. Our preparations are complete. But you do not ask to see the child?" added he, in a lower voice—an anxious glance overshadowing for a moment the triumphant brightness of his face.

"The child!"—faltered Matilda, turning deadly pale.—"Is it then already here?"

"It is in my room with the nurse. We had better lose no time in transporting the little creature hither before the servants are up and about."

And expecting to find Matilda second his proposals with the ardor she had recently displayed in the cause, Sir Richard was amazed to find that no word escaped her lips, and that every tinge of color vanished from her countenance. A confusion of thoughts and feelings overpowered her.—The word "dupe" was ringing in her troubled ears!—

"You seem surprised—you seem displeased!" said he—astonished in his turn. "Did you not expect this?—I understood from you yesterday morning—that all was prepared!"

"Yes!"—faltered Matilda, neither daring to speak nor to remain silent. "You remarked that no further time was to be lost—that I could not do better than come to an understanding with Madame Gervais without further delay!"

"Did I?—Yes, I dare say I did!"—replied Matilda, breathing as though a heavy oppression hung upon her bosom.

"Yet now, you seem reluctant—vexed! How is this, Matilda?"—cried he, growing alarmed in his turn. "Do you mean to fail me in the hour of trial?"

"No, no!"—cried Lady Norman, scarcely knowing what she replied, and anxious only to gain time for the recovery of her self-possession. "But make some allowance for the anguish of my heart at this eventful moment in accept-
ing from your hands a foundling—an alien—instead of having to present you with a child of my own!"

At this appeal, Sir Richard, encircling her affectionately with his arm, kissed the tears from her pale cheeks. At that moment perhaps she would have been reconciled to the event, and content to accede to his projects, but for the words still rankling in her heart—"the dupe of a dupe!"

"The Normans are avenged!" thought Matilda, as she reclined her throbbing brow on her husband's shoulder. "The injury I am inflicting on them is amply repaid.

After a moment's deference to her wounded feelings, Sir Richard seemed to remember that the business they had in hand was too important to be trifled with for the indulgence of unavailable sensibility.

"It is essential, dearest," whispered he, in the most soothing manner, "that the nurse and child should be established in your apartment before the household is astir. I have in readiness to light a fire in the adjoining chamber. Will you give me leave to bring in Madame Gervais?"

And on Matilda's expressing assent he quitted the room, and by the duration of his absence, seemed inclined to give her time for perfect recovery. A woman would have judged more wisely, and allowed no leisure for reflection. The lapse of the next ten minutes re-excited the agitation of Lady Norman to so distracting a pitch, that, had the garde on entering the room been at leisure to take note of her patient, she might have concluded that she was summoned to attend a lunatic. Pale and haggard, she could scarcely support herself when Sir Richard, advancing towards her with the portly Madame Gervais, called her attention sportively to the infant, whose little face she uncovered for her inspection.

"How hideous!"—was Lady Norman's involuntary ejaculation, as the ghastly light of early morning gleamed upon the new-born baby, an object beautiful to the eye of a mother, but distasteful enough to any indifferent spectator.

"Hideous?"—reiterated Sir Richard, his air of triumphant satisfaction giving place to a glance of indignation—"It is one of the finest infants I ever beheld!"

And the garde, comprehending from the tone of her employer that he was enlarging on the beauty of the child, burst forth into a clamor of eulogy, which did not prevent Lady Norman from retaining her opinion that she was looking upon a very ugly babe, attired in a very beautiful dress. Sir Richard did not think it worth while to controvert her decision. He addressed no further remark to her; but began questioning Madame Gervais as to the probability of its having taken cold, and the further arrangements to be made for its comfort and accommodation. He could not have interested himself more warmly in the little creature's welfare, had it been a child of his own.

"Never fear, Monsieur—never fear;—we shall do very well!" was the woman's reply, in the cordial motherly tone peculiar to her vocation. "You have been up all night. We don't want you here.—Leave me with miladi, who has her acquaintance to make with this little personage here. Ghita will get me all I want, mon bon monsieur; and in half an hour we shall have the nurse from the materinale. Leave me with miladi."

To Lady Norman's surprise, he quitted the room without further inquiry or remonstrance; evidently stung to the soul by her hasty sentence of disapproval of the babe. She now felt conscious that she had spoken hastily and harshly; and when, a moment after Norman's departure, Madame Gervais placed the little creature unceremoniously in her arms, saying, "There—hold it carefully for me a moment while I put things to rights a bit, in the other room," instead of resenting the freedom, she extended her arms kindly to receive the poor foundling.

It was perhaps a proof of tact on the part of the old lady, that, instead of giving time to the pretended mother to recoil with disgust from the child forced on her adoption, she appealed instantly to instincts latent in every female heart. No sooner did she find the helpless little being in her arms, than Matilda's heart softened towards it. In its sleep, it uttered a slight moan; and she raised its soft cheek to her own to soothe it with caresses. It folded its tiny hands upon its bosom as she bent over it, and the grace of its infantine movements excited her admiration. "Poor little creature!" was her silent reflection. "It is now motherless.—Its parents have cast it off for ever. I should be unpardonable not to do my best towards supplying their place."

The nurse kept coming and going between the two rooms; bustling about and setting the place to order, without offering to relieve her of her burden. She contented herself with placing a cushion under Lady Norman's foot,
loudly commending her skill as a nurse, and applauding the tranquillity of the babe, who had slept quietly from the moment of leaving Paris, without uttering a single cry to endanger discovery!

"Not a soul knows yet of our arrival," said Madame Gervais, making herself as familiarly at home in Matilda's room as if she had lived there all her days. "The servants will conclude by-and-bye that Ghita has been attending on us through the night.—But we want no one. The fewer prying people admitted into these rooms at present the better. For a week to come, milédi will content herself with my attendance and that of Monsieur. She will laugh at my awkwardness; but what then?—Poor old Gervais is accustomed to be laughed at!—Poor old Gervais is the best of lady's maids to a little gentleman six hours old; but she does not pretend to be a femme de chambre pour une belle dame telle que milédi.

The good-humored garrulity of the old dame seemed to place Matilda at her ease. After the cool silence of Ghita, the familiarity of Madame Gervais was a relief. She talked too incessantly to allow Lady Norman a moment for reflection; and claimed her services for the child as frankly and cordially as if she really imagined her to be its mother.

The nourrice did not make her appearance so soon as was expected; and Matilda found herself growing uneasy as Madame Gervais. The little creature seemed pinning for food. She fancied it might suffer seriously by the delay; and kept hushing it off to sleep upon her bosom, while the garde, who had taken authoritative possession of the supposed sick chamber, despatched Ghita to the lodge to make inquiries.

"We will not render your penance longer than needful," said Madame Gervais, watching with satisfaction the progress her little charge was making in the affections of its beautiful nurse. "The persiennes closed for two days, and your chamber kept for a week, will satisfy the servants. After that, you can take your walks and drives as usual; leaving all further care of the little fellow to me and his nurse. I wish we had her here by this time, for the boy is getting sadly cold and weak!—There!—he does not look so frightful now!"—continued Madame Gervais, as Matilda, alarmed by her lamentations, raised it closer to her bosom to preserve warmth in its little frame. And so successful

had been her manoeuvres, that already Lady Norman was interested in its behalf.

"People not used to the sight of young children are no great judges of such matters," resumed the garde. "But I, who have a couple of hundred such marmots in my arms in the course of a year, can assure you that this is a most promising babe. I'd stake my life he'll grow up a beauty; and what's more, I'd stake my life that, before the year's up, you'll be most as fond of it as if it was your own!—I'm experienced in such matters, ma bonne dame; and it's written in your face that you were born to be dotingly fond of children. Monsieur chose this boy out of several in the Hospice because of its fair! He wished it to be beautifully fair, that it might resemble milédi in complexion!"

By this impromptu piece of flattery, Madame Gervais completed her triumph!—All suspicion was gradually dissipating from the mind of Lady Norman. The maligner who accused her of being a dupe knew not, perhaps, to what extent she had been trusted by her husband. Having locked up the slip of writing in her desk and resolved to make no allusion on the subject to her husband, she gave all her attention to her little nursling.

Installed in full splendor after the arrival of his nurse, the contented child, sleeping in his magnificent berconnette, looked truly the heir of Selwood; and Matilda, having seen the new comers comfortably established, disposed herself to take a few hours' rest in the adjoining chamber; and her sleep was no longer disturbed by the painful visions of the preceding night. It was very late when she woke, roused perhaps at last by the officiousness of the garde, who had crept tiptoe into the room.

"Well, to be sure I hope we have rested soundly?"—cried Madame Gervais, drawing aside the curtains, in obedience to Matilda's commands. "Fresh as a rose, too, dame!—A very different face from those of the poor suffering creatures I am in the habit of attending!—Ah! your ladyship is truly in luck to have all the comfort and satisfaction of a beautiful little boy, without fear, pain, doctor, or physic!—What would some of my poor ladies give to become a mother on such easy terms!—Shall I bring my little man to say good morning to his pretty mamma?"

And without waiting for a reply she fetched the sleeping infant, and laid it by Matilda's side, to make its own way to that kind and gentle heart.
It was thus she found herself suddenly greeted by Sir Richard Norman!—Though overwhelmed with delight at beholding his wife so rapidly reconciled to her position, he had too much tact to express either joy or gratitude; but took a seat calmly by her bedside, and waited till it was her pleasure to address him.

"I am puzzled at present what to call this young gentleman," said she, bending over the sleeping boy to conceal her embarrassment. "What do you intend shall be his name?——"

"Whatever pleases your fancy, my dear Malilda."

"Your own then!"

"Not!"—replied her husband, his voice slightly faltering, "I should be jealous to hear you apply that name in a tone of endearment to any but myself."

"You will choose godfathers for him; and etiquette requires, I believe, that they should decide the point," said Matilda, recollecting with shame the offer made by old Cruttenden to enrich and give his name to her expected child. 

"Our good friend Guerchant has undertaken the office," replied Sir Richard, "and I was thinking of writing to Ireland to Mandeville to become the other."

"I fear," said Matilda, with a deep blush, "that my father will be greatly mortified unless solicited to become one of the sponsors."

"Impossible!"—cried Norman. "I could not reconcile it to myself, dearest, to accept the kindness and liberality of your family, for one so wholly devoid of claims upon your family, for one so wholly devoid of claims upon them."

"Under all the circumstances, there must be many things to which we shall find it difficult to reconcile ourselves," said Lady Norman. "But we can do no less than place the little fellow wholly and absolutely in the light of our child; and it would be cruel to debar my father from a happiness and honor, which cannot be withheld without offence."

"It is not for me to deny a request of yours," replied Sir Richard. "But as, according to the laws of France, this boy must be registered at the Mairie within three days of his birth, not only as the offspring of Sir Richard Norman and Matilda Maule his wife, but explicitly by his christian name, it will be as well to have him baptised this evening by the curé of St. Sylvain by the name of Walter Norman; which is at once that of the Admiral and of my immediate ancestors, and renders our patronymic rightfully his own."

"With all my heart!" replied Matilda. "I have no doubt Master Walter will do honor to his name. I beg his pardon for calling him a fright this morning, before I had obtained a full view of his august person, for I now think him a very fine little fellow," said she, imprinting a kiss on his forehead, "and Madame Gervais promises that his beauty shall eclipse that of my little friend of the Champs Elysées."

There was something in the allusion not altogether satisfactory to Sir Richard. Delighted as he was to find Matilda conferring her good offices on the little stranger, he was silent when she concluded her observations by this reference to the Normans.

At that moment, Madame Gervais, stealing in with a significant smile, informed them that Madame l'épouse de Monsieur le ministre de la marine was in the next room waiting for permission to pay her compliments to l'accouchée. Was she to be admitted?

"By all means!"—cried Sir Richard, allowing no time for Matilda to demur. "You can ask her to become the boy's god-mother with the Admiral, which will remove all difficulties. Rather too blooming for an invalid!"—he continued, pressing Matilda's hand as it smoothed down the infant's robe while Madame Gervais went to usher in the future marraine. "However, you look as happy and maternal as could be desired!—Have no fears on that account."

"Fie, fie!" was the hasty adjuration of the good Madame Guerchant, on finding Matilda engaged in cheerful conversation in a room into which the April sun was brightly shining. "Do you mean to kill yourself with these exertions? My best congratulations to you, chère milédi, and a hearty welcome to your little son!—A boy, you see, as I prognosticated—and everything going on as well as possible. Since you will have daylight in your room, I must be allowed a peep at your child.—Hat the living image of Sir Richard I protest!—his forehead exactly—exactly the dimple on the chin.—A noble boy—a beautiful child—
worthy to be born a Frenchman, and a subject of our be-

10loved Emperor!"

Without noticing the confusion into which her remarks had thrown the Normans, she embraced the boy, dismissed the servat, and ran on to the news of the day;—to the ques-
tions before the Chamber—the audiences given the preced-
ing night by the Emperor; in the midst of which, Matilda discovered from some accidental expression that Norman had not, according to his assertion, dined the day before with Admiral Guerchant—Why had he deceived her?—On that trivial point, at least, she had been unquestionably "a dupe!" All her misgivings recurred with the reflection.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard had quitted the room to afford leisure to Matilda for her request concerning the sponsor-

ship; and amid the caquetage that ensued between Madame Gervais and the mother and grandmother of seven-and-
twenty living descendants, Lady Norman had a moment’s respite for conjecture and mortification.

Her husband, however, was luckily as unconscious of the discovery she had made as of the warning she had re-

ceived.

Satisfied that all difficulties were overcome—that his deep-laid plans had fully succeeded—that all was upon vel-

vet—that he was the happiest of the human race—he re-
tired to his morning-room to complete a few trifling an-
nouncements suggested to him by Matilda. As he sat down to his writing-table in the highest spirits, a smile of triumph stole over his handsome features.

"After all,"—murmured he to himself, as he placed two letters on the desk before him, "my very cares turn to blessings—my thorns send forth blossoms—I am the most fortunate man on earth!—Even the annoyance of having to acquaint old Maule of the existence of a grandson, is fully compensated by the delight of being able to announce to those insupportable people at Grove Park, per favor of the times and Morning Post, the birth of my son and heir!"

As he spoke, he prepared to seal the two epistles destined to convey to the two anxious families such opposite emo-
tions of joy and grief. —But lo! as he stood before the taper with the seal, bearing the aristocratic blazon of the Normans ready in his hand to attest the transmission of a fraud, the library door was thrown open, and a servant entered an-

nouncing—"the Abbé O’Donnel."

CHAPTER XV.

You undergo too strict a paradox,
Striving to make an ugly deed look fair.

Shakespeare.

It was somewhat more than four years after the occurrence of these events, that two travelling carriages, contain-
ing Sir Richard Norman and his family, drove through the village of Selwood, on their return to the Manor.

Summer was in its prime;—peace and plenty were in the land;—and the tenants of the long-absent family, rejoicing in the prospect of renewed benefactions and hospitalities, prepared to greet them with the warmest welcome; and above all, to afford a triumphal inauguration to the young heir of Selwood. A rustic arch was erected at the entrance of the village; covered with laurals interspersed with roses, and blazing with gaudy flags and gold-leaf; while a far more beautiful embellishment was prepared by the hands of nature, in the bloom of the numerous little gardens encompassing the humble tenements lining the road, and in the verdure of the magnificent woods of Selwood, which formed a noble embankment in the back-ground.

Though secretly embarrassed by the ill-timed enthusiasm of his tenantry, Sir Richard could not but feel gratified, when, on reaching the outskirts of his domain, he was sal-
uted by hearty cheers; while a dense mob of farmers and laboring men assembled round the carriage, with cries of "God bless you!"—"Long life to the old family!"—"Good luck to our young landlord!"—"Success to the heir of Selwood!" At the last stage, he caused little Walter to be removed from the second carriage to his own; and now presented the noble looking child to the multitude, whose acclamations might have daunted the courage of a less spi-

rited boy. As if conscious of his consequence, however, the child replied to their cheers by waving his little hat; and
on Sir Richard requiring them from the carriage-window to desist from their attempt to take off the horses and drag the carriage up the hill to the Manor, Walter Norman offered his little hand to be shaken by the foremost of the crowd, with all the affability of a prince. The travellers being at length permitted to proceed on their journey, the villagers of Selwood, ere they dispersed to their habitations for the enjoyment of their holiday, assembled in high court of rustic parliament at the stocks (which in old fashioned villages constitute the seat of government, as the sight of a gibbet is supposed to announce the existence of civilisation,) and decreed that Sir Richard had brought back from foreign parts a far more cheerful face than he took away; and that my lady had brought back a son and heir biding fair to be an honor to the family.

They admitted; however, that this was all the improvement visible in their lady. — Their unprejudiced eyes quickly discerned that a shade was upon her brow; — that her cheek was paler than of old — her brow more pensive. Though still in the prime of youth, a blight was upon her cheek — a blight, engendered by unceasing self-reproaches.

Not all the changes and diversions they had witnessed in their travels, had sufficed to drive her deep-seated grief from the heart of Lady Norman. Having quitted Paris as soon as the expiration of the hundred days brought back the allied armies, and in their train, the coterie of fashionable English, so distasteful to Sir Richard, they had visited every remarkable country in Europe; — had passed a winter in Rome, another in Vienna, and a third in Berlin; — wandering, during the intervening summers, among the scenery of the Appennines, the Pyrenees, the Jura, and the miniature Switzerland of Saxony. Matilda had acquired new impressions, new languages, new friends; but the one still-enduring affection weighed heaviest as ever on her heart. For it was of a nature that forbade its being lessened by participation! — Sir Richard Norman had not only bound her by solemn pledges never to afford a hint upon the subject to living mortal, but had interdicted all further reference to it as regarded himself. He seemed dextrous to forget what had occurred; and Matilda sometimes almost fancied he had succeeded — so rapturous was the delight he took in the progress and promise of his heir — so intense the affection with which he regarded the adopted child!

Lady Norman, herself, dearly loved the boy. It would have been impossible to withhold her fondness from a creature so deeply attached to herself. Yet in her fondest caresses, there mingled a pang of bitterness. There was always a reserve in her attachment. She could never at any moment forget that she beheld in Walter the evidence of unexpiated error, the living proof of an enormous breach of integrity. Of late, indeed, a new care had arisen in her mind connected with his mysterious adoption; but too recently to be accountable for the sadness which had defaced the bloom of her bright and beautiful youth.

Meanwhile, the travellers were installed once more under the roof of the manor; and never had the place appeared to such advantage in the eyes of Sir Richard Norman. The depth and richness of English verdure clothing the park and woodlands, was not more refreshing to his eye than the completeness and elegance of the house. Among the noble palaces and princely mansions of the continent, he had seen nothing so comfortably adapted to the convenience of life. There were all the attributes of the palace — pictures, statues, a fine library, a noble observatory — but there was also the snug book-room, the well-warmed vestibule and staircase, the commodious chambers and airy dressing-rooms, exclusively characteristic of the English country-house.

Already Walter was coursing over the close-shaven velvet lawn the poor infirm spaniel, which by its frolics seemed to recognise its home of old; while Matilda stood on the threshold of the conservatory opening from the saloon, gazing upon the fine exotics which had attained such growth during her absence; convinced that though the plants and flowers of Southern climates may be more glowing and luxuriant, in no country are they so intimately brought home to domestic enjoyment as in England.

Great improvements had been achieved in the place during their absence. A large portion of their income, economised on the continent, had enabled Sir Richard to diversify the park with plantations, and the extension of a fine stream of water; while the interior of the house was adorned with the noble collection of objects of art he had gradually amassed abroad. The chef-d'œuvre of the improvements, however, was a dressing-room destined for Matilda; which opened through a trellised balcony to the coved-roof of the conser-
vatory; concealed by a screen of climbing exotics. Lined with alternate panels of Florentine, Mosaic, and Venetian glass, the intervening draperies were of Lyons silk of the palest fawn color. No gilding—no finery—no starry ceiling or glittering cornices. The tables, carved from blocks of the purest white marble, had been despatched home from Carrara; and an exquisite statue of Silence, by Bartolini, graced the pedestal in the alcove.

Conducted in triumph by her husband to this temple of luxury, Matilda knew not whether most to applaud the taste of its decorations, or the consideration which had presided over their selection. All alienation of feeling had long ceased between Sir Richard and herself. So complete was their re-union, that it seemed scarcely explicable how coldness or mistrust should ever have sprung up between them; and Matilda felt grateful to him for having effaced, by this preparation of a new chamber for her use, all recollection of the painful hours of her last sojourn at Selwood Manor. All was sunshine now.—The house seemed to have lost its former cheerless look; and one at least of its inhabitants had overcome since last he crossed its threshold, the only unsatisfactory circumstance connected with the spot. Sir Richard no longer feared that the inheritance he took so good pleasure in adorning, would pass to the enjoyment of an enemy!

"I like this room—I will have this room for my own—I will come and live in this pretty room with mamma!" cried little Walter, following Sir Richard and Lady Norman to their retreat.

"There is no place for you here, sir—unless, indeed, you mean to deprive me of mine!"—said Sir Richard, pattering the wayward little fellow on the head with doting fondness.

"May I turn him out, mamma?"—persisted the child.

"I should so much like to be with you here, all to ourselves!"—

"Upon my word, you have a good notion of making yourself comfortable!"—resumed Sir Richard, who could never see a fault in Walter. "But I don't intend to be deposed before my time. Content yourself with your nursery."

"Where is his nursery?"—demanded Matilda.

"At some distance—in the eastern wing—the rooms that were mine in my childhood," replied Norman carelessly. "I sent orders to have them refurnished, and have no doubt all is very comfortable. The great advantage is, that being so far off, you need not be troubled with him more than you like."

"But I never trouble her!—Do I, mamma?"—cried Walter, sturdy in the assertion of his rights. "I won't be sent away from her. I won't stay in this place at all, if I may not remain with my mamma."

The exulting smile with which Sir Richard glanced towards his wife, plainly expressed—"Could a child of your own have loved you more dearly?" But he found no correspondent triumph in the eyes of his wife. He could almost fancy that hers were suffused with tears. Hastily consigning the boy to the care of his attendant, he invited her to saunter with him through the shrubberies till dinner-time; but Matilda pleaded fatigue. She was either overpowered by her journey, or by the emotion produced by her return to that long-forgotten home.

Her heart experienced the need of other consolations than rich furniture or gay flower-gardens. She wanted cheering friends—comfortable counsel. There was a weight upon her mind—a weight she still lacked courage to confide to her husband. She would have given much for the solace of female companionship—for the presence of her surviving sister—of the motherly Mrs. Ravenscroft—the light-hearted Sophia. But during her absence the chain of her friendship and connections had been snapped asunder. Miss Ravenscroft was now the happy wife of Lord Selston, and settled with him at a family mansion in Shropshire, beyond reach of neighborship with the Normans; and her proud mother was absent from Selwood cottage, presiding over the events which had given a first grandchild both to herself and her friends at Farleigh Castle.

Of the home of Matilda's childhood scarcely a trace remained. Upon the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth with a rich Liverpool merchant, old Manle had found it impossible to confront, unsupported, the bickerings and twittings of his partner. His health being impaired by a paralytic seizure which disabled him for business, he reluctantly resigned his sceptre into the hands of his son. Cruttenden Manle and his godfather now reigned in the old man's stead; and if his place knew him no longer, it was difficult
for him to know his place;—so completely had his old factory and engines given way to the new-fangled constructions now honoring the name of the firm.

Thwarted by their innovations and disheartened by sickness, Mr. Maule had divided the years of Matilda's absence between his son's rectory in Yorkshire, and his daughter's pleasant country-seat on the banks of the Mersey; and Lady Norman feared that with the happy, prosperous Mrs. Avesford, she should entertain an intimacy scarcely more sisterly than with the Elizabeth tyrannized by Tom Cruttenden, and estranged from her by the superstitious terrors of her father. Her youngest sister had been some years dead. Her brother William had fallen at Waterloo in all the glitter of his first Hussar jacket. There were none remaining but her happily-married brother and sister, and Cruttenden, who was becoming, as his father had been before him, a mere wheel of the factory. From Lady Norman's own kindred, neither sympathy nor companionship was to be expected.

It is the fate even of the most prosperous to experience moments of despondency, when they fancy themselves abandoned by a world that stands aloof to deride their sensibility, and rejoice over their distresses. Such was the mood of Lady Norman when, after being cheered back to Selwood by hundreds of voices and affectionately welcomed to her home by the husband she adored, she took this hasty balance of her loves and friendships; and decided that the tie which linked her to her father's household was broken or ever, and the pleasant confidence of Selwood cottage wholly destroyed. There was none to turn to for comfort but her husband; and it was precisely in her husband that, at that moment, she felt reluctant to confide.

For the event which, for so many years, she had vainly sighed for, at length threatened accomplishment.—As if in mockery—as if in retribution—her dearest wish was granted to be her punishment.—For some months past, Matilda had been aware that she was likely to become a mother!—Admonished by her own regrets, she had not courage to communicate her expectations to Sir Richard. She felt what must be his self-accusation on learning a circumstance that promised him a lawful heir, disinherited by his guilty manoeuvres in favor of an alien. He had defrauded his unborn child;—its guilty mother having connived in the act of spoliation!

Matilda dreaded the effect such intelligence must produce upon her husband. Fondly and intensely as she had longed to possess a child of her own, all satisfaction in her present prospect was destroyed by the fear that she should produce a son, the sight of whom must be a perpetual condemnation to his parents.—What, what would now be the remorse of Sir Richard, the instigator of that culpable transaction!—

Still, he must be prepared. The time was at hand when it would be no longer possible to conceal the truth; and nothing but the extreme improbability that, after thirteen years' marriage, such an event should occur, could account for his blindness. Their return to Selwood having been long intended, Matilda fancying she should find it easier to announce the unwelcome fact at home, had postponed her revelation. Yet now that they were once more under their own roof, she felt that there, of all places, the confession was most difficult. It was so painful to damp the elation of spirit arising from the sensation of being at home; and the pride of having to exhibit so noble a boy as his son and heir!—Matilda resolved to defer it for a few days longer—only for a few days; enough to forward her own recovery from the fatigues of her journey, and afford time for the exaltation of her husband's spirits to subside.

Every day, however, seemed to increase his triumph. She almost regretted that the Abbé O'Donnel had ceased to be her inmate, whom she used formerly to fancy a check upon the hilarity of Norman. But since the birth of the child, the good old man had withdrawn from their household to the college of which he was a member; taking leave of Matilda with so much fervor of fatherly tenderness and compassion, that she accused herself of want of charity in her previous suspicions. The Abbé bade her adieu with tears; and though he refused to perform the baptismal ceremony for her supposed child, in disgust probably at the heresy of the mother, he accompanied his farewell with a solemn benediction to herself, at once gratifying and affecting.

The news of the Normans' arrival at Selwood Manor, soon brought visitors from all quarters of the country. It was summer; the roads were in good repair, (owing, as Lord Selsdon always protested, to the number of magistrates and notabilities attracted to the place during the spinsterhood of his pretty wife;) and acquaintances, both intimate
and unfamiliar, came in troops to ascertain whether Sir Richard and his lady were better looking, or worse for wear, and to criticise the works of *virtù* they had been collecting on the continent.

Of these visitors, their friends from Farleigh Castle were the most welcome. Lady Emily, who had attained the sober age of five-and-twenty previous to their departure, seemed to have added more than four years to her life in the interim; and Matilda, habituated to the usages of the continent, could not help regretting that Lady Emily should wither on the virgin stem, growing cross and prudish according to the spinster nature of old-maidenly England, for want of some kind friend to bring to issue the many admissions of young men too modest to press unencouraged pretensions to her hand. Lady Emily's baffled instincts had found an aim in teaching the young ideas of Farleigh village how to shoot; and, lacking the softening partialities of motherly nature, her preceptorship in Sunday schools and daily classes, rendered her arbitrary and dictatorial. But if no longer a gentle graceful girl, she was a woman of sense and good breeding; and as such, was duly conscious of the acquisition secured to her society by the return of Matilda. 

"Were you not surprised at my brother's marriage?"—she inquired, at her first solitary visit to Selwood Manor.

"More pleased than surprised," replied Lady Norman.

"From the first, I thought it a likely thing to happen. Two young people living in such near neighborhood—on such friendly terms."

"The very reason which prevented my anticipating any thing of the kind!—Affairs of that description so seldom occur in a straightforward, matter of fact, way. George used to come down from town raving about Lady Emeline this, or Lady Helena the other, and seemed to take very little notice of Sophy."

"He did not talk much of her, perhaps."

"He was afraid, it seems, that my father and mother might expect him to make what is called a better match."

"They had certainly a right to look for rank and fortune for Lord Selsdon."

"I don't agree with you, dear Lady Norman; no more did they. If the only son of an Earl with an unencumbered estate of thirty thousand a-year, may not form a marriage of inclination, who on earth has a right to make a choice? Sophy was a gentlewoman with a gentlewoman's fortune and education, and a match for any man in the kingdom."

"She had qualities to render any man in the kingdom happy," observed Matilda. "So much sweetness of temper—so much sprightliness of character."

"Yet with all these probabilities to bring the marriage about, it was very near failing of accomplishment," said Lady Emily. "My father and mother, who are the honestest people breathing and without the slightest capacity for a manoeuvre, determined to bring about a connection on which they had set their hearts, and which would have settled itself without their interference. With this view, they persuaded Mrs. Ravenscroft to settle at Selwood; and soon after her arrival, the old lady having accidentally remarked to her lady-cousin that one of Lord Arden's daughters would make a suitable match for Selsdon, mamma put on a most significant face, and begged she would not mention such a thing, as she and Lord Farleigh had other views for their son."

"Alluding to Sophy?—"

"Exactly; while Mrs. Ravenscroft, who has seen something of the world in her time, instead of conceiving that any such downright allusion was intended, fancied mamma desirous of fore-warning her against forming presumptuous expectations for her daughter. Meanwhile, Selsdon's attentions to Sophy commenced and proceeded. You went abroad instead of remaining to bring things to an issue between your young friends; and I have been too long accustomed to see young gentlemen devote their homage to young ladies without any serious intentions as they are called, to suppose that these daily meetings were producing other results than pleasant rides and walks."

"Instead of which, Lord Selsdon fell desperately in love?—"

"And never told his love; while Sophy not only fell in love, but felt it her duty to acknowledge to her mother her growing partiality. More evil consequences from doing things in a straightforward way, in this world of zigzag and deceit!—Mrs. Ravenscroft, terrified as she would have been on learning that the cottage was infected by cholera or typhus-fever, saw no remedy but flight. After informing Sophy, from the authority of his own mother, that Lord Sel-
don was an engaged man; she ordered fumigations—quitted home—carried her daughter off to Devonshire on a visit to Captain Ravenscroft's relations, leaving us not even a message of courtesy or farewell. Imagine poor Selsdon's despair, and my indignation!—"  

"I can better imagine that of Sophia. Well do I remember the desponding tone of the letters I received from her; which, as they explained nothing of these occurrences I attributed to illness. I was so much alarmed as to address Mrs. Ravenscroft on the subject, who entreated me in reply, to write cheerfully to Sophia, and without giving her any suspicion of my uneasiness. Scarcely a month afterwards, a letter from Sophy overflowing with love and rapture, acquainted me that her marriage was settled with the man of her choice—reminding me of a certain walk to a certain old forge where we had met Lord Selsdon and been escorted by him home—and assuring me that her prospects of happiness were confirmed by the generous concessions of Lord and Lady Farleigh."

"Ungrateful girl, to say nothing of their amiable daughter," cried Lady Emily, almost in earnest: "when, if it had not been for my exertions, she might have spent a twelvemonth longer at Torbay, listening to the pother of her uncles and aunts. It was I, who, in compassion to Selsdon, managed to find out the address of the fugitives. I remember losing a whole morning shouting my cross-examination to old Mrs. Lynch, trying to detect, like a Bow street officer, the haunts and connections of the Ravenscroft side, of which mamma knew nothing."

"And the result was, that Lord Selsdon followed them—proposed—was accepted; and, as the story books say, that they lived very happy ever afterwards!"

"Too happy, I am sometimes inclined to think," replied Lady Emily with a smile. "They are so dreadfully domestic, self-satisfied and indolent, that I am sadly afraid of Selsdon's sinking into a jovial, good-humored, selfish agricultural-meeting, game-law, country-gentleman. My brother is growing fat and florid; noisy in company, and drowsy by his fireside."

"Die, fie!—this is exaggeration,"—said Matilda smiling in her turn; "Sophia would never tolerate such a companion. With all her elegant pursuits, her music, her painting, her modelling —"
woman more substantially educated, or more energetic in her nature; and I trust my dear Lady Norman will endeavour to rouse poor Sophy from her habits of indolence. — And now that I have abused her to my heart’s content, let me see your little boy. — We are all very curious to behold this prodigy — this little Louis XIV. — this long-looked-for, come-at-last young heir of Selwood Manor. I was suggesting to papa last night that, twenty years hence, he would make a charming match for little Louisa Farleigh. Do you give your consent?"

"You forget that Walter will be a Roman Catholic," said Matilda, with a blushing face.

"Twenty years hence, I suspect, that will be a distinction without a difference," cried Lady Emily. "The papists are becoming so moderate, and the protestants so complying, that all memory of fire and fagots is extinguished. We shall have emancipation and a catholic chancellor without so much as finding it out. Ha! Sir Richard— Good morning! — Delighted to see you back in Worcestershire. — I am come to have a peep at your pictures, and statues, and son and heir; and to propose an alliance for him with my little niece. What say you? — Will you accept a Lady Louisa Norman?"

Sir Richard replied with playful gallantry — caused the boy to be paraded before his future aunt — and parried Lady Emily's compliments on the dark hair and eyes of young Walter, as exactly resembling his own. For in spite of Madame Gervais's civilities, the adopted child bore a far stronger resemblance to Sir Richard, than to the fair Saxon beauty of Matilda.

"I hope you will bring this little fellow with you next week to Farleigh Castle," continued Lady Emily. "My father and mother want you to pass a day or two with us, to do honor to the christening they are going to bestow upon their grandchild. It would be a delightful surprise for my sister-in-law to find Lady Norman staying in the house."

To Matilda's great vexation, this cordial invitation was accepted by her husband; and long after Lady Emily's departure, she sat musing upon the necessity of declaring all to her husband, ere she encountered the scrutiny of the large party of her own sex about to be assembled at Farleigh Castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

Les choses que nous désirons vivement n'arrivent pas; ou, si elles arrivent, ce n'est pas dans le temps ni dans l'occasion où elles nous auraient fait un extrême plaisir. — La Bruyère.

"I have good news for you, Sophy," said Lady Emily to her pretty sister-in-law, after Lady Selsdon had received the salutations of the family party, and exhibited the charms of her baby to its admiring relatives. "The Normans are arrived at Selwood, and will be here to-morrow."

"Lady Norman here to-morrow? — That is indeed a delightful surprise!" cried Lady Selsdon. "How I long to see her boy, and show her my little girl."

"Disgraceful! — to think of nothing but your rival nurseries in meeting a friend from whom you have been three years separated!" cried Lady Emily.

"What is this about Lady Norman?" inquired Lady Arthur D., who, among other connections of the Farleigh family, was staying in the house.

"That she is come back from Italy looking beautiful as ever, and joins our little circle to-morrow."

"I have seen or heard nothing of her since we parted four years ago at Paris in the midst of the Bonaparte panic," observed Lady Arthur. "She was a pretty, gentle creature. We used to like her amazingly; and it was amazingly, for we were as jealous as possible of her succès. The French swore that there was nothing like Lady Norman."

"There is nothing like her," said Lady Selsdon, with enthusiasm. "I never saw a person so devoid of selfishness or pretension."

"No merit of hers, my dear!" — observed Lady Arthur, with her usual jactance. "It all arises from living with that savage husband. Show me the house in England wide enough to contain Sir Richard Norman's selfishness and pretension, in company with those of any other person? — She has never had any room to think much of herself; ergo, her virtues are of her husband's creation."

"You speak of the Sir Richard of other days," replied Lady Emily. "You won't know your savage when you
Bruin has learned to dance, I assure you, he is come home as courteous as Chesterfield.”

“Must write word of that to Lady Dawlish.—Heavens! how Frank Villiers used to hate him in Paris!—His ungraciousness passed permission. Frank used to swear to the French that he was no Englishman, but that he had been American Chargé d’Affaires to the court of Dublin.”

“I should not have fancied Sir Richard Norman a man to be trifled with,” said Lady Selsdon, calmly.

“Not if aware of the mystification. But you might as well expect the summit of Plinlimmon to know that boys are playing marbles at its base, as for Sir Richard to suspect that people are presuming to make game of him. In those days, he used to live three thousand miles above the level of the vulgar earth.”

“I prophesy that to-morrow you will pronounce him one of the most agreeable men upon the surface of it,” said her cousin.

“And what has wrought this wonderful transformation?”

“Travel.—The polish which friction impresses on the rolling stone.”

“More likely the birth of his son and heir,” said Mrs. Ravenscroft, who now entered the room after escorting her little grandchild to its quarters. “Sir Richard was soured by the prospect of seeing his entailed estates descend to a distant branch of the family.”

“Not exactly of seeing it,” said Lady Emily, a stickler for verbal accuracy.

“By the way—yes;—I recollect now,” cried Lady Arthur, “Lady Catherine O’Flaherty was stupid enough to marry the man who was to have been his heir. They made sure of coming into the property; when, lo! one fine day Lady Dawlish brought news that there was a little Shiloh en chemise; and we had hysterics, and crises de nerfs, and Eau de Cologne for the rest of the day!—A fainting fit from Lady Catherine is no laughing matter;—Villiers’s shoulder was sprained for a month afterwards!—He was obliged to go through a course of Russian baths.”

“Then pray do not risk bringing on a new attack by informing her that young Norman is the most promising little fellow I ever beheld,” said Lady Emily.

“That was another of poor Lady Catherine’s vagaries!” observed Lady Arthur, gradually reviving her reminiscences of Paris. “Lady Catherine would have it that the Normans were going to impose a suppositional child upon the family. She insisted that Sir Richard and his wife lived on the most disunited terms; and so far moved the spirit of Lady Dawlish in compassion, that she dragged me down one day on a voyage of discovery, to an old château the Normans inhabited near Charenton; where, par parenthèse, we deserved to be detained on our road.”

“And what did you find there?”

“Nothing worth the journey. A stately old barrack of a house, with antechambers and Salles des gardes, to prove that the French nobility who now live en polisson, once lived en prince; and a Caliban of a brother of Lady Norman’s, who myladyed us all around, bit his bread while we bit our lips, and ate omelette soufflée with a sharpened knife!”

“The greater the merit of Lady Norman,” interposed Lady Farleigh, angrily, “who, having such vulgar relations, is so perfectly well-bred. We are very fond of Lady Norman in this house. You recollect, Clara, that I gave her letters of introduction to you in Paris?”

“Certainly—and I did them honor by presenting her to all my set. She would have got on wonderfully in society but for the little caneans set about by Lady Catherine respecting her parvenuism, and Sir Richard’s amourettes with some low wretch or other, one of Napoleon’s Duchesses or Princesses, or something of that kind.—I never understood the story.”

“No occasion, then, to renew the effort,” said Lady Farleigh, looking dignified and displeased at her niece’s levity. “Nothing worthy attention is likely to proceed from Lady Catherine Norman.”

“Tell not that in Gath, my dear madam,” exclaimed the giddy Lady Arthur. “You lawless people who leave London at midsummer, and know nothing of its thrones and dominions, have very little notion of Lady Catherine’s present importance. Lady Catherine is great with the greatest;—has a Pythones’s tripod within the sanctuary of the Carlton Temple; and dispenses ribbons and pensions, by influencing some one who influences the other one. The French soldiers, you know, designate Napoleon ‘Pautre,’—a phrase we have adopted to specify our prince and master.”
"May I inquire, my dear, whom you mean by we?" inquired Lady Farleigh, gravely.

"Nous autres souverains—as a certain serene highness said to the Emperor Alexander, one day at Escudiers. By we, I mean Almacks—the world—society—the people one lives with!"

"Your indefinite pronoun, my dear Clara, can never be made to infer yourself and mamma," observed Lady Emily, "for your associates and hers are as diametrically opposite as black and white chessmen on a board."

"Since you are so pragmatical, then, I mean Lady Dawlish's set"—persisted Lady Arthur.

"I guessed as much," said Lady Farleigh. "Lady Dawlish's set are, I admit, justified in worshipping Lady Catherine, for their idol was wrought with the labor of their hands. But I hope you do not expect reasonable people to bow down to an intrigante, because the agent of the party in power?—"

"I expect nothing just now, except those horrid men borne from rabbit-shooting," said Lady Arthur, wary of the discussion. "Lord Selsdon pretended to set off after them; and instead of bringing them home, seems to have led them deeper into mischief. Now pray don't any of you take up his defence, or I shall begin to suspect they are off to Malvern or Cheltenham!"

Meanwhile, even though the hour had struck for her visits to Farleigh Castle, Matilda had attempted no explanation with her husband!—

Sir Richard was in the highest spirits. He found Selwood improved during his absence beyond his expectations. Mr. Maule having no further business in the metropolis, there was no fear of his renewing his annual visits to the Manor; and as to Tom Cruttenden, they need take no further note of his existence. Selwood cottage was almost as good as uninhabited, so long and frequent were Mrs. Ravenscroft's visits to Tuxwell Park; while the Abbé O'Donnel was safe for the remainder of his days in the Rue des Fossés, St. Victor. Sir Richard was thus secure from those domestic intrusions which he held in such abhorrence. He now lived as happily with Matilda as if the current of his true love had invariably run smooth as glass; with daily increasing joy and pride in the promising little heir of Selwood. Not a shadow of care remained upon his brow; and Matilda trembled at the idea of arresting on his lips the rash invocation of "Soul, take thine ease,"—and substituting a solemn invitation to lasting remorse!—

Nevertheless, the effort must be made.—A glance at herself in the glass on the day appointed for her visit to Farleigh Castle, apprised her of the probability that some gratulatory remark from her old friends Lady Farleigh or Mrs. Ravenscroft might lead to discovery; and arming herself with courage, she resolved to anticipate the startling announcement. She happened to enter the breakfast-room just as Walter was brandishing the bough of a beautiful exotic, which he had torn down in the conservatory.

"Sad complaints of this young gentleman from Anderson, and the gardeners!"—observed Sir Richard, gazing fondly upon the boy and his prize, as if in admiration of such precocity of mischief.

"But why not choose your boughs in the shrubbery, Walter?—demanded Lady Norman. "You would find branches there to flog your horse as well. Why prefer breaking those in the conservatory?—"

"Because the servants ordered me not; and I don't choose to be ordered by any body but you or my papa!—"

"There's a brave spirit!—cried Sir Richard Norman, pouting his round white shoulder, as the child trotted past on his wooden nag.

"Poor fellow!—he wants companions here,"—said Matilda, busying herself with the breakfast things, to conceal the changes of her countenance. "But he may soon have one!—"

"Not very soon. It will be some time before Selsdon's children are old enough to amuse him."

"I did not allude to Lord Selsdon's family," added Matilda, with increasing confusion. "I was anticipating the possibility of his having a brother of his own."

"God forbid!"—ejaculated Sir Richard evidently without conjecturing the drift of her remarks.

"Why God forbid?"—resumed Lady Norman. "Surely one hasty adoption need not so harden our hearts as to render us insensible to the happiness of having children of our own?—"

"To our disappointment on that score," said Sir Richard, still misapprehending her, "I have so long made up my mind that it seems useless to recur to it."
"But the disappointment exists no longer," said Matilda, firmly. "In three months, I shall be a mother."

Sir Richard Norman started from his chair; and to Matilda's heartfelt delight, she perceived that his first movement was a movement of joy.—An expression of rapturous self-gratulation brightened his features.—But, alas! it vanished as it came—vanished, to give place to a death-like paleness, and the gestures of a deep despair!—

"I am punished as I deserve!"—cried he, after a heavy pause, during which tears gathered under his eyelids;—"since, instead of offering you at this moment my thanks and blessings, I am forced to sue for pardon and for pity!—Matilda, can you forgive me for having robbed your child of his birthright?—Come hither, boy!" cried he suddenly seizing little Walter in the midst of his pastimes, and impelling him towards Lady Norman. "Down on your knees, and ask forgiveness with me of this angel!—"

"It is not an angel, it is my own dear mamma!"—cried the little fellow, throwing his arms around Matilda's neck, and imprinting an affectionate kiss upon her face that said more in his favor than words of studied supplications. "And mamma don't choose me to kneel for pardon to any but God Almighty. Do you?"—said he, addressing Matilda with another eloquent kiss.

"Never!" she replied. "But you must thank Him that you are going to have a little brother of your own, Walter.—Shall you not love it better than you love me?"—cried the child.

"I promise you that I will not,"—replied Lady Norman, addressing Sir Richard through the medium of the child. "I will love no little boy better than you, Walter; because you were my first and dearest.—But you must be very kind to your little brother when he comes, and protect him for my sake."

But it was useless to continue her reassurances to the agitated man. Unable to overcome his thick-coming emotions, he rose and quitted the room.

A few hours afterwards, and Matilda and her son were in the midst of the gay coterie at Farleigh castle. Replying to the questions of a host of strangers with equal spirit and intelligence, young Norman was soon pronounced to be all that Lady Emily had described him. Yet these praises afforded little gratification to those they purported to please. Other feelings were burning on the cheek of Matilda; and already Sir Richard seemed to regard the little foundling with disgust. Lady Norman saw distinctly that her revelations had effected a total revolution in the feelings of her husband; and unluckily, his deportment was intimately regulated by his feelings. Instead of the joyous, cheery, courteous man announced by Lady Emily to Sophy and Lady Arthur, he had already relapsed into the moroseness of former years.—His mind was pre-occupied. He had not a word to offer in conversation.—No man recently arrived from the continent, after frequenting, in its various countries, their most brilliant and distinguished society, ever found so little to say for the edification of a dinner table;—and Lord Seldon, whose talk was of

"Guns, bugles, double-barrels, dogs, and thunder," was far more companionable. Even Lord Arthur D., whose colloquial efforts consisted in a smile occasionally interpolated into the discourse of strangers, or a yawn occasionally interpolated into that of his wife, was a less heavy weight on the circle than the man whose severe countenance and accusing silence appeared to tax them with frivolity. Little did good Lord Farleigh dream, as he dilated to his long-absent neighbor upon the road-bills that had passed during his residence abroad to form highways where nothing was ever likely to pass in their thinly-populated district, how far away from Worcestershire were the thoughts of his companion!—Little did Lord Seldon imagine, when he cross-questioned him concerning the game laws, bassets, and chevreuils of France, what anguish of spirit prompted his vague and inaccurate replies!—Little did Lady Arthur D. conjecture that, while he listened without reply to her intelligence that "Lady Catharine Norman's boy, having lost all his beauty, would bear no comparison with his little cousin Walter," the teeth of the smiling man were grinding with agony!—

Every ordinary word seemed to borrow significance in his ears. He kept fancying that those who addressed him had other meaning than they pretended; that they discerned the plague-spot upon his soul, and derided his unavailing repentance!
Already, some comments of the little boy had spread among Matilda's friends the news of her position, and all were ready with congratulations. The elder matrons prognosticated that now she had commenced a family, she would have as many sons and daughters as Queen Hecuba; while Lady Arthur incautiously exclaimed, and so loud as to be overheard by Sir Richard Norman, "Well, I am glad you are likely to have more children. That puts an end at once to the scandalous rumors circulated by Lady Catherine Norman."

"What rumors?" inquired Matilda, in a faltering voice, feeling it impossible to pass over the remark in presence of so many persons.

"That your eldest boy was a supposititious child, adopted to defraud her husband of the Selwood estates."

"Lady Catharine Norman is capable of saying anything gross and insulting!" observed Lady Farleigh, provoked at Lady Arthur's indiscretion.

"Who knows, my dear Sophy"—cried Lady Emily, anxious to laugh off the evident distress of Matilda—"perhaps some malicious person will one day or other accuse you and Selsdon of having stolen little Louisa from the workhouse at Tuxwell, to supersede me in my claim to a portion of the Farleigh property."

"But my dearest Lady Norman, how pale you are growing," interrupted Lady Selsdon, fixing her eyes upon her friend. "I am sure you are overfatigued; you have not yet recovered the effort of your journey. Mamma, make room for Lady Norman beside that open window. The heat of the room, or the scents of that attar has overpowered her. Sir Richard Norman, pray come this way a moment.—I fear Lady Norman is ill!—"

"Matilda!" cried her husband, rushing forward to receive her into his arms.

But Matilda heard him not;—she had fallen into a state of insensibility.
careful that the world judge us less severely than we have reason to judge ourselves. We must take heed of every word that falls from our lips, every glance that escapes our eyes. We must fly from Selwood, where we are objects of constant examination. We must take refuge in the throng of London."

"Not now?—surely you will not require me to leave home again so soon?"—faltered Lady Norman, dreading the effort.

"I wish you to be confined in town. You will have better attendance—you will be safe from espionage—you will be secure from the intrusions of these damnable women!"

"But at such a time their presence would be a comfort rather than an intrusion," pleaded Lady Norman.

"No comfort to me!—replied her husband. "Some unguarded expression would be sure to betray your inexperience. —They would be sure to discover—"

"As you please!"—interrupted Matilda, shrinking from even an allusion to her duplicity. "If you are of opinion that we shall be better in London, let us remove thither next week."

And such was the intention she announced that evening, when questioned by her friends concerning her projects. As she had expected, all were loud in opposition. "London in September would be utterly deserted! Not a friend to cheer her, not an acquaintance to amuse! Lady Selsdon had done so well with country attendance, and country quiet! She would be so much better staying peacefully at Selwood Manor!"—Lady Farleigh promised that Sophy, who was to be her guest for the next six weeks, should constantly visit her friend; and Mrs. Ravenscroft assured her that she was going to spend the autumn at the cottage, and would watch over her as she had done over her daughter. But to all this, Matilda could only reply by admitting her anxiety to secure the attendance of London physicians.

"Why there you had a very fair chance of being seized and shut up in La Force!—Yet not a step would you stir from the spot, even with the fear of Napoleon before your eyes."

"I assure you my fear of the Worcestershire faculty is far more considerable," said Lady Norman, attempting a smile; and this time her plea of defence was fortunate, for it drew down upon her a violent attack from Lady Farleigh and Mrs. Ravenscroft in favor of their pet apothecary, which diverted the attention of Lady Arthur from all recurrence to the past. When next she addressed Matilda, it was to describe the horrors awaiting her in a London September; and the tirade was at length interrupted by Mrs. Ravenscroft with a petition that little Walter, instead of being hurried into the unwholesome atmosphere of London at a period when his mother would be incapable of attending to him, might be left under her charge at Selwood Cottage.

On the day following, the ceremony of christening Lord Selsdon's lovely infant filled the castle with rejoicing. The grandfather and two grandmothers acted as sponsors; the old servants of the household were arrayed in smiles to welcome this budding of a new generation of the family; and the noble guests wore their white ribbons with good grace, and quaffed "victorious Burgundy" to the health of little Louisa Farleigh.

But there was something in the solemnity which sunk deep into the mind of Lady Norman—something affecting in the family tenderness with which the little Christian was ushered into its new life, which strangely contrasted with the isolation awaiting her own. Little Walter's baptism had been hurried over, with the Guerrants only for respondents and witnesses; and it happened that this was the first time she had been present at such a ceremony according to the ritual of the protestant church. The solemn words entered into her soul. She thought of her unborn child, and trembled lest for it she should never hear unfolded that sacrament of grace;—she thought of her unborn child, and felt conscious of her own unworthiness to enjoy a mother's triumph over her peril.

"I shall die—and I have deserved to die," pondered Lady Norman—glancing from the venerable countenance of Lord Farleigh's chaplain, who with such touching emotion was pronouncing the promises of the gospel in favor of the in-
fant whose father he had also presented at the baptismal fount—to the lace draperies of the little girl, arrayed in all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of her glorious christening robe. “The holiest sanctity with which a woman is invested ought to be upon me now. The purest serenity of conscience ought to be mine, at a moment when other women set their house in order, lest in their anguish they should be snatched away. But I—should I not survive this event—must go down to the grave in the commission of sin—in the perpetration of a fraud such as, detected on the part of some poor uninstructed wretch, would consign him to a felon’s chastisement. Were I of my husband’s faith, I should not dare withhold this secret from the confessional; and my only impunity consists in the consistency of hypocrisy, which enables me to conceal it from the world!”

The sadness of Lady Norman’s countenance amid the general rejoicing did not pass unnoticed. But at such a period, excuses were readily found for her low spirits; till her friends, compassionating what they supposed to be her forebodings, decided that with such evil presentiments she did right to remove to London for advice. It was a relief to all parties when Lady Norman returned to Selwood to prepare for her journey to town.

Matilda’s distress was not, however, of a nature to be affected by change of scene. Home brought with it sorrows of its own. The very sight of Selwood was an accusation; for to Sir Richard’s desire to estrange the property from the Grove Park family, did she attribute the faulty deed so deeply repented. His attentions to her were now unceasing; but whenever he drove her in his low phaeton through the woodlands by way of gentle exercise, she was forced to exert herself to talk, lest he should attribute her reverie to contemplation of the injury inflicted upon her child, by the alienation of those princely possessions. Even when he found her ruminating in her boudoir, tranquil for a time, and simply enjoying the luxury of that enchanting room, she would start up on his approach and affect to busy herself in some active pursuit, lest he should suppose her to be struggling with the suggestions of a jealous envy of the superseder of her child!

Meanwhile, the time approached for their removal to town; and Matilda had not yet hazarded a request that her family might be invited to the Manor previous to her departure. Her duty suggested that she ought to seek a blessing from the father from whom she had been three years separated; while her inclinations prompted a renewal of intercourse with the sister, whose letters, during her sojourn on the continent, announced that the intelligent girl had progressed into a high-minded woman. The ten years which divided Lady Norman at thirty-one from Mrs. Avesford, formed a very different barrier from that which at seventeen had divided Matilda Maule from little Lizzy; and she longed to embrace as a friend the sister she had quitted as a plaything.

But when the proposal was at length ventured, Sir Richard looked black and negative.

“It is surely not a moment for your introduction to strangers,” said he. “You cannot invite the Avesfords here without extending your hospitality to Mr. John Maule and his wife, with whom it appears your father is on a visit. This new brother and sister-in-law will be too much for you. They may be noisy, intrusive, disagreeable; and even were they all you can desire, they must still call upon you for exertions to which you are unequal.”

“I confess I long to see my father and sister once again,” remonstrated Matilda.

“If you could see them alone!—But the flurry and bustle of a large family party at such a time!”

“There would be but five; and I promise you not to overexert myself.”

“As you please!” replied Norman, fractiously. “Bring down the whole family in judgment upon me if you find it agreeable!—It only needs old Cruttenden and his protégé to make the plan perfect!”

“I do not ask that,” sighed Matilda; “and were we desirous of their company, the pressure of their immense business prevents their quitting home.”

“Since these people are to come,” resumed Sir Richard, “the sooner the better.—If the hazard must be incurred, do not postpone it till, by hurrying the event, it ensures the further mischief of preventing our journey to London.”

But Matilda had already determined against bringing those who were likely to be ungraciously received, into contact with her husband; and on the following day, instead of obeying his injunctions by despatching the letters of invitation, she informed him that, on consideration, she thought
it better to defer the promised party till her return from town. “Her father and sister would be better pleased to see the baby as well as herself.”

“Mark the accomplishment of my prophecy!” observed Sir Richard. “Already, you speak of this promised child as your own—your only; already you seem to admit that Walter has no claims to their interest. It is this which made me dread an interview with your family. However well you may feign with indifferent persons, when once your heart is opened, dearest Matilda, you must inevitably betray yourself.”

“My heart is not often opened,” sighed Matilda, with irrepressible bitterness, as she reflected how cruelly her affectionate nature had been blighted by the limits assigned to her intercourse with her friends and kindred. “But no matter. I will strive to perfect myself in my painful lesson before I see my family. Later in the autumn, if I live, perhaps you will permit me to invite them.”

The words “if I live” struck painfully upon the ear of Norman. Conscious of apparent or involuntary harshness, but still without losing sight of the peremptory necessity for caution, he contented himself to pass for a monster rather than encourage an expansion of feeling on the part of Matilda, so fatal to the prospects of both.

“I will write to Elizabeth from London, and surprise her with intelligence of my return to England and the approaching event,” murmured Lady Norman, when she found herself alone. “As a married woman, she has probably become aware that a wife is not all-powerful in her husband’s establishment. May the discovery have brought with it events less direful than it has entailed on her unfortunate sister!”

The day was now appointed for leaving Worcestershire. Matilda, on the eve of quitting Selwood, recalled to mind with a sigh the unforeseen incidents to which her last departure from home had been the precursor, and aggravated her regrets by evil inferences for the future. She paid a farewell visit to every favorite spot;—to a flower-garden buried in the woods, which Sophy Ravenscroft and herself had planned during Sir Richard’s absence in France;—to a rustic fishing-house, where, during the two years succeeding her marriage, she had been accustomed to pass the summer evenings with her husband, enjoying the freshness of the surrounding waters. The damp of the spot now struck chill upon her heart!—Autumnal leaves were falling and disfiguring her forest garden. Everything around her partook of the gloomy influence of the hour. Even when, unknown to Norman, she betook herself to the village almshouses raised under her authority, to console her poor pensioners for her renewed absence by a secret benefaction, the terms of their blessings filled her mind with despondency.

“God send you safe through it, my lady!—Heaven prosper you, as it did before, and send you another noble boy to be a playmate for Master Norman!”

It was on her return from this last expedition that Lady Norman, on her way through the park towards the house, found herself suddenly intercepted by Ghita, whose services, at her own desire, had for some time past been transferred from herself to the little boy.

“They have done their utmost, madam,” said the woman, resolutely, “to keep me from your presence. But the time draws near for your departure for town, and I must be heard.”

“Who tries to keep you from my presence?” inquired Lady Norman, struck by the woman’s impetuosity.

“That Mrs. Grimes, whom I followed into your service, and whom you have taken back again since you arrived here,” persisted Ghita. “She seems afraid I should attempt again to supersede her. The fool is mistaken. Not for any sum of gold would I relinquish my attendance upon my boy.”

“Then what have you to say to me, Ghita?”—demanded Lady Norman, becoming somewhat alarmed.

“That you must take Master Walter and me to London with you.”

“That cannot be. It is settled that you are both to remain here. You will take Master Norman every day after breakfast to the lady who resides at the white house beyond the park gates, who will write me constantly accounts of him; and you will give him all the indulgences to which he is accustomed.”

“That will be many—for you are a good woman to the child, and a better wife than he deserves, to the worst of husbands,” returned the wayward Italian. “But your instructions are superfluous;—I must accompany you to town.”

“You certainly will not,” replied Matilda, irritated by Vol. 1.—14
the positive tone of her domestic. "My plans are otherwise arranged."

"Hearken!" resumed Ghita, drawing nearer to Lady Norman, as they skirted together a ragged thicket of hawthorns covering one of the slopes of the park; "There is a subject to which, by your desire, I have been forbidden to allude; but the interdiction holds good no longer when I know my boy to be in danger. I am not blind to all that is passing here. The collusion which, when childless, you granted to your husband, is now bitterly repented both by yourself and him. It is not possible—it is not in woman's nature—that you should consent to disinherit your own legitimate son."

"My own legitimate son is not yet in existence," replied Matilda, almost dreading the sequel of Ghita's remonstrances, lest projects of deeper guilt than she dared contemplate, should be unfolded to her. "I may become the mother of a girl."

"The chances are even;—and should an heir be born to Selwood, I am as convinced as that I have life, there would be evil dealing with my boy. Walter is to be left at this obscure place, and when he becomes burdensome, will be spirited away!"

"No spot in England, however obscure, is beyond the vigilance of the law," said Matilda, in a tremulous voice; "and how dare you suppose that Sir Richard Norman would be guilty of an atrocious action?—"

"I have never known him scrupulous," said Ghita, with one of her sneers of former days. "A sin more or less costs him nothing! lawless and godless—a bad son to the church—a traitor to all who love him!"

"I cannot hear this," exclaimed Matilda, trying to shake off her companion. "Leave me and return to the house."

"I shall do neither one nor the other, Eccelenza, till you have granted my request," said Ghita, folding her hands before her, and persisting in accompanying Lady Norman. "In you I have some confidence. You are too good to allow an injury to be offered to my boy. I will answer for nothing that happens during your absence. I choose to accompany you to town."

"Do you pretend that Sir Richard has shown less affection than myself towards that unfortunate child?" demanded Matilda, resentfully.

"Far from it; he has shown more—as in duty bound. But the change in his deportment since your situation declared itself, has not been lost upon me. He is growing peevish and irritable with Walter. What will he be should a fine legitimate young son be born to his house?—I know him, and therefore dread to think of it!—"

"I know him; and am therefore certain that he will never do less than justice to the child we rashly adopted," said Matilda, with dignity.

"Prove your good intentions then, honored lady, by permitting us to accompany you on your journey!" cried Ghita, laying a detaining hand upon her dress. "If no evil be intended, the petition is a slight one. Keep us in your sight! Do not banish us from your protection! Consider how that little one loves you. Your own will not love you better! Let him not be cast out to perish like the son of the bondwoman!—"

"Is he your own, Ghita," demanded Matilda, on the rash impulse of the moment, "that you plead thus warmly?—"

"Mine?—The mercy of heaven forbid!" replied the Italian. "Rather die than call my own the son of such a father!—But your ladyship must recollect," said the woman, checking herself as she noticed the sudden start given by Matilda, "that I was in personal attendance upon you the day Walter was brought to St. Sylvain—and that I cannot be more his mother than yourself."

"I remember!" faltered Lady Norman, grieved that such memories should be recalled to her at such a moment.

"You grant my request then?" demanded Ghita, encouraged by her mistress's subdued tone. "Sir Richard must determine;—the decision rests not with myself."

"Every decision would rest with yourself had you energy to support your rights!" cried the Italian. "You allow this man to crush your spirit into nothingness—to drag you when and whither he pleases—to exile you from your friends and country, in order to force upon your adoption a ——"

"Ghita! what means this violence?" demanded the voice of some person overtaking them. And in a moment, the arm of the Italian was seized, and Matilda found Sir Richard by her side.

"Ghita is requesting me to take our little boy with us to London," said Lady Norman, dreading the excess to which
he might be provoked by her companion. "She fancies Walter will fret after me, if left alone at Selwood." 
"He will not be alone.—Mrs. Ravenscroft has undertaken the charge of him,—"
"No person shall have the charge of him but me!"—cried Ghita, unabashed; "and once for all, I will not remain here at the château!—"
"You pretend to disobey my commands?"—cried Norman, furiously.
"I do!—and would that I had disobeyed them earlier!—"
"Then quit the château, and for ever!" cried the angry man, unused to find his authority opposed.
"Instantly—if you require it!" replied Margherita, resuming the scornful air so offensive of old to Lady Norman. "It is not your service, God knows, that I have the slightest inclination to remain!—But, before I go, I feel it my duty to declare to this ángel, for the sake of my unfortunate little charge—"
"You dare?"—vociferated Sir Richard, seizing her by the arm, and hurling her to some paces distance.
"I dare!"—persisted Margherita, roused rather than intimidated by his violence.
"Silence!"—cried Lady Norman—interposing with a degree of energy so unusual to her as to impose silence for a moment upon both parties. "I choose to know nothing which Sir Richard desires should remain a secret!—"
"Dupe that you are—you deserve your fate!" ejaculated the impetuous Italian. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that she was injuring the cause of her nursing, she flung herself at the feet of Matilda, exclaiming—"Pardon, pardon, for the poor hot-headed Istrian—who knows not how to control her words when her heart's blood is stirred up!—I have a deeper stake in all this, lady, than you know of!—Take pity on me and the boy, and let us accompany you to London!—"
"Be it so," replied Lady Norman, influenced by some inexplicable instinct. "You shall attend me to London; but it is on condition, Ghita, that this scene is never to be renewed, and that you do not attempt to disturb my tranquility by obscure hints, unavailing to any honorable purpose."
"I promise!"—replied the woman, taking Matilda's hand and pressing it to her lips.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The storms of life fly over the heads of the middle class, and break upon towering mountains and lofty cedars. They have got no ill-got places to lose. They are neither hired nor undermined; but without invading any man's right, sit safe and warm in a moderate fortune of their own.—Dr. South.

London in September has been too often described as the type of everything desolate and dull—savoring of mellow apples, and encumbered with bricklayers' ladders; the pavement damp—the air stagnant—the atmosphere obscured by fogs;—neither cheered out of doors by the freshness of the weather, nor indoors by the cheeriness of winter pastimes.

Europe scarcely produces, in fact, a city more disagreeable than London, between August and the New-year; and the fact is nowhere more apparent than in its ultra-fashionable quarters. Throughout Hill Street, where a house was engaged for the Normans, not a window but was closely
shuttered; nor a door but was sealed as hermetically as a mausoleum. In that part of the town which is said to contain only a population of lords and lackeys, neither lord nor lackey was perceptible; the standard footman with his powdered head, and the standard marquis with his empty head, being alike eclipsed in provincial seclusion.

Sir Richard's knock, on his daily return home to dinner, sounded echoingly and hollowly along the empty street; even the infirm old char-women left in charge of the opposite houses (the most cheerful-looking of which had its windows left open to disclose vast placards of "To let, unfurnished"—scarcely visible through the dim and weather-stained glass,) being too lazy to look out and ascertain the cause of so unusual a disturbance. Nor was he enlivened by the company and conversation of Matilda. He had nothing to relate—he had seen and heard nothing, except the coughs of starving hackney-coaches stationary on their stands; or a few cabriolets scudding along St. James's Street, with their freight of dandies running to seed—a miserable species, indigeneous in the atmosphere of the clubs, and visible above the horizon only between the hours of four post meridian and four post midnight. But with these, the aborigines of May Fair, and Bush Rangers of Hyde Park, Sir Richard had for ever abandoned connection. He now "wandered lonely as a cloud" through the deserted metropolis; and the fussy, fastidious dame, who was to officiate as Matilda's nurse, recommended by the physician recommended by Lady Farleigh, was heard to pronounce that the usual ceremony of clapping up the knocker with a kid-glove might certainly be dispensed with, in that most deserted house of that most deserted metropolis.

All this did not tend to raise the spirits of Lady Norman. The exclusivism of the waiting-gentlewoman, accustomed only to attend upon exclusives, revolted her; Mrs. Smith being evidently of opinion that a lady not in Lady Dawlish's set, who had never been to Almacks, and was not even presented, was a patient far below her cure; till at length Matilda reverted with regret to the good-humored familiarity of Madame Gervais, so much more in character with the duties of her calling. But the recollection of Madame Gervais brought with it a host of painful recollections!—St. Sylvain with its accusing reminiscences rose before her. She seemed to hear the old Frenchwoman's hearty laugh, exulting whenever she effected some manœuvre to baffle the curiosity of the servants; and to see the cordial looks with which, every morning, she brought the infant to be kissed and admired after the completion of its toilet; saying, in a tone not to be resisted, "I must have an embrace for my poor little boy!—If not his mother, ma belle dame, remember you have undertaken to be his friend."

"Who will be the friend of my child!" thought Matilda, "if this business should end unfavorably!—I have cultivated the affections of none, and by none shall I be remembered with affection!—"

It was in vain that Sir Richard Norman devoted his time and eloquence to dispel her despondency. It was useless to propose rides and walks, when all that greeted without was but a repetition of the monotonous scene within. It was useless to propose new publications or works of fiction for the amusement of a person whose thoughts were thus sickened with care.

How different had been the impressions of Lady Norman, could she have emerged from the stagnant oppression of the abandoned city, for a glimpse of the cheerful, happy home of the Avesfords. Fern Hill, in grandeur so many degrees beneath the scale of Selwood Manor, was a gay little spot,—a compact, commodious house, standing in a paddock of about a hundred acres in extent, deriving its chief interest from an extensive prospect of the banks of the Mersey, and a view of the Irish Channel. The house and establishment, of moderate extent, were in a progressive state. The prudent merchant who allowed himself to spend there only two days of the week with occasional visits during the other five, constantly brought with him some addition to the comforts or beautifications of the house. There was movement and expectation about Fern Hill. There was an adjoining farm, to the purchase of which young Avesford looked confidently forward; and he had promised saddle-horses to his wife for the following year. He was, in truth, a sensible, enterprising, warm-hearted fellow; delighted to afford a happy home to the old age of his father-in-law, and by no means likely to become a martyr to the domestic tyranny of Tom Cruttenden. The friend of the family was invited to Fern Hill whenever it suited him to absent himself from the factory; but it was clear, from the
first visit, that he was to come as a guest, and not as a master. Avesford would not even allow Elizabeth's father to be bullied with impunity in his presence.

Though still a stranger to the Normans, he had been tolerably enlightened by his wife as to their position with regard to the family. He saw that one of Maulé's handsome daughters, having married above her station, had been constrained by a proud, egotistical husband to renounce all intimate connection with home; and foresaw that the long absence of the Selwood family on the continent, and the marriage of John Maulé and Elizabeth in the interim, would complete their alienation. For his own part he cared very little even to make their acquaintance; but the fond leaning of his wife towards her gentle sister, whom Tom Cruttenden persisted in asserting to be the most ill-used and unhappy of women, prevented his admitting, in the presence of Elizabeth, his indifference to the fate of Matilda.

One bright September morning Avesford made his appearance betimes at Fern Hill, to enjoy a day's sport in some neighboring preserves, and do honor to a visit from Cruttenden, who was come to spend a few days with his old partner. He found the party assembled at breakfast in a cheerful, bay-windowed room commanding a view of the sea, discussing the probability of the arrival of John Maulé and his wife, who were to visit them in the course of the autumn.

"Maulé, my man, set your chair a little way round the corner, and make room for Avesford by his wife," cried Tom Cruttenden, doing the honors to his host the moment he entered the room. "You need not put in more tea, Betsy,—'tis strong as poison already!—I'm sorry to say it, my dear, but you never had a notion of making tea.—Few women have.—Women make one wait for the tea till it's cold, and bread and butter till it's hot. Avesford, when you've done whispering there, I'll thank you for the newspapers.—I suppose you've been clever enough to bring them in your pocket?—"

"I mean to be clever enough to keep them there," replied Avesford, continuing his breakfast. "Elizabeth does not allow reading at table."

"The deuce she don't!—How long has Betsy begun to lay down the law?"

"Ever since she became my wife," replied Avesford, laughing.

"If she means her bad tea to go down without help of the morning papers, I can tell her she's mistaken!"—cried old Crutt, with rising choler.

"Surely the news, at this season of the year, will keep till we rise from table?"—observed Maulé, gaining courage from his son-in-law's valor to oppose his petulant partner. "Neither parliament nor the courts of law are sitting!"

"What can you possibly expect to find in the papers?" demanded Avesford, provokingly.

"If I knew beforehand, I should have no call to read them!"—cried Cruttenden, snappishly. "Maybe the announcement of a hurricane at St. Kitt's—or maybe a fire in the docks, to take the shine out of the house of Avesford and Son."

"Many thanks!"—replied the young merchant, laughing heartily at the ready malice of the retort. "But my father's estates at Basseterre, and my own warehouses, are all amply insured. Our real estates defy the terrors of the three other elements.—Try again!—"

"Perhaps I may be looking out for the death of the Woldham parson, the reversion of whose living I purchased last spring."

"Nothing will suit your taste, in fact, but a casualty!" cried Avesford. "But be not uneasy about Woldham!—the climate is the healthiest in Yorkshire.—The last incumbent lived to be ninety; and his predecessor was a centenarian."

"A sectarian, I suppose you mean," cried Crutt, chuckling at the idea that he was setting his adversary right.

"Well! if the old gentleman at Woldham holds on, John must rest contented with his curacy.—It makes no odds to me.—"

As this was the first intimation offered to the family by Tom Cruttenden, who, like Friport in Voltaire's play, "savait dormer, mais ne savait pas vivre," of his intended gift to young Maulé of a living of twelve hundred a year, it was not, of course, to be passed over without acknowledgments from the father and sister; which Tom interrupted by exclaiming, "A truce to your humbugging—and just trouble that young fellow to hand me over the newspapers!—"
"I am afraid I must make an exception in your favor," said Avesford, who was fond of trifling with the petulance of the old bachelor. "But if you find anything extraordinary in the great letters, favor us with the communication in token of gratitude."

"Great letters, forsooth!"—ejaculated Tom, tearing open the envelopes of the morning papers. "You don't think me ass enough, at my time of life, to read the opinions of a greater ass than myself, when I have facts lying before me?—The great letters are intended for old women and young children, and I've ceased to be one, and not begun to be the other.—Bless my stars!"—cried he, interrupting himself as he glanced along the columns—"I hadn't the least notion of such a thing!"

"Of what?"—demanded his three auditors, with some interest.

"Have you found tidings of a fire—or a hurricane—or something else equally agreeable?"—exclaimed Avesford.—"What will you give me for my news?"—demanded the old gentleman of Elizabeth.

"A cup of tea rather less strong than poison."—Worth more than that, Madame Betsy!—Bid again!"—cried Cruttenden.

"She will grant you her forgiveness for daring to trifle with her curiosity," observed Avesford, "which, in my opinion, is more than you deserve."

"The deuce it is!"—said Cruttenden, putting the paper into his pocket. "Then she may wait my pleasure to learn what I was going to tell her about poor Matty."

"About Matilda?"—exclaimed Mr. Maule and his daughter.

"Ay—about Matty—and another person belonging to her—not her fine parchment-and-pedigree Jesuit of a husband though."

"Her child, then!—I trust to Heaven no evil has happened to her little son!"—cried the warm-hearted Mrs. Avesford.

"That's more than she deserves at your hands," sneered old Tom. "'Twill be a plaguy long time before Matty trusts to Heaven to bestow its succor upon you!—"

"My sister's thoughts towards her family are kinder, Mr. Cruttenden, than you give her credit for," said Elizabeth, warmly. "Our intercourse has only been checked by the mistrust with which, early in her marriage, you saw fit to inspire my father."

"And I see fit still. Avesford has me to thank that he does not find you telling your beads every morning, instead of reading the chapters for the day."

"But about Matilda?" cried Elizabeth impatiently.

"Oh, if my lady is the affectionate sister you describe, no doubt you will have a letter to inform you of it by the post."

But he was deprived of the delight of inflicting further torment on Mrs. Avesford. Her husband, coming adroitly behind the old gentleman while engaged in squabbling, extracted the paper from his pocket, and read aloud—"On the 15th inst., in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, the lady of Sir Richard Norman, Bart., of a daughter."

"Matilda in England!—Matilda in London!—Matilda the mother of a little girl!" burst simultaneously from the lips of her father and Mrs. Avesford.

"It strikes me now," interrupted Cruttenden, not deigning to notice the manoeuvre practised on him by Avesford, "that were Matty anything worth speaking of either as daughter or sister, it wouldn't be from the public papers you had to learn her return to her native country, after so many years' absence!"

"Her letters may have miscarried," said Mrs. Avesford, in a mortified voice.

"Letters rarely miscarry," observed her husband, gravely; "never, unless when they are known to contain something to repay the hazard of abstraction."

"When did you hear from her last?" demanded Cruttenden, provokingly.

"My father received the last letter in June or July."—"In May," again observed Mr. Avesford. "It was before we came hither for the summer."

"And didn't she tell you there was a chance of another olive-branch—or yew-branch I should be apt to call it, off such a parent stock as that of the Normans?"

"She made no allusion to the subject," observed old Maule, who had been absorbed in reflection.

"Why, she must have been pretty sure of it four months ago—eh?—I suppose Matty has learnt from her husband the
art of making mysteries about nothing; and I wish that may be the worst lesson the fellow has taught her. When young Crutt was in town last spring, he'd a deal of talk about Sir Richard with a rich cousin of his, a city banker; and not knowing Crutt's relationship to Matty, 'twas wonderful what lengths the old gentleman went in speaking of the baronet."

"That must be the father of our neighbor Lady Audley," observed Elizabeth, half aside to her husband. "I had no idea she was so nearly connected with my brother-in-law."

"Never call him brother-in-law, Betsy, if you've the slightest respect for yourself!" exclaimed Cruttenden, "for you know he looks on the whole family as so much dirt, and all but turned young Crutt out of his house, when he took the trouble of going over to see his sister in France."

"About Sir Richard's respect or regard, I trust my wife is too wise to trouble herself," said young Avesford, calmly. "But I confess I feel mortified for and with her, that her sister should be settled in London without giving any intimation of her return to England. We shall live very happily without Lady Norman, and, I trust, Lady Norman will live very happily without us; but I know that in my own family, in my own humble sphere of society, such conduct would be thought unfeeling and preposterous."

"That's because you're an uncivilised savage!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his driest sneers. "Nothing but savages are inflicted now-a-days by the instincts of nature. How would the fashionable world get on so smoothly as it does, if people were to encumber themselves with the old-fashioned lumber and baggage of feelings and affections?—Light weight and no luggage allowed is your only go!—I'll be bound Matty has forgotten in what county she was born, and in another year or two will open her eyes languidly, and wonder whether she ever had a father."

All were silent;—Elizabeth and old Maule from painful emotion—and Avesford from feeling that there was more reason in old Cruttenden's diatribe than usually graced his harangues.

But though indignant against the coldness of "Lady Norman," a thousand kind feelings towards "Matty, gradually rose in the minds of these worthy people, when they pictured her as the happy mother of a young family.—Elizabeth sometimes thought her sister not sufficiently circumstantial in her letters touching the beauty and qualities of her little son, whom they had accidentally heard described by others as one of the handsomest children in existence. But she felt sure that a little girl would fill up the measure of Matty's affections—a little girl, fair and gentle as herself—a little girl, such as Mrs. Avesford often dreamed of calling her own. She began to conjecture by what name the little stranger would be distinguished. Would it be called Matilda after its mother, or Elizabeth after its grandmother and aunt?—"

"My dear, good woman!" cried old Tom, tapping her on the shoulder; "you might as well expect Matty to call it Brummagemina at once!—Take my word for't, 'twill be Alicia, or Mildred, or Blanche, or some other fine name connected with the tombstones in Selwood church. The handling is not to be brought up a papist by that old sneak of a priest—that's one comfort—or as sure as we're all alive, the word mother would have been struck out of the fifth commandment, when little Miss came to be taught the way of making her days long in the land."

Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory mode in which the news of her sister's return had reached Fern Hill, Mrs. Avesford was too kind-hearted to demur about offering her good wishes on the occasion. She wrote simply and affectionately—she could write in no other guise—stating how dearly she longed to hold her sister and her sister's children in her arms; and thanking Heaven that, on this occasion, the babe had seen the light in the land of its fathers. She asked a thousand questions concerning her little niece, which she had never been tempted to inquire concerning her little nephew; whether fair or dark—blue eyed or brown—whether displaying any resemblance to its mother or to the young sister they had lost, who had been for many years the ailing nursing of Elizabeth.

Little did Mrs. Avesford imagine, as she penned these womanly queries, which would have called down thunders of scorn from old Cruttenden, what tears of delight they were to draw from the eyes of Matilda! Lady Norman felt as if her lovely infant had found a friend; as if though so scandalously unwelcome to its parents, the little creature was safe in the affections of the kind and the worthy.—Holding it more closely to her bosom, she breathed her thanks to the almighty that, among her own kindred, and in her father's house, its coming had been hailed as a blessing!
—She even took courage to entreat Sir Richard's permission that her sister might be its second godmother, Lord and Lady Selwood having already petitioned to be two of the sponsors; and the careless tone in which he gave his assent—so different from that in which he treated the slightest matters relating to his adopted child—convinced her that the little girl—the little protestant—would claim a small share in his affections.

Matilda had been spared at least the spectacle of her husband's agony while uncertain respecting the sex of the child. Her sufferings had been protracted; but great as they were, and sincere as was his sympathy, not even the idea of her danger had obliterated one moment from his mind the predominant fear that a legitimate son would be born to shake the firmness of Matilda. Ghita, the only person by whom his terrors were witnessed, was not of a temper to reveal to Lady Norman the pitiable state in which, on the staircase leading to the chamber of his wife, he had awaited information of the birth of his child; or the frenzy of delight with which, on hearing it announced as a girl, he had rushed into the room where Walter was playing, snatched him to his bosom, and covered him with countless kisses! All this excitement had subsided before he ventured into the presence of his wife. It was with leaden eye and staid deportment that he accosted her, and imprinted his chilling kiss of welcome upon the forehead of his babe!—

Though stung to the soul by his apparent indifference, it was, as usual, herself that Matilda accused as chiefly accountable for his fault. Had not an alien been intruded by her consent into the sanctities of his home, how differently would this child of theirs have been regarded by its father!—If Walter had superseded her baby by the influence of his attractions and endearments, who but herself was to blame?—It was she who had introduced a rival under its father's roof; it was she who had diminished its share of parental tenderness and worldly prosperity, by the substitution of an heir to Selwood!—

CHAPTER XIX.

A guilty conscience is as a whirlpool; drawing in all to itself which would otherwise pass by.—Fulley.

Absorbed in delights so new and exquisite as those extracted by a young mother from every utterance and feature of her firstborn babe, Lady Norman, during the weeks following its arrival, took little heed of what was passing in the house. Mrs. Grimes, the permanent woman of the bed-chamber, and Mrs. Smith, the temporary, fought out their animosities unobstructed; hinting of each other a thousand crimes and misdemeanors, without so much as disturbing the attention of Matilda. Heart and soul were devoted to that little helpless, unmeaning, moaning thing, which exceeded in her estimation of human importance a college of Cardinals, or a diet of the empire.

Sir Richard, she knew, passed his mornings at his club. He was beginning, faute de mieux (though a better may be so easily found,) to interest himself anew in politics. The prospects of emancipation were becoming daily more distinct. Great names were now enlisted in the cause; and on them great hopes were founded. Poor little Walter could no longer command an auditor for his simple narratives when he came home from his daily walk in the deserted park, or the cheerless limitation of Berkley Square. In vain did he tell of horses and chariots—gods, men, and columns—no one cared to hear of his adventures. Even his account of a pretty lady, ("almost as pretty as mamma, only not so good-natured-looking," ) by whom he was noticed and fondled, failed to draw down upon Ghita the usual admonition addressed on such occasions by English ladyships to English mentals, "Remember, you are on no account to suffer strangers to speak to the children." Matilda was in fact scarcely conscious of the child's presence in her room, when he returned from his excursions; and Sir Richard was content to see him well and happy, without inquiring upon what fair strangers the boys caresses were bestowed.
At length the day approached for the dismissal of Lady Norman's professional attendants. The bloom of health was once more upon her cheek; and when rendering up her thanks for her recovery, she had the satisfaction of devoting her little girl to the protestant faith, under the auspicious name of "Constance." A day at a fortnight's distance was fixed for the return of the family to Selwood; and by Sir Richard's permission, invitations were already despatched to her friends in Lancashire and Yorkshire, to meet them at the Manor shortly before Christmas, for the celebration of the christening.

All that remained for Matilda was to regain strength as rapidly as possible; and to effect this, she was advised to try gentle exercise, in addition to her daily airings.

"You must come with me, dearest mamma, into the square, and bring my little sister with you, and I will take care of you both," was Walter's prompt invitation, on hearing the prescription."You can lean on my arm, you know, when you are tired; and I will introduce you to my beautiful lady—"

"What beautiful lady, sir?" demanded Sir Richard, who happened to be present.

"A lady who gives me fruit and flowers, and inquires of me about you and mamma."

"Of whom is he speaking?" resumed Norman, addressing Matilda.

"Some lady fond of children who has been captivated by his beauty in Berkeley Square. I was not aware that any person in this neighborhood was left in town."

"It is very wrong of Ghita to let the child make promiscuous acquaintances," cried Sir Richard, angrily. "How do we know who this woman may be?"

"At his age, surely, it does not much signify. But Ghita, who is not without tact, says that Walter's friend is a lady très distinguée in her appearance."

"So are many whom I should be sorry to see bestowing caresses on my child."

"Walter's prônéeuse is usually accompanied by one or two gentlemen perfectly comme il faut; and has a handsome carriage waiting for her at the gate."

"She sometimes asks me to take a drive with her," cried Walter. "But Ghita would never let me go."

"Ghita is perfectly right.—Pray, ascertain who it is," continued Norman, addressing his wife, "the first time you accompany the children to the square."

"I know so few people by sight, that I shall be as inconclusive in my account as Walter."

"Ah! but you do know this lady," cried the child, "for she talks about you and papa, as if she had very, very often seen you; and asks me so many droll questions about are you fond of each other—and is my papa glad to have my little sister—and does he take more notice of it than of me—"

"This appears to be a very inquisitive, officious person!" cried Sir Richard. "I do not half like his account of her."

And in the sequel, still less did he like the actuality; for, on Walter being accompanied by Matilda into the square, the little boy's anonymous patroness proved to be neither more nor less than Lady Catherine Norman.

Vexed at this accidental encounter, Sir Richard attributed the most alarming importance to the approaches and inquiries of Giles Norman's wife. Secluded from the coteries of the fashionable world, he was not yet aware that Lady Catherine's existence as Giles Norman's wife, was merely supplementary to her importance as one of the Hydra heads of the ascendant Tory party; one of those weak, noisy heads, called mauvaises têtes, which contrive to render themselves more prominent and evidential than heads of higher capacity.

Lady Catherine, from a person had become a personage. In that frippery epoch of "gilt and gaud," a handsome, chattering woman, of high descent, qualified by nature and art to look down and talk down the efforts of the untitled and uninitiated, had wonderful scope for the exercise of her insolent egotism. The religious disabilities of Mr. Norman prevented his profiting by her influence so far as to assume a post in the administration. There was no pretext for insinuating his name into the red-book, or her ladyship's into the pension-list. But though unable to shine as more than one of the golden tassels on the fringe of the administration, she kept a house of call for Downing-street dandies out of employ; and by the blaze of her beauty and high Toryism, threw into eclipse the insignificance of her Roman-catholic husband. As it was impossible to make something of him, she made him nothing. Insignificant indeed—insignificant in mind and purpose—Giles Norman rejoiced in a position which a man of spirit and honor would have rebutted as in-
jurious. Lady Catherine's levities of conduct were grave and methodical, but they were not the less defamatory in the estimation of right-thinking and right-feeling persons;—and the diminutive pomposity with which Norman offered his protection, and really advanced the interests of his protégés, convinced the world that he could see no shame in the injury derived from so high and profitable a source.

Success, however, was on their side; and the world, as usual sided with "les gros bataillons." Supported by "Lady Dawlish's set," by high birth, beauty, and self-sufficiency, Lady Catherine brandished her oriflamme, and, like the maid of Orleans, was pronounced to be a holy woman, so long as she remained triumphant. Who, in fact, could presume to cast a stone at her, among those whose missiles of diamonds and rubies are as fatal as paving-stones; but who are so cunningly cautious in their selection of those against whom they arm their slings? Lady Catherine was an ornament to their parties—Lady Catherine was an enhancement to their dinners—Lady Catherine could make cornets of their sons, and niche their grandmothers into the pension-list—provide for their superannuated butlers, and sport with prebendal stalls as lightly as with stalls at the opera. Under her auspices, the whispering school of Madame de Montrond was introduced into the glittering saloons of Carlton House; and while she occupied some remote divan at the Pavilion, discussing with Princess Wittagemont the becomingness of a new turban or curl of an ostrich-feather, the dupes of the beau monde stood aloof and respected the coalition, believing it to refer to protocols and preliminaries of peace. There was a tone of derision about Lady Catherine, sharpened and polished by a course of Parisian courtiership and diplomacy, which it was not easy to connect with the real triviality of her capacities.

"The world," as in Shakespeare's time, "is still deceived with ornament," and runs headlong to surrender itself to any gallant band of marauders that advances with plumes waving, colors flying, and the haka of the trumpet; and so great is the influence of consistency and perseverance of purpose in giving weight to a party, that people were, at that period, blinded into respect for a gang whose unanimity consisted in a general thirst for plunder—whose moral principle was the promotion of the greatest happiness of the smallest number—and whose political principle, "let us maintain the throne, that the throne may maintain us!"—Yet so neat was the workmanship of their cabinets—so compact the organisation of their party—so close and unattackable its homogeneity, that, lost in admiration of the ingenuity of the wasp's nest, the spectators overlooked the uselessness and obnoxiousness of the insects by which it had been created.

Of the temple of conservatism, Lady Catherine was the high priestess;—concocting her auguries with that sacred bird—the golden-egg-laying goose—the people of unrefored England. But upon Sir Richard Norman, her oracular influence was lost. He saw in her only the woman whose children had suffered wrong by his imposture, and who was probably intent upon discovering and exposing its extent. He believed her to be a model of maternal tenderness. He dreamed not that since the child, formerly so pampered with indulgences, had forfeited its chance of heirship to Selwood Manor, Lady Catherine's cupidily and ambition had swerved from the boy to concentrate themselves exclusively in political intrigue; Master Norman the elder being consigned, pro tempore, to oblivion, in one of those Brighton preparatory schools of dandyism, whose birch and primers are gilt, and whose Holland pinafores, distinguished by coronets with a difference—ducal, marquessatorial, and so forth. Meanwhile, scarcely had Matilda's vexation subsided at the discovery of Lady Catherine's advances, when she received a note from Lady Dawlish, saying that, being in town for a day or two, on her way from Walmer Castle to her seat in the north, she hoped Sir Richard and Lady Norman would do her the charity to dine with her the following day, to meet a few of the only race of people then extant in London—ministers and guardsmen.

"I have written a civil answer, declining of course the invitation," observed Matilda to her husband, while Sir Richard glanced over the note, on his return soon afterwards from his club.

"Declining it!—Why the deuce did you not consult me?"

"I fancied that, disliking as you do Lady Dawlish's set, the last thing you could desire would be to dine in their company."

"Is it necessary to entertain a profound esteem for those with whom one occasionally exchanges cutlets and clarets?"
—inquired Norman, with a smile. "We have been leading a dull life lately, and it would have suited me very well to go."

"Then you have still the opportunity," said Matilda; "my note is not yet despatched, and can be written again."

And instead of refusing, (as she had anticipated he would do, when he found the power of option remained,) Sir Richard accepted her proposal to write a new answer to Lady Dawlish, adding, to her further amazement, "We have lived too much out of society, my dear Matilda, since our marriage. I conceive it an injury to my cause and party to have neglected, as I have done, all occasion of extending my personal influence. Now that we have children, we must not overlook their interests for the indulgence of a selfish indolence."

Without exactly understanding in what way little Constance's prospects were to be advanced by her mother's dining with Lady Dawlish, Matilda gladly consented to accompany her husband. The secluded life she led at Selwood was an effort of submission on her part, not of choice: and she felt the inconsistency of their having mixed in the most brilliant coteries of continental society, while to that of London she was wholly a stranger. At Rome, Naples, Florence, Vienna, Lady Norman had shone a star in the highest circles of fashion; but it was there alone that she had formed the acquaintance of English people of her own condition of life.

Next day, at the hour appointed, the Normans proceeded to Grosvenor Square—with a degree of punctuality savouring of the well-bred old-fashioned habits of the country and the continent. Nothing, however, was visible in the drawing-room but a blazing fire, and the bag of lustrous glazed calico encasing the chandelier; and Matilda might have apprehended that she had mistaken the day, but for the indication of the groom of the chambers, that "her ladyship had just gone up stairs to dress, and that the evening papers were on the table."

By-and-by, Colonel Villiers sauntered in from White's, to flurry away to his dressing-room, on perceiving that two antediluvians were already arrived, though it was only a quarter past seven, and they had been asked at seven, meaning of course eight, and in the course of the next three quarters of an hour, the room gradually filled with the seven others, who with the Normans and their hosts were to make up the sociable dozen.

Of these, the first two who made their appearance were fresh from Carlton House, with grave announcements of the severe illness of Queen Charlotte—Lord Longwind and the Right Honorable Chandos Lyde—two cabinet ministers and men of the world. Next came Sir Godfrey and Lady Chippeyester, an ultra-fashionable couple of which the female variety was an amusing chatterbox of unceasing loquacity. The fifth was an easy, agreeable, self-satisfied middle-aged man, whom every body called by a name which Lady Norman mistook for Ratstail or Ratstill—but whether lord, baronet or commoner, she could not guess;—so completely had Ned Raddesdell, the bel esprit, escaped the knowledge of Selwood Manor.

Two more were waited for to complete the party—waited for till Matilda grew tired of waiting. But when, at twenty minutes after eight, a carriage stopped at the door, Lady Dawlish leaned over to her and whispered, "I hope it will be no disagreeable surprise to you to meet your relations the Normans?—I find from Lady Catherine that all guignon is over (or ought to be) between you; and as those sort of family dissensions are out of date in the present century, I concluded you would be glad to brusquer l'affaire."

What Lady Dawlish meant by this latter phrase, Matilda did not exactly understand. She felt that she should be content to wait another hour for dinner, to allow time for Sir Richard's indignation to subside ere his offending relatives entered the room; but to her great surprise, he accepted with a smile Giles Norman's bow of recognition; and, on Lady Catherine's accosting her with inquiries after her little friend Walter and compliments on her rapid recovery, Sir Richard stepped forward courteously to take part in the conversation.

Frank Villiers now sauntering back into the room, followed by a heavy, ordinary, old man, whom Matilda mistook for the butler come to announce dinner, but who proved to be the Earl of Dawlish,—dinner was served.

Hitherto "Lady Dawlish's set" had been revealed to Matilda and her husband in eclipsed splendor—drooping, as all plants are apt to droop after transplantation, in the ungenial soil of Paris, nor did it appear likely that their brilliancy would be more transcendent at a sans façon, autumnal dinner-party, the gold plate being at the bankers, and
the striking members of the set scattered over the face of the three kingdoms. The Normans had lived enough out of the world to be surprised at discovering what extraordinary recherché may be communicated to a dinner without ostentation and a party whose merit consists in being appropriately assorted. The common place grandeurs of Farleigh Castle and tedious state-dinners of foreign courts, had not prepared Matilda for the easy grace, the spirit of courtesy and enjoyment, prevalent among those endowed with such bad hearts, such good digestions and such indifferent understandings, as Lady Dawlish's set.

Could Lord Longwind, with his playful repartees, be the tedious man in the course of one of whose parliamentary periods, a friend is said to have proceeded from the House of Lords six times round Westminster Abbey, arriving back at his place before the minister arrived at a full stop?—Could the agreeable right honorable to her right, overflowing with anecdotes pleasant but wrong, and as piquant as a volume of French memoirs, he the sàgè privy councillor of royalty, whose lengthy plausibilities on questions of national ethics were apt to set even the bench of bishops into a snooze? Every point told. She poked right and left with her golden bodkin, till everyone was fain to keep on the alert: and though Sir Godfrey talked only of cooks and jockeys—the worthies and heroes of his school of the Fine Arts—he talked of them with so much originality, as to render the subject as amusing as a fairy tale. Of Rastall, or Raddesdell, she pondered with less surprise, but equal admiration; for it had already been whispered to her by Giles Norman (lest exposing herself she should immortalise the family name in the amber of an epigram), that he was the most eminent wit of the era.

"When do you set off for the north, my dear Lady Dawlish?"—inquired Lady Catharine.

"It will remain very full till the holidays," observed Lady Catharine. "His Royal Highness does not go to Brighton till next month. You had much better remain here. What will you do at Eastport?"

"Her ladyship will entertain her country neighbors at her own expense, and entertain herself at theirs," said Raddesdell.

"I shall have to invite the whole country round," said Lady Dawlish, languidly. "We have not been at Eastport these ten months; and the house will want airing before we attempt our regular Christmas party. Mr. Chandos Lyde, remember you have promised us a fortnight this winter!—Mr. Norman and Lady Catherine are to be with us."

"I am half afraid!"—ejaculated Lady Catherine, in a tone of plausible regret. "His Royal Highness hinted last night that he counted upon us for Brighton. However, I am going there to-night, and will feel my way about getting off."

"Whom are you likely to have to-night, eh?"—inquired Colonel Villiers. "If I thought Madame de Wittagemot or that new Polish woman, would be there, I'd look in myself,—eh?—His Royalness (Royal Highness) has asked me four times during the last fortnight, and I have never found it convenient to go. —Last time I tried the thing, there was Begrez and his troubadour songs, and that sort of trash, and our illustrious friend beating time,—eh?—"

"A little music before great people, who insist upon listening to it, is the devil," observed Raddesdell.

"One always has the best music at Carlton House," replied Lady Catharine; "and, in my opinion, it is the worst taste not to listen."

"My taste, then, is so bad, that I prefer staying away altogether,—eh?"—said Frank Villiers.

"By which you condemn me to the peine forte et dure of paying double court for your sake," said Lady Dawlish. "But after the next brevet, my dear Frank, count no further upon my maternal virtue."

"I shall go to-night for two reasons," said Villiers, scrutinising the consistency of a canapé d’anchois exactly as a F. R. S. would have examined the horns of a stag-beetle. "In the first place, I wish to admire the effect produced upon certain persons (whose last despatches from Herbault are, to my knowledge, of three weeks’ date) by that exquisite turban of Lady Catherine’s; and, in the next place, I..."
have something very important to communicate to M'Mahon."

"Indeed!"—demanded Lady Catherine, lowering her voice, and vexed at the idea of anything important reaching the Blue Chamber through other hands and lips than her own.

And the moment Raddesdell perceived that Villiers had something to say concerning Carlton House which Lady Catharine Norman thought worth listening to, he wound up Lord Longwind into one of his long stories, under cover of pretending to listen to which, it was easy to seize the heads of the Regental secrets.

"Have you any private news from Kew?"—was her ladyship's faint whisper, aware that the state of his royal mother was just then extremely distressing to the Prince.

"Kew?—From whom?—about what?"

"About the improvement said to have manifested itself in the Queen's health."

"I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating bulletin," said Frank, with some indignation.

"My news is from Geneva."

"From Geneva?—"

"If you see M'Mahon, tell him so.—He will understand.—"

"What can either of you have to do with Geneva?"—exclaimed Lady Catherine, with increasing curiosity.

"Tell him I shall have it by New-year's day."

"I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating enigma," replied Lady Catherine, with a disdainful smile.

"I work no telegraph of which I do not understand the signals."

"'Tis an affair perfectly unimportant to any one but his Royal Highness," said Frank, carelessly.

"You will admit that most things of sufficient consequence to interest his Royal Highness are matters deserving the consideration of those who frequent his society!"

"Does your ladyship patronise Carlton House this winter?"—demanded Frank with perfect sang froid.

"Sufficiently to feel curious respecting a secret involving extremes so opposite as Geneva and Pall Mall."

"Pon my soul you do Geneva and Pall Mall too much honor in giving them a moment's thought," drawled Villiers, provocingly.

"By the way, shall I see you to-morrow at Princess Wittagemot's?"—demanded Lady Catherine adroitly. "We dine there to meet the Duke of York, Lord Liverpool, Lord Castlereagh, and a host of people!"

And the brevet-aspiring Lieut.-Colonel, compelled to answer in the negative, immediately found it expedient to add, by way of appeasing the anxieties of the lady frequenting such valuable society—"M'Mahon will inform you that the illustrious individuals expected from Geneva at Carlton House by New-years day, are neither more nor less than a couple of caterpillars!"

"Creeping things innumerable!" burst involuntarily from the lips of the listening Raddesdell, while Lady Catherine had nothing to reiterate but "caterpillars?"

"His royal highness, anxious to secure something new and original in the way of nick knack (to present to somebody or other by way of étrennes, eh?)—and knowing me to be in constant correspondence with Bautte, desired M'Mahon to consult me. The thing has been kept a profound secret. I despatched a courier to Geneva without losing a moment, and by to-day's post the news reached me that Bautte's last novelty is on the road;—a brace of green-enamel caterpillars with ruby eyes, that eat, drink, sleep, and crawl!—"

"Like Christians!—Which of us do more?" again ejaculated the indiscreet Raddesdell, while Lord Longwind, who took the latter exclamation to be a commentary upon his own text—which happened to regard the arrest of a government clerk charged with robbing the exchequer—regarded him with unfeigned amazement.

"What have you done about Manchester to-day?" inquired Chandos Lydde, at that moment opportunely addressing his legislative lordship.

"Nothing, or next to nothing.—Marched in a couple of regiments, and a company of artillery, as a hint."

"Is Manchester disturbed again?" demanded Lady Dawlisth, with an air of disgust. "How troublesome those manufacturing districts are becoming!"

"Oh! we shall soon bring them to reason," said Lord Longwind, with a significant nod. "See how quiet they have been at Derby since the Brandreth affair."

"It is highly disgusting to be bored, year after year, with the sedulous struggles of those misguided creatures," ex-
claimed Lady Dawlish. "Really people force themselves on public attention now-a-days; who, some years ago, would have blushed to hear the sound of their own name! For my part I have forbidden the newspapers to enter the servants' hall in any house of mine; and if things go on at their present rate, I shall scarcely trust them next year in the stewards' room. The country is in an alarming condition—a condition most alarming to thinking minds!"

"How can you wonder?" said Chandos Lydde, with an air of grave indignation. "The mob is not so much to blame. The mob would easily be kept in order—a wretched set of tame, spiritless, ignorant wretches, who dare not say their souls or their bodies are their own—if left to themselves. But when one finds men of family and education stirring them up to sedition—men like Wolseley and Burdett, for instance, one has a right to feel indignant."

"Sir Francis will not be satisfied till he raises his head to the dignities of Temple Bar," said Mr. Norman, knitting his brows. "It is not such fellows as Thistlewood and Dr. Watson who ought to be made examples of; but your radical baronets, who, for the sake of being talked of, set the country into a state of conflagration."

"He never should have left the town unless for Newgate; or Newgate, unless for the place of execution!" said Lord Longwind. "If the throne and altar of this country should ever be brought to the dust, it will be remembered in history that Sir Francis Burdett was pioneer to the mob that first undermined their foundations."

"History will have something else to do than trouble herself with records so contemptible!" observed Lady Catherine Norman, looking stupendous. "You do not suppose, my dear Lord Longwind, that these wretched frame-breakings, and incendiary fires, and Manchester meetings, will produce more effect upon the times, than if one of the Regent's enamel caterpillars had crawled over the parchment of Magna Charta?—It would be doing too much honor to the mob to fancy that a hundred thousand of them, with Sir Francis at their head, would produce the slightest effect upon the opinions of parliament. The English mob is the most cowardly thing on earth—a lunatic, which a little blood-letting soon brings to its senses; and as to the baronet, you might readily draw his teeth and claws with a peerage. By the way, Lord Longwind, I fear you have forgotten your promise about the folding-doors and new staircase for my aunt Stavordale's apartments, at Hampton Court!—I had a note from her this morning, poor soul! assuring me that the Woods and Forests are the most uncivil people in the world. She has not spent six months in her apartments for the last three years; yet they are always making objections about building her a stack of chimneys, or some such trifle. She has been putting in patent grates, (imagine the infamy of having to find your fixtures in a royal palace!) and they smoke so that she will be obliged to pass her Christmas at one of her son's, Lord Stavordale's, country seats, or with her daughter, the Duchess of Ellesmere. Poor soul!—she has not above five thousand a-year jointure, pour tout postage—or she would give up those horrid apartments altogether."

"I will make a note of her ladyship's wishes," said Lord Longwind, bowing profoundly and taking out his tablets. "I wonder she did not apply for a pension!"—said Lady Dawlish, in a tone of compassion.—"Surely Lord Stavordale served in the first American war?"

"Certainly. He was aide-de-camp to somebody or other who was severely wounded, and experienced some miraculous escapes. I have heard my aunt Stavordale relate the story a hundred times."

"Why don't she mention the circumstance to the Regent?"—said Chandos Lydde, earnestly. "I remember the time when his royal highness never missed one of Lady Stavordale's public breakfasts or masquerades. She has strong claims to his royal highness's recollection."

"I really think I will give her a hint on the subject!"—replied Lady Catherine. "These are not times for loyalty to go unrewarded."

"I had a letter yesterday from Lady Arthur D.," interrupted Lady Dawlish, "in which she begs me to reproach you, my dear Lady Catherine, with having neglected some request or protegée of hers.—What am I to tell her about it?"

"Not a word!—A refusal would bring me half-a-dozen pressing letters from her; and suspense affords her hope, which, like ignorance, is bliss. To say the truth, I have made up my mind never to trouble myself again with any protegée of Lady Arthur's! Somehow or other, she contrives to pick up a set of miserable wretches in actual want;
and if one forgets their case, or mistakes it, or any other trifles of that sort, they make such a fuss, and fancy themselves so horribly ill-used.—Last year, she wrote to me about some stupid old man she wanted to get made gate-keeper at Chelsea Hospital—enclosing me a whole bundle of dirty papers that looked like toll-tickets—certificates, and discharges, and that kind of rubbish. Most likely the housemaid found them lying about and lighted the fire with them, for I never beheld them again. Without them it seems, there was no getting the place; and the ungrateful old man, though I sent him a guinea to compensate his disappointment, actually had the audacity to write me word I had been the ruin of him; and the last time I saw Lady Arthur, she would have it that he had died of a broken-heart!—"

"For the loss of a packet of old toll-tickets?"—demanded Raddesdell, pretending to misunderstand the story. "What an in-toll-erable invention!"

"For the loss of his place rather," said Lord Longwind, really misunderstanding Raddesdell; "for which, after all, we have no proof that he was qualified."

"No! Lady Catherine's housemaid seems to have monopolised the proofs!" observed Raddesdell. "But, after all, the discharges had better have missed fire."

"I really must say, in justice to mamma," said Lady Catherine, abruptly, (and every one present wondered what Lady Roscrea could have to say to the veteran's certificates,) "that whenever she has people to push on, they are of a class who are glad to have their services rewarded by government, but can do very well without. Her proteges are grateful if one succeeds for them; and if not, one hears nothing of hair-triggers or broken hearts. There was her friend Lionel Warde, you know," continued Lady Catherine, addressing Longwind and Lydde, "whom I plagued your lives and souls out to send governor to Nova Scotia, and you would not, because a military governor was wanted and Lionel Warde is only a barrister. Certainly mamma had just then a right to expect wonders from you, my dear Lord Longwind; for you know very well she had been making the Dublin dowagers' wigs stand on end, by receiving for your sake your friend Lady Theodosia, who is certainly not fit company for decent people."

"And to whose husband you gave that command in Ireland, because you could not get Lady Theodosia received in London!"—added Lady Chichester, laughing.

"And yet, when your letter of refusal arrived about Warde, mamma took it as well as if you had chosen to oblige her. However, it did not much signify. She got him a commissionership of bankrupts instead."

Feeling, perhaps, that these details of the "shop" could not be very entertaining to Matilda and her husband, and that her fair cousin was not serving her own cause with them by such naked truths, Lady Dawlish moved to the drawing-room; where Lady Norman had to undergo a thousand interrogatives touching her past proceedings and present projects. Lady Dawlish expressed her amazement that, after the dissipations of the continent, Matilda could settle down to the humdrum monotony of a country neighborhood; while Lady Catherine took occasion to hint how gratifying it would be to her, could Sir Richard be persuaded to visit Brighton—how happy certain distinguished leaders of the Tory party would feel, were Sir Richard Norman to disappear from the ranks of the enemy—and how probable it was that, should emancipation ever be conceded, it would be by the party in power—the party so skilled in the policy of the French proverb of "giving a pea to catch a bean."

In vain did Matilda assure her, that she never attempted to influence the political opinions of her husband.

"You, at least, permit me to attempt to influence them?" demanded Lady Catherine.

"Certainly!" replied her gentle companion. "But I warn you that it is labor lost."

"The labor you delight in physics pain!" replied the high priestess. All that evening, she devoted her attentions to the man whom she knew detested her; and on the following day, a footman (whose livery buttons bore the arm and battle-axe, and golden star, described by the young gentleman now at the Brighton preparatory,) left visiting cards in Hill Street from "Mr. and Lady Catherine Norman."

* Donner un pois pour attraper une fève.
CHAPTER XX.

So absolute she seems
And in herself complete.

Milton.

Women of the world have various ways of achieving their ends. Some stoop to conquer, others exalt themselves by bravado;—some vanquish by sweetness, others by bitterness. Lady Catharine Norman was in the habit of accomplishing her purposes by an imperturable sang froid. The coolness with which she parried the rebuffs of Sir Richard was amazing to the timid Matilda. In her ladyship's days of subordinate consequence, when an effort was indispensable to enable her to keep her slippery place in society she had been loud and insolent. But having now attained what she considered a post of honor, she maintained her perilous footing, like other rope-dancers, by the calmness of her audacity. There was a silent positiveness about her, as forcible as the quiet current of a deep and dangerous river.

Matilda said "not at home" to her ladyship's visits—declined her invitations to dinner—replied to her hand-kissings, when they met in their morning drive, by a repulsive bow.

But Lady Catherine had an object in view, and heedless of rebuke, went silently and obstinately towards its accomplishment.

Now that all hope was gone of achieving a higher private fortune than the possession of Grove Park and three thousand a-year, to which, by the death of the old banker they had that spring succeeded, (thereby, as is often the case with modern heirs, losing their credit from being obliged to pay their debts,) she began to cast her eyes around her in search of other chances of aggrandizement.

She had interest, as it is called, to command everything which interest can command; and the proprietorship of a couple of rotten-boroughs would scarcely have effected more for the insignificant Mr. Norman, than the pair of blue eyes in the handsome head of his wife. But his catholicism unlucky threw him out of the line of advancement. There was no doing anything for him. The disabilities which had made a banker of the father seemed likely to make a bankrupt of the son. Old Giles, detesting the haughty, protestant daughter-in-law, by whom his eldest son had been seduced from the paths of the stock exchange, had bequeathed to his three younger sons his business in Lothbury; and to Lady Catherine's self-conceited husband, his Hertfordshire estates, and an income which would have enabled him to enjoy them, had he not previously created for himself an income of double the amount, the departed capital of which was now to be paid off in the shape of post-obits.

But though disqualified to be forwarded to a government in British America, or a military command in Ireland, though not even "du bois dont on fait des colonel," young Norman did not despair of promotion; for Lady Catherine had pledged herself that he should be promoted. In the earlier times of their marriage, the Grove Park family had attempted to raise themselves to the level of her aristocratic pretensions by constantly asserting, that there was a dormant peerage in the family, which law or equity, or parliament—which is supposed to represent both—might at any time revive in their favor; to which boast, uttered by Agatha and her brothers, old Norman usually replied by inquiring, how they thought "Lord Woodchurch and Co." would look engraved upon his brass-plate in Lothbury, or inscribed on the creditor side of the banking-books of his constituents?—But the statement had reached beyond the ear of his daughter-in-law; and when his demise conveyed to her husband these rights of aristocratic heirship, she set all the faculties and industry of poor old Sir Isaac Heard into movement, to investigate the claim.

For though her ladyship's influence with Carlton House and its ministries would avail nothing towards the creation of a catholic peer, it might forward a claim of restoration; and she trusted she had only to prove herself entitled to become Lady Woodchurch, to secure her coronation rights as a peeress of the realm.

But, alas! no sooner had the Herald's Office commenced its ferret-like operations among the archives of the White Tower, British Museum, and other sepulchres of decaying parchments, than it appeared that the most important documents relating to the Woodchurch peerage must be in the
possession of Sir Richard Norman, of Selwood Manor; nay, that it depended only upon himself to put in a counter claim by opposing the petition of his kinsman!

This was sad news for Lady Catherine!—She could not forget, or trust that the Normans had forgotten, the insults she had heaped upon them in Paris. They were her enemies—enemies of her own creation.—Still, she reckoned largely upon the instability which the frivolousness of modern society produces, even in our enmities. If “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel”—thou canst not abhor. For it was as easy to imprint a durable impression upon the shifting sands of the sea-shore, as upon the mobile characters of a man or woman of the world!

Had the Normans been thorough-paced, London fashionables, a few smirks, smiles, and plausibilities might have salved over their wounds. But even in her haughtiest day of insolence, she had stood somewhat in awe of the handsome baronet. There was a sternness, or abstraction, of she scarcely knew what, in his nature, defying at once her captivations and his aggressions. But it was not for such a self-reliant spirit to despair. She attacked him in what she knew to be a vulnerable point, by her caresses of little Walter; and followed up the manoeuvre by a series of civilities and cajolements to his wife.

The same feeling which had prompted Norman to accept the invitation of Lady Dawlish, at length caused him to succumb under the load of Lady Catherine’s courtesy.

“The old brute, my guardian, is gone,” said he. “The daughter they wanted to force upon me is married. Of the rest of the family, I know nothing. Lady Catherine’s husband is a mere nonentity; and as we are likely to be thrown together in society, better accommodate ourselves with a good grace to the evil!”

Recalling to mind his former virulence in Paris, and his often repeated charges to her to avoid all intercourse with the Normans, Matilda’s countenance expressed the surprise consequent upon so unaccountable a transition.

“No need of perpetuating grievances?”—cried Sir Richard, replying to her looks. “It will be an advantage hereafter to the children to be on good terms with the various branches of the family;—more especially Walter, who has so much to apprehend from their animosity.”

Carefully as Matilda was now schooling herself to place the two children upon a par in her estimation of their rights, if not in her personal affection, it nevertheless startled her when she found Sir Richard thus undisguisedly advocating the interests of the little foundling. It must of course be so.—“The adoption could not be made by halves.—Still she wondered that his heart’s blood stirred not more warmly towards the little Constance—her own image, his own offspring—than towards the child of some Parisian outcast—the child of shame—the child of sin.

It was no small aggravation of her momentary pique, that Walter’s future interests required her to sacrifice her repugnance and accept in good part the advances of Lady Catherine Norman. Though Matilda’s nature was ill-qualified to form an accurate estimation of the odiousness of such a woman, she experienced involuntary disgust whenever she found herself in company with the intrigante. Unable to measure the extent of her misdoings, the glittering exterior of the serpent was almost as distasteful as would have been the latent venom she had not the science to decompose.—Lady Catherine’s unwomanly hardness—her sneers at every thing good and virtuous—her innate, ingrained, intolerant, and intolerable worldliness,—filled poor Matilda’s heart with uneasy feelings when tête-à-tête with the Pythoness of Carlton House. She longed to escape to Selwood Manor, and the family circle which Christmas was to bring around her—from the intrusions of the Normans and others of Lady Dawlish’s set.

On the eve, however, of her departure for Worcestershire, Sir Richard urged her to fulfil a long-standing engagement to visit Covent-garden Theatre, and enjoy for the first time one of the exquisite and feminine performances of Miss O’Neil, then in the zenith of her fame. The “Dawlish set” affected to trace a likeness between Matilda and that charming actress; one of Lady Catharine’s standing jests in Paris, when her fair rival appeared in society, attired in a black velvet dress, that displayed to peculiar advantage the fairness of her hair and complexion, being to exclaim, as she entered the room, “Here comes Isabella, the heroine of the Fatal Marriage!”—Lady Dawlish had lately made it her request that she might enjoy the satisfaction of introducing Matilda to her prototype; and it was mortifying to the simple-hearted Lady Norman, that her pleasures
should be thus studied by one whose gratification she
could not feel inclined to study in return.

On repairing to the theatre, however, it appeared that it
was the royal box they were to occupy, per favor of Lady
Catherine; and that instead of having projected the party
for her enjoyment, their conversation did not suffer five
minutes’ interruption to admit of her appreciating the per­
fornances. Yet brief as were the snatches permitting the
novice to admire the inimitable enunciation and touching
pathos of the most feminine of actresses, her attention was
enthralled to a degree which rendered painful the interrup­
tions of her companions. She did not fail to note, as she
had often noted before, that nothing can exceed the ill-breed­
ing of an exclusive. Instead of compassionating her sym­
pathy with the stage, Lady Norman’s tears seemed only to
stimulate the activity of their senseless prattle.

At length, Sir Richard, out of patience with their imper­
tinence, rose and quitted the box; and no sooner had he
taken refuge in some quieter seat that the real purpose of
their visit to the theatre became apparent. From that mo­
ment there was not even a pretence of interest in the woes
of Isabella, or the wrongs of Biron.

“I have some papers here, my dear Lady Norman,
which I wish you to study,” said Lady Catherine, drawing
a packet from the embroidered bag which it was the fashion
of that day to drag about; “or rather (as you have little taste,
I fancy, for genealogies and parents), which I entreat you
to recommend to the attention of Sir Richard.”

“If they relate in any way to the affairs of the late Mr.
Norman,” observed Matilda, drawing back, “pray say
nothing to him on the subject. All former animosities are
extinguished. It would surely be injudicious to rake them
up!”

“I should scarcely describe them as relating to the affairs
of the late Mr. Norman,” replied Lady Catherine with con­
tempt. “With his trading interests, thank Heaven, we
have ceased to entertain the slightest concern. But they re­
late to a matter in which he is represented by his husband.
Mr. Norman’s claims dying with him are, of course, vested
in Giles.”

Matilda looked puzzled, and was about to turn away in
the hope of being allowed to bestow her attention on the
sorrows of the wretch “who should have died at Candy!”

when Lady Catherine began to enter into a thousand cir­
cumstantialities relating to the Woodchurch peerage.

“... But since Mr. Norman, as representative of this Jeffrey
Norman, Lord Woodchurch, is entitled to the barony, of
what service can be the concurrence of my husband?”—
demanded the simple-hearted Matilda.

“Of no real service. But it will wear a better appear­
ce that the family should be unanimous on the question.”

“Sir Richard can have no motive to dispute the rights of
Mr. Norman more than those of any other person,” replied
Matilda. “But he has not the smallest parliamentary interest
and will, I fear, be of little use.”

“As to interest,” said Lady Catherine, glancing loftily
towards Lady Dawlish, “our cause is safe enough. All I
wish to be assured is that we shall meet with no opposition
from any member of the family.

“I will give the papers and your message to Sir Richard,”
replied Matilda, eager to dismiss the business, “and leave
him to discuss the matter with Mr. Norman.”

But throughout the evening, though the question of
peerage and genealogies was carefully avoided, the influence
of her views concerning both was visible in every word ut­
tered by Lady Catherine. She seemed smitten with a
sudden rapture of enthusiasm for the beauty of Sir Richard’s
person, and the endowments of his mind; protested, that
the previous day in the park, she had never happened to
notice his admirable air, when with the world with
noble horsemanship—not, till Lady Dawlish’s dinner par­
ty, the superiority of his talents. The lady who prevented
Napoleon’s courtiers from discussing the symmetry of the
Emperor’s hand by exclaiming, “de grace, ne parions point
politique!”—might have parried the flatteries of Lady
Catherine by observing, “Wait till the petition is before
the house!”

On their return home that night from the petit souper at
Lady Dawlish’s which closed the labors of the evening
Sir Richard received from his weary wife an account of her
mission, and the papers which she promised to return in his
name to Lady Catherine Norman, if he did not choose to
be at the trouble of examination.

“Not examine them!”—cried he, entering with ardor
into the cause. “You cannot suppose that I am going to
take those people’s word concerning this Woodchurch
THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

—It may turn out of high importance to Walter!—I shall sift the affair with the greatest nicety. I remember hearing the Abbé O'Donnel mention, that my father always conceived himself to be the head of the Woodchurch branch of the family."

"But Lady Catherine insinuates, that it is only through her family interest that the title is likely to be revived in their favor; and that for any other branch, nothing would be available."

"Then I am convinced that my claims are as good as theirs!"—criéd Sir Richard. "She would not have held out that intimation, unless for purposes of discouragement. —Give me the roll of papers.—I will examine them before I sleep this night."

"After being talked to death for the last five hours, your mind is surely not in a state to form any accurate judgment," observed Lady Norman.

"I shall lay the case before the accurate judgment of the first genealogists of the day," replied her husband. "All I would ascertain to-night is, the extent of Lady Catherine's audacity in attempting to cant me out of my family rights."

And in spite of his fatigue, Sir Richard remained till morning poring over the papers injudiciously committed to his hands; and was ultimately so convinced of the priority of his claims, that, after allowing himself only an hour or two for repose, he posted off in search of the eminent lawyer to whose consideration he had determined to refer the case.

"The question scarcely admits of dispute as a matter of right," was the answer given, on a cursory view of the documents. "What it may become as a matter of favor, is another thing. The petitioning party must have tolerable reliance on the strength of their parliamentary interest, to fancy the lords would confirm so halting a claim as the best which, even if unopposed, they seem prepared to make out."

Sir Richard returned from this legal interview in the highest spirits. Snatching little Walter upon his knee at dessert, he drank to him as the future Lord Woodchurch. He seemed to exult in the idea of this new aggrandization, chiefly for the sake of the boy; and informed Lady Norman that so necessary did he consider it to be on the spot to assist the researches of his legal adviser, and reply to the proposals of the Normans, that it would be impossible for him to accompany her the following day to Selwood Manor.

"With a thousand apologies and excuses for this resolution," he entreated Matilda to make excuses to her family for the duty towards his "children," which rendered it incumbent on him to despatch her alone into Worcestershire, to do the honors of Selwood Manor.

CHAPTER XXI.

No triumphal arches, no flags, no garlands, awaited little Constance Norman on her first arrival upon the territory of her forefathers. There was not even an exulting father to hold her up to the admiration of the village, as the carriage rolled through Selwood. But Matilda was too happy in the beauty and well-being of her unexpected treasure, to experience even a momentary pang of mortification. She was returning home, in safety and happiness, with her babe smiling at her bosom; and it became her not to lament, either the presence of little Walter, or the absence of Sir Richard. It was vexatious to find that Mrs. Ravenscroft had quitted the village to spend her Christmas holidays at Tuxwell Park; and that four and twenty hours must elapse ere she had the joy of exhibiting the beauties of "Miss Norman" to eyes more discriminating than those of the purblind housekeeper, and old family steward, who looked unlovingly upon its little heretic face. But next day, her family were to assemble—her gray-headed father—her happy brother and sister; bringing with them the strangers they were about to introduce to her affection.

The meeting was a joyous one on all sides. The little family party travelled together, and made their appearance within ten minutes of the appointed time. But even while admiring, at Matilda's suggestion, the beauties of her chil-

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children, and offering their heartfelt greetings to herself, frowns overcast the brows of John Maulé and Avesford, on learning the uncourteous absence of the master of the mansion; the one resenting the insult for himself—the other, for his father.

"Tom Cruttenden prophesied that Sir Richard would not be on the spot to receive us!" mused old Maulé. But he fortunately mused in silence—too deeply penetrated by the delight of folding a new generation of his descendants to his bosom to murmur at trivial grievances. The poor old man fancied that the instincts of nature were stirring powerfully within him, as he laid his hand in benediction upon the head of the heir of Selwood; and assured Matilda, that he could trace in the boy's dark eyes a strong resemblance to her brother William.

"The girl is a pretty babe enough," said the old gentleman, glancing carelessly at Constance. "But you mustn't expect me, my dear, to think so much of her as of Walter. Your son's a noble little fellow, Matty; and I love him the more for reminding me so strongly of my poor Bill. Missy is fair you see, and less like the Maulé part of the family. Missy, I warrant, is the image of some of the Normans who, if I'm to judge by their portraits in the gallery, were most of them sallow-faced bodies."

"Surely I must have been once as fair as Constance," pleaded Matilda, piqued for the honor of her babe. "To be sure you were, my dear. You took after your mother's relations. You never bore the least resemblance to your brothers and sisters."

Lady Norman interrupted a discussion interesting only to her father and herself, to explain, to the best of her power, the urgency of the business which detained her husband in town. But though they labored to look politely convinced of the necessity for his absence, an irrepressible glance of contemptuous incredulity was visible in the intelligent countenance of the young merchant, which was not lost upon Matilda.

John Maulé and his wife were sober, steady, serious people, attached to their tranquil routine of life; who, regarding their journey into Worcestershire as a sacrifice inadвая to the wishes of the old gentleman, were rather glad than sorry to be spared the additional exertions which must have arisen from the presence of Sir Richard. The husband, after renouncing his father's noisy calling, and taking himself to the church as the quietest of the learned professions, had selected his wife as the most silent young lady of his acquaintance—intending to pass through life in methodical obscurity, discharging the duties of a parish priest in their narrowest acceptation—officiating in the parish church one hundred and ten times in the course of the year, and reading family prayers in his own parlor seven hundred and thirty. His parsonage was neat and trimly to a miracle. A Dutch excess of cleanliness caused the furniture to shine, the grates to glitter, the shaven lawn and closely trimmed espaliers to pull forth their monotonous verdure. His parishioners rarely called forth his reproofs, unless by disorderliness in their persons, or untidiness in their households; and his favorites in the village were supposed to shave or whitewash, sweep or garnish their way to the parson's good graces. If cleanliness, according to the proverb, be secondary only to godliness, John Maule was a semi-saint after his kind. Circumscribed in understanding, and unexpansive in affections, he was content to take Selwood as he found it; regretting only that so extensive and well-wooded a park would not, by any expenditure of old women and besoms, be delivered from its disfigurement of its withered leaves.

The methodical parson and his shy, nervous, little wife were very different beings from the frank, sensible Elizabeth, and her firm, strong-minded husband. While John Maule complimented Lady Norman upon her looks, and thought it wonderful she should look so young and pretty, after being racketed all over Europe, and exposed to the inconveniences of sea-voyages and land-journeys almost as harassing and distracting as the uproar of Cruttenden Maule's Birmingham manufactory—Charles Avesford considered it far more extraordinary that she should preserve such cheerful spirits, after spending fourteen years in the company of an ill-tempered, disagreeable man, useless in his generation, yet as proud of himself as if he lived to confer benefits upon mankind.

Matilda, meanwhile, though grieved to notice the declining health of her father, and find her brother married to a non-entity, soon began to experience that happy frame of feeling arising from a family re-union after long sojourn in a land of strangers. There were distant kindred to be in-
quired for, of whose names for years she had heard no mention. There were entertaining anecdotes to be listened to, of the increasing eccentricities of Tom Cruttenden and young Crutt, related with good-humored drollery by Avesford. There was a description of Fern Hill to be extracted from Elizabeth, and an account of John's parsonage—"small certainly, but singularly commodious"—interrupted by little agitated allusions from Mrs. Maule to their prospect of an early removal to Woldham Rectory.

Matilda listened, pleased to find them all so happy in their lot; and gratified in turn by her sympathy, every heart warmed towards her. Before dinner was over, all present felt that it was a family-party; and, in spite of the massive plate, stately liveries, and magnific dining-room, forgot that their dear Matty was Lady Norman of Selwood Manor, with a chance of being shortly saluted as the lady of the Right Honorable Lord-Woodchurch.

To herself, all was sunshine thus surrounded by those to whom she knew herself to be an object of pride and affection; till the moment of dessert, when it was the custom of Sir Richard, as of all partial parents, for Walter to make his appearance. Matilda had not dared revoke, during her husband's absence, the order for Master Norinan's joining the party; and he was accordingly paraded by Ghita, as usual, to the head of the table, and greeted with caresses by the guests. As the Italian stooped to draw a chair for her charge, her eyes unfortunately encountered those of her lady; and Matilda read, or fancied she read there, pity and contempt for her hypocrisy, in accepting for the alien the tenderness of her poor old, white-headed father. Her hireling seemed to be rejoicing in the consciousness of moral superiority.

That moment, the happy family meeting forfeited its charm in the eyes of Lady Norman!—Instead of feeling proud of welcoming her father, sister, and brother under her roof, and evincing her affection for them in presence of their new connections, she was conscious only that they were sitting at the board of a deceiver, and that their honest hearts and blameless lives were aggrieved by the collision. It was not the highborn wealthy baronet's wife doing the honors of his family mansion to the manufacturer, the merchant, the village-priest; it was the forsworn evil-doer, sitting at meat with those whose souls disdained an untruth, and who would have recoiled from the commission of an act such as she had dishonorably adventured!—

When the generous wine sparkled in a crystal goblet engraved with the armorial bearings of the Normans, in the trembling hand of old Maule, he exclaimed, "Toasts, they tell me, are old-fashioned things; but I must have one to-day! —Here's a health to my grandson!—here's health and prosperity to the heir of Selwood!"—And while his son and son-in-law pledged him in a hearty bumper, Elizabeth, leaning across her husband, grasped with affectionate pressure the hand of her sister.

"May he live to be a blessing to you," said Mrs. Avesford, ere she raised the glass to her lips; while Matilda, pale and trembling, had not courage to bid the smiling boy embrace his grandfather and aunt. Her mind was absorbed in the painful reflection that of her own fair girl, in whose veins alone their kindred blood was flowing, no one uttered a syllable!—

Nor were her sufferings diminished by the child-like questionings of little Walter concerning his new relatives. "Are you my mamma's papa?—Are you my mamma's brothers and sisters?—Why are you not so pretty as she is?—What made you come here?—When are you going away?"—and so forth. But for the readiness of Avesford who saw from the variations of Lady Norman's countenance that something was amiss, though he could not divine the cause of her disturbance, the boy would have continued to pursue his awkward interrogatories unanswered.

"We are come here that you may show us Selwood Manor House, and park, and village," said he to the indulged little fellow. "And in return, you shall come and see me, Walter, and I will show you ships and sailors, and the beautiful birds and shells they bring me from distant countries."

The child's attention thus attracted, he was soon established on Avesford's knee, asking a thousand questions, and unfolding the little budget of his own traveller's reminiscences; but it was not till he retired for the night, that Matilda became restored to her wonted composure.

A week had been originally fixed for the duration of the visit; and Lady Norman trusted that, in a day or two, Sir Richard would be released from his London engagements to admit of the christening of her child taking place during
their stay. For to have the ceremony performed during her husband’s absence was a thing not to be thought of. Extended intercourse with the world had done little to detach the heart of that gentle wife and mother from its chartered affections. The first object of her life was still the froward husband, by whose all-potent influence she had been swayed to wrong; the second, the little creature, the flower springing to adorn her autumnal day, which she trusted was to unite them in yet closer affection. In former days, indeed, she had believed want of offspring to be the solitary cause of their estrangement; and if now the birth of Constance failed to knit anew the slackened ties of his early love, it would be occasioned by the interposition of the young Ishmael she had fostered under her roof.

Matilda felt it her duty to omit no occasion of awakening the parental instincts of Norman in favor of his daughter. His tenderness must be cultivated in behalf of Constance. He must be allowed to omit no customary form of kindness. He must be present at her christening, though differing in ceremonial from those of his professed church. Injudicious mother! who sought to impose the claims of her child as a tax upon the feelings of her husband!—

Two days, however, alone remained of their visit, and no Sir Richard made, or promised to make, his appearance. Elizabeth and Avesford settled it apart that he was an ill-bred, ill-conditioned being; an Ethiopian unworthy to wear on his brow so rich a jewel as Matilda. But they accompanied Lady Norman with such pleased alacrity to visit the most striking spots of her picturesque neighborhood, and the whole party seemed to enjoy themselves so much, viewing her schools and almshouses, the village being enlivened at that moment by its annual distribution of blankets and good cheer, that she fancied her husband’s slight had been unfelt. John Malé and his wife were content with the calm monotony of Selwood, which they pronounced to be almost as quiet as their own parsonage, congratulating Matilda on being so little molested by the troublesome claims of a neighborhood; and Avesford, though he preferred the busy prospects of his humbler domain to the boundless extent of indistinct landscape wearying the eye at the Manor, had taste and information to appreciate the value of its fine library, and interesting collection of works of art.

Old Malé, meanwhile, had other objects to absorb his attention. At once proud and fond of his grandchildren, he was never weary of being led about by young Norman to visit in the park his favorite pony—in the gardens, his favorite seat—in the house, the gallery containing his favorite suit of armor.—Matilda almost trembled to see with what infatuation her father was attaching himself to the boy.

“How amazed my friend Cruttenden would be, Matty, to see you, our mother of such a princely little fellow!”—said he, one evening to Lady Norman, after obtaining her promise that a first-rate artist should be engaged at his expense to make a portrait of his beautiful grandson. “Tom has not quite forgiven you, my dear, for not naming one of your children after him. I have a notion, however, he will remember your son handsomely in his will. All he has in the world is to go to my descendants; and as your brother Crutt seems set against matrikinony, and yours are, at present, the only young ones in the family, I shouldn’t be surprised if the heir of Selwood were eventually to inherit as good a property from his mother, as from all his grand ancestors put together!—Girls are none the better for fortunes. It only makes them the prey of fortune-hunters. But we must see and do our best for Sir Walter Norman!—”

At Matilda’s request, who began to suspect that her husband would prolong his sojourn in London as irregularly as he had formerly done in Paris, the little party agreed to remain an additional day at the Manor. Some time would probably elapse ere their return thither. She felt less able than formerly to confront the isolation of a secluded life. Her rearing had been among the familiar and sociable. Her nature had not been trained for the aristocratic seclusion of Selwood; and now, alas! she had lost even the peace of mind which had rendered solitude, if not delightful, supportable.

It was not the many-colored scenery of the continent, or her recent gay associations in London, which inspired her with a dread of ennui, during the absence of Sir Richard. The cheerful spirit of Avesford, and the companionableness of his wife, rendered her deeply conscious of the blessing derivable from pleasant intercourse. In his happiest moods, the tone of Sir Richard’s mind was pitched a key above or below her own. He was a casuist—a theorist; unsympathising with the march of mankind, or the homely interests of life. Egotism closes the human heart as effectually as misanthropy; and while the Avesfords were golden links
in the mighty chain of humanity, despising nothing and nobody either agreeable or useful to their fellow-creatures, Sir Richard Norman surveyed the world with universal contempt.

Enchanted to find in Matilda a woman unspoiled by the world—sweet amid domestic bitterness, and humble amid a thousand incentives to arrogance and pretension—they gladly agreed to postpone their departure, but scarcely had the point been conceded, when, to the annoyance of the whole party, and the dismay of Matilda, Sir Richard Norman made his appearance. On her return from her drive with her father and the Avesfords (while John and his silent mate performed their daily constitutional round of the shrubberies), she was informed that her husband was in the library; and found him seated on the sofa, with Walter upon his knee!

The greeting was constrained on both sides. The husband made no movement to join his guests—the wife dared not propose it; but as Matilda took a place silently by his side, he put down the boy, and extended his hand kindly towards her. Lady Norman now noticed in his appearance an air of languor and indisposition inducing her to exclaim:—It was illness, then, and not business, that detained you in town!—Dearest Norman, why did you not write me word that you were indisposed?

"I have not been ill," he replied. "But a thousand untoward circumstances have occurred to thwart me. I delayed my return, therefore, till I thought I was likely to be alone with you. I hoped these people would be gone?—"

"They have only two more days to remain here," replied Matilda. "They are all anxious to return home. It was only as a concession to my earnest request that they agreed to stay another day.

Sir Richard involuntarily shrugged his shoulders; then, perceiving the mortified air which overspread the features of his wife, he added—"Forgive me, dearest Matilda!—But, when vexed by the contrarities of life, I cannot expect from others the indulgence I meet from yourself; and I am just now so much out of sorts as scarcely to be fit society for those who have so strong a claim on my attention."

"Make me, at least, one promise," said Matilda, bitterly. "My family have only twenty-four hours to remain under your roof. Treat them with the courtesy you bestow on strangers, and give them not reason to fear that our fire-side is harassed by care. My father is old and ailing. Let him die in the cheering belief that his child is happy as she is prosperous. In the name of that boy," she continued, pointing to Walter, who, having slid from Sir Richard's knee, stood aloof, amusing himself with some childish pastime—"I require you to conduct yourself with kindness and consideration towards those who have never failed in kindness and consideration for you or yours!—"

Startled by this appeal, Sir Richard rose, took her arm under his, and proceeding at once to the drawing-room, welcomed every member of Matilda's family to his house with a grace and courtesy of high breeding so like the Sir Richard Norman of other times, that Matilda was gratified to perceive how instantaneous an influence he was usurping over the feelings of Avesford and her brother.

On retiring for the night, however, she was still more gratified to find the favorable impression reciprocal. Her husband had come in contact only with the less-gifted members of her family; and the ill-timed lectures of his father-in-law, and obtrusive vulgarity of young Crutt, had not prepared him for the quiet good-breeding of John Maué, or the intelligent manliness of Avesford. Even old Maué, as a doting grandfather, was more bearable than as the automaton whose wires were worked by Tom Crutenden.

"Mrs. Avesford has been more fortunate than her sister, Matilda!" said he, with a melancholy smile. "She has chosen a man of sense and education, with too much feeling to neglect her happiness, and too much principle to mislead her judgment. So much the better for all of us!—Avesford may become a valuable counsellor to you and yours. It is a comfort to me to find him so superior a man."

"What need have I of the advice of my sister's husband, while I am secure of yours?" demanded Matilda, with an involuntary feeling of alarm.

"We are all mortal. I am ten years older than yourself; I have not accustomed you much to the exercise of your own judgment," said Norman, endeavoring to smile away the apprehensions he saw gathering in the countenance of his wife. "But be of good cheer, Matilda. I mean to
live many years yet to try your patience. Meanwhile, admit that Avesford is a fine, gentlemanly fellow—a pleasant inmate—and valuable addition to our family.

"So untrue is it that all men are equals," observed Dr. Johnson, "that no two men ever remained half an hour in each other's company without the one obtaining a superiority over the other."

In the course of a single evening, Charles Avesford had obtained a decided ascendancy over his brother-in-law!

CHAPTER XXII.

I something do excuse the thing I hate
For his advantage whom I dearly love.—Shakspeare.

It was gratifying to the sisters to perceive, on the morrow, with what readiness their husbands fell into each other's society. Each was agreeably surprised in the qualities of the other; and Sir Richard experienced real delight in pointing out the natural beauties of his estate to one who had good taste to appreciate them, and in discussing its management with one who had valuable advice to bestow. They rode together over the park and home-farm of Selwood; and Elizabeth and Matilda exchanged glances on their return, implying a mutual conviction that their future intercourse would be such as they could desire.

Nevertheless, the quick-sighted Avesford had already discovered that all was not well with Sir Richard. In spite of his efforts to be companionable, and his desire to appear to advantage, it was plain that something hung heavy on the spirits of the baronet.

During the christening ceremony of the morning, he was almost as much affected by the sensible and impressive reading of John Manle, as Matilda had been by the same service performed at Farleigh Castle; and his deportment throughout the evening was so mild and depressed—so different from what the Avesfords were prepared to expect—that Elizabeth instinctively attributed his meekness to indisposition, and her husband, to mental affliction.

As they sat together after coffee, Elizabeth discussing with Sir Richard the probability that little Constance would grow up into a striking resemblance of her mother, Avesford suddenly interrupted them by remarking, "I don't doubt she will be pretty, but the boy is positively the finest fellow in England. We shall have a famous description to give of him to our neighbor Lady Audley. I believe, Sir Richard, she is a near connection of yours?"


"She was a Norman, I think?—'Agatha Norman?'—I remember seeing the name in an old music-book which she lent my wife."

"You are acquainted with her, then?"

"Sir Thomas is our nearest neighbor. Lady Audley's society is a great acquisition to Bessy."

"But you do not always reside at Fern Hill?"—inquired Sir Richard, as if the proximity of his cousin Agatha was no great incentive to the performance of his promise to take Matilda and the children early in the summer to visit the Avesfords.

"Oh no—from May till November only. My house of business in Liverpool is a commodious family residence. We remain in the country only so long as the weather enables me to come backwards and forwards."

"Perhaps, then," observed Sir Richard, "you will have no objection to extend your hospitality to us in April instead of June. The scene at Liverpool would be a novelty to Matilda. She has never seen an English maritime city, or docks, or any thing of the kind."

"No, no, no!"—cried Avesford, laughing; "you shall drive over from Fern Hill and visit our lions. But it would not amuse you to find yourself running all day against trucks, bales, punchoons, jars, and chests. My compting-house and ware-houses are immediately connected with my dwelling-house. I have often heard old Cruttenden describe the consternation of your looks when you were first introduced to the factory; and should feel vexed, I fear, to see you disgusted by the stir and bustle which constitute my pride and glory. There is nothing interesting or picturesque in commercial details. Such things may look well enough from the Rialto at Venice, or Mole at Genoa; but we Liverpool folks are plain matter-of-fact people."
"And the proudest people of my acquaintance, my dear Avesford!" observed John Maule, with a quiet smile. "I never met with so much etiquette and ostentation (except in a Cathedral Close) as when, two years ago, you introduced me to your thrones and dominions. In point of classical and literary taste, too, what city in the empire competes with Liverpool?"

"Pho, pho!—we tried to astonish the country parson," said Avesford, good-humoredly; "we were afraid you should come the pedant over us, and forestalled you by coming the alderman and Roscoe over you!—But, joking apart, Sir Richard, you would enjoy yourself more at Fern Hill; the situation of which is beautiful and the air singularly fine; to say nothing of the pleasure the Audleys would have in forming the acquaintance of their cousins."

"I know nothing of Lady Audley," said Sir Richard, stiffly. "I have not seen her since she was a child, and I, her father's ward."

"She is a spirited, high-minded woman," said Avesford. "I am sure you would like her. Her brother, too, is a fine young man."

"Lady Audley has several brothers."

"I alluded to Rupert Norman, who spent several months with the Audleys last year. He is partner in a house of business at Trieste, trading largely with Liverpool; and took the opportunity of having affairs to settle among us, to bring over his Italian lady on a visit to his family."

Sir Richard Norman appeared so silently indifferent to the proceedings of this branch of her family, that Matilda, who had been hitherto engaged in conversation with Mrs. Maule and her father, thought it civil to interpose.

"Is Mrs. Rupert Norman a handsome woman?—she inquired.

"Strikingly handsome," replied Elizabeth, joining in the discussion. "The elder brother is married, I believe, to a woman of rank. Of her, Lady Audley seems to know nothing; but she soon grew extremely attached to Benedetta. I cannot say I was very fond of her. There is something wild and fierce about her eyes."

"Something Italian, perhaps?" observed Matilda.

"Italian, with a vengeance!" cried Avesford. "Your souls made of fire, and children of the sun, may be admirable ingredients for a tragedy or opera; but they are the devil among the decencies of private life!—For my part, I stood in positive awe of Madame Norman, and have liked Audley Oaks much better since her departure."

"They are gone, then?" demanded Norman, who had borne no part in the recent conversation. "To Trieste, probably, by this time. They left Lancashire on a visit to their relations in the south."

And Sir Richard evincing no further curiosity on the subject, the discussion fell to the ground.

On parting finally from Mrs. Avesford on the morrow, Matilda felt ashamed to avow how likely she thought this unlucky neighborhood with the Audleys, to interrupt their projected intercourse.

"Charles and Sir Richard seem to have got on admirably together," was Elizabeth's remark on the subject. "It would be, in fact, difficult for Avesford's frank, honest nature to give offence; and I cordially hope, dearest sister, that for the rest of our lives, our families may remain on the happiest footing."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Lady Norman; "I have had more need of your affection, Bessy, than I have dared express. Henceforward, though I may not need, I shall truly enjoy it."

To the whole party, Sir Richard Norman's parting greetings were kind and courteous. He spoke confidently to Avesford of a visit to Liverpool in the spring, and cheerfully assured old Maule that there was not the slightest chance of the Selwood family again quitting England.

"You see," observed the old gentleman, in extenuation of his pertinacity on the subject, "I bore but ill the thought of Matty's going abroad when you last left us. But now, I can't make up my mind to have my only grandson cross the sea. I shouldn't be easy in heart to lose sight of little Walter!—"

Matilda felt ashamed to meet the looks of her husband, immediately after being compelled to listen and reply to these misplaced expressions of tenderness.

"We must console ourselves for the necessity of deceiving him, with the reflection that the boy is the source of unmixed delight to him," was lady Norman's faintly uttered comment; fancying from the depressed air of her husband, after the departure of their guests, that his conscience stood as deeply rebuked as her own.
But Norman’s thoughts were elsewhere. A far more painful blow had recently awaited him. On expressing to his cousin (or rather to Lady Catherine, his cousin’s stronger as well as better half,) a determination to prosecute his claim to the Woodchurch peerage, he had been informed that, as it could only be conceded as a matter of favor, his proceedings would be injurious to others, without proving beneficial to himself; and on his persisting, in spite of this warning, to give notice of an intended petition, he received a verbal intimation from Lady Catherine that she thanked him, at least, for taking so much trouble about a title which, after all, was likely to descend to her son.

"Your life is as good as ours," said she, infuriated out of all self-control on finding that Sir Richard was in possession of the documents necessary to secure the claim.—"Enjoy it for your time, therefore, and welcome. But remember that (unless Lady Norman should have a son) it must eventually revert to us.—"

To this startling allusion, uttered from her carriage-window in presence of the servants, as she happened to encounter Sir Richard at Lady Dawlish’s door, he hazarded no reply. He dared not defy—he dared not concede.—The slightest word or admission on the subject was fraught with peril. Hastening from the presence of the virago, he quitted town that night to confer with Matilda as to the eligibility of putting forward pretensions, likely to draw down upon him such terrible retaliation.

"I was in hope a," she replied, when Sir Richard laid the question before her, "that all misgivings had vanished from Lady Catherine’s mind?"

"The information accidentally afforded me this morning by Avesford, of Rupert Norman’s arrival in England and visit to Grove Park," he replied, "convinces me that she has obtained ulterior information. We are, perhaps, more than ever in peril!—"

"But what can Mr. Norman of Trieste know upon the subject more than herself?"

"No matter!—he is satisfied that either from him or others, she has gained fatal intelligence!"

"But when Lady Audley learns from my sister with what enthusiastic affection the boy is loved amongst us?"—observed Matilda.

"True!—The Avesford’s reports of your affecti—"
wife. "I was going to say by one whom I truly and dearly love, except when I regard him as the successful rival of my child!"

Relieved of one ground of anxiety by Matilda's indifference to worldly distinctions, Norman resolved to renounce all active measures concerning the Woodchurch affair. It would be time enough to put in a protest, should Giles Norman hazard a petition.

Sir Richard soon found, however, that pretensions to peerages were not to be snatched up and laid down at the instigation of personal caprice. No secrecy having been enjoined on the subject in the first instance, Matilda, by way of extenuating her husband's prolonged stay in town, had mentioned to her friends at Farleigh Castle the motive of his delay; and the Earl (an old gentleman who had survived almost everything but adoration of his order, and a peculiar code of politeness, whose table of precedence descended from the divinity straight to the anointed king of England, and from the anointed king of England straight to his peers,) was elated by the idea of so vast an addition to the social dignity of his neighborhood. He respected Sir Richard Norman greatly as an old baronet, and felt that he should respect him fifty times more, as representative of one of the barons of Magna Charta.

"Renounce the claim?"—cried the old lord, on learning from Norman's lips his present determination. "That would be 'letting I dare not wait upon I would' most shamefully! Why, my daughter Emily understood from Lady Norman that yon had obtained from the Herald's Office the utmost encouragement and support?—"

"And so I did," replied Sir Richard, calmly.

"Yet you would tamely sit down content to give up your pretensions?—Fie, fie! my dear Sir Richard!—I won't believe it of you.—"

"The thing cannot be done without considerable trouble and expense," argued Norman.

"And is it not worth trouble and expense, my dear sir?—What trouble and expense do not people incur to secure even one of your bran-new patents; and yours would date, I fancy, from 1203!—God bless my soul!—I would expend half my fortune to establish my right to such a creation!—"

"It might be worth your Lordship's while," observed Sir Richard. "Your son is in parliament, and will perhaps hereafter obtain the lieutenancy of the county. Under such circumstances, I admit that an ancient English peerage is a better thing than an Irish earldom. But to a Roman Catholic like myself, earldoms or baronies are alike indifferent. I live on my own land, neither a courtier nor a politician. Precedence is immaterial in a career so obscure as mine. I know the validity of my claims; and it is but an injustice the more on the part of the legislature, that I find myself excluded from my rightful place in the Upper House."

"Pardon me," said the old nobleman; "but if you do not take the measures indispensable to establish your pretensions —"

"Do not, my dear lord, attempt to aggravate my political disgusts by inspiring me with bootless ambition!" interrupted Sir Richard. "Let it suffice that I am restless and aspiring for my party; for my own share, suffer me to retain my self-satisfied obscurity."

"I would rather reverse the case and see you an agitator on your own account than on that of the Catholics," replied the good old lord, with a smile. "On that score, my prejudices are undiminished. Yet I cannot, in conscience, blame you for wishing to take an active part in the business of the country; since half my own time is spent in inciting my son to similar aspiration. How can we be surprised, I ask, at the growing influence of the democratic party in this country, when young men of family, having an important stake in the country, resign themselves, like Selsdon, to field-sports one-half the year, and sluggardly the other?"

"We are not surprised," replied Sir Richard. "Our hopes, as you are aware, derive daily strength from the growing influence of liberal opinions, the natural emanation of those middle classes whom I fear your Lordship is apt to designate as the democratic party."

"You do me injustice," replied Lord Farleigh; "and you are equally unjust towards yourself by affecting to take your place with the popular faction. Except on the single point of emancipation, your principles must necessarily be conservative. Nothing can be more absurd than to persist in rangmg the political parties of this country under the two exploded banners of whigism and toryism. The exigencies of the times and the march of society have created a hundred political sects. You might as accurately divide
religious parties at the present day into Jews and Gentiles, as political, into whigs and tories."

"I so far agree with you," replied Norman, "that, though the whig party must ever hold the strongest claims on the gratitude of the present generation of Roman Catholics, yet when half a century of civil equality shall have obliterated the rancor of religious animosities, it will probably be with the conservative party that the higher class of Roman Catholics are found amalgamated. A far sighted tory leader, anticipating this, may perhaps be the person to break our chains and enable the enfranchised to strengthen his own forces."

Lord Farleigh shrugged his shoulders. "I have ceased to indulge in political prognostications," said he. "The times are too strangely disordered to admit of deducing opinions from premises altogether unprecedented. The history of no other country affords a lesson from which to frame the horoscope of England. Luckily, 'tis a good ship, which has weathered and may still weather, many a storm. But I suspect there are ymphoons in the wind such as never before tried the strength of her canvass. As I daily assure my son, these are no times to slumber by the fireside. Those who love their country should be up and doing!—"

Sir Richard Norman, too well bred to enter into political discussions with a man of Lord Farleigh's age, whose interests and opinions were diametrically opposed to his own, could not but call to mind that such were precisely the declarations he had heard a few days before, from the lips of Avesford, in a totally adverse sense. The Liverpool merchant, and the Worcestershire Magnat, were necessarily of opposite factions; looking upon the state of parties, the one from the ascending, the other from the descending scale; but both were equally aware that a power-engine was in established operation, to supersede the mouldy mill-wheels and lumbering looms of what are called the good old times.—There existed, in fact, more sympathy between them than between the conscientious conservatism of Lord Farleigh, and the narrow, though daring doctrines of high toryism, gobbled through the chattering mouth-piece of Lady Dawlish's set; or than between the enlightened liberalism of Avesford and the unargumentative radicalism of Cruttenden Maule, with his eternal cry of "I should like to know, now, within a million or two, what the house of Hanover has cost this country since its accession!"—or, "Radical reform, sir!—nothing short of the whole hog!—What's the use of keeping a country in petticoats, when it is old enough to be breeched!—"

Had it not been for the ready attention of his daughter, who had attained the age when the noses of superannuated young ladies wax red after dinner and their conversation blue, Lord Farleigh would seldom have found an auditor for his political Jeremiads. But Lady Emily listened respectfully, and replied consolingly, to the remarks of a worthy old man grieved to leave the world at the commencement of a campaign of which he could not foresee the issue, and which he feared would prove disastrous to his posterity, even if beneficial to his country; while Lord Selsdon "voted politics a bore," caring more for his stud and kennel than for the debates of both their houses."

Though a well-disposed young man, the future Earl of Farleigh presented a striking specimen of the evil results of an English education, as per custom established. Lord Selsdon, after spending eight years, and five thousand pounds, at Eton and Oxford, had learnt nothing but "words, words, words!"—Drilled from form to form, through the routine of the classics, and having divided his time at the University between dissipation and Algebra, he was as ignorant as a ploughboy of the rudiments of available human knowledge. Superficial polish had been applied to the block ere it was carved into symmetry—and his mind now presented a misshapen mass, inscribed with the phrases of Greece and Rome, but devoid of the grace of scholarship, or the wisdom of philosophy. Nevertheless, as Lord Selsdon happened to fall short of libertinism, he passed for right-worthly among those of his own degree; "an excellent creature; "an estimable young man; "a most domestic and exemplary nobleman." Content to lead the life of the sloth and fatten on his own substance without regard for the leanness of his fellow creatures, he gave fifty pounds at Christmas to the poor of his parish, by way of atonement for adding at nightly divisions his vote to the list of those who ground their bones for bread by maintaining crying and cruel abuses.

Lady Farleigh, who had exhorted the tutor of her only son to teach him "to live cleanly and like a gentleman," eschewing all dangerous vices and vulgar errors; and who fancied that, in marrying him at an early age to an accom-
plished young lady of domestic habits she had secured his
days to be long in the land and a comfort to her old age;
little suspected his deficiency in the lofty virtues incum­
bent on his high estate as a maker of the laws—a moulder
of the times—a guardian of the liberties of the nation. She
appreciated not the errors of existing systems as exempli­
fied in her own family. She saw not that (unless the vulgar
daring of sportsmanship be held a sufficient evidence of
manliness) she had made an old woman of her son; or that,
by immuring the stately girlhood of her daughter from all
chance of a marriage of inclination, she had thrown her
riper years into the avocations of the opposite sex; that
Lady Emily should have been apportioned as Lord Selsdon,
and Lord Selsdon as Lady Emily.

"How shall I like London?"—inquired Lady Selsdon of
Matilda, when they met at Farleigh Castle, at a farewell
party given previous to the annual break-up of the different
families of the neighborhood. "Selsdon's return to par­
liament will be gazetted on Saturday. His uncle, who has
been keeping his seat warm for him, would not hear of be­
ing troubled any longer, and Lord Farleigh insists upon
our all going to town next week."

"You will meet with a thousand things to gratify you,"
replied Lady Norman, unwilling to damp the expectations
of her young friend.

"But poor mamma will find the spring so long!"—said
Sophy, dolefully. "Last year, she was constantly coming
over to Tuxwell."

"Mrs. Ravenscroft did not surely expect that Lord Sels­
don would become altogether a country gentleman?"—"

"She knew that neither Selsdon nor I wished for any
thing beyond Tuxwell. We are all so happy there!—The
air agrees so well with Louisa—and Seldson is so fond of
his farm!—"

"He will find new interests in his new duties," argued
Lady Norman.

"He has not the least turn for politics!"—replied Sophy.

"But supposing he were to get bitten like the rest, what
will become of me while he is passing day after day, and
night after night, in the House of Commons?—"

"You have so many pursuits to occupy your time, my
dear Sophia."

"Indeed, I have not!—Who can go on practising and
drawing with no one to stimulate or applaud?—I have given
up all that sort of thing; Selsdon does not like to find me
engrossed by such nonsense. He says, there is something
girlish and pitiful in mere accomplishments!"

"You have the more leisure, then, for reading."

"Solitary reading makes one feel so lonely!—I seldom
read, unless to Selsdon, when he wants to be kept awake
after dinner."

"At all events," said Matilda, "in London you will
soon be surrounded by family friends and new acquaintan­
tces, and make so many gay engagements!—"

"Seldson detests balls and parties; and I shall have no
courage or inclination to go out without him."

This was a position in which Matilda could particularly
sympathise. "I have never passed what is called a season
in town," said she, "but it strikes me that, without trou­
bling yourself too much with the dissipations of the
world—"

"Dearest Lady Norman, for mercy's sake do not encou­
rage this sister of mine to become so mere a drone!"—in­
terrupted Lady Emily, who sat impatiently by, listening to
their conversation. "Sophy has a world of business on her
hands. She has not yet been presented; she has not yet
been introduced to our numerous family connections; she
has done nothing; she has every thing to do. If Seldson
and Sophy had their own way, they would never stir from
Tuxwell again, till they came to take possession of Farleigh
Castle; nor ever stir from Farleigh Castle again, till they
went to take possession of the family vault!—Is this the
purpose of their existence?—Is the position of such a family
as ours in society to be wholly lost?—Is its influence to
melt away?—Is its next generation to turn out a race of
rustics?—"

"Do not waste your eloquence, dear Emily, or make
yourself uneasy," cried the good-humored Sophia. Sels­
don is preparing to obey his father's commands and follow
your advice with a good grace. A house is engaged for us.
He has promised me the alternate weeks of an opera box;
and Lady Farleigh is to present me at the first drawing­
room."

"Come, come!—this looks well," cried Lady Emily.
"Mrs. Ravenscroft has fulfilled her promise of interposing
her good counsel."
"Mamma seems to think it indispensable we should not pass another spring in the country," sighed Sophy, mournfully. "She says we ought to see more of the world; as if any thing we are likely to find there would make us happier than at Tuxwell."

"It is disinterested on the part of Mrs. Ravenscroft," observed Matilda.

"Poor, dear mamma! moaned Lady Selsdon.

"We shall do our best to make her happy and cheerful during your absence," said Lady Norman, kindly. "It is my duty to make up to her, when left alone, the kindness she formerly showed me during my widowhood at the Manor."

"How dull it used to be for you at the Manor in those days," exclaimed Lady Selsdon. "How different you must find it now with the children to occupy your attention."

"But they are not old enough yet to occupy her attention," said Lady Emily, anxious to discourage her sister-in-law from sinking into a mere nursery dawdler. "They are at present no companions for Lady Norman. Their education cannot have begun."

"Emily sees nothing in children but education blocks," cried Lady Selsdon, vexed at being thus sermonised. "My dearest Emily, you know no more about the companionableness of children, than I know about ship-building!—It is precisely because their education has not commenced that they are charming companions. An untaught child is a creature that has nothing to do but love its mother from morning till night. Your caresses are never importunate—your proceedings are safe from criticism—you are 'mamma'—the second providence, (or, rather, the first, for beyond your care it knows at present nothing) a person to be kissed, caressed, and captivated by all its little powers of coquetry. —All this, my dearest Emily, renders a child's company delightful; and all this vanishes the moment great A unfolds visions of birch-rods and dunces' caps."

"Then, depend upon it, my dear, no Newton or Mrs. Trimmer will ever turn out from your school-room!" cried Lady Selsdon, provokingly. "Village children require thrice as much whipping as others. Poor old Dr. Lynch used to wear out a cane a quarter at Selwood, yet never pretended to teach anything beyond the catechism."

"I wonder he ever taught that perforce of caning!"—cried Lady Emily, angrily; "and it was precisely because he taught only that, that he was compelled to have recourse to the ferula."

"Do try to make her understand the vast difference between a mother's feelings and those of a schoolmistress," exclaimed Sophy, appealing to Lady Norman. "Explain to her (you who have much longer experience than myself) the delights of a mother's life. Tell her what you feel when your boy is racing before you in the garden, or jumping on your knee to be praised and caressed. Tell her what joy you have in all his movements—all his words—all his looks; how you delight to hang over him in his sleep, or hail his waking. Tell her how sensible you are to his lightest touch—his faintest breath. —None but a mother, dear Lady Norman, can explain all this."

But Matilda was silent. She knew not how to reply to such an appeal, with Waller as the exemplification.

"Speak to her for me," persisted Sophy, taking the hand of her friend; "for so long as I attempt to describe my feelings, she does but accuse me of weakness. All, and more than all, I feel for my little Louisa, you have experienced for your beautiful Walter."

"My dearest Sophy, feelings such as these, however natural, ought to be enjoyed with trembling. Make not to yourself an exclusive idol of your child, for at best it must be an idol of clay. What would become of you were anything to happen to Louisa?" inquired Lady Emily, sententiously.

"Yet it is an event for which every parent ought to prepare her mind."

"As if it were possible to prepare one's mind for such a calamity," cried the young mother, with indignation.

"Well, well; I hope to see you become more rational. —In London, the company of men and women will perhaps inspire you with a taste for something beyond the nursery."

"She talks to us that never had a son!" cried Lady Selsdon to Matilda, as her sister-in-law stalked majestically out of the room. "We experienced matrons are
wiser in our generation. I will answer for it (nicht wahr) that, at this very moment, you are dying to get back to Selwood and to Walter!—"