THE
HER
OF
JOANNE
BY
the Author
of
"Mothers and
Daughters", 
IN TWO VOLS
VOL. II
THE HEIR OF SELWOOD:

BY THE AUTHORESS OF
"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "PIN MONEY," &c.

Leon. How now, boy?
Max. I am like you, they say.
Leon. Why that's some comfort!

Winter's Tale.
THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Lui-même de nos jours avait mêlé la trame,
Sa vie était ma vie—et son âme mon âme.

La Martine.

One of the most laborious parliamentary efforts of Lord Selsdon's maiden-session was, to defraud his majesty's government of twenty pence per diem, by franking a letter from Sophy to Selwood Cottage, acquainting mamma with the progress of Miss Louisa's teething, and receiving to his address, in return, a letter from Selwood Cottage to Sophy, acquainting her with the state of her mamma's health, and the news of the village. There would appear, indeed, to be a peculiar charm in corresponding at the expense of the nation; for it may be observed that persons within ready reach of franks, write letters fifty times as often as those whose correspondence is to be had for money.

Selwood, meanwhile, afforded little variety to diversify Mrs. Ravenscroft's maternal counsels to her daughter about keeping the baby out of the way of infection, by never letting it mingle with the vulgar throng; and securing herself from cold by means of a swansdown tippet.—The rectory was dull and dormousy as ever; and during the absence of the Normans on the continent, only two accessions had occurred in the neighborhood; the establishment of some extensive iron-works at the old forge at Avonwell, and the conversion of a certain Scarwell Farm into Scarwell Park. An estate half way between the manor and Farleigh Castle having been purchased by a retired upholsterer from Bath; who, having expended fifty of his hundred thousand pounds in the purchase, and wasted thirty more in building a stuccoed castle on the spot and converting a pretty trout-stream into a
sleepy lake, found it impossible to keep it up on the interest of the remaining twenty. The estate was now, therefore, under the hammer of that remarkable professor of rhetoric, George Robins.

It was of the Normans, therefore, that Mrs. Ravenscroft was chiefly moved to write; and her letters contained, not only a gratifying account of Matilda’s attentions to herself, but of the improvement of her young friend’s domestic position.

“You would scarcely know Lady Norman!” wrote Mrs. Ravenscroft. “She has turned out as adoring a mother as we used formerly to think her an adoring wife. Her baby is always with her in the drawing-room when I call at the Manor, and accompanies her in all her drives and walks. Like yourself, my dearest Sophy, she seems to think a girl a prize worth a thousand boys; for I never noticed any of these violent demonstrations of tenderness towards Walter. Perhaps she considers the idolatry of Sir Richard enough to spoil him.

“By the way, I consider the young heir of Selwood is to be aprodigy; for there is just arrived at the Manor a certain Mr. Manningham, to act as his tutor. Sir Richard speaks of him as an admirable scholar; and Matilda speaks of him not at all—from which I infer that he is as great a gêne to her as we used to fancy old O’Donnel. But she is too happy now with her little Constance to care much for old abbés; and though I have never heard her make a remark to that effect, it must be a great comfort to know that their fine old place will descend to a son of her own. The fate of a dowager compelled to quit a spot she has passed years of her life in embellishing, to make room for strangers, has always appeared to me one of the hardest cases sanctioned by our laws.”

Of the maternal partiality thus noticed by her worthy neighbor, Matilda was of course as little conscious as human beings usually are of their foibles. Her nature had been chilled in childhood by the want of a mother’s love and by her father’s absorption in business; while the reserves created by difference of religion, and the vexation arising from want of inheritors, had gradually estranged the warm affection which, for a time, concentrated all her own in Sir Richard Norman. From the moment of the fatal fault into which she had suffered herself to be betrayed, she had re-

signed her hopes of happiness as one unworthy the favor of Providence; and when, after all these trials and anxieties, she found herself at last a mother, and mother of a girl—of a being whose birth conveyed no especial reproach to her partner in crime—the floodgates of Matilda’s heart were opened, and she loved as mother never loved before!—Lady Norman would have blushed had any rational being witnessed the extravagant caresses which, when alone, she lavished on her little nursling. She now discerned how pale and cold a copy of a mother’s love had been her former sentiments for Walter!—She now saw what a feeling of insecurity had always mingled in her caresses of the adopted child!—Walter had appeared an unstable blessing; a creature who might be at any time claimed and estranged from them; a creature whom others had a right to love better than herself. But her little fair smiling girl was all her own—exclusively her own—for life—for death—for eternity!—If Matilda remained blind to her self-exposure in all this, Sir Richard was an observant spectator of her weakness. He now beheld unveiled the passionate depths of her soul. He saw how she could love;—what lustre the excitement of this new feeling of maternal tenderness could lend to her eyes—what sweetness to her tone—what vigour to her step. She was at once softened and strengthened by her position as a mother.—She was more sensitive—more firm. On all points relating to Constance, she had a will and opinion of her own.

Sir Richard was half disposed to be jealous of his little girl;—jealous for himself—still more jealous for Walter. “The poor boy was never cared for thus!”—he would say, on noticing some excess of maternal vigilance.—“Every one must perceive the difference you make between your little girl and our boy!”—Mortified at the expression which seemed to disclaim on his own part all portion in his daughter, Matilda would not stoop to defend herself; and when he announced that his new chaplain was engaged to undertake the charge of Walter’s education, Lady Norman renewed her offence, by expressing vehement satisfaction that Walter was to be placed under the hands of a tutor.

“I never doubted that you would be glad to get rid of him out of the nursery,” angrily observed her husband.
"On the contrary, his little gambols amuse the baby,—Nurse will be sorry to lose him," replied Matilda.

"I was not thinking of the nurse or the baby,—I was thinking of yourself!"

"I agree with you, then, that he is become too headstrong for petticoat government. When you were tracing, the other day, Lord Selsdon's unenergetic character to the bad system of his education, I could not help thinking it would be an advantage to Walter to have a rational companion ever at hand to answer his questions, and lay the foundation for a good education hereafter."

"Engrossed as you are, I admit that you find very little time to increase his stock of information," observed Norman. "But you will be troubled with him no further. I have ordered apartments to be prepared for him and Glita, next to the chaplain's rooms. They will form an establishment apart."

"Do you think it wise," demanded Matilda, startled by this arrangement, "to establish such complete disunion between the children?"

"You were yourself the first to establish it. But give me leave to assure you, that the more marked your alienation from Walter, the greater will be the reparation urged by my conscience."

"My want of kindness and affection for the little fellow will impose no great tax upon your sense of justice!" was Lady Norman's mild reply. "But unable to instruct him in the principles of the faith he is destined to profess, I rejoice that you should have found a tutor qualified for this important duty."

By this view of the case, the wrath of Sir Richard was appeased; nor could Matilda but triumph in the recollection of her father's recent remark, when caressing young Norman—"Ay, ay, little man! Make as much as you will of me now.—No fear of the jaws of the young crocodile.—Till you get among the Jesuits and begin to spend your time in paternosters, you are of my own flesh and blood.—By and by, things may alter.—I won't answer for being half so fond of you, when you've been taught all the ugly lessons in store for the heir of Selwood!—"

"And now," thought Lady Norman, "now that those lessons are beginning, my father will do involuntary justice to my child!—When we meet again, Constance will become his favorite; and as soon as she begins to notice him—to speak—to run about—he will find that, instead of resembling the family portraits he dislikes so much, the little creature is the image of his once-loved Matilda."

But while Mrs. Ravenscroft and others noted with satisfaction the increasing serenity of Lady Norman, and the happy change in her mode of life, Matilda noted with pain that her husband, though no longer surly with herself, was more subject than ever to starts of passion. The delight which, on his first return from the continent, he had taken in Walter, and in Selwood for Walter's sake, though keen and vivid as ever, was sometimes overcast with clouds that "came like shadows," but did not "so depart." They bequeathed a lasting injury to his constitution, and left a painful impression on the minds of those with whom he associated. The servants grew afraid of their master. The tenants were careful never to address him except through the medium of the steward. Even Mr. Manningham owed his security from hasty and groundless reproof, to the panoply of his sacred calling. There was not a creature in the neighborhood but was conscious of the irritability which had formerly been visible only to the gentle Matilda.

Most of these occasional observers attributed this disturbance of mind to deranged health. A few beheld in it only the violence of temper engendered by egotism, and fostered by indulgence; as among despotic monarchs the youthful libertinism degenerates in middle age into a tyrant. But to Matilda's eyes, the veil was drawn aside. She saw the secret ulceration of his soul. She knew that he lived in a constant state of self accusation, and (since the dark hints thrown out by Lady Catherine Norman) a constant dread of exposure; and felt convinced that it was by this one fixed idea her husband's mind was engrossed during those daily rides which he now chosè should be solitary, and those prolonged and mysterious rambles, in which he contrived to evade her companionship.

There was nothing just then stirring in the country to divert his sickly fancies from himself. The meeting of parliament had carried off the Farleigh Castle party and the scanty remnant of their neighbors. Mrs. Ravenscroft he scouted as a pottering old woman—the Lynches as a positive infliction; while the minor objects appealing to his attention, were all more or less connected with the improve-
ment of his estate or embellishment of his house, and consequently connected with the hazards of its inheritance.

"If, after all," said he, after one day inspecting, in company with Matilda, the laying of the foundation-stone of a fine suspension-bridge, connecting together the steep banks of a beautiful ravine in the park—"if, after all, this care and cost should avail only the offspring of those hateful people; if it should prove that—'for Banquo's issue I have fil'd my mind'!—I know not, in fact, why I expend another thought on the matter, I am convinced that Lady Catherine's vague insinuations had a definite purpose. There was something maliciously exulting in her eye, when she said—'unless Lady Norman should have a son!'"

"If you really imagine so," said Matilda, incapable of suggesting the consolation of which she saw him so much in need, "the things that ought least to occupy your regret are the time or money you are devoting to the embellishment of the estate. The employment amuses your mind, and injures no one."

"Injuries no one—but may eventually benefit those whom I would willingly crush into dust!"—cried Sir Richard, compressing his lips, and knitting his brows.

"The discovery can never be effected during your lifetime," observed Matilda, scarcely knowing how to frame the commentary for which she saw he was waiting; "and such of your friends as may have the misfortune to survive you, would find in the exposure of the transaction a thousand deeper causes for affliction than waste of substance in favor of the Normans of Grove Park."

"Of substance!"—cried Sir Richard, with kindling eyes.

"Do you suppose that my cares are pinned upon a few thousands more or less, abstracted from my daughter's fortune?—No, no! the thought that troubles me is, that they may perhaps obtain the enjoyment of this place, with which I, my life, and happiness, are so intimately connected; that I scarcely recognise my existence apart from Selwood; that I saw the light, and where my father and my father's father was before me;—this place, where I used to adjourn, in my harassed, mortified boyhood, in welcome respite from the domestic tyranny of that blackguard, petitlogging banker;—that fellow who used to extinguish my spirit inch by inch—drop by drop;—this place, to which I repaired in my dawn of manhood, on throwing off his damnable yoke—for the first time free—for the first time unconstrained;—this place, Matilda, this dear, dear spot, to which I brought my fair and gentle bride, and bade her rule thenceforward the destinies which I little dreamed would prove so stormy!—That so dear and intimate a possession should ever minister to the enjoyment of those whom through life I have abhorred, drives me to frenzy!—Shall I have labored to make Selwood a terrestrial paradise for them—for theirs?—Is that room which you so delight in, to become the resort of the insolent, low-minded intrigante?—Lady Catherine Norman?—Are my beautiful pictures, my exquisite sculptures, to fall to the share of Giles Norman—a beast incapable of apprehending the smallest of their beauties;—a noble library, which poor O'Donnel devoted years of his valuable life to arrange and classify, till the toil silvered his head?—Think of those unenlightened dunces, inviting their idiotic crew to vent their jests upon its pedantic catalogues!—My father's picture—my mother's—the trees planted by their hands—the ancient furniture rendered sacred by their favor—these to be desecrated and ravaged by the hands of those Vandals?—Matilda! I have not patience to contemplate it!—I swear to you, that were I convinced of their being in possession of the intelligence of Walter's illegitimacy, the last act of my life should be to apply a torch to the old mansion, that I might die in the blessed conviction that its threshold could never be profaned by foot of theirs!"

"Even then, the site must fall to their possession," faltered Lady Norman, shuddering at the idea that the irritated man before her was capable of accomplishing his terrible threat.

"Ay!—they might build another Scarwell Castle on its smouldering remains"—cried Norman, with the look of a maniac.

"The woods, and waters, and spot of earth which I delight to call mine, must still be theirs—but as sure as the soul is immortal, Matilda, my spirit would haunt this desecrated spot!—The Normans should have no peace at Selwood.—I would sit with them by the fireside—drink with them by the convivial board—pray with them by the altar—watch by their sleeping pillows—scare them on their bed of death—be with them in terror and anguish for ever and ever!—"

Matilda paused and gasped for breath as the words of
this frantic denunciation rang in her ears. She began to fear that Norman’s senses were forsaking him—she began to tremble lest he should perceive she thought so.—They were traversing the park together, and had just attained an open area commanding a fine view of the house, and commanded by its so that if any of the household chanced to be looking forth, his frantic gestures could not but attract their notice.

"Look at it!"—cried he, stopping suddenly, and snatching Lady Norman’s arm under his, while with his disengaged hand he pointed to the noble pile, every window of which was blazing with the reflected effulgence of the setting sun; while the dim towers of Norman Castle darkened by mantling ivy frowned in the back-ground, contrasting with the vivid brilliancy of the inhabited mansion, like death with life. "Look at that noble dwelling!—The whole kingdom affords nothing comparable with it in its peculiar majesty.—Artists and antiquarians admire and applaud it. I love it!—Matilda, it is mine!—It belonged to those to whom I belong.—It shall never be theirs who belong not to me!"

Lady Norman became now more than ever convinced of an aberration of intellect on the part of her unfortunate companion. The agitation and remorse of the last four years had evidently been too much for his reason. For if Giles Norman and his family were thus rejected as aliens, how much rather the foundling, in whose veins no drop of kindred blood was flowing!—

"You do not look at it; you are not inclined to do justice to Selwood!"—cried Sir Richard, when he saw her eyes downcast to the earth, to avoid the glaring glances of his own.

"In all our travels, I beheld no private residence comparable with it in dignity and beauty," replied Matilda, striving to rally her spirits. "But I would fain have you enjoy it while Heaven vouchsafes you the means of enjoyment, without entering too anxiously into what may chance when we are no more. It is not the fear of the discomfort of our schemes, my dearest husband, which ought to render us uneasy. It is the eye whose scrutiny we have never deceived, whose vigilance should be most terrible in our eyes."

"God judges us not as we judge each other!"—muttered Norman, in an incoherent manner. "Man has invented laws to fetter and molest his fellow-man—the law of the strong—the law of the tyrant—the law of the unjust. The means by which such are evaded, Matilda, are always lawful."

"I am no casuist," replied Lady Norman, gently. "I do not attempt to oppose my opinion to yours on such points. But if you feel troubled in spirit, surely the advice of Mr. Manningham might—"

"Ha! you have undertaken, then, to cant me into confession!"—cried Norman, resuming his previous impetuosity.

"To conciliate these Normans into according their protection to you and your daughter, you have undertaken to persuade me to give up my boy!"

"I have undertaken nothing, except to preserve inviolate my promises to yourself," replied Matilda, firmly. "Do not make me repent them by this unreasonable violence. To Walter I have ever done, and shall continue to do strict justice; and if I named as a desirable counsellor a member of your church, it was because I know the secrecy of the confessional to be as that of the grave."

"My dear wife, you know nothing of these matters," interrupted Sir Richard, subdued by her gentleness. "If my secret once found its way to the confessional, it is not betrayal I should have to fear, but sentence of restitution. Anything but that, Matilda—anything but that! What has been done I would do again. It is not remorse of conscience it is dread of circumvention, that troubles my spirit. You have seen me set at naught the perils of the law to complete this act of fraud and forgery; and so far from trembling at my audacity, I would peril my eternal salvation could it in any way avail to seal the security of my attempt!—"

"I cannot, and must not, listen to this!" cried Matilda, breaking from him. "The chastisement of Heaven will fall upon you and yours, if you persist in cherishing these virulent and unchristian animosities."

"Animosities!" repeated Sir Richard, as they now advanced together towards the house. "Alas! my poor Matilda! how little do you understand the feelings by which my conduct has been governed—by which my views are still inspired. If ever human error were excused by the tenderness of its motives, Heaven will have mercy upon mine.—But enough of this! See! the children come to
Every day seems to develop his intelligence and beauty; nature seems to rendering him worthy to become the heir of Selwood."

He turned towards his wife, in hopes to obtain an approving smile from Matilda. But already she had escaped from his presence and fled into the house, overcome by terror and emotion.

The post of the following morning brought a long letter from Avesford to Sir Richard, filled with common-place details of a mere matter of business; but their very insignificance seemed acceptable to the perturbed spirit of Norman as a relief from the excitement of his thoughts. A consignment of antiquities and objects of art, purchased by him in Italy and shipped from Naples, had, owing to some mystery, been seized the preceding year by the custom-house; and during Sir Richard's recent stay in town, (having disdained the proffered interest of "Lady Dawlish's set" to free them from the warehouse of bondage,) he had obtained no redress. But Avesford's good sense and knowledge of business proved successful. Empowered by Norman to petition in his behalf, he had obtained an order for the packages, and now waited instructions respecting the mode of having them forwarded to Selwood Manor.

"See how influential these mercantile people are becoming in this country!" cried Sir Richard, on acquainting Matilda with the contents of her brother-in-law's letter.

"Avesford, you perceive, had only to speak and be attended to, while I danced attendance in vain upon those rascally commissioners!—They knew me to be nobody—not known upon 'Change—not known in the house. The landed gentry of England are thrust to the wall. Money, and parliamentary influence which is to be bought with money, are the law-makers of modern times!—Lady Catherine Norman's interest would have obtained the Woodchurch peerage. Avesford, as a man known in the money market, has obtained my bas-reliefs and statues. It is only the Roman-catholic Baronet who lives and dies a nonentity!"

"You would be very indignant did any other person call you a nonentity," replied Matilda, with a smile.

"Should I? I must be an egregious ass, then,—for it might prevent them using a more opprobrious word!" cried Norman, with bitterness. "When I am in my grave, how do I know that the whole exulting world will not be entitled to call me knave?—Look here, Matilda: this excellent fellow, Avesford, who would cut his right hand off rather than be guilty of a dirty action, signs himself mine with esteem—Yours, my dear Sir Richard, with great esteem.'—A pretty object of esteem; am I not, Matilda?—Some day or other, perhaps, you will be talking over my villany together, when acting as my executors!—The secret which a man wastes his existence in preserving, is usually betrayed before he is cold in his grave. Of what are we masters in this world?—What do we control?—What can we secure?—Our property is the prey of laws which we abhor; our conduct, the sport of minds which we despise. Who can presume to call himself master of himself?—" "We are not masters of ourselves, since we have an account to render to Him who hath interdicted our over-solicitude for the things of this world!"—replied Matilda, earnestly.

"Stay, stay, stay!"—cried Sir Richard, bursting into a frightful laugh, and starting up to ring the bell. "If I must needs undergo a sermon, let Manningham be summoned at once. My chaplain is paid for his trouble. I never lent an ear to gratuitous homilies!"

And Matilda, harassed and shocked, had only to take refuge in solitude from the frantic man, whom to deliver to the counsel of others, was to deliver to the judgment-seat!—

CHAPTER II.

Quando più tra gli affanni altri si duole
Par che dei cari suoi, più si rammenti;
E ben che sien lentani, il dolor suole
Con forte fantasia farli presenti.

Meditiamo gli affetti e le parole,
Onde ci renderian lievi i tormenti;
E con quei sensi in lor persona capressi,
Pensiamo a loro, e consoliam noi stessi!

CARLO MAGGI.

LADY NORMAN rejoiced in the discovery that, in replying to Avesford's letter, her husband had complied with the
request of his brother-in-law, that he would name an early day for their visit to Liverpool. It was not change of scene alone to which she looked forward with hope. Matilda expected wonders from the tranquillising influence of a sober and observant household; where, conscious that his actions were under examination, the disturbed man would refrain from those ebullitions of feeling in which he indulged at home. She calculated, and justly, that the presence of a person of whose esteem he was ambitious, would impose greater restraint upon his petulance than even the observation of what is called society.

But Lady Norman, thoroughly alive to the alarming state of her husband's feelings, looked further and deeper than the palliation of his immediate sufferings. Conscious of the deep-seated nature of the wound which she could not heal and must not presume to probe—perceiving that the age and position of Mr. Manningham in the family was not such as to command respect from a man so careless as Sir Richard in the discharge of his religious duties—she turned her thoughts towards the only living mortal she had ever seen exercise important influence over his character. Unaware how far the frailties she lamented had been produced by the artful indulgence of his preceptor, she recollected only that she had seen the haughty spirit of her husband quail before the mild reproofs of the Abbé O'Donnell; that in the height of his passion for herself, the priest had always been able to circumvent her influence; and that, at the period of Sir Richard's exultation in France at the moment of Walter's adoption, it had needed only the arrival of the Abbé (reminding him that the son in whose birth he rejoiced was the son of a heretic) to reduce his demonstrations of delight. The Abbé, therefore, was of all men living the one most likely to bring his mind into a better frame; and as Matilda dared not allude to the source of her uneasiness, her letter to the old priest contained only an earnest appeal to his feelings in favor of his former disciple.

"If you have the least regard for Sir Richard," said she, "you will do violence to your inclinations, dear sir, and once more visit Selswood. I am aware that for years past, it has forfeited all favor in your sight. But I beseech you to dismiss from your recollection its Protestant mistress and her offspring, and remember only him whose youth was trained by your care, and whose health and spirits have become alarmingly infirm. No living mortal but yourself possesses the least authority over Sir Richard Norman. Exercise it now for his sake and the sake of his children. Be with us as soon as circumstances will allow. We are setting off into Lancashire on a visit that will not detain us beyond a fortnight; and on our return I trust to find you established under our roof.—Do not, I implore you, neglect this earnest invitation—"

Comforted in spirit after the despatch of this letter, Matilda prepared for their journey to Liverpool. Sir Richard seemed pleased with the idea of the expedition, and was gratified by Matilda's eager negative when he proposed leaving Walter and the tutor behind at the Manor.

"Consider how strange it would appear to the Avesfords, and what disappointment it would occasion in the family!" cried she; and Mrs. Ravenscroft, who at that moment entered the room to bring her daily report of the Selsdons and Farleighs, warmly seconded Lady Norman's assertion, that the sea air would be advantageous to the child's health, and the novelty of the scene both profitable and pleasant to his young mind.

Apprehensive that the old lady, if left to enlarge upon her arguments, might weaken them with much prose, Lady Norman directed her attention from Liverpool by inquiries concerning London.

"After all our fears, then," she observed, "Sophy is growing as great a rake as the rest of the world!—The season not begun; yet you see she talks of engagements without end!—"

"Poor dear girl! it is very considerate of her (knowing how anxious I am on her account) to make all these efforts to amuse herself," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft. "Sophy, like her poor father, is the most domestic creature on earth—(all sailors are domestic; give them a cheerful fireside, and they have not an ambition beyond it. I am sure Admiral Guerchais must have told you, my dear Lady Norman, that a quiet, comfortable evening at home with his family was the only thing poor Ravenscroft found worth living for.) And in the same way, Sophina would willingly retain in town her jog-trot, humdrum ways and habits of Tuxwell Park.—But the Farleighs very properly and naturally desire..."
some sort of family connection to be kept up by their son. They are vastly proud, too, of Sophy’s beauty and accomplishments. (I must do them the justice to say, that they are as proud as I could be myself of Sophy’s beauty and accomplishments.) And so you see, instead of allowing her to stay moping at home every evening after evening, while Selsdon is away at the House, Lady Farleigh requested her niece, Lady Arthur D——, to introduce my daughter into the best society. Sophy is actually the rage in what is called Lady Dawlish’s set!—It is astonishing how kind Lady Arthur has been in getting her invited everywhere. Lady Dawlish herself, it seems, is a very amiable, pleasing woman; and her son, Colonel Villiers, my daughter writes me word, is as attentive and careful of her as if she were his own sister. Night after night, he gets up her carriage and cloaks her, and attends her, because he knows Selsdon to be elsewhere engaged, and unable to look after her; and, of course, it is very pleasant for an inexperienced young woman like Sophy to feel that she is not thrown upon the protection of ‘utter strangers.’

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Matilda, inanxiously, “has my poor Sophy already fallen into the hands of that set!”

“Indeed she has; and I am assured, that it is not every one who would have been so fortunate during her first season in town. I fancy, my dear Lady Norman, that she is partly indebted for her welcome among them to your kind recommendation. Sir Richard’s charming cousin, Lady Catherine, was among the first to take her up; and Sophy says, they are quite inseparable. They meet daily, and daily talk of their mutual friends at Selwood. Lady Catherine has taken Selsdon in hand. She says the cubs of the Tory party belong to her—that she is obliged to drill them into shape; and Sophy declares it is amazing how much influence Lady Catherine has already acquired over her protegé. She makes him go to Almack’s every Wednesday, and the Opera every Saturday, (to which Sophy could never persuade him.) Lady Catherine protests, that it is part of a member’s duty to show on holiday nights how much he stands in need of recreation.”

“Lord Selsdon too!”—exclaimed Matilda, amazed that Mrs. Ravenscroft, whom, in her own inexperience days she had been accustomed to regard as so much a woman of the world, should be blind to the dangers awaiting her daughter and son-in-law; without considering how little analogy exists between the wholesome order of society formerly frequented by the captain’s wife, and the horde of civilizarians surrounding Lady Selsdon.

Three days afterwards, they were at Liverpool, installed in the roomy, cheerful habitation of the Avesfords. Lady Norman was surprised to find it a relief to the spirits to remove from the tranquil seclusion of such a spot as Selwood Manor, to the busy hum of a commercial city. It was not so much the novelty and tumult of the scene which diverted her mind, as the spectacle of happy multitudes engaged in active pursuits, and opposing a reproachful contrast to the discontents of the luxurious owners of Selwood Manor, passing their selfish lives in nursing into monstrous an evil of their own creation.

“Don’t talk to me of low spirits!”—said Avesford to his sister-in-law, after conducting her over the Asylum for the Blind. “Consider the unfortunates you have this day beheld, peaceful and patient under their heavy deprivation; and then tell me whether there is pardon in heaven for the murmurs of those on whom Providence has showered its choicest blessings, and who presume to be unthankful.”

“Here may be embittering circumstances in a seemingly-prosperous destiny, undreamed of by the world,” faltered Matilda.

“Ay, ay!—such is ever the cry of your nervous hypochondriacs who eat and drink so well that they digest ill—and fancy themselves unhappy,” cried Avesford. “A fortnight’s starvation, and stone-breaking on the high road, would cure the worst case among you—from Byron to Sir Richard Norman!—You assure me your husband is naturally of a depressed turn of mind.—Nonsense! no man is born of a deponding turn.—The evil is, one way or other, of our own creation.—Sir Richard has had the imaginary misfortune to experience no real misfortune since he supped his first earthly mouthful from a golden pap-boat.—Residing chiefly on his own estate, monach, or at least viceroy, of all he surveys, his mind has contracted the rust of egotism. The snail in its shell is not more limited in its views of life than a man of liberal fortune who estranges himself from contact with society. There is nothing for the cure of such ailments as Sir Richard’s, but the rough encounter of cities and civilization. By finding himself of so much consequence.
to those around him, he has become of too much consequence to himself. He wants at once rousing and depressing. Pardon me if I speak thus freely; but you have addressed me frankly on the subject, and I give you my frank opinion in return."

"And truly do I thank you for it!" replied Matilda.

"But Sir Richard's peculiar position——..."

"No man has a peculiar position," cried Avesford stoutly. "Our great error lies in thinking so. We are all alike mites, laboring towards the same great end. Some of us are consequential mites, and choose to strut in armor; while others are content to creep or bustle on in natura. Neither in our own eyes, nor those of each other, however, have we a right to assume more than mediocrity. It is in the sight of One greater than ourselves that we may become of higher account, by admitting ourselves to be mites but acting like men."

"Would that I dare entreat you to talk in this style to Sir Richard!"—sighed Matilda."

"I talk in this style to you, my dear sister, as to a person enjoying moral health," replied Avesford. "With an ailing spirit, I might deal more tenderly; but still without admitting that I detected its ailment. Yesterday, for instance, among the party of happy-hearted, strong-minded men who dined with me, not one of course suspected the peculiarities of Sir Richard, or attempted to accommodate his modes of thinking to those of a stranger who was no more than any other guest at my board.—What was the result?—That the hypochondriac was drawn out of himself—that he felt it necessary to rally his powers of mind to place himself on a level with those with whom he was accidentally associating, and to whom he could give no higher proof of his importance, than evidence of faculties and principles equal in spirit and honor to their own.—Admit that last night he retired to rest in better spirits than usual?"

"For a single evening, the most determined hypochondriac will sometimes rally."

"Renew the occasion, and the improvement will be as often renewed. Sir Richard should pass a portion of every year in town. Because the legislature rejects his services, human nature does not reject them. There are learned and humane associations ever in operation, possessing claims on the time and talents of all wealthy and enlightened men, and double claims on the time of those unembarrassed by peremptory occupation. Members of parliament, professional men, merchants, or bankers, are too often pressed into a service which belongs of right to those who enjoy leisure as well as opulence. Persuade Sir Richard Norman of this;—persuade him that the library at Selwood is not the universe—that the interests of the world elsewhere are worth forwarding, and its esteem worth obtaining—and you will achieve a conquest greater far than when Matilda Maule first won the heart and hand of the owner of Selwood Manor!—"

"I must leave the lesson in your abler hands," replied Lady Norman with a sigh. "A wife is the last preceptor by whom a man likes to be admonished!"

"Don't say that!"—interrupted Avesford, as the pony carriage stopped at his own door. "Some men delight in petticoat government. Ask Elizabeth whether I am not an amenable animal in domestic life. She forbade me, for instance, this morning, to invite the Audleys to my house during your stay; and without inquiring the motive of her interdiction, I promised obedience."

"The motive," replied Lady Norman, with a smile, "you deserve to know, in requital of your good advice. I requested my sister to defer her invitations till after our departure; having reason to believe that Norman's desire to avoid making his cousin's acquaintance, was the sole cause of his repugnance to visit you at Fern Hill."

"Your explanation consigns me to confusion worse confounded!"—cried Avesford, shrugging his shoulders. "But into other people's motives I rarely trouble myself with inquiries. Suffice it if I understand my own, and those of my wife."

Sir Richard, meanwhile, soon found his reserve subdued by the frank good humor with which his brother-in-law did the honor of his native city, exhibiting its fine monuments with pride, but without exaggerating their importance.

"We do not ask experienced travellers like yourselves to think much of us," said he, to the Normans. "But we know our own value. We are able to note the increase of our capital and population. For our public monuments and institutions, we are not indebted to kingly
favor, or the caprice of a royal concubine. All you behold around us is the fruit of honest and unassisted industry. — Can your Florences and Milans say as much for themselves?"

To little Walter, on the other hand, Avesford had the gratification of displaying the wonders of a vessel of five hundred tons, launched two years previously by himself, and now returning from a first voyage to the East; and of conducting him over one of those American "carracks," those dandies of the ocean which display such rich adornments, that Europeans are tempted to fancy that the boors described by Mrs. Trollope must regard elegance as a trans­portable offence, and banish it from their cities beyond the high seas.

In the houses of Avesford's friends and connections, meanwhile, to which he was hospitably welcomed, Sir Richard was surprised to find interesting collections and valuable works of art, prized as highly by the owners as the heirlooms of Selwood by himself; more highly, indeed, than he had found objects of similar interest in Italy, where they are now chiefly noticed as marketable commodities.

"You are as much startled, I perceive, at discovering a fine black-letter library under the roof of my uncle John, the West-India merchant," said Avesford, "as at finding crystal and porcelain, inlaid wood and silken hangings, in the cabin of a New-York merchantman. You have hitherto judged us, I see, by your experience of the Wicksets and Cruttendens; but as John Manle informed you, my dear Sir Richard, we are proud people—proud of our connection with such names as Roscoe and Canning. — Even Manchester, which strangers, call our sister, we look down upon as a country-cousin; and as to Birmingham—but I will not affront Bessy, who, I perceive, is pouting at me already."

Avesford's exultation in favor of his thriving birth-place was warmly echoed by the Normans. Sir Richard was vexed only that his brother-in-law's friend, the American Consul, and other dignitaries of the place, would not allow him a moment's respite from the beauties of Fern Hill. Avesford, familiarized with the superior dignities of Selwood, was wise enough to know that Sir Richard might return in peace to Worcestershire, without having admired the growth of his shrubberies, or the oriental stucco of his banqueting-room. But Fern Hill was a sort of Tusculum—a chartered show-place—in its humble neighborhood; and Norman began to fear that the innumerable queries and comments, with which he was assailed on the subject, must end in a request on his part to be driven some morning towards Birkenhead, in the neighborhood of which the villa was situated. But from this humiliation, he was spared by the tact of the Avesfords; and the period arrived for his return home, without his having experienced an uneasy moment during the visit. Sir Richard had been kept in spirits by the boisterous raptures of Walter at all he saw and heard; while Matilda enjoyed the renovated spirits of her husband.

"That he could be ever thus!"—thought she, as she saw him take the arm of his brother-in-law, and set off with elastic step toward the Exchange, or to read the papers of the day. "Here, how easy it seems to amuse him;—he, who used so to detest the name of trade, and to declare that, from the sale of Joseph by his brethren, all human bargains consist in knavery on one side, and dupey on the other!"

She did not perceive that the very incongruity of the place with his former experience and opinions, constituted its charm in his eyes; and that the contrast of the bustling quays with his silent study at Selwood, was as admirable to him, as his own stately person and graceful manners proved to the solid, but plain and inelegant individuals with whom he was consortig.

"Prepare yourself for a grand exhibition to-day at my friend Wainewright's dinner," observed Avesford, as the Normans were preparing to proceed to the hospitable roof of the gentleman whose aid had been instrumental in the recovery of Sir Richard's Italian treasures; and with whom, during his stay in Liverpool, he had formed a pleasant acquaintance. "Wainewright is a capital fellow. But he is unfortunately our ex-mayor; and mayors, like the measles, are often fatal in the rudiments of disease they leave behind. Wainewright has never recovered from his mayoralty."

"It is, at least, not an infectious disorder," said Sir Richard. "We may enjoy your friend's turtle without fear of the result."

"If he required us to enjoy only his turtle. But Wainewright chooses his guests to enjoy his service of plate; and what living mortal cares for the service of plate of any other man?—"
"I care very much for the Cellini he showed us the other morning," observed Sir Richard.

"Certainly. But Wainewright is more engrossed by his Rockingham dessert service or engraved champagne glasses, which any one may have for money. We are not impeccable, even in Liverpool," continued Avesford, sportively. "There occurred a royal visit during Wainewright's mayoralty, which, unluckily, inoculated him with a taste for courtiership. He has warmed at the sight of a lord from that day to this; and I am sorry to announce that you are indebted for this day's banquet, rather to your social position, than to the pleasantness of your conversation, or power of appreciating a chef-d'œuvre of Cellini."

The projected journey of the following morning having disorganised their arrangement, the Normans, contrary to their custom, were late; and Mr. Wainewright's drawing-rooms were filled with strangers, when they arrived. The dinner, which was announced before they could take a survey of the company, verified Avesford's declaration that it would prove vanity and ostentation. The party nearly doubled the amount of guests which any but a crowned head can entertain with comfort; and the double dozen was accordingly condemned to a hot room and a cold dinner; turtle with the chill taken off, and lime-punch just warmed through.

Sir Richard, however, was no epicure, and had sat at too many good men's feasts in his time to recoil from one of modern excellence. Seated beside the lady of the house, he had on his left hand a fine-looking woman whose name he did not hear; but whose title was speedily pointed out by the ardor with which Mrs. Wainewright demanded, "what soup her ladyship would take?"—Her ladyship, however, seemed inclined to take nothing, except inordinate notice of Sir Richard Norman; and with that susceptibility to attention common to his sex, he soon made up his mind in return, that his fair neighbor was as intelligent as she was handsome. They entered into free discussion of England and the continent; and Norman was beginning to experience some surprise at the accurate knowledge of his position and pursuits implied by the remarks of his companion, when she suddenly observed with a smile, "I am inclined to fear that Sir Richard Norman does not know me. Surely you cannot have forgotten your cousin Agatha?—"

The agitated start of the baronet replied better than words; and instantly glancing towards Matilda, he discerned from the air of sympathy with which she sat regarding him, that she had already discovered into whose unwelcome presence they had been betrayed.

Unaware of any family connection between the parties, Mr. Wainewright had mayorially considered that a Roman-catholic baronet was exactly the person to be invited to meet a Roman-catholic baronet; and in so doing, had gratified the eager curiosity of the harsh and masculine Lady Audley. For Avesford had afforded singular attestation to his assertion that "Liverpool people are not infallible," by defining Lady Audley as a "high-minded" woman. The sentiment he mistook for high-mindedness was merely hauteur. Throughout the category of human frailties, pride is, perhaps, the one least likely to be understood at a place such as Liverpool. Lady Audley was, in fact, as proud as a peacock of her Normanship. Though married to a man of descent equally honorable, pride of birth—pride of self—pride of family—predominanted in her mind. She had not yet forgiven Sir Richard's refusal to elevate her to the head of the clan which she regarded with such infatuated partiality.

Piqued into a determination to prove to her contemptuous cousin that it was in her power to form an alliance more eligible than the one he denied her, Agatha Norman had remained single till her father's death, by doubling her portion, tempted Sir Thomas Audley to repair his family-seat at her expense; affording her in exchange the long-coveted dignity of precedence as a baronet's wife.

But Lady Audley was no improvement upon Agatha Norman in any thing but title. Her naturally good abilities were invalidated by inordinate self-esteem. Though really a handsome woman, a certain sarcastic dryness of manner derived from her father, had prevented even her youth from appearing young; and now, at four and thirty, she passed for a middle-aged woman!—There was no pleasant weakness in the nature of the lady of Audley Oaks. She disliked such trivialities as children, poetry, flowers, or needle-work. Her genius soared above the trash of novels; but she was a mathematician, a metaphysician, and divers other i..."
not a musician, however; for of that gentle art she cared only for thorough bass; and to the wonder of the Wainwrights and their kind, she could out-argue the mayor and corporation in political economy. In the neighborhood of Audley Oaks, as formerly in that of Grove Park, she was reverenced by the elders as a very superior woman, the best whist-player in the county; but it was observed that the moment Miss Norman, or Lady Audley walked into a room, the young people spontaneously retired to the room adjoining.

Aware of the connection by marriage between her country neighbors the Avesfords and the Selwood family, Lady Audley was surprised that she had not been invited to meet them during their sojourn in Liverpool. Residing within three miles of the city, and accustomed from her youth to mercantile society, she was at all times glad to escape from the tediousness of the dullest house and dullest husband in the kingdom, to cheerful dinner-society where she had the satisfaction of wrangling with the men in authority, and taking precedence of their wives; and when the expiration of the Normans’ visit convinced her that Avesford had expressly avoided bringing them together, she settled it to her satisfaction, that Sir Richard Norman had demanded the sacrifice, from unwillingness to hazard comparison between his handsome, high-bred cousin, and the homely sister of the unpretending Elizabetli Avesford.

The beauty and refined elegance of Lady Norman proved consequently a severe blow to her rival. Matilda’s natural grace, though polished by the ease of continental society, remained undeteriorated by the affectations of London fashion; and Agatha was forced to admit, that it was not mere ignorance which had induced the Liverpool dames to report Mrs. Avesford’s sister as unrivalled in beauty and deportment. She could only console herself by laboring to espy a fault!—That soft, mild, submissive brow of Matilda, was far below the level of the true Norman spirit, which she beheld enthroned in all its harsh and arrogant altitude, upon the handsome brow of Sir Richard.

For to her, his very defects were attractive.—The proud, shy boy, in whom her girlhood had delighted, was now the haughty, reserved man—the type of all she had dreamed of in her projects of wedded happiness. Such was the husband with whom she would fain have studied abstruse divinity, emblazoned genealogies, and cavilled evening after evening in metaphysical disquisition;—living and dying within compass of their park wall;—and performing their daily orisons apart from the vulgar throng, in the very chapel where their Normanised dust would eventually be secured from amalgamation with plebeian clay!—She felt, and perhaps justly, that her iron nature was more congenial with his than the golden ductility of Matilda. And when from the contemplation of Sir Richard’s distinguished air and features, stern as an effigy of the middle ages, she turned towards the meaningless face and diminutive person of Sir Thomas Audley who sat hemming and hawing his commonplace platitudes into the ear of the patient Lady Norman, it was impossible to repress the consciousness that her scornful cousin had the best of it.

On another point, again, she was forced to confess inferiority. Long had it afforded satisfaction to her spinster fretfulness, that her brother remained sole heir to the dignities of Selwood Manor and Norman Castle; and the birth of Walter was as severe a mortification to herself as to Lady Catherine. With her sister-in-law, who at that time resided with the family at Grove Park, she was as much at variance as might have been anticipated from the collision of tempers so arbitrary; yet it was not the less a grievance to find her family excluded from their long expected inheritance, by a child of the manufacturer’s daughter.

Such was the feeling which had produced those anxious inquiries of the Avesfords concerning little Walter, attributed by Sir Richard to suspicions which had never entered the mind of his cousin:—the assertions of Lady Catherine, respecting the supposititious birth of the heir of Selwood, having been treated by Lady Audley as the delusions of a disappointed woman; while her brother Rupert and Madame Norman affected total ignorance of the proceedings of their kinsman while on the continent.

Clouds darkened therefore the mind of Lady Audley when, after dinner, she requested from Mrs. Avesford an introduction to her sister. But she had not conversed half an hour with Matilda before they disappeared. The softness of Lady Norman’s manners, which most people found so ingratiating, excited in Agatha a sentiment of contemptuous pity. When Matilda talked with varying color and sparkling eyes of her baby, and listened with unconcealed delight
to a ballad having nothing but pathos and simplicity to recommend it to which the youthful voice of one of Mrs. Wainewright's daughters was lending peculiar charm, Lady Audley admitted that such a woman was unworthy to be the object of a good, stern, solid hatred. As well acquire from a Sabbath of Lapland witches a gale capable of rending asunder a mainsail—merely to reduce to rags a paltry shred of combric!—

Taking her seat beside the vapid wife of her cousin, she accordingly oppressed Matilda with the weight of her patronage; and Sir Richard had the satisfaction of finding her under cross-examination by the shrewd sister of Giles Norman, touching Walter's age, disposition, and resemblance to the Norman family; her voice faltering, and her color rising to crimson, as she replied to the comprehensive interrogatory. Forewarned by Norman's susceptibility that the attention of Lady Audley was likely to be on the alert upon this critical subject, Matilda fancied herself submitted to a premeditated scrutiny; while Sir Richard was convinced that the trembler must inevitably betray herself and him. "Thou conscience doth make cowards of us all!"

Little did poor Mrs. Wainewright imagine, as she ambled round her showy drawing-room with a pack of cards in her hand, recruiting for Lady Audley's rubber, what anguish of spirit was enthralling two of her distinguished guests; thanks to her notion, that a baronet could not eat his dinner in comfort unless matched with a baronet;—as if guests, like saltcellars, were to be assorted according to pattern!

CHAPTER III.

He dies and makes no sign.—Oh! God forgive him.

Shakespeare.

But for this unlucky encounter, unmixed would have been the regret of the Normans on entering their travelling carriage the following day. The frank cordiality of Elizabeth had confirmed into affection the instinctive love of her sister; while the sterling sense and manliness of Avesford

"Not even of her brother?—I should as soon think of checking myself, dear mamma, when uttering a panegyric on yourself!"

"In both instances you would do well to guard your expressions. It is indecorate and ill-bred to indulge in company in the expression of emotions in which your companions are unable to sympathise. Family affections are of this description."

"Certainly, certainly!—In mixed company I should scarcely do so misplaced a thing as eulogise my mother or brother. But to praise to my dear mother her only son is surely a different affair?—Surely I may expect you to sympathise in my enthusiasm for Walter?"

"I would rather have you less enthusiastic, even with me. Enthusiasm begots disappointment. The waxen wings of Icarus appear to me to typify enthusiasm rather than ambition. You played very well to-night, Constance," continued Lady Norman, purposely changing the subject; "without making difficulties, and just as I wish to hear you."

"Make difficulties when Walter seemed so anxious that Lanner's waltzes should receive justice?—But I am glad you were satisfied, mamma. Do you think my brother was pleased? He did not seem much struck by Louisa's performance;—yet she has learned of Moscheles for the last eight years."

"Walter, like yourself, is partial; for Lady Louisa is a first-rate pianiste."

"Perhaps that is the reason she interested him so little. Walter dislikes every thing that resembles art or pretension—particularly in women. I have heard him say so a thousand times."

"Your brother's opinions when he was last in England were unformed and inconsistent. He is grown positive—I trust we may find that he has grown reasonable."

"You speak, mother, as if you had some gruignon against my brother!"

"I do not wish him, my dear, to obtain unlimited influence over your mind. How do you like Lord St. Aubyn?"

"That silly boy?—I have not even thought about him. It never saw a more insignificant personage."

"He has just come into the enjoyment of sixty thousand Vol. II.—7
a year, and two of the finest places in the kingdom. Lady Farleigh fancies him very much taken with Sophia."

"What can it signify?—Sophia would not think of marrying such a nonentity—more particularly now that she sees him in hourly comparison with my brother."

"I suspect Lady Sophia is likely to consider Walter the greater nonentity of the two."

"But even Lord Charles and Sir Frederick Cranstoun, are more amusing than Lord St. Aubyn. When Lord Charles will condescend to converse, he has a great deal to say; and when Sir Frederick gets out of his friend's hearing, he is quite a rattle. While Walter was engaged tonight in that interesting conversation with Lord Farleigh and the Dean, about popular education on the continent, Sir Frederick kept relating all kinds of entertaining London anecdotes, as if expressly to draw people's attention from it; and Sophy and Louisa laughed so provokingly all the time that I could scarcely catch a word my brother was saying."

"It was more your business, Constance, to join in the conversation of your young friends, than to appear engrossed by the holdings forth of your own family. You will expose yourself to derision if you yield your whole attention to your brother."

Next morning, as Miss Norman was going down to breakfast on her mother's arm, they fell in on the staircase with Lady St. Aubyn; and Constance was obliged to fall back, while Lady Norman proceeded down stairs with the Marchioness. In the hall through which they were to pass, stood Sir Walter, examining a county map. As the elder ladies passed him, he turned round with a respectful salutation; but as they advanced, Matilda noticed the kiss with which the young man greeted his sister. The color rushed to her face. It seemed as if all her caution to Constance served only to increase the unreserve which was springing up between her and her brother.

In the course of the morning, a riding party was proposed. Lord Farleigh's hounds having to meet at an indifferent and distant covert, Sir Frederick and Mr. Merton alone had sportsmanship enough to accompany him to the field; while Lord Charles, Walter, and the young Marquis, remained to escort the ladies. But Lady Norman made objections to her daughter joining the party. "Constance was grown so timid that she scarcely liked to trust her on a strange horse. She hoped they would excuse Constance."

"My sister grown a coward?—My sister not like to mount anything but her own mare? cried Sir Walter, suddenly striking into the conversation. "Why, Constance, this is a shocking account of you!—What has altered you so strangely?—You were a bold rider when I left England!"

"She met with an accident after you quitted us, and has been nervous ever since," interposed Lady Norman. "And now that Amy Redely excites so much notice by scampering over the neighborhood, I scarcely allow Constance to go beyond the park gates."

"We must reform all this now that I am come home, and she has some one to ride with. I would not have her lose her seat on horseback for the world!" cried her brother.

"Constance, I shall have you out with me every day. Depend upon me to bring back your courage!"

Lady Norman felt vexed to hear Sir Walter assume a sort of authority over her girl. She had scarcely patience to listen to the conversation which was now proceeding between them.

"Yes, yes—you must ride to-day. Lady Louisa and her sister insist upon it—and I insist upon it—and every one insists upon it!"

"If you insist upon it, there is an end of the matter," replied Constance, quitting the room to put on her habit. And the Ladies Farleigh, who chose to monopolise the attendance of the Marquis and Lord Charles, were relieved when they found that Sir Walter would be occupied in overcoming the fears of his sister.

"I will not go," whispered Constance to him at parting, "unless you promise not to leave my side a moment."

And Lady Norman, who, standing at the hall-door, overheard both the whisper and Walter's reply in the affirmative, longed to forbid the expedition. She could picture to herself the admiration with which Sir Walter must necessarily contemplate the beautiful figure of Constance, never seen to greater advantage than on horseback—her fair ringlets streaming to the wind—her delicate cheek flushed with the bloom of exercise; while the stiff, constrained persons of the Ladies Farleigh, and their stony, inexpressive faces, af-
forded a foil to her perfections. But it was too late. The little party was already out of sight.

Could poor Maitilda have followed them with her eyes, the fact would have overstepped her apprehensions. The spirited Constance was mounted, kept her in real, and not altogether groundless alarm. Lord Selsdon had once or twice hunted him; and Lady Louisa, in the wantonness of youthful spirits, choosing to take the first fence on emerging from the park, it required more strength or skill than Miss Norman was mistress of, to restrain her horse from following the example. Agitated, yet anxiously controlling her alarm for fear of displeasing her brother, Constance sat fast, while her gay steed profited by every grip or drain upon the green strip of road along which they were cantering, to try the force of her hand. But Sir Walter, when he saw her really frightened and matched beyond her strength, instead of bantering her fears, grew almost as nervous as herself, and never for an instant quitted her side.

"I think I will take Constance home," said he at length, riding up to the Ladies Farleigh, who were proceeding in high spirits, indifferent to the comfort of their companion.

"Her horse is too much for her."

"Let us all return," said Lady Louisa, recovering some sense of civility on being thus addressed.

"By no means. My sister will insist upon proceeding if she finds herself an obstacle to your ride," cried Sir Walter. "And as she will be safer at home, let me beg of you to take no notice of us!"

Acquiescence was prompt on the part of the two girls, who were unwilling to have a pleasant ride interrupted by the incapacity of their friend; and as it would have been indecorous to pursue their ride, unescorted, with the two young lords, Norman insisted that Lord Farleigh's groom should proceed with the party. He and his sister required no such attendance.

It unluckily happened that Lady Norman was enjoying a solitary walk on a terrace commanding a view of the approach to the house, when Constance and Sir Walter were descried winding leisurely along the road!—Miss Norman's horse was quiet now that it was parted from its frisky companions; so quiet as to admit of Sir Walter placing his hand upon the pommel of her saddle, as they rode along. —Lady Norman was greatly displeased.—What had induced them thus to separate from the rest of the party?—Why were they thus alone together?—Why thus needlessly familiar?—What would any one think who saw them, as she did, in this unseemly attitude?—Nothing could be more unwarrantable—nothing more indicative of—Of what? Alas! poor bewildered woman, she had lost all check upon the progress of her fears. In a brother and sister, the incident was perfectly natural and blameless. The young people were in fact talking of her; praising their mother as she deserved to be praised, and concerting schemes for her future happiness and comfort!—

CHAPTER VIII.

O she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
That live in her.

Shakespeare.

The mother of an only daughter, endowed with excellence, beauty, and fortune, is seldom anxious to be deprived of her company by an early marriage. To lose her beloved Constance—her late-born Constance—her faultless Constance—was a thing Lady Norman had hitherto contemplated with terror. But now, she felt suddenly anxious that her daughter should form a suitable attachment. Before they quitted Tuxwell Park, the Marquis of St. Aubyn made formal proposals for her hand; and though Lady Norman was conscious of the improbability that his unformed manner and unaccomplished mind should have produced a favorable impression, she was almost disappointed by the positiveness of Constance's refusal. Miss Norman said not a word to conciliate the wounded maternal love of the Marchioness, or the self-love of her son; merely stating that her home at Selwood was too happy to admit of any desire of change.

"But your brother will marry, my dear Miss Norman,"
remonstrated Lady St. Auby, "and what will your home be then?"

"Still happy, I trust," replied Constance with a smile; but Lady Norman fancied that it was shaded by a cast of uneasiness. It was in vain the two mothers represented the excellence of Lord St. Auby's temper and principles, and the privileges of his high condition. Constance would not hear of him. She did not want to be a peeress. She was not covetous of castles or diamond necklaces; and as to the young man's personal merits,

What was mere good-nature but a fool?

Sir Frederick Cranstoun's attentions also evidently contemplated a serious declaration. But with all Lady Norman's anxiety to secure the destinies of Constance, it was not to a fashionable profligate she wished to sacrifice her child; and his proposals were accordingly forestalled by the most repulsive coldness. It was to him, nevertheless, that Lady St. Auby attributed the ill success of her son. The young marquis being too carefully guarded by her vigilance to become the dupe of the listless duel, nothing had remained for Lord Charles and his friends but to turn him to account as a butt. His awkwardness, his incapacity, his effeminacy, his wretched horsemanship, his quizzical toilet, afforded them constant themes for wit and merriment; and though Lady Louisa Farleigh and her sister had reasons of their own for not joining in the laugh, Constance was more than once betrayed by her spirits and inexperience of the world, into a smile. She saw with what readiness Walter had in his own case turned upon the offenders the battery of their impertinence; and consequently accused Lord St. Auby of imbecility for being so easily over-crowed.

A week afterwards, as the Normans were discussing round the Avesfords' cheerful fireside at Fern Hill, the pomp and vanities of Tuxwell Park, Constance was reproved by her mother for having even appeared to sanction the persiflage of Lord Charles and Sir Frederick.

"You have very little idea," said Lady Norman, "of the pain inflicted upon a timid person by the irony of a coterie."

"But you saw, dearest mother, how quickly their impertinence was silenced by the good sense of Walter," cried Miss Norman.

"Not altogether by my good sense," interrupted her brother, with a laugh. "Guess to what I owed my impunity from their attacks?—To my cousinship with a certain Captain Norman of the guards, whom I never beheld; and who, it seems, is one of theirs."

"Lord Mornington's son?" demanded Lady Norman, with an air of embarrassment.

"Precisely. The moment our relationship was explained, they became my most obedient, humble servants; and Lord Charles has undertaken to make a man of me—that is, a man about town—whenever I choose to be put up at clubs or down in visiting lists."

"Lord Charles Bartley made rather a good speech in the house last season," observed Avesford. "But except that the devil can quote scripture for his purpose, it is incomprehensible where he came by his principles!—A born and bred tory, idle, dissolute, and vain, preaching reform and retrenchment—is an anomaly."

"Private experience has perhaps enlarged his public views," said Mrs. Avesford.

"I fear his views are those of his interest rather than his conscience," said her husband. "He backs the winning horse. There is as much jockeyship in public life as in any other career; and when I find a man professing public opinions six thousand degrees purer and more enlightened than those of his personal practice, I have a right to doubt his sincerity. Lord Charles's politics are probably those of the constituents who keep him out of the King's Bench, and may eventually promote him to a place;—for why should he protect, as a legislator, the welfare of the people whom he defrauds as a debtor, and despises as a dandy?—I cannot reconcile so much public virtue with so much private vice."

"Nevertheless," remonstrated Sir Walter, "patriots have in all ages emerged from the school of Epicurus. The myrtle has been torn from more than one enervate brow, to give place to the mural crown."

"Never—unless where generous and manly qualities were pre-existent," cried Avesford. "With the exception of hazarding their necks in a fox-chase, what manliness is exhibited by the pitiful class of modern exquisites?—What
is there frank, fair, or honest, about their community?—Listen to the details of their money transactions not with Jews and usurers, but with each other.—Look to the yearly events of the turf—the gaming table—nay, to the common transfer of a hunter from one to another. Was there ever such barefaced indifferance to the rules of integrity!—such base desertion of the chivalrous associations of their order?—They may talk of radical meetings and democratic writings, my dear Norman, but the higher classes of this kingdom are never so wantonly degraded in the eyes of the people as by themselves;—by their works ye shall know them."

"Lord Farleigh seems an amiable man," observed Sir Walter; "respectable in private life, and conscientious in public."

"I cannot call a man conscientious in public life," said Avesford, "who is a stone-deaf enemy to improvement, and a vociferous stifler of inquiry. Men of Lord Farleigh's caste have so much to lose by every popular reform, that delicacy should forbid them to be clamorous against measures ensuring the welfare of millions at the expense of a personal sacrifice. Were they to exhibit on any private question the rapacious tenacity they do not scruple to avow in the great national struggle, they would be scouted as shabby fellows. Attack the legality of their tenure of any portion of their private property, and they will answer, 'Search, examine; if my claims prove defective, I am ready to renounce them.'—Why be less honorable in their mode of dealing with the demands of the people?"

"By the way, dear mother," cried Walter, "I can scarcely express to you the kindness and distinction I received in Paris from your friend, Guerchant, the Ministre de la Marine. It was to him I was indebted for my private introduction at the château, and the favors shown me by the King. Gracious as Louis Phillipe shows himself to all the English, his mode of receiving me at Neuilly was an exception in honor of the friendship of the Guerchants."

"They were always kind and excellent people," said Lady Norman, in a low voice. "No man do I respect more highly than Admiral Guerchant."

"The old gentleman was rather indignant, however, to find that you had never named him to me as my godfather.

In France, you know, the tie of sponsorship is held twice as sacred as in England," observed Sir Walter.

"The disastrous moment at which the rite was solemnised—my own absence—the difference of religious worship between us," faltered Lady Norman, "rendered me perhaps blamably negligent, but surely I have frequently cited the Guerchants to you as partial friends of your father and of myself!"

"Say, rather, most faithful," replied Sir Walter. "You should bear the old Admiral do justice to your courage and presence of mind when abiding my birth in the midst of the idle rumors raised by the English as a pretext for their cowardly flight. By the way, his daughter, the Duchesse de Barjac, insisted upon taking me to the old Château de St. Sylvain, where I was born."

"And did you really visit the place?"—demanded Constance, deeply interested in details which the habitual reserve of Lady Norman had hitherto enveloped in mystery.

"Only the gardens—the terraces and charmelles of which are still in good preservation: but the house is converted into a manufactory; and though I went over it, there was nothing to point out the memorable chamber in which so eminent a personage as Walter Norman saw the light. I was assured that there was an old woman in the village, a Madame Gervy or Jarvais, or some such name, who had been formerly in the service of an English family at St. Sylvain. Do you remember such a person?"—said he, suddenly turning towards Lady Norman.

"So many painful reminiscences are attached to that period," faltered she, pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate, "that I find no pleasure in reverting to it."

"Let us say no more, then," cried Sir Walter; "but admit, dear mother, that I was fully justified in making a pilgrimage to a spot, where I entered upon the life which your affection has rendered so happy."

Constance, with glistening eyes, glanced from the pale face of Lady Norman to the earnest countenance of her brother, feeling that some reply was due to the fervency and grace of his appeal; but her mother answered not a word. Matilda kept at all times a conscientious watch over her lips, lest she should aggravate by hypocrisy the fault with which she evermore upbraided herself; preferring rather to be reviled as lukewarm in her maternal affections, than affect towards Walter the passionate tenderness of a mother.
"Now I come to consider the case, my dear Walter," observed Avesford,—his thoughts being thus accidentally led back to the peculiarities of his nephew’s foreign birth—"it may become hereafter important to you to have a copy of the registry of your baptism. I recommend you to apply to Admiral Guerchant to have an acte de naissance properly made out. Can you remember exactly where the registry took place?"—he continued, addressing his sister-in-law. "Probably at St. Sylvain.—Sir Richard undertook the whole arrangement."

The first time I am with you again at Selwood, we will search your poor father’s memorandum book for some allusion to the event," said Avesford to his ward. "We may find the certificate among his papers; if not, you can write to the Admiral. He will not mind taking a little trouble for the son of his friend; and if the old woman you heard of were really a household servant of the family, she might be able to put him on the right scent."

"I have commissions to execute for Madame de Barjac," said Sir Walter. "On forwarding them, I will beg the Admiral to procure me in return the necessary papers."

The subject was dropped in deference to the presence of the widow, in whom it appeared to revive unpleasant recollections; but from Lady Norman’s mind, it was not so easily dismissed. That Walter should have been upon the eve of an interview with Madame Gervais—even on that fatal spot—the scene of her connivance in fraud—the old woman, probably sinking into that feebleness of years, from whose weakness or compunction confession is so easily obtained, filled her with consternation. The fine open character of the young man forbade all suspicion that more had transpired in his visit to the Château, than he had avowed; but might not the inquiry so inopportune suggested by Mr. Avesford lead to further exposures—perhaps to the discovery of the truth?

In every way she was miserable!—To behold the impostor constantly before her, with Constance in his arms, was a vexation her patience could scarcely support; or, on the other hand, to have the truth discovered—the imposture detected, her own honor, her husband’s memory, disgraced beyond retrieval—was a trial still more alarming. The punishment of Lady Norman’s fault seemed to hang daily heavier upon her life. She had formerly hoped that time would habituate her to her false position; but experience taught her that time has no narcotic for the restlessness of an evil conscience.

She rose, the day succeeding this painful conversation, trusting that the whole might have already passed from the memory of Walter; upon whom the pleasures and duties of life were exercising such varied influence. Amid the flurry of attaining his majority and entering his public career, Admiral Guerchant, St. Sylvain, and the extrait de baptême, might possibly escape his recollection.

But on that very day, arose a source of anxiety of a more painful nature. The infirm son of the Avesfords, attaching and attached as such helpless beings often prove, was suddenly attacked by a spasmodic illness of the most alarming nature. In hopeless grief, the parents hung over the couch of the little sufferer; and Lady Norman and her daughter congratulated themselves that they were on the spot to alleviate the trials of the tender and distracted mother. Though every friend to whom the Avesfords were dear had long indulged in an opinion that the release of the sickly boy would be a mercy to themselves and him, yet when the moment of removal drew near, one and all indulged in prayers that the blow might be suspended. There was such intensity of affection between the parents and the poor boy, whose wistful eyes looked up to them with looks of love, that no one could bear to anticipate the moment when those eyes must close for ever, and the joy of parental love cease to brighten the tenor of their days!—

The medical attendants who, having tended the ailing child from infancy, seemed to approach his sick-chamber with more pitying faces than the couch of many a more important patient, shook their heads when they saw the feeble frame racked by these new symptoms of disease. The danger was not immediate, but they feared it was irretrievable.

"I must be off for town to-morrow," said Avesford, falteringly, to young Norman, the evening after this decree of the physicians had gone forth. "I am pledged to my constituents to be present at the debate of Thursday."

"Pledged before you could anticipate this sad crisis in your family!"—interposed Sir Walter.

"Pledged, as we pledge ourselves at the altar, for better for worse—in sickness or in health!"—replied Avesford! with assumed composure. "My duty calls me to my post.
God forbid, that in self-commiseration, I should sacrifice
the interests of which I have made myself the depository!"

"Nevertheless, the imminent danger of an only child—"

"The danger I am assured is not imminent; and were it
so, my presence here would avail nothing to its removal,
"It is only for the assurance of my own anxiety that I desire to remain,
and what are my feelings compared with the great progress
of constitutional reform?—I must go, my dear Walter!—Do
me only the favor to relinquish your pleasures when I dare
not relinquish my duty. Remain here to counsel and com­
fort poor Charles's unhappy mother!"

Walter Norman pressed the hand extended towards him,
and found that it was cold as death. There were no tears
in the eyes of Avesford. He evidently did not choose to be
seen of men unmanned by a domestic affliction. But it
was not the sternness of the stoic, beneath whose cloak
the fox is gnawing; for immediately afterwards, in attend­
ing to the sorrows of his wife, his voice became broken
and unintelligible.

He went;—and young Norman fulfilled his promise of
filling in the house the place of the absent master. But his
presence in the sick-chamber where no word was to be
spoken, no movement to be hazarded, proved a restraint;
and Mrs. Avesford would not hear of his paying them
more than occasional visits. It was enough to engross the
constant companionship of Lady Norman;—Constance and
Walter were too young to be afflicted by the continual
spectacle of grief and pain.

"Make your sister ride and walk with you as usual, my
dear boy," said she, to her nephew, "and you will relieve
me from one source of anxiety. Constance is delicate.
The spectacle of my poor child's sufferings is too much for
her. Persuade her to accompany you every morning to
the water-side. The sea-air will reinvigorate and support
her."

Walter readily promised, and readily performed. It was
impossible for Lady Norman to raise objections to a scheme
so natural. Yet every day, when their absence grew longer
and longer, and their cheeks more flushed on their return
with health and happiness, she entertained a wilder fear
that they took too much pleasure in each other's company.
Yet what could be more natural than that Constance,
hitherto estranged from companionship of her own age,
should rejoice in the society of one to whom her hoard of
innocent reflections might be unfolded!—Between familiar
friends, nothing conduces to more unreserved communica­
tion than a solitary walk;-

No eye to watch, and no tongue to wound them,
All earth forgot, and all heaven around them;

no restraint upon the joyous talk, with which in their gayer
moments Walter called forth the laughter of his sister; or
upon the tears of affection, with which, in a softer hour,
Constance described to her brother the mild, forbearing,
tender governance of their mother during his absence on
the continent. The young man had a thousand curious
anecdotes to relate, and customs to describe, of the various
lands he had visited. Like most persons whose education
is completed abroad, he possessed the talent of narration;
was not afraid of hearing his own voice; not ashamed of
trying to interest others in that which had interested him­
self. Italy, Greece, Germany, Denmark, Russia, supplied
his memory with a thousand amusing traits and beautiful
landscapes, which he delighted to describe when he saw
how eagerly Constance listened to the description.

The heavy eyes and saddened countenance with which
she emerged from the house of mourning, gradually gave
place to the invigorating impulses of youth and joy; and
fresh colours bloomed on her cheeks—fresh spirits beamed
in her eyes—while, leaning on his arm, she forgot both
time and place in the details of his varied conversation.
Every walk became the precursor of another. They de­
scribed new objects to be visited—new landscapes explored;
the tide was to be up at such an hour, or the sands at
low-water were to afford them new ground for enjoyment.

Nor was the discourse of the young Normans always of
a frivolous nature. The afflicting scene from which they
emerged into the enjoyment of the open atmosphere and
the contemplation of the beauties of nature, sobered their
gaiety. Both were beginning to conceive opinions and
reform their principles, according to their opening insight
into the ways of the world; and these were to be compared,
argued, adopted, or rejected, between them. Walter be­
came almost affected when by degrees the secret sanctuary
of his sister's golden thoughts and pious feelings was un
veiled to his view:—his arguments were silenced—his eyes dazzled—for he saw that the place whereon he stood was holy ground. Even his anxiety to strengthen her mind by a more steadfast view of the harsh realities of life, gave place to his reverence for a purity of spirit, on which, as on the saintly one described by Milton as dear to Heaven—

A thousand liveried angels wait,
To lackey its desires.

Constance had, in fact, a serious object at heart. The difference of faith which seemed to divide her immortal soul from that of her brother was an obstacle to her happiness. She knew that, by their father's will, Walter was to be reared a Catholic; but that no impediment was to be placed upon a change of faith arising from conviction. That conviction, she dearly longed to secure. She perceived that his long residence at Rome had opened the eyes of her brother to absurdities and abuses, which it was easy to place in a still stronger light; and though deeply conscious of her incapacity for the task of conversion, she possessed more advantages than she was aware of. There was no irony, no mockery, in her gentle pleading—no assumption of authority—no pretence at wisdom. She spake neither with the tongue of men nor angels; but with the gentle tongue of woman—a voice, when lawfully employed, how all-convincing!—Those truths which the mildest of mothers had impressed upon her own veneration, the mildest of sisters strove to impress upon that of her brother.

Sir Walter listened in silence; if not convinced by her arguments, touched by her eloquence. Often when she had ceased speaking he longed to entreat her to begin again, that he might once more revere the sweetness of soul suggesting such just and heart-riving expressions. Though they sometimes prolonged their walk to the hour when a winter sunset reddened the sky and the twilight damps of the shrubberies softened the air, yet on reaching the hall-door he would invite her to take another turn. It was so much more agreeable to have Constance leaning on his arm and soothing him with her gentle philosophy, than to return to the contemplation of unassuageable pain and unconsolable grief!—

On such occasions Lady Norman became almost harsh in her reproval of their truancy. What right had Sir Walter to hazard the health of his sister by exposure to the evening dew?—What motive to induce her to loiter by the shore when storms were blowing up, and snow or rain impending?—If Constance had so wild a propensity to contemplate at any cost the phenomena of nature, it was her brother's duty to oppose her indiscretion.

Walter was wonderstruck on perceiving with how strange an expression of countenance these remonstrances were delivered by his usually gentle mother. The first time she had occasion to repeat her reproofs, her eyes sparkled and her color went and came with emotion. Yet as they were standing in the anteroom adjoining the sick-chamber of poor little Charles, she could not indulge in a full avowal of her displeasure.

Again, however, the offence was renewed; for Lady Norman's limitations of their walks began to be unreasonable. She soon decided that they must not outstep the boundary of the pleasure grounds; and as these limits unluckily extended to the ascent of a craggy cliff from whence a splendid marine view, with all its variations of light and shade, was discoverable, Constance and her brother found it impossible to resist, one evening, their desire to view the setting sun from that elevated spot. On their return, they learned that Lady Norman had been inquiring for them; and on entering her room, found her in tears—the severest rebuke they had yet received. Kneeling before her, Constance promised not to offend again; but she framed her promise in terms of such absolute disposal over the movements of Sir Walter, that Lady Norman experienced a still deeper wound from her submission.

Even pre-occupied as she was, Lady Norman's susceptibility could not wholly escape the observation of Mrs. Avesford; and she fancied that sympathy in her affection disturbed the even temper of Matilda. Many people seem out of humor when out of spirits. But Lady Norman's disposition was not of this unreasonable class. She was usually forbearing, humane, gentle; and Mrs. Avesford at length began to apprehend that some unexplained calamity was weighing on her mind. Walter might have formed some unworthy attachment, or Constance oppose some girlish obstacle to prospects of establishment which her mother was not at liberty to reveal.
One day, when little Charles, after hours of protracted torment, had fallen into a gentle slumber, rendering it prudent for those who were watching to repair to the adjoining room, the two sisters sat beside the window; Mrs. Avesford with a book in her hand which she was not reading; Lady Norman with work in hers, over which her tears were falling while she pretended to work.

"My dearest Matty,"—said the former, extending her hand towards her sister's knee, after watching her for some minutes in silence—"Why deny me the joy of comforting your troubles?—God knows—my only consolation is in the solace you afford to mine."

But Lady Norman, though she pressed convulsively the hand extended towards her, remained silent. To rally her spirits or chide back her tears, was impossible;—to admit their origin, equally out of the question.

"You have something on your mind," pursued Mrs. Avesford; and what can weigh on a mind like yours, unfit to be confided to a friend?—"

Still Lady Norman replied not. A profound sigh alone admitted the truth of her sister's assertion.

"Dare I vex you, my dear sister," continued Mrs. Avesford, "I could almost upbraid you for trifling with the blessings of Providence. Consider the gifts you enjoy!—Health, prosperity, and the love of two noble children, who have grown to maturity under your eyes, in goodness, beauty, and intelligence—all that the heart of a parent can desire!—Reflect upon the difference of your fate and mine!—The comfort of my future years concentrated in the poor, frail, tormented being suffering in yonder bed;—his utmost happiness, respite from pain—his habitual existence, torture!—Yet even with this affliction ever before me, I do not dare repine! I should fear that some misfortune might overtake my husband in retribution of my ingratitude."

"I admit that I am unreasonable," replied Lady Norman, attempting to rally her spirits. "I expect impossible things, in requiring that the heart over whose opening qualities I have watched for eighteen years, should remain exclusively my own. I was wrong not to calculate upon the influence of time—the influence of others."

"You do not surely mean that you are jealous of Constance's affection for her brother?"—cried Mrs. Avesford, fancying herself suddenly enlightened. "Oh! my dearest sister! beware how you embitter your happy existence by such weakness—such wickedness!—Forgive me!" added she, as she saw the tears steal once more down the pale cheeks of Lady Norman; "but I love you so dearly, Matty, that I tremble at the idea of your estranging your children's affections by over-exaction. Never was there so sweet—so loving a creature as that girl of yours! Constance worships the print of your footsteps in the dust. But would it be natural to love less tenderly the brother with whom she has been brought up in tender, sisterly affection?—I should detest Constance if she did not prefer her brother to every living being beside yourself; and detest Walter if he did not fully return her affection. Avesford is always in admiration at the intensity of their mutual attachment."

Lady Norman shuddered.—"It is impossible," said she, "for any human being to place himself in the position of another, however close their habits of intimacy. Walter and Constance, on the eve of forming attachments and engagements that must ensure their separation, cannot add to their happiness by cultivating a regard that may prove offensive to the husband or wife of either. Had I affected for a brother of my own age the enthusiasm which my poor girl cherishes for hers, it would have been the cause of serious estrangements between Norman and myself."

"Sir Richard Norman was an exception to most rules in the conduct of his domestic affairs," remonstrated Elizabeth. "Forgive me, therefore, if I entreat you not to discover to your children the jealousy you have avowed to me. One remonstrance of the kind to Constance would create reserves between you—alienate her confidence from her mother, and redouble her love for Walter!—Believe me——"

A deep moan interrupted a colloquy which might perhaps have led to wider disclosure. In a moment, Mrs. Avesford was by the sick-bed of her child; anticipating the wishes, and soothing the unexpressed anguish of the patient boy by the tenderest endearments and exhortations.
CHAPTER IX.

C'est mon monde à moi;—un monde de rubans et de manchettes!

M. de Senneterre.

Lord Farleigh's family was now settled in London for the season, preparing for the opening campaign; and just as his lordship expected to find every succeeding November, in trying his favorite coverts, double the sport of the preceding hunting-season, his lordship's wife and daughters seemed to fancy that fresh pleasures were to be found in their favorite resorts of balls and operas. Not that Lady Farleigh was a finessing mamma. Too indolent for any exertion of the kind, her pet fancy-work and pet lap-dog monopolised her attention; the young ladies on whose education had been expended such a prodigious outlay of givers and masters, being by this time, it was to be hoped, capable of taking care of themselves. There could be no doubt that proper alliances would come in search of the two good-looking daughters of an earl, who gave such good dinners and professed so thoroughly the good old creed of Toryism.

Lady Louisa, however, was by no means satisfied at the tardiness of their arrival. She was too fully persuaded of her merits not to feel indignant at having been out-rivalled with the Marquis of St. Aubyn, in her father's own particular country-house, and with all the appliances and means of conquest to boot, by a simple country-girl like Constance Norman. An object of flattery from her birth—grandmothers, nurses, waiting-maids, governesses, masters, and united to inflate her young mind into overweening self-esteem. The claims of others she had never heard brought into competition with hers; and piqued by the unexpected discovery that there were other feet besides her own at which the indiscriminate world might be tempted to bow, the mortified beauty ran some risk of throwing herself away in marriage, to prove to her aged flatterers and youthful competitors, that she need not be an old maid like her aunt Lady Emily Farleigh—whose red nose and attempts at juvenility were favo—rite objects of derision to Lord Selston and his sisters. She was ready to flirt with Sir Frederick Cranston, or Captain Norman, or any of the attachés of any of the foreign embassies, in order to mark to old Lady St. Aubyn her utter contempt of the desertion of her son.

Lady Sophia, on the other hand, having survived by a season her loss of Lord Meldrum, was not insensible to the merits of the handsome young Baronet of Selwood, the generous donor of Parisian cadeaux, whose fine eyes and fine estate were powerful in the scale even against the fine gentlemanish of Lord Charles Bartley. She soon found a thousand pretences for her predilection. Sir Walter was an old acquaintance—their parents were still older friends. Her brother would be delighted with his manly spirit, and her father with the rent-roll of his estates. Sir Walter had informed her, indeed, that he disliked the grand monde, and had no thoughts of visiting London. But this flat blasphemy had been uttered during the hunting-season—a period of the year when few young men know how to appreciate any object on earth but a fox's brush. Lady Sophia was, therefore, still on the look-out for his arrival at Mivart's or Fenton's; and in the hope of accelerating his movements, addressed the following letter to her friend Miss Norman; a fair specimen of the style of young ladylike correspondence which absorbs such reams of satin paper, and so materially augments the revenues of Her Majesty's Post Office.

"Hill Street, March 2d.

"We are greatly concerned, my dearest Constance, to receive no announcement of Lady Norman's removal to town for the season; mamma having always conceived that she would not delay your presentation at court beyond the present year. I entreat you, ma chéristime, to write us word that your visit is only deferred till after Easter. Indeed, my dear, you ought to be already in the field. We had our second ball last night at Almack's (the first we never attend, for fear of being accused of airing the rooms); and I assure you that, for the time of year, the thing was tolerable enough. One had all the new débütantes to see and criticise; all the new foreigners to learn the names of; to admire the verdure of the marchioness's old green satin gown, which comes into new leaf every spring; and the yellowness of certain white crêpe gowns, which have tra-
velled to Yorkshire, Cornwall, Scotland, or Ireland, and back again since last season. By the way, pray inform Sir Walter, that Musard's orchestra favored us with one of those divine waltzes of Lanner's, which he brought from Paris; and I enjoyed it as a reminiscence of our charming little sociable evenings at Tuxwell Park. Often, dearest Constance, very often, may we enjoy a recurrence of those friendly interchanges of thought and feeling.

"Palé blue is decidedly the color of the season; and will you believe that the heavy silk, grosgrain, is worn in preference to satin or any lighter material. Imagine poor Lady Mary Clare, (as bleme in complexion as a white mouse, or your Bath miss the beauty of the Avonwell Forges,) pretending to dance in a half-train dress of the palest blue gros de Naples! Lord Charles Bartley kept protesting she looked like a Bengal light; and, without being ill-natured, the effect was really pitoyable.—But I forget that I must not address this criticism to my dear Constance. That lovely pale blue mousseline de soie, which Sir Walter brought you from Paris, has been ever since my standard of perfection.—A propos—how strange that so old-fashioned a material as grosgrain should come in again; it must be the "grogram" alluded to in the Vicar of Wakefield!—Qu'en dites vous?"

"I had a charming contredanse last night, with your impertinent cousin, little Captain Norman. He is really the most original, as well as the most conceited creature in London. Think of his writing an official letter last season to that invertebrate slave of the ring—that untirable gravel-grinder—Lady—— (as if from the Ranger of the parks) proposing, for the advantage of the community, to affix a water-cart to the rear of her ladyship's carriage, which is rarely known to quit the drive; and the other day, when Lord Mornington's new liveries came home for the drawing-room, he packed them up and sent them by the omnibus into the city, addressed to the Lord Mayor—protesting that they were too fine for anything but a shrievalty. He is always getting into scrapes!—It is a pity that they are not redeemed by certain personal characteristics of the Norman family. But one seldom sees so distinguished-looking a person as your brother. Captain Norman, entre nous, declares himself very curious to renew his acquaintance. When are his wishes to be gratified? Repondez, ma toute aimable—repondez, repondez—and persuade Lady Norman to commission mamma to engage a house for her. Adieu done, et a revoir. We look anxiously for news of you; and with united regards to the adorabilissima madre, (not forgetting Sir Walter,) I am, dear Constance, Votre toute devouee, Soph."

Most inopportune was the arrival of this flippant epistle at Fern Hill, whether it was forwarded from Selwood Park. The Normans were occupied with the details of a death-bed; and Constance threw it half perused aside, that she might relieve her mother in her watch with the sorrowing parents of the dying boy.

Avesford, having discharged his duty heroically in the great debate where the influence of his eloquence was required, had now paired off with some gouty idler, and returned to support the sinking spirit of his wife, and sustain, in its last agonies, the beloved child passing through momentary clouds to eternal sunshine.

The little family circle was overwhelmed with sadness. The Avesfords were too generally beloved for their silent affliction not to command a sympathy rarely accorded to vociferous grief. There was something inexpressibly affecting in the thoughtful tenderness with which the expiring child struggled against his torments to spare the feelings of his parents; and in the inquiring, bewildered look which, during the last night of his existence, overspread his little wasted, waxen face, as if awed by the sense of dawning peace, and perplexed with the thought of coming immortality!—Avesford sat silent by the bedside holding the hands of his wife, while he watched the exhaling breath of his only child.—Not a murmur escaped his compressed lips; but those who were standing near him, noted from the visible pulsation of his temples, how terrible a strife of anguish was passing within.

At length, Constance, unable longer to support the tension of feeling caused by this prolonged wretchedness, crept from the chamber, and took refuge in the library to give unrestrained course to her tears; and Sir Walter, noticing that Lady N. Norman's position beside the child forbade her to follow, hastened after his sister, whose pale face announced the indisposition as well as distress. Sir Walter led her to the library sofa, reclining on which, a burst of tears relieved...
her overcharged heart. The afflicted girl was in no condition to take note of the passing minutes, while she sat concealing her face upon her brother's bosom. Her thoughts were raised in prayer to heaven;—prayer that mercy might be shown to the expiring child, as well as to his sad survivors—prayer that absorbed every sense and every faculty—till she was startled by the voice of her mother severely addressing her.

"Is this a time, Constance," cried Lady Norman, "to mark your indifference to my wishes?—Return with me to your family—you must not, you shall not, remain here,"

"My dearest mother," interposed Sir Walter, apprehending from the wildness of her air and address, that affliction had disturbed her reason, "sit down, I beseech you, a moment, and compose yourself. Constance will take your place for a time in the sick room.—You need refreshment—you need rest.—I will not have you sit up another night."

"You will not have me!" cried Lady Norman, half frantic on perceiving that he did not even withdraw his arm from the waist of Constance.

"You are not equal to these exertions," he continued, in a soothing tone. "Were my uncle and Mrs. Avesford less engrossed by their miseries, they would feel the impropriety of so severely taxing the strength of two delicate women like you and Constance. "See!" cried he, drawing Miss Norman closer to his bosom, "she is still trembling and exhausted; while as to yourself, mother, I scarcely seem to recognise your countenance!—nay, compose yourself, I entreat you."

Lady Norman was indeed in a state of strange excitement. Overpowered by her efforts throughout the day to repress her feelings, her face was almost convulsed as she stood witnessing the endeavours passing between Constance and her brother. But at that moment, an unusual stir in the corridor apprised them that some direful event had taken place in the sick-chamber; and Avesford appeared, conducting his almost unconscious wife. "Comfort her!" faltered he, addressing Constance and her mother, as he placed her between them. "All is over. Our poor boy is released!"

But even while administering relief to her afflicted sister, Lady Norman could not refrain from examining the movement of Sir Walter and her daughter, with glances of displeasure and mistrust.
Norman's manner, a consequence of the inexplicable influence of excessive grief. She fancied that her mother's mind had been suddenly distracted at the moment of her nephew's death!

To refrain, therefore, from expressing herself as usual concerning Walter out of deference to her mother, did not suggest itself to her mind. The journey from Fern Hill to Selwood, was one which at all times exercised a dispiriting influence over the mind of Lady Norman. Though more than sixteen years had elapsed since the loss of her husband, never did she set off from the Avesfords' door towards home, without recalling to mind the day when, proceeding thence for the first time in all the pride of happiness and security, she had been suddenly plunged into the depths of despair, and Constance, remarking as usual a despondency the motive of which she had long conjectured, fancied that she was doing wisely and kindly, in trying to divert her mother's attention from past sorrows, by directing it towards her present sources of joy.

"I wonder whether Walter will keep his promise of being at home next week?"—said she, after they had performed nearly half the journey in silence.

"I trust you do not wish him to quit poor Avesford and my sister, so long as his company appears a comfort to them?"—replied her mother coldly.

"Perhaps it might be better for them to be compelled into society with persons whose company would be a greater restraint than Walter's. My brother is so attached to them—so full of sympathy for their sorrows—so gentle and affectionate in his manners—and was himself so fond of that poor little fellow—that he will only assist them in cherishing their grief! For their sakes, therefore, as well as ours, I think he will be better at Selwood."

"But not for his,"—said Lady Norman. "It is time that Walter should learn something of the world."

"Surely he has been living in the world for nearly four years past?"—said Constance, with an air of surprise.

"Not the English world. The society of England is a thing apart; and so absolute in its forms and arbitrary in its customs, that a young man brought up like most Roman Catholics, either in retirement or on the continent, labors under disadvantages on his entrance into public life. In Walter's case, these are increased by a long minority, and the want of family connection; and the longer he defers his entrance into the world, the greater will be his difficulties."

"But what difficulties await a young man of his position and fortune?"

"As he is likely to live among his equals in rank and fortune, these will afford him no distinction."

"But his talents—his manners!—At Tuxwell Park, he was distinguished, not only above his equals in rank, but his superiors.—Observe how popular my brother becomes with every one he speaks to!—"

"The Farleighs, as old friends of his father, are partial and over-indulgent."

"But the Dean of Gloucester was not a friend of poor papa, (I think you told me you had not met before?)—And I heard the dean remark to Lady Farleigh that he had never seen a young man of Walter's age so full of information, yet so diffident and unassuming."

"The dean is a violent politician, and may hope to bring Walter over to his side."

"Could a high-tory dean expect to convert the ward of my uncle Avesford?—But I assure you their conversation was not of a political cast; for I sat listening to every word, and you know, dear mamma, how I hate politics. When Sir Robert Skaremidge and Mr. Redely dine at Selwood and indulge in their tiresome party squabbles, I have always a headache next day. Whereas Walter and the dean—"

"It is extremely ill-bred, my dear, to give precedence to a member of your own family, when coupling the name with that of a stranger."

"The dean and Walter, then, were most entertaining. It seemed natural, however, to assign a priority, in this instance, to my brother, for it was Walter who sustained the conversation. The dean did little but make inquiries into his observations abroad."

"The observations of a young man of Sir Walter's age!—"

"I have heard my uncle Avesford say that, as regards simple facts, the perceptions of young people are freshest and most to be trusted."

"Perhaps so; but not their digested relation of them.—Youth is simply an imitator—a mere monkey. There cannot be a greater mistake than to attribute originality to an untutored mind. The faculties which produce originality..."
of character are only developed by time. A man seldom thinks for himself 'till he is thirty."

"But Walter's studies were so ably directed by Mr. Manningham, and my uncle's advice and correspondence have been of so much importance to him!"

"Your uncle Avesford's letters, I fancy, were merely letters of business. Avesford is a useful member of society, but he is merely a practical man. I do not conceive Avesford's mind to be of a superior order."

On such a point Constance did not presume to argue with her mother. She contented herself with replying in a low voice—"Walter considers that a man useful to the community is the only true philosopher. My brother says he would give all the speculative wisdom that ever bewildered the brains of mankind, for the consummation of a single useful invention, or public measure."

"I have no doubt that the moral and political principles concocted between Sir Walter Norman at one-and-twenty and Miss Norman at seventeen, are of a highly valuable and important nature," replied Lady Norman, impatiently. "But be assured by me, Constance, that it sounds as ridiculous in you to become the expounder of your brother's theories, as it would to hear Sir Walter discussing silks and crewels!"

"But I assure you, mamma," cried Constance, trying to parry this grave reproof by a cheerful retort, "Walter is wonderfully wise in such matters as silks and crewels. It is astonishing what a proficient he became at Paris in the mysteries of the toilet. French ladies appear to think that men ought to be interested in even the least of their pursuits. They are not half so much in awe as we of the superior wisdom of the lords of the creation."

"Because their lords are beings of a more frivolous race," replied her mother; and having now strayed from Sir Walter, during the rest of the journey Lady Norman contrived to restrict the conversation to generalities. On arriving at home, however, she was fated to be again offended. "How dull we shall find it here now without Walter!" observed Constance, on entering the house.

"Yet you were cheerful enough, my dear, during your brother's residence abroad!"—remonstrated Lady Norman.

"I knew not then what an addition he was to be to our society. I can scarcely understand, mother, how you bore, so patiently with my stupidity during his absence. His return seemed to wake us up from a long dream!"

"Do not make yourself too unhappy at being a week separated from him," cried Lady Norman, quitting the room. "He will probably be down next week to flatter and indulge you, and win away your love and confidence from your mother."

Alas! it was Lady Norman herself who was doing all in her power to estrange the love and confidence of her child!—Awakened at length to her mother's jealous susceptibility, Constance resolved to keep watch over every word and action likely to stimulate her jealousy. She refrained from all mention of her brother's name; and in silence and solitude, indulged in affectionate longings for the return of one whose society was the delight of her existence.

The Skaremidges soon arrived, as in ceremony bound, to visit the Selwood family on their return home; and never had their tediousness appeared so flat and unprofitable. The Redelys made their appearance, too—re-opening all the griefs of Lady Norman by ill-bred inquiries touching the painful scenes she had been witnessing. But even this was more supportable than Mrs. Redely's enthusiastic praises of her son.

"Well—now Sir Walter's away in London—I suppose I may say what we all think of him!"—cried the lady of the others, towards the close of her visit. "Upon my honor, your ladyship has some right to proud!—Six feet high, if he's an inch: and quite the high old family look.—You must have his picture done ma'm for the Selwood gallery.—I warrant it won't disgrace it. Amy, my dear, wouldn't Sir Walter Norman make a fine likeness for the Selwood gallery in the uniform of the North Worcester Yeomanry Cavalry, with a corporal behind a-holding in his horse, like the pictures of general officers one sees in the London exhibition?"

"The yeomanry cavalry!"—retorted Amy with contempt. "Give me the scarlet uniform of the Tuxwell hunt!—Do you remember, Miss Norman, at the ball at Farleigh Castle, how well they all looked?—But Lord Selsdon is such a very fine young man!—"

"Lord Selsdon?—Why he is little better than a schoolboy," cried Constance, unable to conceive the superiority over her brother imparted in the fair Amy's estimation by a
scarlet coat and a coronet. "And so coarse, so noisy, so full of slang!"

"A trifle too spirity, perhaps," observed Mrs. Redely. "But quite the topping sportsman and English nobleman. Redely says, Lord Selston has the best seat of his age he ever saw; and I suppose you read last year, ma'am, of his winning the great pigeon-match at the Red House—Pray, is there any likelihood of the family being at the Castle this summer?—she continued, addressing Lady Norman.

"When Lord and Lady Farleigh are down, they make the neighborhood quite another thing; and if they were not coming till autumn, Amy's got an invite to Harrogate for June, and Buxton for July, which, maybe, might suit our books as well. You see Amy can't abide being mured up at home, after the gay life she was used to at Bath. It isn't to be expected of young people to be as fond of home as old folks, unless when they haven't seen anything pleasanter—as in your young lady's case," added Mrs. Redely, intending to be polite to Lady Norman; while Constance endeavored to make the dashing Amy feel herself at liberty for the summer, by assuring her that the Farleighs had no intention of passing it at the Castle. Thus discouraged, Mrs. Redely fell back upon Sir Walter.

"It's a curious thing enough," said she, "that your ladyship having but two, there should be so little likeness as between Miss Constance and your son:—one so dark, t'other so fair—one on so large a scale, t'other so slight. Redely was saying that they looked far more like husband and wife than brother and sister. I suppose it comes from one being born in France and t'other in England. After all, maybe, its best for a young lady to be fair, and a young gentleman to be brown. Dark men wear best, and fair women—and make the prettiest couple too. We did hear, ma'am, that Sir Walter was very much taken at Tuxwell with Lady Sophia Farleigh; now her complexion—"

"My brother admire Lady Sophia Farleigh!" interrupted Constance, with a smile. "Believe me, you are quite mistaken."

"Oh! as to that, a young gentleman's family is not always the first to be informed of likes and dislikes; and I can assure you, Miss Norman, that the old housekeeper at the Castle had a letter from her niece, which is young lady's maid at Tuxwell, to say that there was bets laid in the steward's room of a match betwixt the young people before the end of the London season."

"Walter is not gone to town for the season; he will be at home next week," said Constance. And the moment the Redelys had taken leave, she flew to her own room to search for Sophy Farleigh's neglected letter, and ascertain whether it betrayed any expectations confirmatory of Mrs. Redely's intelligence.

But though it was clear that, at the time of writing, no understanding subsisted between the parties, Miss Norman fancied she could discover indications of interest on the part of Lady Sophia, such as, with her brother in town and probably a constant visitor at Lord Farleigh's, might ripen into a nearer regard. Sir Walter, like most young men of his age, was an indifferent correspondent. It was not from his own pen they were likely to have an exact account of his movements; and his sister accordingly set about making herself seriously uneasy lest the inventions of the servants' hall should be verified. As a girl, she had been girlishly fond of the lively, chatty Farleighs; as a young woman, she was conscious of their heartlessness and artificiality; but as a sister-in-law she disliked all thoughts of either. Walter, her darling, warm-hearted Walter, deserved something better than to become a secondary object to such a wife as was to be expected from a spoiled, selfish girl of fashion.

Full of this "darling and warm-hearted Walter," she now directed her steps towards his room, which was at the extremity of the gallery in which her own and her mother's were situated. It had been his from the period of Mr. Manningham's instalment at Selwood; and during his absence, Constance occasionally visited it, rather to see that her brother's belongings were kept in order than as a matter of sentiment. It was, in fact, a complete young man's room, selected because overlooking a stables yard and disfigured by all sorts of unsightly treasures:—a gun-rack—a bear-skin by way of hearthrug, and a hammock by way of bed;—upon the chimney-piece, the jowl of an immense pike (landed by Walter at twelve years old), curiously preserved in a glass case, with a pied pheasant (shot by him two years later), as its companion. In an old-fashioned book-case were divers works upon farriery and angling, with his whole collection of Stonyhurst classics; among
whose torn and shabby calfskin suits, were to be distin-
guished a few spruce prize-books in gilt morocco,” the
gift of his attached friend, Rochus Manningham,” such as
“Locke’s Human Understanding,” “De Lolme’s British
Constitution,” and a superb edition (a farewell gift to his
departing pupil) of “Enstace’s Italy.” On a stand near
the book-case, were a pair of old-fashioned globes, on
which strange defacements were written by school-room
abuse:—a tiger hunt having been sketched with a crow-
quill by young Norman on the area left mysteriously
blank by geographers in the infancy of African discovery,
and groups of leviathans and walruses in the then chartless
polar seas:—while the celestial globe displayed, crowning
the fat and starless sides of Cetus the whale, a striking
likeness of Lady Norman’s globose old house-keeper!

Over the fireplace, framed in black, and glazed in glass
of village green, hung the portrait of a favorite grey poodle,
named Titus, the first attempt of Constance in water-colors,
the head of which not a little resembled the learned nodle
of a barrister in his forensic wig. The tables and chairs,
though originally of rich materials, bore evidence of having
been occasionally used as a carpenter’s bench, bookbinder’s
shelf, or lithographic press; the young baronet, to whose
eye that workshop of many trades abounded in pleasant
reminiscences of boyhood, having not only entreated that
they might never be replaced, but that even the charred
circle, traced by a red-hot glue-pot on the oaken floor, might
be suffered to remain un-effaced.

To this pantechnicon of manly arts and sciences, did the
gentle Constance now most improbably repair. In her
brother’s absence, that room appeared his especial home.
Its very atmosphere was scented with the Russia-leather
travelling trunks of Sir Walter, which communicated to his
clothes their peculiar aroma; and from the double barrels of
Nock, down to the ivory dog-whistle, not an object around
her but was more particularly the property of her brother.

The motive of Miss Norman’s visit was not merely a
desire to look upon these familiar things, or indulge in
thick-coming fancies touching their owner. She had com-
pleted, at Fern Hill, some water-color drawings from
sketches of Morean scenery contained in her brother’s
sketch-book; and wished to surprise him with the gift of his
own productions transferred as it were from prose to poetry.

Simple frames had been procured at Liverpool for these
drawings; and though it was by no means her intention to
keep so trifling a circumstance a secret from her mother,
the state of Lady Norman’s feelings and the affliction
of the family would have rendered any immediate allusion
trifling and unfeeling.

She was now about to hang up these pictures previous
to Walter’s return. She wished him to find them there on
entering the room. She wished him to see how much he
had been thought of during his absence; and after deliberate
examination of lights and shades, fixed upon two panels
opposite his bed as most advantageous to her performances.
It was only to remove from the hooks already fixed there,
two prints of Warwick Castle chiefly remarkable for their
bold defiance of perspective; and Santa Maura and the
Leucadian promontory were displayed in their stead,
arayed in those vague and aerial tints, with which Copley
Fielding or Cattermole delight to envelop the mysteries of
nature in the mysteries of art.

Having fixed them to her liking, Constance sat down
beside the hammock in one of the most notchcd and dis-
colored of Sir Walter’s favorite chairs, to contemplate her
handiwork:—unconsciously leaning her cheek upon her
hand, while demurring whether her Egean sea might not
be a thought too blue, or her Ionian sunset a shade too
purple;—when, lo! the door burst open, and her mother,
pale and indignant, stood before her—

“What are you doing here, Constance?” cried Lady
Norman, whose countenance derived an almost cadaverous
hue from contrast with the deep mourning in which she
was attired.

“I often come here, mamma,” replied Miss Norman,
startled into a blush—“often when my brother is at Sel-
wood—and often when he is away.”

“I desire, then, that whether he is absent or present, you
will never enter the room again,” replied the agitated Lady
Norman.

“Certainly not, if such are your commands. But will
not Walter think it very odd—very unkind—if, instead of
visiting him as usual, when he has his drawing or book-
binding about, I am obliged to say that you have ordered
me to refuse?”—

“Is it absolutely necessary you should tell him so?”—
demanded Lady Norman. "Can you not leave it to his
delicacy to suggest that there are eight rooms open below
in which at all hours of the day you can meet unmolested,
without selecting his own for your mysterious communica-
tions?—"

"My dear mother, if you object, I will never again cross
the threshold," cried Constance, with growing earnestness.
"I came hither only to hang up yonder two drawings,
which I intend as a present to my brother."

Lady Norman cast her eyes in the direction pointed out.
The paintings seemed to her disordered mind to have been
finished and the frames procured, in deliberate secrecy.
"You perhaps remember the two subjects in Walter's
album?" pursued Constance in an extenuating tone. "I
have only filled out and amplified his outline?"

"Have the goodness to take them down again," said
Lady Norman, harshly. "I do not choose that he should
find them hanging there."

Miss Norman hesitated.—"I finished them expressly
for my brother!"—pleaded she, in a tone tremulous from dis-
appointment. "Ever since his return to England, Walter
has been asking me to undertake a drawing for him. The
picture in oils of his own painting which he sent to London
to be framed, was intended for my dressing-room; and I
shall be deeply mortified if you forbid me to give him these
drawings in return."

Lady Norman made no reply. She began silently to
remove the pictures from the wall on which, the tears of
Constance burst forth.

"Indeed, mother, you are wrong," said she, moved be-
\nond her filial patience, "to take so much pains to lessen
the affection between Walter and myself. God knows my
love for him does not diminish a grain of my respect and
attachment towards my mother!—But I should deceive you,
mamma, if I did not candidly declare that nothing you can
say or do will prevent my cherishing for him a love as firm
as it is tender. You are unjust towards us both, in wishing
that it should be otherwise."

"Unhappy girl!" cried Lady Norman, letting fall the
pictures she held in her hand—"are you thus madly bent
on goading me on to declarations which may prove the
ruin of the family?—Know that this man whom you caress
as a brother, whom you love with such dangerous, such
mistaken affection——"
you been with me all this time?—I fancied I had left you. I fancied that I had received some cruel injury, and quitted Selwood for ever!—Have I been ill, mother? My arm is bound up—my head is stiff—have I been bled?—what has been the matter?"


"True, I remember now;—I was brought hither out of Walter's room.—What can have made me ill?—Was there not something—some disappointment about my brother?—Is Walter come home?"

"Sir Walter is not here," replied Lady Norman; and the dryness of her tongue brought back the fatal truth to the recollection of the unhappy girl.

"Oh, mother!—I remember all now!" cried she, letting fall her head on her pillow. "I remember the dreadful sentence which deprived me of my senses. Were you sporting with me? were you trying my courage!—Say yes! Tell me that you wanted only to ascertain the extent of my affection for him!"

But Lady Norman could not make the desired declaration. She could only say—"Compose yourself, my dearest child!—unless you wish to procure the ruin of Walter Norman, be calm, be cautious!"

"It is true, then?" said Constance, faintly, raising her eyes towards Lady Norman—"It is true that I have lost my brother—my friend—my companion.—Oh, mother! why have you deprived me of the playmate of my childhood!") And greatly to her relief, tears now flowed from the burning eyes of the invalid.

Lady Norman felt that it was not the moment to enter upon her own vindication. "You are not yet able to listen to the details of this unhappy story," said she. "When I find you restored to self-control, you shall know all. It has required much, Constance, to bring from the lips of your mother an avowal which must lower her for ever in your estimation, as the abettor of an unpardonable fraud. But for years, my child, has the hand of heaven been heavy on me!—For years have I been assured that chastisement was awaiting me where it would be sorest to bear. It was in you, Constance, the child of my pride and my affection, that my guilt was to be punished. It was you who were to suffer—you who were to be made a sacrifice! I saw you becoming the slave of an unlawful affection, and rushed in to save you from destruction!"

"You are in error," replied Constance, with mournful composure. "So long as I believed Walter to be my brother, where was the danger for me?—It is only now that my trials are beginning."

"They must arise, then, from your own rashness," cried Lady Norman with a look of consternation. Walter has no more idea of the truth, than you had yesterday. He must never know it—never suspect it! He, at least, is guiltless of all reproach. It is your father and mother, Constance, who are to blame. Reflect that the slightest indiscretion on your part would betray your parents to infamy; and him, whom you loved as a brother, to a life of poverty and shame."

"I will be careful," murmured Miss Norman, with a wistful look of self-compassion.

"Walter is a foundling—an obscure foundling—sprung from the lowest grade of the French people, and wantonly adopted as heir of Selwood to gratify the family pride of your childless father! But he has been trained in honorable sentiments and principles of uprightness and integrity; and I am convinced that were the slightest suspicion of the truth to reach his mind, he would instantly reveal all, and renounce the honors unworthily forced on his adoption."

"He would do well," murmured Constance, in the same tone of unnatural composure.

"He would do well to obey the dictates of his conscience. But what right have I, pledged by a solemn oath to my husband to uphold this imposition, to sanction his being reared in luxury and honor, in the bosom of an affectionate family, in the respect of a multitude of dependants—to cause him, on his arriving at man's estate, to be cast out to ruin and disgrace?—I love Walter—I appreciate his excellence, his nobleness;—it was only while apprehending danger from your infatuation, Constance, that my heart was irritated against one who has grown up with me to maturity in the love and duty of a son.—I felt that I could not support the spectacle of his degradation! I promised the dying Sir Richard Norman to be a mother to the boy. It is not from my quiver that the arrow must be launched against his peace."

"He, at least, has done no wrong," faltered Constance.
"Nor must he suffer wrong. It is enough that I have violated my solemn engagement for the preservation of my child. She must not render me the origin of a deeper sin, by allowing the smallest hint, the slightest suggestion of this fatal secret to escape her lips."

"I promise, mother," replied Miss Norman.

"Whatever may betide—nothing—no earthly consideration—no prayer—no entreaty—must wring the confession from your lips?"

"So far I solemnly engage myself," replied Miss Norman. "But from the alteration of my manner, Walter will suspect that something is amiss. Exercise what care I may, I shall betray myself!—I cannot be with him as I have been!—My grief—my consciousness—will suggest inevitable changes. Every action of mine will be an avowal. Oh, mother! if you do not wish Walter to suspect the truth, take me hence—or the first half hour we pass together will show him that a fatal secret is weighing on my mind."

Lady Norman gazed with tender pity upon the agitated girl. "It is not to me, whose life has been embittered by duplicity that you need enlarge upon the difficulties of your task, she replied. "I know all you will have to suffer—all the efforts you will be required to make. But, setting your mother's welfare out of your view, I solemnly entrust to your keeping the memory of your father, and the peace and prosperity of Walter."

And hastening from the room, she left her victim to ponder upon these things. She felt that it would require time and reflection to subdue the agitated soul of her daughter to calmness. At present, Constance was to see no one. Solitude and silence must prepare her for her first interview with Sir Walter.

Already Matilda was beginning to tax herself with the perpetration of a new fault. She felt that, wrong as had been her silence, more culpable still was the confession which terror and excitement had at length extorted from her lips. She had lost the respect of her child—she had embittered the innocent life of Constance—and only to plunge her into new dangers!

"A fatality is upon me!"—cried she, in her hour of solitary self-reproach. "From the first moment to the last, every step I have taken in this iniquitous business has plunged me into deeper misery!—Having once set foot in the crooked path, it became impossible for me to regain the ways of happiness and truth."

Her compunction increased when, having exerted herself to rise, Constance joined her in the drawing-room, and attempted to resume her daily occupations. Miss Norman's cheek was ghastly, and her manner so bewildered, that her mother was confirmed in her belief that, in half an hour, Sir Walter would discover some fatal mystery to be oppressing the mind of his sister. Hoping that change of scene might be beneficial, Lady Norman proposed a drive, and labored in the course of their airing to promote desultory conversation. But it would not do!—Constance cast a half-reproachful, half-stupified look towards her; as if reproving her that at such a moment, she could revert to things indifferent. Despair was upon the young girl's mind, as if the remains of one tenderly beloved were constantly extended before her eyes!

All holy trusts, all earthly affections, seemed crumbling from her grasp. All that her life had been passed in loving and respecting was no longer to be respected—no longer to be loved. Her mother—her adored mother—had for years been occupied in deceiving the world and her;—her brother—her Walter. But from that point she recalled her thoughts with a cold and sickening shudder!—Little as she knew of the world, Constance felt that the false position in which she stood, was one unprecedented;—at variance with the spirit of the times and the march of human events. She had been singled out for sorrow—been singled out for probation;—perhaps for atonement. It was in vain she tried to rally her spirits to reply to Lady Norman's commonplace observations upon the road and the weather. "Do not talk to me, mother!" burst at length irrepressibly from her lips. "I cannot yet recover from this dreadful blow!—Leave me—leave me to myself!—"

Lady Norman discovered that her rash effort to retain the affections, and guard the welfare, of her child, was to be the source of deeper alienation between them!—She had rescued Constance from the familiarities of Sir Walter Norman;—she had consigned her to the clinging curse of gloomy and distracting thoughts!—

"To-morrow, perhaps, he may be here," faltered Miss Norman, when she took leave at night of her mother.

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“God keep him away! Hourly as I used formerly to pray for his return, do I now pray for his absence. I must have time to prepare myself for the meeting.”

And “time,” Sir Walter seemed well inclined to accord! The appointed week was prolonged to a fortnight; yet he neither came nor wrote. Constance, who for the first ten days had congratulated herself on the postponement of the trying hour, grew anxious during the last four. If the prognostications of the Tuxwell servants should prove true! If Walter should be attaching himself—nay, engaging himself to Lady Sophia Farleigh!—If he should come home only to announce that he was about to bring into the midst of them a bride—a wife—a being to engross for the future his whole fondness and regard!—If as her brother he had done this, Constance would have been consoled by the reflection that nature’s ties are never to be cast aside; that even over a husband and father, a sister’s claims remain valid. But this illusion was gone for ever!—It was not on such grounds she could now presume to appeal to his affections. Her rights were extinguished; her attachment was a mockery!—If Walter were to marry, her mother would doubtless remove from Selwood, and they must learn to visit that beloved home as strangers; and look upon that beloved being as the property of another.

At length, a letter arrived in his handwriting bearing the London postmark. It was addressed to Constance, but Constance had not courage to open it; and she wept in silence while her mother read aloud Sir Walter’s easy, frank, affectionate account of his proceedings in town; the attendance at Lincoln’s Inn exacted of him by Avesford; and the intimacy he was forming for his own pleasure with his relations the Morningtons.

“Since meeting them at dinner at the Farleighs,” he wrote, “nothing can exceed the attentions I have received from Lady Mornington. I do not cite our fine-lady cousin as the most faultless of human beings, my dear Constance; but considered as a mere woman of the world, she is agreeable and well-bred, and has taken infinite pains to conduce to my amusement. At her suggestion, I have engaged a house for the season in Park Lane; and leave it to your eloquence to prepare my mother for listening to my arguments in favor of your both sharing it with me after Easter, as soon as the ceremonies of attaining my majority have received honor due at Selwood Manor. Avesford promises that in a few days he will relinquish all further claim on my time; when I shall have the happiness of telling you, as I daily assure myself, how truly I am both yours and my mother’s most attached and faithful W. N.”

“He may be here perhaps to-morrow!”—was Constance’s only remark upon the letter.

“He has entangled himself in an intimacy with his greatest enemies!”—was Lady Norman’s further-sighted rejoinder. But at that moment their attention was claimed by an invitation from the Redelys, who were in the habit of assembling the neighborhood on occasion of a fair held from time immemorial upon Aronwell Green, enlivened by rustic sports and popular diversions. In a remote county, any pretext serves for bringing country neighbors together; and the Normans, Farleighs, Skaremidges, and a few others were annually to be found among the gay visitors of the Mid-lent fair.

“You will of course send an excuse?” said Miss Norman, who in her earlier days had been accustomed to look forward with glee to the humble fête.

“What pretext have we for an excuse?”—inquired her mother, justly considering that Constance would be less embarrassed by Sir Walter’s presence in a numerous company. “Walter may choose to attend a meeting to which so many boyish reminiscences are attached; and it will be thought strange if for the first time we absent ourselves.”

A note of acceptance was accordingly despatched; intimating that Sir Walter was not yet returned from town, but would probably be at Selwood in time to accompany Lady and Miss Norman to pass the day at the Forges. Constance made no further remonstrance. She cared little now whither she went, or by whom her cares were noted. Her attention was absorbed in watching for the unusual stir in the house that might at any moment announce the return of the absent master.

Yet, after all this caution, Sir Walter’s arrival was a surprise!—The mildness of the weather had tempted Lady Norman and her daughter into the park, so far as a little glen dotted with thorns, among which were usually to be found the first violets blown at Selwood;—and every former spring, Constance, full of hope and happiness, had been...
on the spot sooner than the violets, listening to the linnets singing on the bare sprays of the old thorn-trees, as if they too were watching for the upspringing of the early flowers. But Constance took no further heed of the weather or the season. On this her first visit to the glen, she found it sheeted with white and purple violets, and fragrant with their pure and transient perfume.

On arriving at the spot, and noting the profusion of its tassels of pale primroses, with the green sheaths of the orchis starting up under the knotted, rugged, old thorns, Constance did not stoop as usual to present one of the first spring-flowers to her mother. She looked listlessly around as if wondering why so much beauty should be lavished in vain, and was about to propose returning home, when a murmur of voices was heard upon the air, and in a moment Sir Walter and a stranger were seen approaching them. Constance and her mother were fortunately still standing in the hollow of the glen; for the former was incapable of stirring to meet the new-comers. Sir Walter, however, hurried down towards them in advance of his companion.

"Mother, I have brought my cousin Captain Norman to pay you a visit," cried he, seizing the extended hand of Lady Norman. "How have you been?—I am afraid you have thought me dilatory; but I assure you it was impossible to come before.—Captain Norman! My mother and sister."

And while Lord Mornington's son-and-heir was performing his ceremonious salutations and lispig his far-fetched civilities, Sir Walter threw his arms around the waist of Constance, and, pressing her to his bosom, imprinted an affectionate kiss upon her lips.

"Don't scold me for having delayed so long in town!"—cried he, attributing her recoil to displeasure. "I assure you, my dearest girl, I would gladly have come last week—if she were indisposed. And now that she is well—quite well!—let me sec that you are in good health."

"I am not very well," faltered Miss Norman, her eyes dim with tears and scarcely able to sustain herself. "This is the first time I have been out for many days, and we were on the point of returning to the house."

Without another word of inquiry, Sir Walter drew her arm within his own; and supporting her whole weight upon it, assisted her up the steep ascent. He did not so much as look round to ascertain how Lady Norman was getting on with her unexpected guest; or whether her inquiries after Lord and Lady Mornington had brought them into a train of conversation.

"My dear sister—how weak you are—how nervous!"—said he, in cordial tones of affection at once welcome and painful to the ear of his companion. "Have you had any advice, Constance?—Were you ever before subject to these attacks?—Why did not my mother write to me?—Had I known that you were indisposed, not all the guardians in the world, nor all the lawyers in Westminster Hall, should have detained me in London!—Lean on me, Constance. You breathe so short, dearest, that I almost fear you have ventured too far from home.—Have you been suffering from cold?—Is your chest delicate?—Let me pin your shawl closer over your chest."

Nearly as incoherent as were Walter's interrogations, were the replies of poor Constance. She said that she was recovering from a feverish attack—that she was better now—that she should soon be quite well—quite herself again! But as she uttered this promise, tears dropped from her eyes. She could scarcely support the excess of kindness with which the unfortunate Walter was greeting his alienated sister.

"Had I dreamed of your indisposition, I would not of course have brought down Norman with me," said he, as they proceeded together slowly towards the house. "But the Morningtons have been so civil to me in town, and are so anxious to be on the best terms with us and to offer you every protection on your introduction into society, that when Captain Norman mentioned one day at dinner his desire to see Selwood Manor, I could not refuse myself the pleasure of introducing him to his venerable ancestors and living relations. "Entre nous," continued Sir Walter, lowering his voice—"Norman is a desperate fine gentleman, and disagreeable enough to those who do not take him in the right way. But he is by no means such an ass or such a coxcomb as he pretends to be."

"You do not give a very favorable picture of him," said Constance, trying to rally her spirits.

"I mean to secure myself against two evils, my dear, by
letting you into the secret. I don't want you to fall in love
with him—and I don't want you to fall out with him."

"I promise you to do neither," replied Constance, gra-
dually cheered by the sound of Sir Walter's gladsome voice.
"But what are we to do with your fine gentleman?—To-
morrow, mamma has promised to spend the day and dine
at the Forges?"

"And why not?"—cried young Norman. "What a re-
freshing novelty for a man who has lived enshrined, like a
pagod, in the inner sanctuary of the temple of exclusivisml
Norman has never heard people talk above their breath,
unless his colonel giving the word of command; nor seen
young ladies move a muscle of their sweet countenances,
except an occasional glance of horror at some tiger presented
to them as a partner. Old Redely, with his slaps on the
back, and an appetite that could ' drink up eisel, eat a cro­
codile,' will appear to him a monster worth visiting the
Prairies to behold; while as to your pretty, prattling Amy,.with what her mamma characteristically calis ' her cherry-
clack always a-going,' he will conclude her to be wound up
every morning for exhibition, like Bautte's enamel conju-
rers and tumblers."

"You will venture then to include your friend in the par-
ty?" demanded Miss Norman.

"Certainly. But call him not friend, Hal, an' thou
lovest me!—Friend is a name I reserve for my most fa-
miliar of familiars. It is not every cousin one wishes to call
a friend. You and I, dearest, are friends as completely as
though we were not brother and sister. But had Amy
Redely been my twin-bom, I could never have made a
friend of her!—"

Involuntarily Constance replied by a grateful pressure of
the arm on which she was leaning. But the movement was
one of forgetfulness, or rather of reminiscence. Next mo-
toment the impulse was repeated and atoned by a crimson
blush;—and precisely when this accusing testimony was
mantling on her cheek, did Lady Norman and their visiter
come up with them, as they entered together the swing-gate
of the lawn.

By some strange association, there occurred at that mo-
tment to Matilda's mind the singular scene which—returning
from that very walk eighteen years before, previous to the
birth of Constance—had occurred between herself, Sir

Richard Norman, and Ghita, the Italian nurse of the sup-
positious heir of Selwood!—

CHAPTER XII.

Du cinquant—des graces—une nuance d'esprit sur un grand fond
d'arrogance ; telle est l'essence du fat de nos jours.

Tableau de Paris.

"That worthy with the peaked beard, who stands
opposite watching you from his frame, as if expecting you to
ask him to take wine with him, has the honor, Norman, to be
your ancestor and namesake,"—said Sir Walter to Captn
Norman—at the close of a sociable family-dinner in the Sel­
wood eating-room, the key-stones of whose venerable oaken
ceiling were carved with the family crest, and the massive
old plate of whose side-board was profusely wrought with
the same device. "Allow me to present to you Sir Giles
Norman, Knight, master of the revels to Harry the Eighth ;
whose effigy yonder, according to the showing of half a
dozcn county histories, is an original by Holbein—accord­
ing to my poor judgment, a miserable copy."

"I am no judge of pictures," replied the gentle Captain,
whose alias of the 'Spring-chicken' was current throughout
the three regiments of guards. "At the grove, which is a
mere citizen's box, we have only a few hunting sketches,
and Gilray's caricatures. But were I to possess a gallery,
I should prefer having it filled with copies. One
has some chance of keeping copies in the family; whereas the chan-
ces are ten to one in favor of Raphael's or Claude's finding
their way to Phillips' or Christie's in the course of half a
dozcn generations. Now-a-days people are wise enough
to look upon their pictures and timber, like their exchequer
bills, as a tangible investment."

The tone and phraseology of Captain Norman were so
new to Constance and her mother, that though he paused
for a reply, neither of them ventured on a remark.

"And yet," said Sir Walter, "one cannot help admiring
the almost Roman feeling which inspires so many of the
half-ruined Italian nobles, to preserve the treasures of art in their mildewed marble palaces, while they subsist in frugal self-denial upon lentil porridge, and muddy wine.

"There is nothing I can help more easily!"—lisped the captain, sipping his claret. "I plead guilty to a total want of sympathy in heroic madness, magnanimity, Roman feeling, or whatever you and the tragedy-makers are pleased to call it. These high-minded high mightinesses would lead a happier life by selling the chef-d'œuvres they cannot afford to keep, to the nobles of our nation bouilli-quières, who can and thus be enabled to find themselves in food and fuel. In my opinion, personal comfort is a pleasanter companion for one's threescore-years-and-ten, than a whole cohort of aguish fine sentiments."

"Your edition of Benthamism, then, advocates the greatest happiness of the greatest number of years, eh?" said Walter, amused by his cousin's affectation. "But I am really shocked to find you so degenerate a Norman!—My conscience will compel me to marry and cut off the entail, to prevent your sending the lameos Selwood Titian to the auction mart the first time the loor aces are against you."

At this menace, the captain smiled what was, in fact, customary, fastidious, smile; which Lady Norman interrupted into a peculiar and most significant sneer.

"The family tree, you know, has only two acorns left upon it," continued the unreserved Walter. "Constance, of course, counting for nothing as an unprofitable branch."

"You forget, my dear sir, my Trieste uncle's semi-Italian brood; to say nothing of my Yankee uncle's seven goodly sons, who are selling n'ads and treacle dry stores on the banks of the Mississippi," replied the Spring-chicken, languidly. "Were you to vanish from the face of the earth, there is every prospect of legitimate heirs to Selwood for centuries to come!"

And the captain again smiled what appeared to Lady Norman a malignant sneer.

"Of the Trieste Normans, we know nothing," resumed the spring-chicken, after a pause. "My mother is the last woman in the world to keep up family connections. Familyism is at best a parvenu virtue. It may be a proof of tact in new people to look after the rooting and shooting of their offsets, to establish a name; but a mighty inconvenient thing for people of a certain standing. In ancient houses, as in old trees, the branches are apt to decay at the extremities. It is only among very great people one ever hears such a word as poor relations."

"You have not that excuse for disowning your Italian and American cousins," said Walter, almost provoked by his coxcombry; "for I understand they are immensely wealthy."

"Are they?—I never asked.—I know nothing at all about them," replied the Spring-chicken. "I consider it a serious misfortune to belong to what is called a good family, with a genealogy extant; or like the balance sheet of a haberdasher's stock-book, peerage, a baronetage, or gentryage, to record the amount of one's kindred, and entitle uncles and aunts, whose existence one might otherwise ignore, to inflict their impertinent advice. It is owing to the family pride of an idiotic old Lady Audley, whom, but for one of these family catalogues, my father would forget was his sister, that I was not made partner in an ale-brewery, instead of an ensign in the guards. The lucky dog who took my place, is realising ten thousand a-year and keeps hunters at Melton; while I have ten thousand pence and a pony!—Had I been a Smith, Brown, Green, White, or Thompson, instead of a Norman of Selwood, I had by this time been a rogue in grain, and a happy man!—Who knows?—Perhaps I might have risen to be an alderman!—"

Unable to distinguish between the jest and earnest of her superfine cousin, Constance represented to her mother, on repairing to the drawing-room, the danger of hazarding his company at the Forges the following day.

"I have already sent off a messenger with a request for permission," replied Lady Norman, not sorry to find her daughter's attention engrossed by the absurdities of her cousin. "Amy and her mother will delight to make the acquaintance of one who will appear to them the type of London fashion."

"But why not send an excuse for the whole party?"—inquired Sir Walter, on the arrival of an answer from the Forges written with blue ink on embossed paper, and sealed with pea-green wax. "Constance is scarcely strong enough for the exertion—are you, darling?—Constance would be much better at home!—"

"It will be impossible now to excuse ourselves," said
Lady Norman, coldly. "The Redleys are friendly neighborly people, who would take our absence to heart."

"My sister, at least, need not be fagged to death to please them," cried Sir Walter. "You, my dear mother, and Norman, might drive over together; and I will join you at dinner, if Constance should not like to be left here quite alone."

"Indeed I am well enough to accompany mamma," faltered Miss Norman, with glowing cheeks, aware how little this arrangement would please her mother. "I promised myself much pleasure in doing the honors of Avonwell fair to Captain Norman."

This remark, addressed in deprecation to her mother by the trembling girl, was received with a gratified bow by the guardsman; who, unused to bestow much attention on girls, had hitherto scarcely deigned a glance at his country cousin. He now looked gratefully towards her, and admitted that she was as pretty as discriminating. Her compliment lent him eyes to discover the dazzling fairness of her complexion, and the Madonna-like expression of her countenance. "With a little fashioning," mused the Spring-chicken, "the poor girl might pass muster in London. That head and those curls would produce a sensation in a ground-tier opera box."

And faithless to his London principles, he forthwith took a chair beside her, to determine whether the accomplishments of her mind corresponded with the beauties of her person.

"May I ask whether you give the preference this year to 'Flowers of Loveliness,' or 'Gems of Beauty?'"—said he, in his most mincing tone; "or whether you remain constant to the poor dear 'Keepsake'?"

Miss Norman admitted, with unblushing face, that she had seen neither of them. "My aunt Avesford once sent me one of the Annuals," said she; "but nothing pleases me which is so unreal. Such books remind me of the enchanter's rope of sand."

"Thank Heaven she has no taste for literature!"—was the guardsman's inward remark. "I would as soon make love to the black gentleman, as to a blue lady; and in these scribbling times, one is never safe. My mother's maid brought out a fashionable novel last year, under the title of 'A Dowager Duchess.' May I inquire, Miss Norman, how you like the new blonde?" he continued, resuming his catechism. "Do you prefer blonde argentée, or the massive dentelle d'argent?"

"I never heard of either," replied Constance, unabashed. "Thank Heaven she is not an élégante!" again mused the captain. "Half the men of my acquaintance are ruined by milliners' bills! Will you allow me to ask which you consider the most humorous?" he resumed, aloud—"Dantan's Statuettes, or H. B.'s Sketches?"

"You will think me very ignorant, I fear, when I own that I have not seen them," answered Miss Norman with a smile.

"You fear!—How I reverence such ignorance!"—cried her cousin, with real or pretended rapture. "In these times, young ladies are so wonderfully knowing, so apt to break into bon-mots and calembours before they break through their leading-strings, that it is luxurious to meet with any thing really unsophisticated. I am grateful for my happy fortune in making your acquaintance previous to your first season. By July next, my dear Miss Norman, you will probably possess a whole wilderness of annuals—have learned the price of blonde—and placed Dantan's D'Orsay on your chimney piece!—"

"Not if all this acquirement of knowledge is dependent upon her quitting Selwood," said Lady Norman, coming to the assistance of Constance, whom she saw puzzled by the strangeness of her cousin.

"I thought I understood from Lady Mornington that you had engaged Lady Margaret's house in Park Lane? said Captain Norman, turning towards Sir Walter.

"For six months; and I trust we shall all be settled there by the middle of May," he replied, looking up from a letter he was reading.

"Not all; you must really excuse me, Walter," said Lady Norman. "I am not desirous that Constance should make her appearance in the London world."

"And in what other world, my dear madam, is there any possibility of moving?"—interposed Captain Norman, as if really asking for information sake. "Where do you intend Miss Norman to live?—with whom?—for what?—"

"With her family; and I trust to ensure happiness to herself and them," replied Lady Norman, in a more subdued voice.
"But, my dear mother, I engaged this house solely with
a view to your pleasure and my sister's advantage!" argued Walter, vexed at so strange a resolution on the part of Lady Norman.

"It is not yet three months since I heard you declare
your intention of remaining at Selwood till the grouse season," replied Lady Norman, coolly.

"But I had not then learned from Lady Mornington,
Lady Farleigh, and others of our friends, the necessity for
my sister being presented, in order to appear in the world
with the distinction becoming her position in life," said Walter, stoutly. "Nothing but my views for Constance
would have determined me to pass a season in London
previous to taking my seat in parliament."

"I thank you for your care of her welfare," replied
Lady Norman, almost ungraciously, "I hope I am not
likely to neglect it; but I have no intention of taking her to
town."

Netted by the positive tone assumed by her ladyship,
yet unwilling to startle their guest by a family dispute (the
first he had ever been disposed to attempt with his mother),
Sir Walter deferred to a more convenient season the argu-
ments he intended to offer in favor of his plans. While
Lady Norman resolved to disappoint a project which would
throw her daughter hourly into the company of Sir Walter
in all the propriety of a London house, Sir Walter was
determined that either Constance and his mother should ac-
company him to town, or that he would remain with them
at Selwood.

Next day, he attempted to visit Constance in her dress-
ing-room, before breakfast, to exact a promise of co-opera-
tion in his attempts. But the door was closed against him;
and the maid answered his knock with information that
Miss Norman would meet him presently in the breakfast-
room. It was impossible to obtain a moment of private in-
terview; and immediately after breakfast they set out for the Forges.

"Take your leave of trees and vegetation, Captain Nor-
mansaid Constance—as the barouche wound along a
lane, the sloping banks of which were clothed with plant-
tations, in which the varied hues, caused by the budding of
the underwood—the red dog-wood rods and green shoots of
the larch trees—supplied the brightness of summer foliage.

"This shelving lane, with its wild hyacinths and lilies of the
valley, is the last pleasant spot between Selwood and
Avonwell. A step beyond it, and you will discover the
influence of the Forges.—See! The road is already mended
with scoriæ. Half a mile further, and the evil spell has
done its worst."

And, according to her indications, the stranger perceived
the trees gradually diminish into bushes, and the dwarfed
bushes finally disappear. Then followed a host of sickly
pastures, disfigured by an atmosphere of that disagreeable,
calcinated nature, emanating in a less degree from every
brick-field; and next (the Forges being that day at rest in
honor of the fair, and the sky consequently pure from its
usual clouds of smoke and vapor,) they descried, on the
top of a naked hill, the soil of which looked as if extracted
from the crater of Vesuvius, the huge, square, family
man-
sion of Mr. Redely, of dingy red picked out with white;
covered with tall, slender, irregular chimneys, like an
asparagus bed running to seed. Around it neither tree nor
shrub was visible. Had a swarm of locusts passed over the
land, it could not have been more completely denuded.
Some attempt had been made to coax a few laures into
growth, in the fine gray dust and ashes surrounding the
paved court. But the laures knew better. The domain
of the Fire King might be a cool and humid retreat, com-
pared with the scorched wilderness called Avonwell House
by the Redelys, and the Forges by every one else in the
county.

"What an Avernus!"—cried the Captain, as, winding
round the knoll on which the house was perched, they
overlooked on the declivity below the range of furnaces usu-
ally glowing with flame, but now exhibiting only their
blackened sides and iron chimneys. "Were I master of
Selwood, I would not atlow such a defacement to exist within
five miles of me—I would buy the fellow out!—"

"I fear he is quite as able to dispose of me;—and as I
happen to have two uncles who consider this spot the only
interesting feature in the neighborhood," observed Sir Wal-
ter, "one of them being proprietor of a manufactury twice
as unsightly as this,) the objection would come with an ill
grace.

"But the factory to which you allude," said the Spring-
chicken, "is probably situated at Birmingham, Manches-
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ter, Sheffield, or some other city of abominations. — There
are and ought to be condemned spots set apart for these
disgraces! People have no right to go about defiling the
face of respectable counties and ruining the exquisite scene-
ry of Derbyshire or Worcestershire, by furnaces and engine-
chimneys."

"When first I came to Selwood, instead of the Forges at
Avonwell, there was only a trace that something of the
kind had formerly existed," observed Lady Norman. "It
was a great source of regret to us when, on our return from
the continent, we found a favorite spot thus miserably dis-
figured."

"That must be one-and-twenty years ago," said Captain
Norman, after a moment's reflection. "How long did you
remain abroad after the birth of Sir Walter?"

"About two years," replied Lady Norman, her cheeks
flushing crimson at the inquiry.

"Miss Norman, then, was born in England?" he per-
sisted.

"Yes—in England."

"At Selwood Manor?"

"Since you are curious on the subject," said Lady Nor-
man, hastily, not knowing whether to resent his pertinacity,
or turn it into a jest—"Lady Mornington is best able to sat-
tify you. She was in London at the time, and visited
Constance while lying in her cradle."

"But she did not visit Sir Walter while lying in his!"—
said Captain Norman—turning sharply round with a look
in which Lady Norman's conscience read a thousand accu-
sations, and which caused the blood to recede from the face
of Miss Norman.

"That was very uncivil of her—a great disrespect to the
Heir of Selwood!"—cried Sir Walter, laughing, and wholly
free from the embarrassment evinced by his mother and sis-
ter. "For if I remember, Lord and Lady Mornington in
formed me that they were in Paris the whole time of my
poor father's sojourn there."

"Not the whole time," observed Captain Norman.

"You will find that they quitted France before the heir of
Selwood made his appearance."

The expression, though by no means unusual, seemed to
convey a particular meaning to the ear of Lady Norman.

"Ay, ay!—I remember!—I was born during the Hun-
dred Days, when English, Russ, and Pruss, were twinkling
of poor Nap's expiring star!—I fancy my father and mother
were the only persons who stayed to face the enemy."

"Not quite!"—replied Norman, gravely. "There were
still a few fellow-countrymen on the spot, to watch over so
momentous an event as the arrival of the heir of the Nor-
mans!"

Fortunately for Lady Norman, the carriage having at that
moment reached the tumult of the fair, with its tin trump-
etes, wooden rattle, drums, fifes, men, women, and chil-
dren—the four spirited horses could with difficulty be held
in by the coachman; and the grimy population of the
manufacturing district not recognising the carriage, imme-
diately raised a cry of "shame," and put themselves in
posure of defence.

"Make your fellow push on through the midst of them!"—
said Captain Norman with a languid glance over the
heads of a mob which, even in the only holiday of their
year, retained their claim to the title of the great unwashed.

"Bid him whip his horses over a few of them to teach
them better manners!"

Happily for the tender bones of the Spring-chicken, his
counsels were unheeded by the dingy tribe agitating them-
selves round the carriage.

"Go gently, Thomas!"—was Sir Walter's counter order to
the coachman. "At the top of the green we will get out;
then take the carriage round the back way to Mr. Redely's,
without returning thither. Had I known the road
was likely to be so crowded, my good friends, we would
not have attempted to make our way."

A loud huzza hailed the delivery of this conciliatory ad-
dress; extorted by the pale face and agitated demeanor of
Constance, which Sir Walter attributed to the threatening
aspect of the mob.

"Long life to Sir Walter Norman, and the old house of
Selwood!" cried a few of the foremost malcontents, who
had been examining the armorial bearings on the traces they
were preparing to cut. And while the people shouted, and
the horses gave renewed signs of disapprobation, Captain
Norman secretly commented upon the sneaking spirit of
Sir Walter, who had neglected so glorious an opportunity
of trampling down half a dozen filthy mechanics presuming
to dispute his title to the crown of the causeway. It was
not a pupil of Lady Mornington’s school who was likely to have patience with such pitiful subservience—such cringing to the sovereignty of the people.—

“*How pale and nervous you both look!*”—cried Mrs. Redely, as she welcomed Constance and her mother to the gay marquee appropriated to her party in the meadow devoted, by the permission of her husband, to the sports of the day. “*I suppose you’ve been frightened with those spirit horses?—Will you take anything?—A glass of sherry, or old Tudy Madeira?—Do!—Well, if you want, the foot-races had better begin. The people have put them off half an hour for us. The Skaremidges came early; and so did the Smiths and Greens.—But where’s Amy?—Amy, my dear!—Here’s Miss Norman and her ladyship, and Sir Walter and the captain. Set seats in front of the marquee.*”

And the fair Amy came curtseying forward like a country actress, over-dressed and over-civil.

“*Is that young lady about to enhance the sports of the day by favoring us with a performance on the rope?*” whispered Captain Norman, amazed that a bonnet and feathers, calculated for the meridian of Kensington Gardens, should be thrown away upon a country fair.

“*Why do you inquire so?*” replied Miss Norman gravely, suspecting, and with truth, that Amy’s finery was intended for the captivation of Sir Walter.

“*Because she is so much smarter than a lady ought to be, beyond the boundary of Hyde Park Corner. There is something meretricious in gaudy raiment among green trees and hawthorn hedges.*”

“But as we have no green trees just now, and our hawthorn hedges are not in leaf, Miss Redely’s gay dress serves to animate the scene,” said Constance, glancing at her own simple mourning habit. “Besides, neither Amy nor I are ever likely to enter the boundary of Hyde Park Corner. Such dissipations as fairs and races form the extent of our opportunity for being fine.”

“For pity’s sake do not class yourself with that young person,” cried the captain, affectedly; and with respect to London, rely upon mine and Sir Walter’s influence to secure your season in town. My mother shall write to Lady Norman. All shall be settled to your satisfaction.”

“If you mean by securing my visit to London, believe me, I have not the slightest inclination to quit Selwood,” replied Constance, feeling it necessary to uphold her mother’s determination.

“My dear Sir Walter, pray come hither and listen to Miss Norman’s extraordinary protestations against London,” cried the captain, seizing his cousin’s arm, and tearing him away from the smiles of the fair Amy.

“*Do you imagine that I ever consult the rebellious little puss?*” cried Sir Walter, gaily.

“*Who gave you leave, Constance, child, to have an opinion of your own?—I shall dispose of you as I please. Till lawfully married, you are as much my goods and chattels, as the chairs, tables, and joint-stools of Selwood Manor.*”

“*Miss Norman, why do you allow him to talk so!*” cried Amy, joining frizzantly in the conversation. “*If I had a brother, he should do nothing but what pleased and suited me.*”

“*Walter never does anything but what pleases and suits me,*” burst involuntarily from the lips of Constance.

“*There’s a declaration!—You quite spoil him!*—Lady Norman, here is Miss Norman assuring Sir Walter that he is all perfection. If she goes on flattering him at that rate, I’m sure I congratulate his wife.*”

Lady Norman looked haughtily displeased. Taking the arm of her blushing daughter, she led her away towards old Lady Skaremidge; but as Captain Norman still remained within hearing, she limited her reproof to—“*How often must I remind you that there is nothing so ill-bred as for families to group together in mixed company, as if no other person present were worth associating with!*”

Poor Constance proved her susceptibility to the reproof by devoting herself throughout the remainder of the morning to the Skaremidges, and their less interesting country neighbors. She saw no more of Sir Walter. Sir Robert Skaremidge, old Redely, and an elderly Smith and Thompson or two, soon hurried him off, according to country neighborhood custom, to hold their private petition sessions for deciding upon the malpractices of the petit sessions—grievances of small tithes, tolls, trusts, turnpikemen, and other minute displeasures;—while the young baronet, moved by the buoyant spirits of his age to escape from the synod of elders, and exercise his observation upon the tastes and dispositions of the populace, with a view to providing enter-
tainments for the ensuing festivities at Selwood, showed evident tokens of impatience, which Lady Norman, whose eyes were seldom diverted from his movements, attributed to his eagerness to rejoin her daughter.

She passed a miserable morning. Thanks to the obsequiousness of the world, she was oftener entertained with panegyrics of Sir Walter than with any other topic. Her country neighbors fancied themselves sympathising in the pride of the mother of an only son, by enlarging unceasingly on his perfections. The Skaremidges had their tale to tell of his popularity in Germany. Their dear Lionel’s letters were full of the regrets excited by his speedy departure from Munich, and the admiration which, during his brief sojourn, he had called forth. Constance looked piteously towards her mother, to remind her that it was no fault of hers these praises were heaped upon Walter; and during the ensuing hour, spent in pretending to be amused by the grotesqueness and humor of the country sports, they had to undergo the congratulations and compliments of every acquaintance present, upon his return in such good looks and charming spirits.

For Sir Walter, having at length extricated himself from the coils of that many-headed hydra, a knot of pottering country-neighbors, was now the life of the fair. He did not choose to remain a fastidious spectator, lest the people should fancy themselves stared at like wild beasts. While Captain Norman, leaning over Constance, fixed his eyeglass upon their pastimes, Walter was among them, giving prizes to be run for—purses to be wrestled for—and dispensing fairings with a liberal hand to all the fullblown belles of the fair. An offering of some kind or other had been already made to every lady belonging to Mrs. Redely’s party; but the only object of any value to be found at Avonwell—a workbox richly mounted—was presented to Constance. Every one applauded. Every one agreed that, in these times, young men are sad brutes to their sisters; and assured Lady Norman that in this as in all else, her son was a pattern for the rising generation!

“I do not absolutely approve of Sir Walter’s manners!” whispered the Captain to Miss Norman. “There is a fitness of things even in buying gingerbread at a fair. He is behaving to-day in a manner highly commendable at an election—but his deportment is too candidatorial for any ordinary occasion. As a member, it is right to court popularity; but it is infra dig. to seek it as a man. I am of opinion that he degrades himself by going in a roundabout; and that all this distribution of gingerbread is trivial and out of place.”

In spite of her griefs, Constance found it impossible to resist the gravity with which this oracular speech was delivered; and Amy, imagining like most ill-bred people that others were as ill-mannered as herself, immediately concluded that Miss Norman’s merriment was excited by something amiss in the arrangements of the day.

It would have been sinful, however, to find fault with the cordial hospitality of the Redelys. As soon as the fair began to grow riotous, the party crossed the meadows towards the Sofatara of Avonwell House; and the diversions of the day concluded with a dinner which might have done honor to more distinguished establishments. The Spring-chicken was amazed to perceive that the savages, upon whose desert land he was thus accidentally wrecked, participated in those luxuries and improvements of the table which he had conceived to be the privilege of his elect circle.

“How one learns to despise and overthrow one’s idols as one advances in life!”—said he sententiously. “Among the few objects remaining to my veneration was a well appointed dinner-table. And here is an old Worcestershire cyclop, who drops his hs and wears leather gaiters, with a service nearly as good as Sefton’s!—It is enough to disgust one with human life!”

Resolved to devote her attention exclusively to her cousin so as to avoid incurring the reprehensions of Lady Norman, Constance rejoiced that the ready flow of his flippance saved her all necessity for more than a monosyllable in reply.

Acustomed to the glories of conquest, Lady Mornington’s son thought nothing more natural than that the rustic beauty should have fallen a victim to his attractions. Nevertheless, his vanity was gratified. Constance was the prettiest girl he had transfixed for some time past. She was well born, for she was his kith and kin; and in possession of a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, with good expectations. Before they rose from table, the Spring-chicken admitted to himself that, were it possible for a man of his standing about town to perpetrate matrimony, he might almost permit himself to think a second time of his cousin!
CHAPTER XIII.

Oh, not my brother!—yet uneasy—
God! am I left alone on earth!—Byron.

Weary as Constance soon grew of Captain Norman's laborious trifling, she was not sorry to find his stay at Selwood Manor prolonged beyond the four or five days originally specified for the visit. So long as he was there, Lady Norman felt perfectly at her ease. So long as he was there, Constance was at her ease also. With a third person interposed between herself and Sir Walter, she could enjoy his society as heretofore.

The weather was propitious for riding. Spring was budding in every hedge; and day after day, the little party set forth to display to the heir presumptive some favorite point of the scenery of Selwood. With the exception of Lady Norman, all were in high spirits. Sir Walter elated with the unmixed happiness of his position; his cousin with the dawning excitement of a passion which almost dispelled the artificiality of his habits and conversation; and Constance with the joy of sharing the society of a person tenderly beloved. Her mother was the only person who looked forward with trembling towards the clods suspended on the verge of their sunshiny horizon!—

"You had much better remain with us, my dear Norman, till our grand celebration at the end of the month," said Sir Walter to his cousin, one morning, as they returned from rabbit-shooting, followed at a distance by the keepers. "In ten days comes Easter, when you will certainly not choose to be in town; and my birth-day falls in the week following."

"I have been a week here already, my dear fellow," said Captain Norman. "When I asked you to introduce me to Selwood, I did not intend to set up my staff under your roof-tree!"

"You could not foresee what inducements you might find. But if you persist in returning to town on Thursday,

I shall know that you are afraid to trust your Toryism in the same house with Avesford. I am convinced you hate my uncle as a radical, and despise him as a rotter."

"On the contrary," replied Norman—rousing his courage for a vast effort—"I should be gratified to make the acquaintance of one of the most eminent men of the day. I have heard wonders of Mr. Avesford's value from Lady Audley, who lives near him; and he was devilish civil and hospitable to little Quickset, of ours, when he was recruiting in his neighborhood."

"Behold Dalhousie, the great god of war, Lieutenant-Colonel to the Earl of Marl!" cried Sir Walter, laughing. "But no matter whether his politeness to little Quickset, or his legislative eminence have succeeded in soothing your animosities; only stay and humanise among us. You will have plenty of time to perform quarantine and wipe the guilty spot from off your hand before the commencement of the London season. Fii d'honneur homme, I will never reveal in decent society that you rusticated more than a day or two with your country cousin!—" "Avesford is guardian to Miss Norman, I think, as well as to yourself?" inquired the Spring-chicken, trying to look unconcerned.

"Yes, to both of us; and a kinder or more conscientious never existed," cried Sir Walter. "If you knew what pains he has taken to make me see things with my own eyes, and judge matters with my own judgment, instead of playing the pacha with me;—keeping down my selfish pride and encouraging only a proper consciousness of my position and its responsibilities. If ever I am worth more than this dockweed," cried he, whipping off the first green head that presented itself, "it will be thanks to Avesford!"

I do us the justice to ascribe something to the influence of honorable ancestorship, or Newmarket goes for nothing!" remonstrated Captain Norman. "But, bridge, and spur, have done their part, perhaps, but blood was the foundation of all!" And the diminutive captain, whose air and proportions resembled those of a bantam chick, drew up with an attempt to prove by the outward and visible signs of aristocracy, that he was able to count quarterings with any German prince of the empire; while Norman, six feet high,
and endowed with the form of Theseus, presented the model of a demigod rather than of the outcast of a foundling hospital. No one, accidentally viewing the two cousins, would have suspected that the puny captain was the legitimate heir of Selwood;—the noble Walter an ignoble interloper.

Captain Norman's next topic of discourse was more to the taste of his companion. He began suddenly to enlarge upon the merits of Miss Norman.

"Yet according to your theory," cried Sir Walter, "Constance's pretensions ought not to stand on the same line with those of Lord Farleigh's insignificant daughters?"

"You totally misapprehend me!" cried his cousin. "The Farleighs are nobodies. The Farleighs would scarcely obtain admission into a German chapter. The first Lord Selsdon was a city knight of the time of James the first; when the Normans of Selwood Manor were almost in their decadence."

"And yet an English earl with such an estate as his..."

"My dear Sir Walter," interrupted the Captain, "I know an English earl, with twice the Selsdon rent-roll, whose grandfather was an Irish soap-boiler!"

"What then?—Are not all honors bubbles!" cried Sir Walter, laughing heartily at his cousin's vehemence, while Captain Norman seized the opportunity of his jocularity to revert to his lovely cousin.

"After all," said he, "perhaps Lady Norman is prudent in declining to take your sister to town. She would lose so lovely a creature the first season; and an only daughter is not so easily parted with. A single subscription at Almack's would secure a match for Miss Norman."
man has not yet seen the man she would be disposed to marry."

"Ne gagez pas!" replied Captain Norman, looking almost as simple as the heroine whose words he quoted.

"Do you empower me to ask her the question?" demanded his cousin.

"Thank you. It was perhaps rash to hazard the insertion of my name in her list of rejections next to that of the Marquis of St. Aubyn. Besides, Lord Mornington, though as little apt as most men to interfere in the affairs of his wife or son, might think it necessary to play paternal, and resent my having taken such a step without previously consulting him."

"Lord Mornington, I should imagine, would scarcely object to Miss Norman of Selwood, as a daughter-in-law?" observed Sir Walter, proudly.

"He might object to having a daughter-in-law at all."

"Then why apply to me till you had obtained his sanction to your addresses?"—cried Walter with increasing irritation. "Did you fancy the honor would be too great for our fortitude if it burst upon us too suddenly?"

"I hoped you would give me such encouragement," replied Norman, with gentlemanly forbearance, "as might justify my applying for the consent of Lord and Lady Mornington. I hoped you would, at least, show so much courtesy as to say that you did not object to me as a brother-in-law."

"I have spoken hastily," cried Sir Walter, with his usual warm-hearted candor. "But the truth is, I cannot readily reconcile myself to the prospects of any match for my sister. Constance is every thing to me; and I have made up my mind that, so long as she remains single, I will indulge no thoughts of marriage. Where shall I ever find so sweet a companion—so docile, so affectionate? In comparison with my sister, all women appear to me coarse in person and mind;—and Selwood would become a wilderness, were she taken from it to preside over a house of her own!"

"Nevertheless, it is an event that must occur," said Captain Norman, coolly.

"Why must it? Are there not thousands of examples, especially in Catholic families, of women preferring a single life?"

"Miss Norman is too lovely and too womanly to devote herself to a vocation so unnatural as that of a lay nun," said the Captain. "Be assured, however, that you have said enough to determine me to pause ere I open negotiations with Lord Mornington."

"I—my dear fellow!—What have I said?—Nothing, I hope, to cast any disparagement upon your pretensions?—You are at liberty to address my sister—at liberty to repeat to her every syllable I have uttered—at liberty to—"

"We are both of us getting a little warm," observed Captain Norman, affecting to recover his self-possession, "which is not surprising, considering the glowing nature of our subject. At all events, suffer me to beg that it may be dropped for the present. It is my intention to depart for London early to-morrow. When you hear from me again, I shall have learned whether it is in my father's power or pleasure, to place me in a position entitling me to offer proposals likely to effect an alteration in your views touching the disposal of our lovely Constance. By the way, had we not better discharge our guns before we approach too near the house?"

Sir Walter understood this as a peremptory dismissal of the question. His blood was boiling. He could scarcely command himself to behave with common civility to Captain Norman in the space that intervened between them and the house.

"As I depart so soon, it would be but decent, I believe, to ride as far as Scarwell Park, and make my excuses for not dining with your friend, Sir Robert Skaremidge, on Saturday?"—said Captain Norman, perceiving by the turret clock of the offices that two awkward hours were still to elapse previous to the ringing of the dressing-bell. But Sir Walter, though approving the proposal, and accompanying his cousin to the stables to order one of his finest horses brought round and his own groom to be in attendance, said not a word of bearing him company.

No sooner had the discomfited visitor attired himself in visiting guise and departed, than Sir Walter, finding his mother engaged with a visit from the old maiden sister of the vicar of Selwood, put his head unceremoniously into the drawing-room and invited his sister to walk with him."

"Constance! I want to speak to you—I have something very particular to say to you," cried he, in so peremptory a manner:
a tone of voice that Lady Norman had not courage to interpose an interdiction.

"Put on your hat and shawl, and come and walk with me in the shrubbery," said he, the moment the drawing-room door closed behind her;—and in a few minutes, Constance was proceeding on his arm along the yew-walk, scarcely able to keep pace with his precipitate footsteps.

"You said you wanted to speak to me," faltered Miss Norman, after some hesitation. "Has anything unpleasant occurred?"

"Nothing—nothing of any consequence. I only wished, my dear Constance, to ask you a few questions important to your happiness—important to mine."

An idea glanced into the mind of Miss Norman, that a suspicion of the fatal secret with which she had been recently entrusted, might have reached Sir Walter. "Ask nothing," said she, "which I am not at perfect liberty to disclose. Even you, Walter, have no right to exact from me a breach of promise."

"Of promise?"—he repeated, unconscious of the error into which she had fallen. "Surely you cannot have already entangled yourself. Surely you cannot, previous to my return to England, have pledged your word to——"

"Not previous to your return to England."

"And since—whom have you seen likely to engage your affections—Sir Frederick Cranston? No?—Surely Norman cannot be justified in his assertion of having made an impression on your feelings?—I will not believe it of you!—A prating, self-sufficient coxcomb!"

"We misunderstood each other I fancy," said Constance, greatly relieved. "If you would inquire whether I entertain a personal regard for Captain Norman, your previous warning that such a connection would be displeasing to you, ought to afford you sufficient assurance to the contrary."

"You mean, then, that had I not intimated my disapproval, you would have received his attentions with pleasure!—"

"Not under any possible sanction or circumstances," replied Miss Norman, warmly. "Even had you and mamma recommended my cousin to my acceptance, I could not have overcome my repugnance to his affectation, and overweening notions of his own consequence."

"I expected as much of you," cried Sir Walter, seizing his sister's hand and shaking it as he would have done that of a young friend of his own age and sex. "And yet, that fellow's cool, deliberate way of asserting his hopes sufficed to put me out of temper. The fool is persuaded he has only to propose and be accepted—accepted at a moment's notice, and after a week's acquaintance, by Constance Norman!—"

"Perhaps he is wise enough to guess that a longer acquaintance would be still less favorable to his views," replied Constance, smiling at the impetuosity of her companion. "But now or at any future time, my feelings towards Captain Norman would be the same; I could neither like him as a lover nor respect him as a husband."

"I was sure of it—I was quite sure of it!—There is even less to commend in him than in Lord St. Aubyn. St. Aubyn knows nothing of the world, and may improve. Norman is self-sufficient and unimprovable."

"Both, however, are equally remote from my standard of merit," replied Constance, more gravely. "Nor is it likely I shall ever see it attained by mortal man. This is no discouragement. I am too happy at home to have the smallest wish to leave Selwood."

"Thanks, thanks!"—cried Sir Walter. "To own the truth, it would go to my heart, Constance, to part with you. You are only seventeen. You have at least four years before you, to form a wise and prudent choice; four happy years, my dear sister, during which, I promise you all the fondness, all the consideration, necessary to your comfort. Secondary only to my mother, you are mistress here. Say whom you wish to be invited to Selwood—whom you wish to be dismissed from our acquaintance—and, reasonable or unreasonable, your desire shall be fulfilled!—There is no cost or sacrifice at which I would not secure the companionship of my dear and only sister, without which my existence would become a blank."

"You will form other attachments—you will marry——"

"No! A married life has no temptations for me. I have so reverential an estimation of the claims and ties of matrimony, that were I really to marry, I should become a slave—a non-entity. But, thank Heaven, I am on my guard. All I hear, see and read, of the manoeuvres of fashionable mothers and the practices of fashionable wives, convinces
me that it must be a rare exception which ought to cheat a man out of his liberty. Such instances as I knew abroad—such instances as the Morningtons lately pointed out to me in London!—"

"It is the interest of the Morningtons to disgust you with matrimony. Had they chosen, they might have pointed out happy and respectable couples."

"Very few, I suspect, according to my appreciation of happiness," interrupted Sir Walter.

"You have formed exaggerated notions, perhaps, concerning the bliss of married life," said Miss Norman.

"I have!" replied he, with enthusiasm. "I have pictured to myself a wife, beautiful, gentle, and innocent, as Constance Norman, and prudent and high-principled as her mother. To such a woman, I should surrender the guidance of my life without reserve; and from such a woman, I should exact an attachment great in proportion to the surrender of my whole existence—my time—my will—my thoughts—my hopes—my conduct."

"Even wedded to such a paragon as you describe," observed Constance, smiling, "I should doubt the discretion of such a passion. A man is, and ought to be, the head of the house. In his hands should its authority be vested. Such is the law of man—such the law of God; and it will grieve me should I live to see you despised as under female domination."

"Secure me from it, then, by a promise to remain with me at Selwood!—"

"What better can I desire!" exclaimed Constance. But the expression of countenance with which her avowal was received, induced her to qualify the hasty pledge by a reference to the will of her mother. "So long as mamma pleases to reside with you, and to allow me free liberty in the rejection of any offer that may present itself!"—said she.

"I will have no reserves," cried Sir Walter. "As your brother, I am entitled to as much confidence as you accord to your mother. She cannot love you better—she cannot be more disposed to promote your happiness."

"Her life has been devoted to me. A mother's rights—forgive me—are more imperative than your own," replied Miss Norman, gravely. "But subject only to the restrictions she may place upon my conduct, I promise all that you require."

It was fortunate for Miss Norman that she had resumed her usual composure of demeanor; for Lady Norman, having at length got rid of her guest, was at this moment advancing towards them, with anxiety and suspicion in her looks.

**CHAPTER XIV.**

Toi seul, triste martyre de ta sombre prudence,
Toi seul ne connais pas la douce confiance—
En vain de ton secret tu te sens opprèser.
Au sein de quelques amies l'espoir se voile—
Des plus mortels poisons l'abeille fait son miel,
Toi, du plus doux objet tu compos es ton fief.——

**DeLille.**

**OF TEN did the unhappy mother, after having suffered her anxieties to betray her into harshness towards her idolised child, retire to her room to indulge in solitary tears and alone by self-reproach the injustice of her conduct.**

Lady Norman knew that her cares, and the violence into which they sometimes stimulated a naturally amiable character, were but the after-fruit of her fault—a fault how fertile in mischiefs and troubles of every gradation of bitterness.

All that she was able to extract from Constance, when continuing their walk together after the departure of Sir Walter, concerning the object of his indecorous summons, was an admission that Captain Norman had made him the confidant of an intention to tender proposals for her hand. The announcement, however, made at dinner by the Spring-chicken of his intended departure on the morrow, and a sudden resumption of his original flippancy and impertinence, satisfied Lady Norman that he had proposed and been rejected; and when again alone with her daughter, she did not disguise her indignation at finding her opinion and authority set at naught in the family.

"Did Sir Walter Norman imagine," said she, "that I should place any restraint upon your decision on such a point!—Should I have left you less at liberty than he has
done to reject a man whom I know to be the object of your contempt?"

"Certainly not, dear mamma. But as my cousin probably felt more at ease in conversing with my brother— with Sir Walter, it was natural that the affair should be discussed between them. To my judgment it was never even referred. I believe Sir Walter contrived to make Captain Norman sensible that his suit was not likely to be acceptable."

"And what right had he to take so much upon himself, without consulting either of us?"

"My indifference towards Captain Norman must have been evident to the whole house; and Walter did not wish to keep him in unnecessary suspense."

"No!—he chose to dismiss him with a degree of precipitation and discourtesy which has sent him off infuriated to London, and made the Morningtons our enemies for life!—Sir Walter Norman may live to repent having provoked so dangerous and potent an adversary."

"I trust not—I earnestly trust not!" said Constance, turning pale. "It would be hard, indeed, if Walter's care for my happiness were to operate to his disadvantage."

No further reference was made to the origin of disagreement; but the excitement of Lady Norman's temper and the alteration of her manner, could not have failed to attract the attention of Sir Walter, but that his time was devoted to the preparations and arrangements contingent upon the attainment of his majority. A political dinner, too, was about to take place in a neighboring county, of which his uncle Cruttenden Maule, was one of the stewards, and to which the presence of Sir Walter Norman (as a hoped-for member of the radical party) was solicited. Either through inadvertence or disinclination the letter of invitation remained unanswered; and Cruttenden, who had not visited Selwood Manor since his nephew's arrival in England, accordingly made his appearance to reprove, congratulate, and renew his solicitations. Though affectionately welcomed by Lady Norman and Constance, they could not but secretly rejoice that the inbreak of the thundering radical had not occurred during the visit of the fastidious Spring-chicken.

"Where's Walter?"—cried Crutt, after having hastily returned their greeting. "Pray why didn't he answer our letter?—"

"What letter?"

"An invitation from the stewards of the Free Union!—"

"Walter is much engaged just now with his tenants and bailiffs," said Lady Norman, calmly. "I dare say it escaped his memory."

"It ought not to have escaped his memory!—" cried Cruttenden, warmly. "I'll answer for it 'tis the most important letter the post has brought him since he returned to Selwood!—I hope Matty, you're not trying to make a milk-sop of the lad!—"

"If you mean by interference with his political opinions," replied Lady Norman, "you must be well aware, my dear Cruttenden, that I have submitted entirely to the intentions of Sir Richard by committing his son to the control and guidance of my brother Avesford."

"Ay, ay!—left him to become a pitiful half-and-half—neither fish, flesh, nor good red-herring," cried Crutt. "As if the misfortune of being born a Frenchman wasn't enough, without adding the disgrace of being a bred-trimmer—a luke-warm, spiritless creature, without wit to be one thing or 'tother!—"

"But Walter is one very decided thing, uncle," interrupted Miss Norman. "I heard your friend Mr. Redely calling him to task for having declared himself a moderate whig, and announced at some public meeting his intention of standing on those principles at the next dissolution."

"'The devil he did!'—cried Crutt, not allowing time to Lady Norman to rebuke the unbecoming interposition of her daughter.—"Then tell Master Walter from me that he may look sharp about him.—By Jove! if Redely were only to stand against him, the young gentleman would soon find that the Norman interest isn't what it was in this part of the country, twenty year ago. Look at the strength that has started up—Look at Redely and the money turned at the Forges! Look at the new population betwixt this and Scarwell Park!—The Normans have gone down twenty per cent.; and unless Walter should turn out something stancher than there's reason to hope for to bring matters round again, he may go and play clerk to parson Avesford's preaching in the house, and devil a thought the country will be ever the better or wiser for either of 'em!—"

"No real friend of Sir Walter would desire to see him take a violent part in politics," observed Lady Norman. "It belongs neither to his age nor position in life."

"It belongs neither to his age nor position in life."
"Violent!—women call everything violent that goes beyond the humdrum opinions of their great grandmothers; as the Sussex fishermen call it blowing a gale, when there's wind enough to put out a farthing rushlight. As to his position in life, old Crutt always swore you were just the woman to be cramming the lad's head with absurd notions of that kind. Avesford's twaddle distanced me with Walter, and now your twaddle is distancing Avesford; and between you both, my nephew will dwindle into a poor pitiful do-nothing, like the rest of 'em!"

The moment Sir Walter made his appearance, these charges were renewed against himself. Even the frank, good-humored vivacity of his nephew's welcome, could not immediately subdue the spleen of the Mirabeau of Soho.

"It won't do, my lad!"—said Crutt. "All the cousin-come-over-me in the world isn't worth the plain ay or no, which explains whether a man's with one or against one!—"

"Whether a member is with you or against you, perhaps," said Walter laughing. "But surely a man may find a mezzo-termine between assent and dissent—to express that he approves your good things, and eschews your evil ones?—Tell me truly, uncle!—Did not that superannuated spirit of mischief, that Methuselah of spite and contrariety, Tom Cruttenden—who still sits cowering over the hearth, raking up coals of strife in the family, suggest that now or never was the time to snatch me, like a brand out of the fire;—and having rescued me from Avesford's eludehes, make a radical of me for life?"

"Never mind who suggested it—I am here now, and ask you a plain answer to a plain question.—Do you consider vote by ballot a final measure?"

"What do I consider, eh, Constance?" cried Sir Walter, turning to his sister, and affecting to parry by a jest an interrogatory which he felt that his uncle had no right to press in so peremptory a manner. "You know I have promised to have no political opinions but yours. What am I, my dear?—whig or tory—conservative or destructive?—I pause for a reply."

Cruttenden Maule had sense enough to perceive that his nephew did not choose to commit himself by a premature and gratuitous profession of political faith. But Lady Norman, whose mind was biased by a ruling passion, saw fit to take the sportive sally of the young baronet au pied de la lettre; and her reprehensions of his levity were so in temperate that, that long before they were concluded, her brother was the first to propose to Walter, to adjourn to the park, and view the recent improvements.

"Matty, I see (like all the woman that ever were born,) is unwilling to part with an inch of authority without a struggle!"—cried Cruttenden, as he trudged along by his nephew's side towards the new pheasantries. "I saw by her letters that matters were not running smooth between you. The moment old Tom heard of her intention of quitting Selwood, 'Mark my words, Crutt,' saye he, 'the young spark and the dowager have had a tussle, and she's retreating in time from the field, to save the shame of being packed off!'—"

"In God's name, what can you mean!"—cried Sir Walter, greatly astonished. "There has not been the slightest misunderstanding between my mother and myself. She is sometimes peevish with my sister, (why, I can scarcely tell you, for Constance has the most angelic temper upon earth!) but with me she has been ever on the best of terms."

"Well, then, I suppose it is with the view to keeping so, that my sister has made up her mind to come and settle at Halsewell Lodge."

"You are growing more and more unintelligible!"—cried Sir Walter, in some agitation.

"Why, don't you recollect the shooting-box I built about ten years ago, which, when it was finished, old Crutt would never set foot in 'cause he swore it was damp?"

"Yes, I remember Halsewell."

"I had tenants in the house till last summer. But they quit at Michaelmas; and about Christmas time, Matty, seeing an advertisement of Halsewell in the county paper to be let or sold wrote to me, and making a handsome bid. Of course, it wasn't a thing to be heard of to let money pass betwixt brother and sister; and for a week or two, we were on and about it 'cause I would not hear of rent, nor she of living there without;—and all was to be kept such a grand secret, that there was no chance of a mutual friend bringing us to an understanding. Well—to make an end on'—I had a deed of gift drawn up, making over the place to Constance; and, you see, poor Matty had no right to refuse..."
during the girl's minority. After all the words that had passed the property wasn't valued at four thousand pounds; and surely a man, without chick or child belonging to him, has a right to expect his sister or niece will expect that much of him—eh?"

"Yes—no!—I was not thinking of the place!" cried young Norman, with considerable emotion. "Has Constance been artful enough to conceal all this from me!"

"As far as I know, the girl is still in the dark. For some foolish reason or other, Matty has chosen to make a mystery of the business—even from the Avesfords—even from my niece;—and though, of course, I am glad enough for my own sake: to have them come and settle in what I may call my neighborhood, I can understand that my sister may be inclined to keep her scheme snug, for fear of the opposition it was like to meet with from Constance. As to you, I thought you were at the bottom of all."

"Could you for a moment suppose that I was coinciding in a project which is to deprive me of the society of those who are nearest and dearest to me?"—cried Sir Walter, with indignation.

"You really had no finger in the pie?—Then please to recollect," said Cruttenden Mule, "that what I have let out is in strictest confidence. Matty would never forgive me, if she knew I had betrayed her secret."

"But in return, you must promise to remonstrate with her, my dear uncle, as of your own accord. You must represent to her the impropriety of removing my sister from Selwood; and the scandal it will create in the world, should it be supposed that my conduct towards my mother has been such as to compel her to fly from Selwood Manor!—God knows my affection for my family is unbounded!—God knows I have never intentionally given offence to either one of them; and if I have accidentally erred, I am willing, for the peace of my own conscience as well as to restore a good understanding between us, to humble myself to the most abject apologies to my mother!—You must tell her all this.—"

"My dear Walter, compose yourself!" cried his good-natured uncle, with much concern, "I'm sure I'm heartily sorry I've said any thing to vex you. It's no fault of yours that Matty chooses to live independent; nor no news to you, I should think, that—give women their way as much as you will—they'll always find some pretext or another for flying off into their tantrums!—"

"But my mother is so reasonable—so amenable to argument!—Were you even now to point out to her the consequences——"

"She might take it into her head that I repented what she calls my generosity, and that I want to dissuade her from inhabiting Halsewell. Wait till Avesford (who had always the greatest influence with her) comes down from town."

"I cannot wait a day!"—cried Sir Walter, gasping for breath.

"Then write, and get him (without committing me) to expostulate with her by letter."

"I must see Constance—I must consult Constance.—Indeed you must permit me to entrust this matter to my sister. I assure you, my dear uncle, her discretion may be relied on."

"So you seemed to think when you referred your choice of party to her," cried Cruttenden, laughing at his nephew's vehemence. "The discretion of a little mind of seventeen!—"

"Consider that from her infancy she has been the companion of my mother. Perfect reliance is to be placed on Constance!"

"Well, well! I take her prudence upon your word. Matilda appears to me, just now, to be fretful and out of spirits; and it is not for me, to whom she has always been a kind, affectionate sister, to aggravate her anxieties. Nothing must transpire till she sees fit to acquaint you with her projects—least of all, while I remain in the house."

Already, Maulé had agreed to sleep at Selwood, and proceed on his way towards the union meeting, early on the morrow; but a drill constrained evening, spent with the disunited family, made him repent his resolution. The moment Lady Norman and her daughter retired for the night, Sir Walter recommenced his inquiries of his uncle. As yet, he had been unable to obtain, even a momentary interview with Constance; but having received from Maulé deliberate confirmation of all he asserted in the morning touching Lady Norman's determination to quit Selwood, he
fancied that a few minutes’ conference with his sister would enable him to determine the real state of his mother’s intentions."

"Constance can’t be asleep yet," said his uncle. "Go up to her room and talk the matter over with her. I will smoke a cigar while you are away. In this room, the nuisance is allowed."

"You shall have your cigar," replied Norman, rising and opening a fresh case of Havannahs for his uncle. "But I fear I shall not be admitted to my sister. It is contrary to my mother’s rule for me to enter their rooms."

"Stuff and nonsense!"—cried Cruttenden, proceeding to light his cigar. "How long has Matty grown so damned prudish?—I’m sure she didn’t learn the lesson at home. We boys used to run in and out of hers and Beasy’s rooms just as we pleased."

"Because you were boys. My presence would be a restraint. I think her regulation a good one; but there can be surely no harm in breaking through it on so particular an occasion."

"Pho, pho, pho!—to be sure not,"—cried Crutt, more intent on the delicious fumes of his cigar, than on weighing the proprieties of the case. "If I had not set in for a comfortable smoke, I’d go with you myself. Matty would scarcely find fault with my visiting either of their Blue chambers!—And now, be off with you, Walter, for I should like to hear the upshot of all these mysteries before I sleep."

The door leading to Miss Norman’s apartment opened into the same corridor with that of her mother;—but a small ante-chamber and dressing-room intervened between Lady Norman’s bed-room and the gallery; so that, once retired, she was not likely to be disturbed by the opening of her daughter’s door. Though sleepless on an uneasy pillow, not a murmur reached her ear of the discussion that now arose between Constance and her brother;—the latter earnestly entreating the former as earnestly declining a few minutes’ conversation. Miss Norman, attired in her dressing gown, stood at the half open door, entreating Sir Walter would retire; unwilling to grant a concession she was certain her mother would disapprove.

"My dear sister—I ask but for five minutes. I beseech you let me in for five minutes. The matter is one which regards the happiness of our future life,"—cried Walter. And such was the despair painted in his countenance, that Miss Norman, dreading lest something connected with the secret of his birth might have accidentally transpired, hesitated no longer.

"Loss no further time,"—said he, gently pushing open the door of the ante-room, and closing it behind him. "Cruttenden is waiting to hear the result of what I have to say to you."—And Constance, conceiving that Lady Norman’s objections were directed against unreserved communication between them in any time or place, renounced all further opposition, and took a seat beside Walter, who had already thrown himself into a chair.

"Constance!"—was his first scarcely articulate ejaculation. "Are you in this accursed plot against my peace?"

"Compose yourself, dearest Walter," said she. "All I said this morning I am ready to confirm.—Whatever may transpire, I shall ever entertain for you the fond affection of a sister."

"Yet you are about to sanction a measure that will drive me forth from Selwood for ever!—For I will quit the place. —The moment Lady Norman reveals her secret to the family, I bid adieu to my home—I bid adieu to my country. Since she disdains to receive from me the love and duty of a son—I will fly from England—visit the country of my birth, and ——"

"Alas! alas! by what cruel accident has this fatal secret transpired!”—cried Miss Norman, losing all self-possession.

"You knew it then, Constance;—you knew it this very morning when I was pouring out my whole soul to you;—yet you disdained to enlighten me.—It was by others I was to be apprised of the cruel truth!"

"God forbid that I should be the first to pronounce the decree which, after so many years of affection, renders us strangers to each other!" cried Miss Norman, wildly.

Sir Walter gazed upon her in silent amazement.

"Surely, surely," she continued, tears now pouring down her cheeks, "since it was my father’s will that you should assume the rights and title of his son, the choice which invested you with the empty gifts of fortune, entitled you also to my sisterly affection!—Since my knowledge of this hateful, fatal secret, my attachment, dearest Walter, has
rather augmented than diminished!—Compassion seems to soften my heart with new tenderness towards you.—I feel not only for the bitterness of the false position in which you have been placed, but for the privations awaiting you.

—For I know, Walter—I know as surely as if you had already said it—that the moment which revealed to you this cruel mystery, determined you to fling aside the fictitious honors imposed by others upon your acceptance."

"How long have you known this, Constance, and from whom did you learn it?"—gasped Sir Walter, upon whose bewildered mind terrific light was now breaking,

"From my mother!—She revealed all to me during your absence in town."

"She told you that I was not her son?"—demanded Sir Walter, growing paler and more haggard, while Constance replied by a mournful sign of assent. "But did she tell you who were my parents?—Bereaved in one moment of all that I hold dear on earth—my kinsmanship with her and you—has she bestowed nothing upon me in return?—Did she leave me none to love—none—none to love me?—"

He paused. "She said that you were a foundling, born of foreign parents, and adopted by my father at Paris as heir of Selwood."

"French parents!—murmured the unfortunate young man. "Such parents as could sell their child to be the innocent object of a fraud—Outcasts—perhaps beggars—bought to consent to their disgrace and their son's undoing!"

Instinctively, Miss Norman approached her beloved Walter, and entwined her hands caressingly round his arm. __ His first movement was to unclasp them, and repel her advances. "You are no longer my sister," said he, "I must not presume to tender you the endearments of an equal!—"

"As a brother, you are still beloved;—as a brother, you will ever, ever be beloved!—" exclaimed Constance, again clasping her hands together, yet almost overpowered by her harshness. "Do the years we have passed together plead nothing in my favor! You are my brother, Walter!—No longer the heir of Selwood, but still my beloved brother!"

"Reflect on what you promise," cried he, throwing himself distractedly on the sofa, and drawing her towards him. "Think on how ignominious a wretch you may perhaps be lavishing your tenderness!—The blood of robbers, swin-

"No—do not suppose it!"—exclaimed Miss Norman, attempting to soothe by the most affectionate gentleness the frenzy of her companion. "There is nothing in your heart—your mind—your nature—but what is good and noble—noble with the nobility of the Almighty's own creation!—When did you ever entertain a base intention, or a mean opinion?—you are noble, dearest Walter.—Something in my inmost breast assures me that you are come of gentle race."

Softened by her caresses, though still wild with perplexity and wonder, Walter passed his hand over his forehead, and tried to compose his bewildered senses sufficiently to determine what course was next to be pursued. But the effort only served to render him more frantic.

"You have been sporting with my fortitude, Constance!"—cried he, suddenly bursting into a convulsive laugh, as retrospective thoughts seemed for a moment to restore the stability of his former position. "Own that you have been trifling with me!—Own that I have borne my trial well!—But no!—"—cried he, smiting his brow with his clenched hands, as he obtained in a view of Miss Norman's mournful countenance fatal confirmation of the reality of his misfortune. "It is all too true. I have no sister—no mother—no home—no country!—What have I done to be thus miserably degraded?"

"Walter, Walter! have pity on yourself and me," cried Miss Norman, throwing her arms around him. "Meet this reverse as becomes a man—as becomes the character you have borne among us. In losing all else, do not forfeit our respect. Your change of circumstances can effect no shadow of change in our affection, unless by effacing the precious qualities which have long rendered you so dear!"

"Constance," faltered her agonised companion, folding her closely to his bosom, as if fearing that already she was about to be torn from him for ever. "You were the dearest blessing of my day of prosperity;—of my adversity, be the consoling angel."

He could add no more. Lady Norman, with stern indignation in her looks, stood beside them. Roused from her pillow by the elevated tones of the excited Walter, she had rushed into her daughter's room.
"Are we not a moment safe from these intrusions?" cried she. "Is not even my daughter's chamber sacred at midnight, with the whole family retired to rest?—Sir Walter! I have but a few more weeks to remain under your roof, and I entreat you, I command you—I entreat you as a friend, I command you as a mother—show some respect for the decencies of society—show—"

"Madam," replied he, with stern gravity, "the time is over for such words as these to pass between us. Appeal to me no more as a son, but as a wretch whom your wildness has raised above his humble condition only to dash him down to destruction. My existence has been marred by the caprices of others. Do not augment my degradation by the mockery of this address! Marred by the mockery of this address?—I know all. You are still the Lady Norman whom I have idolised and venerated; I the miserable outcast on whom you have lavished such cruel kindness."

A shriek from Constance, whose eyes were fixed upon Lady Norman's ghastly face, suspended all further remonstrance on the lips of Walter.

"What is all this?" cried Cruttenden Maule, who, weary of waiting for his nephew, was come in search of him. "My niece in tears!—my sister—Walter, what means this disturbance?"

"It means," cried the unfortunate Walter Norman, falling on his neck and sobbing aloud, "that I have lost all—that I am losing my reason!—Recoil from me—cast me forth as an impostor! I am not the son of Sir Richard Norman—I am not the rightful heir of Selwood!"

CHAPTER XV.

Oh! mother—yet no mother!—SAY AG."
"They cannot—they shall not be! Were all the lawyers in the kingdom to pronounce in favor of my keeping possession of Selwood, I would not remain here a day after the avowals of—of Lady Norman!"

"After all, I can't but feel that you are right," cried Crutt, shrugging his shoulders, after a long pause of deliberation. "I might have guessed that so straightforward, warmhearted a lad had never a drop of Sir Richard Norman's blood in his veins—who was as bitter an aristocrat, and as crooked a contriver as ever drew breath. What sort of a chap is this rightful heir you talk of?—Is he likely to act an honest part by you, and feel the value of the sacrifice made in his favor?"

"Don't call it a sacrifice!—Reflect how many years he has been kept out of his own!"

"And was the fault yours, pray?—Mightn't he be kept out of it to all eternity, but for your integrity?"

"I expect nothing from Lord Mornington," said Walter, proudly. "The wrong I have done him was unintentional; but I should wilfully degrade myself if I consented to become his pensioner. Thanks to Avesford, I have received a good education. I have not been pampered; I have not been bred luxuriously; I have few expensive tastes. As soon as I recover the stunning effects of a blow so unexpected, I shall find courage to exert myself; and (I am vain enough to think) friends to support my courage."

"You have one at your side, my dear Walter," said Cruttenden Maule, much affected, "who loves you not a jot the less for all that is come and gone. You have been bred under my eye as my nephew;—you have become my nephew—and such to the end of time you shall remain. Never had Walter been more dear to her than now, when he stood before her deprived by the frenzy of her remorse of the undue distinctions of fortune. She felt that he had injured him by the betrayal of his secret; he, that he was injured only by the act through which that secret had originated. Or rather, it was not of injury he was conscious;—he felt only unhappy—only destitute of the ties
which, but the preceding day, had rendered him the happiest and proudest of mankind.

Cruttenden had already given up his political dinner; his thoughts were absorbed by the affliction which had fallen upon Selwood. Walter was anxious to set off immediately for London, to consult with his guardian touching the most becoming mode of communicating to Lord Mornington and his son the extraordinary event that had occurred. But no sooner did he talk of leaving Selwood, than Lady Norman and Constance implored him, almost on their knees, not to let them lose sight of him in his present state of mind; and the good-natured uncle instantly offered to be the bearer of letters of explanation to his brother-in-law, and return with Avesford's opinion, if he found it impossible to absent himself from his parliamentary duties for an interview with Matilda and his ward.

No sooner had Maule departed on his friendly errand, than the three left behind found the restraint of each other's presence almost insupportable. So long as Cruttenden was among them, with his abrupt manners, jovial voice, and unceremonious dealing, they had found the discussion of the most delicate questions easier than it now appeared to treat of the most indifferent. Neither of them knew in what terms to address the other; neither of them wished to mark, by a sudden transition of manner, too deep a consciousness of what had occurred. All conversation was an effort. They had too much matter for reflection to be disposed even for each other's society; yet a moment after Lady Norman had retired to her room, conscience suggested that Walter might, perhaps, fancy himself neglected, nay, designedly avoided; and she accordingly returned to impose a further restraint upon his harassed feelings.

It had been insisted upon by Maule that no steps should be taken at Selwood, till he brought down advice from Walter's guardian; and all the preparations for the attainment of the young baronet's majority were accordingly suffered to proceed. Every hour, some person or other waited upon Sir Walter for orders or instructions which it was repugnant to his feelings to issue;—servants, bailiffs, tenants, overseers, laborers, had questions to ask, or favors to solicit.

Not a few of the petitioners quitted Selwood Manor with the impression that the young gentleman, of whose urbanity they had heard so much, could be as ungracious as his neighbors; for he listened without affecting to disguise his absence of mind; and instead of granting a satisfactory answer, begged time to consider questions of which it was clear he had taken no pains to understand a syllable. The heir of Selwood was evidently in a fair way to be spoiled by the pomp of his situation.

No sooner had Walter dismissed his importunate solicitors, than he wandered out into the park, shuddering as a thousand trivial objects renewed the anguish arising from early associations. There was the sapling oak surrounded with its fence of honor, of which, guided by his supposed father, his little hands had been made to plant the acorn on his arrival from France, according to the immemorial custom of the heirs of Selwood Manor. There was his old brown pony (Cruttenden Maule's first present to his nephew,) shaggy with age, and almost blind, which came neighing to meet him, so regularly had the kindness of Constance accustomed her brother's pet to be caressed during Walter's absence from England. There was the old avenue which he had thinned and refreshed—There a new road stumped out towards the woodlands, the direction of which Miss Norman herself had suggested—to include the most picturesque points of the landscape.—There were the venerable Gothic almshouses peeping from between the sycamore trees, of which the aged inmates had blessed his birth, and to whom his very aspect was a spectacle of hope and gladness.

And all these were to be abandoned—all these to be forgotten, or remembered only as a dream—a mockery!—Early affections were to be obliterated—early opinions renounced—nay, even the lofty principles and patriotic aspirations instilled into the wealthy baronet, must, in future, unbeseech the poor foundling who was to depart, self-exiled, from the gates of the Manor. From the garden of Eden, he was to wander into the great wilderness, bringing forth "thorns and thistles, that in the sweat of his face he was to eat bread." The past was to be as nothing. "His life was only now beginning;"—"Would," murmured Walter, as he groaned aloud in agony, "could that it were now to end!"

Still, there were consolatory thoughts! During his brief stewardship at the Manor, he had done no cruel or unjust thing; as a member of society, no ungenerous or unworthy
action. Many voices were lifted up to Heaven in blessings upon his charity, or in testimony to his forbearance; there was not a token by which he was aware of having an enemy in the world. How different had been the bitterness of Walter's soul if followed in his banishment by the execrations of the poor—

"They will sometimes remember me," he murmured, on attaining an eminence from which, through the leafless trees, the village was discernible;—"remember me with kindness—perhaps with regret—I have injured no man—despoiled no man.—My career, God be thanked, has not been that of the oppressor!—"

As if invoked by the spell of that condoling thought, the spirit of peace stood beside him. Constance, who had followed him at a distance from the house, placed her arm in his, determined to accompany his wanderings. For Lady Norman no longer evinced the smallest jealousy of their being together. The frantic apprehensions which had led to the fatal discovery, were dissipated now that the young people, forewarned of the ground on which they stood, were on their guard against themselves. All anger seemed to have departed from her nature; like some evil spirit, exorcised and cast forth by a superior power.

They walked on together in silence. While apart, a thousand thoughts had arisen for a communication; yet, now they were side by side, not a word suggested itself.

It was a bright balmy day; the landscape was fresh with vegetation, and varied with sunshine and shade; the woods were budding almost visibly before their eyes; the orchards were frosted with many blossoms; the shrubberies alive with the flutter and song of birds. The deer lay huddled under the still leafless oaks, as if fancying that, since the preceding day, leaves must have sprung forth to shelter them from the vivifying April sun; and the slopes were bright with early flowers—gay-suited courtiers of the spring—pressing forward into bloom. All around was brilliant, genial, hopeful—resplendent with promise and prosperity.

At length, Walter ventured some trivial remark on the beauty of the weather, lest his companion should consider him selfishly absorbed in his troubles; while Constance answered cheerfully, dreading that he might fancy her intent on their relative change of situation. It was impossible for them to indulge at present in any natural impulse, Miss Norman was intent only on proving to Walter the undiminished warmth of her affection; Walter, on concealing from her the undiminished strength of his. After every fresh effort at conversation, they relapsed into deeper silence. Their hearts were full—too full—for too full for words.

At length a turn of the road brought in view through a vista of the woods, the dome of the family mausoleum, containing the remains of Sir Richard Norman. The sun sparkled upon the tall gilt cross crowning the summit of the consecrated abode of death; recalling to the minds of both the reverence with which they had so often, from childhood, repaired, hand in hand, to the spot, unknown to Lady Norman; whose grief they were unwilling to revive by reference to the object of their filial regrets. Upon their father's grave they had knelt and prayed in secret, uninfluenced by differences of religious faith; while recommending their father in the earth beneath to the mercy of their Father who was in heaven, and beseeching the love and intercession of him who had watched over their infancy, and who was now, they trusted and believed, a companion of the spirits of just men made perfect.

Unconsciously, they now continued to direct their steps along the mossy path overshadowed with lofty pine trees, towards the mausoleum; for the solemnity of the place, instead of increasing the reserve of Walter, seemed to encourage him to give utterance to his griefs.

"That he could have so cherished and loved a being alien to his blood!"—were the first words that became intelligible to Miss Norman of the incoherent ejaculations which burst in a subdued voice from his bosom. "You, Constance, who know your father only through my representations—you who were an infant when he was taken from us—cannot appreciate this. But I swear to you, that even so tenderly as you are estranged to the bosom of Lady Norman, even so—every night, every morning—was I clasped to that of her husband. I can feel it now, Constance—the embrace in which he used to enfold me, till sometimes my petulant childhood rebelled against the earnestness of his caresses. I can hear them now—the benedictions he used to lavish on my head. They were those of a tender, fervent, anxious parent. Unless all earthly affections are a pretext, a falsehood, a derision—those embraces and those blessings sprang from the impulse of parental love!—Can
he have so deceived me?—To secure his own purposes, can he have been this habitual dissembler?—Can such cold hypocrisy exist in human nature?—Oh! no, not; I cannot, will not, believe that the father whom my little heart revered and loved, even as it loved and reverenced the Almighty Being, the origin of our mutual affection—and sorrowed after for years with such bitter and poignant affliction—was thus sportmg with an infant’s love!—"

No answer was to be offered to this outpouring of the soul; and after some minutes’ pause, Walter resumed aloud the chain of his reflections!

"Yet it must be so!—Lady Norman can have no motive for her avowal. It must be so! I must be a poor deluded cast cæsare, even at an age whose innocence is usually its defence against deliberate treachery.—Oh, Constance! in this hour of varied torments, I feel that it would almost console me could I permit myself to restore my confidence to the memory of him whom I cherished as a father. It was such a deep seated, such a religious love I bore him!—Long as is the period since his death, not a day of all those years have I failed to invoke his name with the pious veneration of a son. I can pardon his having imposed upon the world; but not his having defrauded my young heart of its warm affections. He should have dealt honestly by his victim. He should have treated the heir of Selwood as his heir—not as his child—no, not as doating fathers treat an idolised and faultless child. You, Constance—you the offspring of his marriage—he never loved or caressed as he did the foundling! I can understand now why my mother—why Lady Norman seemed jealous for her girl, and would follow us with her infant in her arms, as he led me out into the park or through the village, proud of the admiration I excited.—I can understand it all!—But, oh! wherefore deal thus cruelly by the child he was mocking with this empty show of tenderness?—Constance, may you never experience the pang of withdrawing your reverence from a parent!"

As if aware that the heart of his companion might be already cognisant of such a trial, Walter suddenly checked himself.

"My own undeserving may have merited my present tortures," cried he, after a vain attempt to keep silence. "Perhaps I was insufficiently grateful for the joy of being

the son to such a mother—the brother of such a sister. Conscious as I was of my happiness, I ought to have given breath to hourly thanks for being allied to such warm hearts—such spirits of love and peace. It is only now I am alone—alone in the universe—spurned, despised, contemned—that I appreciate what it was to be entitled to your sisterly tenderness!—Of all the griefs and humiliations weighing upon me, my only insupportable disappointment is that of the affections! But yesterday, a mother, sister, kindred, friends; now, nothing!—To feel that in some remote portion of the world, no matter how humble the sphere of society, there were those on whom I held the claim of kinship, would be some alleviation.—But even that comfort is denied me!—In the wilderness a drop of water is as unattainable as an abounding river!"

"Time will soften the blow," faltered Constance, in a low subdued voice; "time will enlarge your views, and afford you fresh objects of solicitude. But do not ask me to sympathise in your despondency!—I cannot regard you as isolated—I cannot think of you as an outcast. To me, in spite of every proof, you are still my brother!—My heart avows you so.—my heart proclaims you so. Nature cannot be thus deceived—cannot be thus deceitful.—Till you voluntarily throw me off and disown me, Walter, worlds shall not tempt me to call you by any other name!"

"I accept the pledge," said he, though not with the elevation this generous promise might have been expected to inspire; "but till my soul can extricate itself from its present maze of wonder and consternation, expect me not to be grateful: At present, every softer human feeling is dormant in the bosom of the foundling!"

Vol. II.—14
The props
Of love and loving hearts o'erthrown; what follows
But ruin to the structure of my fortunes?
Most lonely am I in this world of care—
Of all forsaken creatures most abandoned!—Massinger.

Trying were the hours still remaining to be worn through,
ere the return of their messenger from town. Yet when
the following evening, a carriage was at length discerned
through the dusk slowly ascending the hill towards the
Manor, not one of the three persons so deeply interested in
the tidings it was to convey, but would have gladly prolonged
the suspense against which they had been murmuring!

Lady Norman retreated hastily to her own room; and,
though unwilling to expose her agitation to her daughter,
insisted that Constance should bear her company, in order
to leave poor Walter free and uncontrolled in the interview that was to decide his destiny.

As he entered the hall to welcome his friend, Walter dis­
cerned, unless deceived by the uncertain light, that several
persons were alighting from the carriage. From amon­
g them his beloved guardian advanced towards him; and hur­
ying him beyond the observation of the servants, folded
him fervently and parentally in his arms.

“Ere this affectionate greeting could be acknowledged as it
deserved, Mrs. Avesford was by her side, eager to admin­
ister her share of comfort to the afflictions of her long
cherished Walter, both Elizabeth and her husband being
secretly indignant against the authors of the imposition by
which his feelings had been so cruelly set at nought.

They pitied Lady Norman; but their honest hearts could
not overlook the habitual duplicity in which she had dwelt
among them. They could believe that she must have suf­
fered deeply. They knew that the first step taken in the
path of deceit is the cause of a thousand unanticipated de­
ceptions; as a single untrue line in a mass of building falsi­
fies the whole structure. They even suspected that her
harassing anxieties, and the perpetual dread of divine ven­
geance, had eventually bewildered her mind, and excited her
to the frenzies instigating her confession. The long con­
cealment, the final motive of disclosure, were alike offensive
in their eyes. But compassion suggested forbearance.

Her fault must be tenderly dealt with; for it was that of
the mother of Constance.

“My dear boy,” said Avesford, when seated beside Wal­
ter in the drawing-room, and still affectionately retaining his
hand, “I have heard with the sympathy for which I know you
will give me credit, the particulars of this wretched story;—
and approve all your views—all your proceedings.—You have
acted as a man of honor, Walter; you have acted as I would
wish my ward, my friend, to act.—I cannot offer you high
lineage or princely fortune in compensation for those you
so honorably resign. But I offer you an honest name, and
what the world calls opulence.—My wife loves you as I do.
Be the child of our adoption—the comfort of our old age!
—My fortune is the fruit of my industry, my family is pros­
perous in all its branches. There will be none to name or
resent the disposal of my property; and I have only to bless
the goodness of Providence, which supplies to me so
worthy a successor, and one so dear to me and mine.—
Thus far, Walter, for the bright side of your prospects!—
Against the gloomy one, my dear boy, all my care—all my
affection—will not suffice to close your eyes!—Let me,
therefore, counsel you to confront with fortitude the contem­
plation. Let every step and measure be instigated by the
best impulses of your soul. You must see clearly, in order
that you may decide discreetly.”

Walter replied only by pressing in silence the hand of
the friend thus nobly careful of his interests.

“Do not suppose,” resumed Avesford in the same low
persuasive tone, “that I wish to undervalue the greatness
of your trial, or of the sacrifices you are called on to make.
But I would not have you invest them with undue con­
sequence. A man, Walter, is the son of his actions—not of
his position in life.—You are still on the threshold of your
career. On yourself alone depends the honor or shame of your destinies. Denied the more endearing ties of life, you will also be exempt from their claims upon your time and tenderness. Henceforward, therefore, be your country's, my dear Walter, heart and soul your country's, till by your exertions you have earned a title to leisure and distinction. As the pampered owner of Selwood Manor, such virtue had been difficult—perhaps impossible. Your misfortunes, therefore, may become a source of merit, and of distinction, far more flattering than the utmost glories conveyed by descent; and I feel that, as the ardent laborer in an honorable cause, you will stand higher than as the heir of a line whose founders fought at Crevy or Poitiers."

"Your words afford me encouragement," replied Norman, vainly attempting to assume a more cheerful tone. "I shall some day be grateful to you for giving me hope. At present, I am writhing under the stings of memory."

"Let me now inquire," pursued Avesford, perceiving that his wife and her brother had quitted the room to go in search of their afflicted sister, "whether you have experienced further harshness from Lady Norman since her cruel revelation of the secret originating in her dissembling."

"None!—Neither in that occurrence or any other, do I find grounds of complaint; during the last two days, her kindness to me has been that of a mother."

Avesford bit his lip impatiently, scarcely able to repress the dissatisfaction gathering in his heart against Matilda. "I need not ask," he resumed, "whether, till this disastrous epoch, any hint had transpired to excite your suspicions of the peculiarity of your situation. With your frank disposition, Walter, I feel that you would not have concealed them a single hour from me, your friend and guardian. But I am anxious to know whether, during the last three days, any further disclosures have been made?"

"No allusion to the subject has passed Lady Norman's lips. Humbled and repentant, her only object appears to be a reparation for the pain she has inflicted."

"So far, well. I have comfort, then, in store for you. A packet is in my custody, Walter, addressed to you by your late father."

"My father!"—mournfully interrupted Walter. "By the late Sir Richard Norman," said Avesford, correcting himself, "which may throw some light upon this miserable subject. By his desire, it was to have been given to your hands on the day of attaining your majority. But as it is necessary that a general exposure should take place previous to that event, I conceive that I am acting up to the spirit of my instructions by forestalling by a few days the stated period. I have only one condition to make, my dear Walter—that, regarding me as a second father, you permit me to be present during your perusal of the letter."

"You are afraid to entrust me to myself at so trying a moment," said Walter, gravely. "But fear nothing. After all I have borne, I have courage for the rest. What more—what worse can betide me?—And yet," continued he, when Avesford, after having rung for lights, proceeded to place a heavy packet in his hands, "I own I tremble! At present, I know my birth to be obscure—mysterious. I may have to learn that it is the result of shame, of guilt! Avesford, pity me—give me your hand—give me courage. I may have to learn that I have living parent's, and that they are such as to disgrace me!—"

"Read—read!" said his compassionate friend; and having brought candles from the distant table, on which at his command they had been placed by the servants—and disposed them so that the full light fell upon the sofa on which Walter had thrown himself, he withdrew to the fireplace. However, Avesford detached his eyes from his ward, he perceived that Walter's face was deathly pale—that he looked heart-sick—exhausted. For a moment he repented having been so precipitate in the delivery of the packet. He saw that Walter had scarcely courage to break the seal, that his hands trembled—that he was laboring for breath and self-command.

Unwilling to prove a restraint upon Walter's feelings, he contemplated the young man's hesitancy as the whole scene stood reflected before him in a large mirror over the chimney-piece against which he was leaning; and though the affectionate guardian longed to be by Walter's side, breathing words of encouragement, he had courage to stand aloof, and leave nature to her struggles, and his protegé to the sustenance of that strength which is from above.

He was not prepared, however, for the sudden change which soon developed itself in Walter's countenance and
deportment. Within the exterior envelop, the contents inscribed in which appeared to excite little emotion, were two letters, one of which he proceeded with eager haste to peruse. At the conclusion of the first half dozen lines, a sob, a gasp, escaped the bosom of Walter; and ere Avesford could reach him, he had fallen back on the sofa, overpowered by a burst of hysteric tears, such as rarely affords assuagement to the sufferings of his age or sex. Walter wept like a child—like a woman—as he passionately and incoherently exclaimed, "I am content—I am happy!—Rank and fortune are gone; but the best treasures of affection are left. No longer Sir Walter Norman—no longer master of Selwood—but still, still and ever, the brother of Constance!—Where is she—let me go to my sister—let me enfold her once more in my arms!"

Avesford, who feared that the young man's senses were bewildered, mildly, but resolutely detained him. "I must not have you alarm her by the sight of all this distraction," said he. "Compose yourself."

"Compose myself! when, after the tortures of the last three days, I find the worst of my apprehensions groundless," cried Walter. "Oh, Avesford, Avesford!—if you knew what it has been to me to feel that an eternal gulf had arisen between me and the beloved companion of my childhood!—my sister!—and how proud and joyous I am in pronouncing that word—that name—that soothing, tender name!—But perhaps," cried he, suddenly checking himself, "Lady Norman's pride may again interfere to deprive me of this consolation!—She may not permit her daughter to distinguish with sisterly regard the illegitimate son of her husband!"

This expression removed a load of anxiety from the mind of Avesford, by affording a key to all Walter's inconsistencies.

"Lady Norman will scarcely refuse her countenance to the adopted child of her sister and brother," replied he. "But does it appear, then, by Sir Richard's letters, that she whom we have all been taxing with duplicity, was herself a dupe?"

"My mind is still so bewildered," cried Walter, pressing his hand to his forehead, "that I am scarcely able to develop such a tissue of mysteries. Read, my dear Avesford. You will be better able than myself to see through the intricacies of the case."

And having thrust the envelop and its contents into the hands of his companion, Walter leaned back, screening his face from observation, as if to collect his thoughts or conceal his emotions.

The moments hurried by unnoticed. The agitation of his feelings left him no leisure for impatience; for it seemed to rouse him from a profound reverie, when, after a deliberate perusal of a letter of many pages closely written, Avesford returned it to his hand, observing—"I congratulate you, Walter! In all this, there is much to afflict—nothing to impart a permanent stigma—nothing to inspire you with any harsher feeling towards the authors of your days, than compassion for the frailties of human nature. Your father seems to have endured in his latter days such bitterness of remorse as disarms the severity with which we might otherwise feel inclined to consider so great a fault. Cut off in the prime of his career, it is probable that, had Sir Richard outlived the evil influence exercised over him, he might have made atonement and restitution. The delinquent was evidently haunted by dread of exposure. He knew the weakness of his wife. He knew that one who had been wrought upon to abet his errors, might be wrought upon to reveal them. Mark the tenor of the appeal addressed to you in the enclosure:—'I entrust this letter to the honor of my beloved son, to be opened in the event of legal rights being established to invalidate his claim as heir to my title and estates. But in case no such claims should be preferred, I require him to preserve it inviolate during his life, and to take steps for its destruction unopened at his decease.' It is not our fault, Walter, that these injunctions have been disobeyed. Lady Norman's revelations rendered it necessary to refer to what I trusted would prove to be testamentary dispositions—and though, alas! these letters serve only to confirm the truth of her assertions, they have at least satisfied the cravings of your affectionate heart, and proved that, in all he adventured here and hereafter to advance your interests in life, Sir Richard was actuated less by an unjustifiably vindictive feeling towards his heirs, than by tenderness for the innocent offspring of his illicit love."

Walter Norman seemed to shrink from this reference to the shame of his origin; but Avesford mildly continued—"It is possible, my dear Walter, that your unhappy mother may still survive; and though you have no right to en-
danger her peace of mind and reputation by a betrayals of the errors of her youth, this second letter, bearing her address, points out your father's desire that you should approach her. On this point, Walter, comfort may be in store for you."

The young man shook his head. "You, least of all the world, are entitled to judge him harshly. When you have fully perused Sir Richard Norman's appeal to your feelings, you will also be the least inclined. Meanwhile, I have one counsel to bestow. Consecrate your father's avowals to the holiest secrecy. Suffice it to the world that you renounce the inheritance of Selwood. Even Lady Norman must not be too largely trusted. Your sisters youth and Matilda's delicate position render it needless that they shall know more than I undertake to disclose to them—that you are the son, though not the heir, of Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor."

"Go to Constance, then—go to my friends—and set their minds at ease, by explaining the happy aspect my affirms have taken," said Walter, pressing his hands to his throbbing brows; while Avesford, though his heart thrilled at the young man's generosity in applying such an epithet to a circumstance which, though it entitled him to the sisterly love of Constance, rendered him a beggar and an outcast, could not forbear to notice that Walter had already begun to generalise Lady Norman among his "friends."

Instinct seemed to forewarn him that, while the discovery of his origin entitled him to the affection of Miss Norman, it was to create an enemy in her mother. In Matilda's now embittered frame of mind, it was not likely she should regard with indulgence, far less with tenderness, the offspring of one whose rivalship had embittered her youth, and estranged from her idolised child the fondness of its father.

Perplexed as she had been of old by the mysteries enveloping the proceedings of Sir Richard, Matilda was now fated to a more tormenting renewal of her misgivings. Avesford hastened to announce in general terms to the family that Sir Richard Norman, after avowing Walter Norman to be his son, added a codicil to his will, entitling him, in the event of the discovery of his illegitimacy, to a moiety of his disposable property which had been hitherto assigned as the portion of his daughter, and while Constance, bathed in tears of joy, flew to the arms of her brother, Lady Norman pursued her agitated interrogations. She insisted upon knowing the name of Walter's mother. "For whom had she and her child been sacrificed?"

"Be content, my dear sister!" was Avesford's stern reply. "Let the secrets of the dead rest with them in the grave. Walter's feelings and Sir Richard Norman's instructions on this delicate topic are to be respected. Henceforward, I exercise over him the authority of a father; and my first mandate forbids him to reveal more than is already known of his unhappy birth. My wife and her family will, I know, coincide in my wishes."

Lady Norman stood too much in awe of the honest man whose good opinion she feared she had already forfeited, to press the question in opposition to his will. "God knows the poor fellow shall never be mortified by my curiosity!"—was Cruttenden Maule's cordial reply to the appeal of his brother-in-law; "for all that has come to light, I don't love him and shan't love him a jot the less than when I thought him my nephew. I never had a slighting word or look from Walter, when he was a great gentleman; he shall never have one from me now he's a beggar."

"Softly, softly, my dear Maule!" interposed Avesford, with a smile. "Fern Hill is not Selwood Manor; yet the time may come for Walter Avesford to occupy a more eminent position in society than Sir Walter Norman."

The jealous heart of Lady Norman experienced a new pang at this startling announcement. The alien introduced by her weakness into the bosom of her family, then, was to be detained and cherished there to the detriment of her own daughter!—Constance, so beloved at Fern Hill, was to be superseded in the affection of the Avesfords by the illegitimate offspring of her husband!—Conscious that it became her to evince as strong an interest in behalf of the unfortunate Walter as the rest of her family, she dreaded his entrance into the room, when she must rise and embrace him. Within the last hour, he had become hateful to her. She longed to look upon his face as though his lineaments were still unknown to her, hoping to decipher there the fatal secret, and detect a resemblance, not to the faithless husband of her youth, but to the woman who had replaced her in Sir Richard's affections. But while she longed, she loathed!—It was impossible not to transfer to this living evidence of her wrongs the resentment she was no longer able to expend on him whom she had so
gratuitously loved—on him who had so gratuitously injured
and abandoned her.

Walter appeared, at length, with Constance on his arm
—the faces of both irradiated with joy; and, at that mo-
ment, he so singularly resembled Sir Richard Norman in
the happier period of his career, that Matilda shuddered, as
if again in his presence, at the recollection of her broken
promise, and the approaching disgrace of his son.

No one, however, would have inferred from the young
man's deportment that he was on the eve of a step precipi-
tating him from the summit of prosperity. While Con­
stance continued to whisper, as if never weary of the name
"my brother—my dear brother"—he scorned to afflict
himself with painful reminiscences. Instead of calling to
mind that the hours of his pride were numbered—that he
was spending his last evening at Selwood Manor, he chose
to dwell only upon the alleviations of his lot.

"Do not pity me, dearest," was his reply to the sorrow-
ful glances directed towards him by Miss Norman. "Con-
sider how much cause I have to be grateful. Reflect what
were my feelings yesterday, and from what depths of misery
I have been redeemed. To have found a sister—a father—
when I believed myself condemned to resign for ever the
sweetest affections of life, makes me regard myself as more
than ever a favorite of fortune."

Nor did his courage fail him when active measures were
to be taken. The dignity and firmness of Walter's deport-
ment were as remarkable as the silly wonderment of the
Mornington family at finding themselves invited to take pos-
session of the Selwood property. For some time, they
 treated Sir Walter Norman's letter of explanation as a hoax
upon their credulity. But it was too gravely worded for
them to persist in the idea; and there needed little logic and
less evidence to secure their ultimate conviction of the truth
of his declarations. All they had so long suspected it was
now easy to believe.

Nevertheless, Lord Mornington and his son were sensi-
tively touched by the spirit and integrity of Walter's conduct.
His views were not those of the world in which they had
their being; and as generosity is a quality that often begets
generosity in return, they felt piqued by his disinterested-
ness to make some display of magnanimity. After asser-
taining that he was to take the name and succeed to the pro-

erty of his opulent guardian, they hazarded vast profes-
sions of counsellory regard and loud threats of pecuniary mu-
nificence; and, encouraged by these friendly demonstra-
tions, Walter entreated that they would limit their kindness
to allowing his secession from his honors to pass in silence.
No public explanation of his change of circumstances was
requisite. The superior rank of Lord Mornington dis-
pensed on his part with any change of title to arrest the
attention of society; and when at length it became clear to
the neighborhood and tenantry that there existed a flaw
invalidating Walter's claim to the Selwood estates, they
settled it among themselves that the misfortune originated
in some informality connected with the protestant Lady
Norman's alliance with a catholic spouse. This view of
the case having been confidently announced by the county
paper, was duly copied into all the London journals, to be
transferred at the close of the year into the "Annual Re-
gister," and become matter of history; and Matilda, bound
to silence by a sense of honor and remorse, as the Mor-
ingtons by a sense of gratitude, had the mortification to
find that, with the majority, Walter—the child of her rival,
the blight of her existence—was henceforward to pass as
her own illegitimate offspring!

In process of time, the editor of the "County Chroni-
cle," in order to vary his inventions and keep up the interest
of the public, judiciously added—"We learn, with sincere
satisfaction, that, in consideration of the legal oversight to
which his amiable and talented nephew has fallen a victim,
that distinguished gentleman and upright patriot—the hono-
rable member for Liverpool, has entailed upon the only son
of the late Sir Richard Norman the whole of his princely
estates in Lancashire, Cumberland, and Westmoreland. By
the king's letters patent, Walter Norman N——n, Esq.,
heretofore called Sir W——er N——n, is, consequently,
to assume the name of A——d. Mr. Walter N——n
A——d is at present residing with his uncle at his beauti-

ful mansion at Fern Hill."

"Let them talk and let them write, my dear boy!" was
Avesford's reply to Walter's remonstrances against leaving
these assertions uncontradicted. "To whom do we owe
explanations on the subject—I and all my family are con-
tent to leave the world to its silly conceits. Society
may swallow a newspaper invention, more or less, without
choaking;—those who pin their faith on such authorities deserve to be taken in. I trust you will soon give these people something better to talk and write about than your birth, parentage, or education. From any young man but yourself, Walter, I should have insisted upon proofs of will and power to work out his own independence ere I secured to him the reversion of my property; but it were unreasonable to exact such exertions from you who were not reared with the view to professional distinctions; and as to stimulating them by holding out pecuniary temptations, I know you well enough, my dear Walter, to feel sure that the semblance of a bribe would disgust you with your opening career. All I ask of you, therefore, is, to strengthen your understanding by the study of men and books; that when called upon to devote your services to your country, you may not be found wanting. It is not only at Fern Hill, but, as the friend of the people, and the servant of the public, you must learn to supply the place of one who holds it a sin against the Creator to allow those faculties to rust in inactivity which are given us for the advantage of the community.

Avesford shook his head with a good-humored smile, on noticing with how vague a look of abstraction these exhortations were received. "At present, poor fellow, it is labor lost to preach to him," was the good man's wise conclusion. "Such a shock as he has received is not to be overcome in a day. His mind is elsewhere—his heart is elsewhere. We must leave time for his emotions to subside. A visit to the continent to work out his destinies and set the instincts of that affectionate heart at rest; and then, let him fairly start in his new career of life!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Four months had elapsed from the period of these startling vicissitudes:—the harvest, whose green and tender blades scarcely clothed the ground at the epoch of the Normans' abandonment of Selwood Manor, being ripe and heavy for the sickle. Walter had reluctantly submitted, during the interim, to the advice of his adopted family that he should remain in England till deeds of mutual release were signed between himself and the Morningtons; and Constance and her mother happily settled at Halsewell. No sooner, however, were his affairs finally adjusted, than he took his departure for the continent—alone, absolutely alone. The faithful domestic many years attached to his service, being a native of Selwood, was considered by Walter at present an unsafe companion, and left at Fern Hill till his return. Yet though thus lonely, his spirits were less than usually depressed. He was excited by the consciousness of manifold duties to be fulfilled. His first object was to address to the Avesfords an outpouring of the feelings which had for months struggled undivulged in his bosom. In England his heart had been so wounded, his soul so perplexed, that he found himself unmanned by emotion whenever he attempted to give utterance to his gratitude for the more than fatherly protection accorded to him by his guardian—the more than motherly affection testified towards him by Bessy, who, remembering with gratitude the kindness shown by Walter towards her poor infirm Charles, felt that she could not repay him by too dear a sympathy in his misfortunes.

Of all this, Walter was now able to express his consciousness. He could write, though he could not speak; and his full heart hung over the letters he despatched to Vol. II.—15
Avesford and his wife, with an excess of tender weakness only to be imagined by those who have been snatched out of the depths of misery by the tender mercies of a friend.

To Avesford, however, his letter contained somewhat more than these acknowledgments. Walter had so long accustomed himself to submit, not to the authority, but the counsel of his enlightened guardian, that, as yet, he had never summoned courage to resist Avesford's recent disposal of his destinies. Disappointment, however, had matured his reason, till on some points he was clearer-sighted than the disinterested friend intent only upon securing his happiness.

"Do not think me ungrateful for the noble intentions you have announced towards me," wrote he, "when I entreat that you will permit me to work out my fortunes in some professional career. It is not for me, my dear Avesford, to eat the bread of idleness. The line of employment likely to be most acceptable to you, and profitable to myself, is, I fear, the law; but my inclinations point otherwise. Forgive me, but I have not yet fortified for England!—The knowledge of foreign languages acquired during my long sojourn on the continent will probably avail me in a diplomatic career; and I hope to obtain an appointment as attaché. Any mission, from one end of Europe to another, would meet my views;—God knows I have no predilections to guide my choice. Only give me an occupation to save me from myself!—Only let me prove that my industry may be relied on; in order that Constance and her mother, on seeing me in the road to independence, may be persuaded to accept back that moiety of Sir Richard Norman's personal property which, but for me, would have been the undivided portion of his daughter.

"Your interest, my dear Avesford, would readily obtain this favor from government. But as you have never shackled your political independence by the smallest obligation, I appeal to you whether you may not prefer my obtaining the appointment by means of some personal friend. My intimacy with the son of the Duke of ———, leaves me no apprehension of being refused.

"Thus far as a matter of inclination. But even as a matter of prudence, I have strong arguments in favor of my project. In spite of the sage and magisterial airs I have sometimes seen him assume, my guardian has not yet ent-ered his eight-and-fortieth year; and should some unforeseen misfortune deprive him of the beloved companion so dear to us all, a second marriage might render him the father of children whom even his partiality would bitterly repent having disinherited in favor of a stranger.

"Suffer me, therefore, I entreat, to reverse the common order of things, and dictate to my benefactor the mode and measure of his bounties. During your lifetime, grant me such assistance, as after my act of restitution to Constance, will maintain me till my official services are repaid by the means of self-support. Lacking nearer and dearer heirs, your intentions in my favor may eventually be fulfilled. Meanwhile, (and long be the interim prolonged,) leave me your esteem, and permission to labor for my independence!—"

This letter once despatched, Walter felt in some degree relieved from his burthen of cares; and at liberty to resign himself to the influence of the fixed idea which was beginning to form the at once torment and consolation of his existence—his mother!—There were moments, indeed, when prolonged contemplation of the subject disturbed his young mind almost to madness. For Walter was still endowed with the holy illusions, the generous candor of youth. He had still an honest trust in the perfectibility of human nature; still that warm aspiration after the good and true which, whatever may be the turpitude of original sin, proves that the corruptions of the world beget sinfulness of far deeper dye. He had not yet tamed down his standard of excellence to the dwarfed and diminutive scale which the experiences of society force upon our adoption; nor been compelled by circumstances to offer his devotion to shrines, whose idols he knew to have been profaned. Excellence was the object of his fervent worship. He believed in virtuous women and honest men; nor could he at present figure to himself a being convicted of humiliating frailties whom it was possible to love and to honor.

Yet such must be his mother!—a fallen woman—a faithless wife—an unnatural parent—who had surrendered the offspring of her guilt to be reared for a fraudulent purpose in a foreign country, without deigning a second time to cast her eyes upon it!—He had dwelt among pure and high-principled women. Lady Norman and her sister were chaste in word, look, and thought, almost to coldness; and these, with his gentle sister, formed his types of womanly
excellence. But from these he was now to withdraw his veneration; to bestow it on all that was most faulty—most degraded.

Sometimes, however—sometimes, after weary and oppressive meditations upon the isolation of his existence—he found himself gradually yearning after this unknown and absent mother—the woman in whose veins his blood was flowing—the woman in whose eyes he fancied he should decipher all the mysteries of his destiny—the woman from whose lips he was to wring words of endearment—words of welcome. Then came the counter apprehension that the blessing he sighed for might prove a curse!—that he might be abjured and rejected! He might have to work his way to the heart of his mother through the cuirass of worldly prejudices and predilections. She might, perhaps, occupy a position, from which to descend for the recognition of her son, were ruin and infamy!

But in order fully to develop the perplexity of his feelings, it becomes necessary to unfold the secret revealed in the testamentary letter of Sir Richard Norman. The packet addressed to Walter, to be opened on the attainment of his majority (in the event of a claim having been preferred to the heirship of Selwood,) was dated from the Manor House in the year 1819, and conceived in the following terms:

"Should circumstances eventually require this letter to be placed before my son, it will reach his hands at a moment when disappointment and mortification have excited to the utmost his resentment against that unknown father, destined, perhaps, to fall into the grave ere his boy is enabled to form a correct judgment of his character, or measure the strength of his affections.

"For you are my son, Walter;—my son in kin and tenderness—though not, alas! in legitimate heirship. Your mother is of honorable birth—your father of honorable descent; yet the laws of the land deny you ancestry—deny you a social position—deny you all but such honors as may be conquered by your own exertions; for you are not the offspring of lawful wedlock!

"Forgive me, Walter! Your father calls upon you from the grave which has long concealed his frailties and his repentance, for pardon and for pity.—Judge me not too severely.—"
that she resented with bitterness worthy the occasion the
disappointment to see her serene, smiling, happy, at moments
when I was smarting under some covert insult offered by
the hateful Normans!—I had overlooked the difference of
station and religious faith existing between us; yet, instead
of securing by these sacrifices a sympathising, subservient
companion, I had obtained only a smiling, affable wife,
content to sail in the sunshine of my lot, but careful to avoid
the depths and rocks diversifying its safety and smooth-
ness.

"I now discovered how little the unaccomplished mind
and vapid conversation of Lady Norman were calculated to
adorn and sweeten domestic life. I, whose neglected edu-
cation afforded small grounds of pretension, began to regard
with contempt the limited faculties of my wife. I fancied
myself entitled to higher companionship. The calm sub-
missiveness which ought to have assuaged my petulance,
served only to render me more overbearing.

"Such was my state of mind, Walter, when the unex-
pected opening of the continent enabled me to visit Paris.
The Abbé, having motives for desiring to appear before his
foreign superiors accompanied by his wealthy and influ-
ential pupil, strenuously invited me to share his journev.
The project was unopposed by Matilda; and, eager to
escape from my embittered home, and the tauntings of her
vulgar relations, I hastened to France.

"You, my son, who, I trust, will have become familiar
from an early age with the diversity of foreign life can
scarcely appreciate the sensations of one transla°ted for the
first time from a life so cold and monotonous as mine, to
the brilliant scene of Paris, enlivened by the presence of
the allied armies, and cheered by the unexpected restoration
of peace. It was a moment of general joy—universal
hilarity;—and new life seemed to enter into my soul.
Spring was in its prime; and every heart seemed to beat in
unison with the season. Never had I been so elated__
never so reckless. No sacrifice was to be spared that con-
duced to the delight of an epoch never again to recur in the
weary waste of my existence.

"The Abbé was not an observant spectator of my en-
thusiasm in the intoxicating pleasures of the hour. Ab-
sorbed in vulgar pleasures, I soon announced my intention
of spending the allotted period of my absence at Paris; and
this did not suit the professional projects of the old man,
who recoiled from no artifice or astuciousness that tended to
further the interests of his church. It was necessary to his
plans that the rich English Catholic should accompany him
to the presence of the sovereign pontiff; and to Italy he
was accordingly determined that I should proceed.

"Had Father O'Donnel exercised over my mind the
authority with which my position as his disciple ought to
have invested him, he would have appealed to me as my
tutor, as my director, to fulfil his object. But his office had
never been unworthily exercised. Throughout the inter-
course between us, it was my will that had commanded,
his wisdom that had obeyed; and on the present occasion,
as on all others, he had recourse to stratagem to procure
what ought to have been obtained by argument.

"I have satisfaction in store for you!" said he, with a
gracious smile one evening when, on returning from a
riotous dinner party to dress for a ministerial ball, I found
him seated quietly in our old-fashioned hôtel in the Rue de
Grenelle. "I have to present to your acquaintance, my
dear Sir Richard, two ladies almost as virulent as yourself
against the family at Grove Park."

"Two English-women?—I am sick of them!" cried I;
their ceremonious insensibility, at all times wearisome, is
not to be tolerated in contrast with the graceful vivacity of
the Parisians."

"My ladies are neither ceremonious, insensible, nor
English," replied the Abbé: "though one of them, I admit,
bears the ill-omened name of Norman."

"Worse and worse!" cried I. "Let me hear no more
of them; for I am in haste to dress for the Duke of Wel-
lington's ball."

"Dress as quickly as you please—the quicker the bet-
er; for I have promised that you shall accompany me for
half an hour to the Comtesse de L----'s on your way to
the Faubourg St. Honoré."

"The Comtesse de L----'s!"—I exclaimed, startled by
the mention of a name connected with all the glories of Na-
poleon's camp, all the splendors of his court.—"I thought
you announced just now a Mrs. or Miss Norman?—

"What's in a name?" cried the old man, jocosely, over-
joyed to perceive that he had succeeded in captivating my
attention. Put on all your attractions for a presentation to two of the loveliest women in existence, and—en route!—

"Half an hour afterwards, we stepped together into my carriage; and were conveyed to a handsome hotel in the Faubourg du Roule, which I had already noticed for its noble gardens skirting the Champs Elysées; and after being ushered up a magnificent staircase past the grand apartments of the rez de chaussée, were introduced into a suite of rooms on the second floor, the atmosphere of which announced it to be the abode of luxury and beauty. Elegance predominated in the choice of every object that met the eye. Rare flowers were scattered in several of the richly-furnished rooms through which we were ushered. But the small octagon chamber, decorated with delicate arabesques, which terminated the suite, contained only commodious seats; and scarcely had we entered, when I was compelled to desist from my observations on finding myself presented by the Abbé to a young and beautiful woman who closely followed us into the room; leaving the battens open into an adjoining saloon, more dimly lighted than the boudoir.

"For the first time, my dear Norman, I have the pleasure to see you disposed in favor of a relation," said the Abbé; 'Madame Norman is just returned from England, after an unsatisfactory pilgrimage from Trieste to Grove Park, whose inmates she remembers with an aversion almost equal to your own.'

The mystery was thus developed. The lovely stranger before me was the Italian wife of my cousin Rupert; and the motive of her journeying to England was speedily explained.

"The daughter of an opulent nobleman of Idria, engaged in commercial speculations, Madame N. had visited Vienna with her family, at the period of Napoleon's occupation of the city; when old Marcodani, in attempting to conciliate the Emperor's favor for his mercantile projects, had been partly drawn in, partly compelled, to bestow upon one of the low-born generals of the Corsican adventurer the hand and fortune of his younger daughter. At the period of the marriage, Benedetta Marcodani was scarcely fifteen—timid, affectionate, delicate—a fragile flower, likely to be crushed by the iron hand of the uneducated man to whom she was thus roughly assigned. Her reluctance was unconcealed and unconfess. But the tears of whining girls were received by the Emperor with as little concern as the resistance of some petty prince of the empire. The remonstrances of old Marcodani were dismissed with a pinch of snuff. The trembling bride appeared the following day at the high altar of St. Stephen's, escorted by the notabilities of the imperial court. Monsieur le Général Comte de L——, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, was enriched;—and Benedetta became a wretch for life!

"Such was Madame Norman's brief sketch of her sister's history.

"She was my nurpling," said she—tears falling from her dark eyes as she proceeded in her narration. 'We were motherless, and 1 had been unto her as a mother;—had trained her warm heart and noble mind to aspire after happier destinies. Judge, therefore, what it was to me, to behold the gentle girl, whom I had taught to revere the decencies of a quiet domestic home as comprising the true happiness of her sex, flung into the arms of a man who, without an idea beyond his brigade and his cigar, regarded his wife as one among the gilded toys lavished upon him by the Emperor, as a reward for his services; and to be devoted in return as an ornament to his court, or an enhancement to the amusements of the imperial circle, whenever her smiles were put in requisition!—I discerned this with clearer perception than poor Benedetta—All she felt was repugnance for the coarse, uneducated man, who noted her tears with an oath; and instead of listening to my entreaties that the young countess might, for the present, remain with her family at Trieste, sent her off, under the escort of one of the Emperor's chamberlains who was conveying despatches to Paris, to await his return at the close of the campaign.'

"Madame Norman described, with so much feeling, so much energy, the affliction of the young girl thus prematurely banished from her home and country, that it was impossible not to sympathise in her emotion. She alluded also, with deep feeling, to her almost motherly terrors, in knowing her unprotected sister to be exposed to the temptations of a luxurious and licentious court.

"On this point, however," she continued, 'I was reassured, by the notorious impetuosity of the general. The violence of character which alarmed me for Benedetta's personal comfort, reassured me for her honor. The Comte de
was not a man to be trifled with! The Comte de L—— was not a man whose wife could be approached with levity. Among the dangers and difficulties besetting a young girl of sixteen, compelled to play an ostensible part in the most brilliant of European courts, this peril was spared!

Benedetta, meanwhile, was installed in this splendid hotel; where all the gifts, all the pleasures which opulence could bestow, courted her enjoyment. The count treated her as a child, to be conciliated with toys and sweetmeats; and in conformance with Napoleon's desire that the wives of his generals should enhance, by their style of living and appearance, the magnificence of the imperial court, the young and lovely countess was distinguished by the richness of her jewels—her equipage—her entertainments.

Although Benedetta's letters contained no murmurs against her destiny, I could discern that the child was unhappy. Affection, at her age the brightest jewel, the most perfect gift—was wanting!—She was alone in her splendid palace; lonely in heart and soul—a companionless and miserable exile.—

Fortunately, her appointment as lady of the bedchamber to the new Empress almost her country-woman, soon supplied an occupation for her leisure. For the count, occupying a high command, was now with the army in Spain. Napoleon's confidence in his high military capacities compelled him to remain absent from Paris; nor was he known to express dissatisfaction at being thus banished from the home which an ill-assorted marriage had stripped of its attractions. How was a man of his age and pursuits to converse with a child like Benedetta—a child trembling at the sound of his rough words, and the sight of his forbidding countenance?—You may treat it as a jest,' continued Madame Norman, perceiving that a smile overspread my own—b ut the Comte de L—— was, perhaps, the only man in Paris who looked with perfect unconcern—perfect indifference—upon the lovely countenance and beautiful form of my sweet sister.

Had it been otherwise, Benedetta's affections would have been gradually attached by the devotion of a heart even so rude as that of her husband. My sister is an enthusiast. His military honors were not without value in her eyes. She took pride in his distinctions, and would...
The Heir of Selwood.

The marriage of my elder brother-in-law with the daughter of an influential cabinet minister, gave us assurance of a favorable result.

"In the beginning of May, therefore, I proceeded to England—to London—to the family of my husband. Of noble origin and endowed with a handsome fortune, in every respect the equal of my husband, I was prepared to receive from them the attentions due to a woman, a stranger, and a relative.

"But how, oh! how was I welcomed!—By some with coldness—by some with scorn. Though unconnected with Napoleon or the French nation otherwise than by my sister's compulsory marriage, I was treated as an enemy—an upstart!—One would have imagined, chevalier, judging from my cruel reception at Grove Park, that my hands were embrodied in English blood, and that I visited England as an intrigante intent upon advancing the interests of the usurper. From Lady Catherine Norman, in particular, I met with the most cruel slights. Though my patience did not enable me to support many days the mortifications heaped upon me, I had time to appreciate the insolence of that hateful woman. I spoke of appealing to you, chevalier, as the head of the Norman family, to engage your influence in behalf of my poor Benedetta. But Lady Catherine informed me with a contemptuous smile, that as a Catholic, your interference would be rather injurious than otherwise—that you were a nonentity, or worse;—and that till the succession of her infant son to your title and estates, the Normans of Selwood were likely to remain obscure and powerless!—

"For a time, every sentiment was absorbed in resentment at being thus harshly treated by my husband's family. But the claims of Benedetta were stronger than even those of pride. I knew that unless the object of the Count de L—could be secured, a life of misery was in store for her; her terror of her husband being so great, that she might be tempted to any rash act securing her from his society.

"A new channel of influence, meanwhile, presented itself to my hopes. My father's only brother, Father Giuseppe Marcodani, Superior of the Jesuits' College at Rome, is supposed to possess considerable influence with Cardinal Gonsalvi and his Holiness. His interference, I am assured, might operate wonders in our favor. With this view, sir, I am about to visit Italy; and having been recommended by my uncle's correspondents in Paris to seek the protection of a brother of his order so eminent as the Abbé O'Donnel, I some days since obtained an introduction to your venerable friend. The rest you will divine. His amazement, on learning the name and connections of the sister of the Comtesse de L—, and mine, on discovering in the pious ecclesiastic whose escort to Italy would be so singular a comfort to my unprotected condition, the friend and preceptor of my husband's kinsman:"

"You intend, then, madam, to honor the Abbé by becoming the companion of his journey?" I inquired, fascinated by the graceful frankness of Madame Norman.

"That must depend upon yourself!"—she replied with a smile. "The Abbé assures me that he is too deeply pledged to Sir Richard Norman to ——."

"Let that be no obstacle," cried I. "It will afford me sincere delight to forward the object of Madame la Comtesse by ceding my place in the carriage to her charming sister."

The words had scarcely passed my lips, however, before I repented my promptitude, not only on account of the vexation which suddenly overcast the brows of O'Donnel, but because a glance at Madame Norman's lovely countenance, brightened by the impulses of joy and gratitude, reminded me that such companionship might have imparted a charm to my Italian journey. The pledge, however, was already accepted; and O'Donnel turned the conversation to general subjects, as if resenting to himself the right of private remonstrance.

"All I saw of Madame Norman served to increase my admiration. The exquisite modulation of her voice—the ingenious simplicity of her manners, derived added charm from contrast with the vain and affected Parisians. Nevertheless, I experienced some curiosity to behold the Benedetta in whose behalf my services were thus cavalierly enlisted; and though Madame Norman excused the absence of her sister on the plea that extreme timidity rendered it painful to the Comtesse de L—to present herself before strangers, I discerned more than once the outline of a tall, graceful figure, traversing the adjoining saloon, and doubted not..."
that the anxieties of the young countess were rendering her an unseen auditor of our conversation.

"It became necessary, however, to take leave. Madame Norman's allusion to the evening engagement, which caused me to appear in full dress, left me no alternative but departure; and my whole way from her presence to the illuminated porte cochère of the duke, was harassed by the vehemence of the Abbé's remonstrances. He would not hear of my abandoning my journey to Italy. He represented in colors equally glowing the advantages our cause might derive from the establishment of an immediate connection between myself and the Vatican, and the delight I should myself derive from the society of so charming a companion as Madame Norman; while I, in my turn, alluded with a smile to the risks we might mutually incur from such familiar association.

"'My presence,' replied the old man, with indignation, 'will, I trust, afford a guarantee both to Rupert Norman and the world, that an affectionate sister, performing an act of disinterested service, was not insulted on her pilgrimage by the gallantry of a well-born Englishman!'

"To pacify his irritation, I consented to visit Madame Norman on the morrow, and solicit her approval of our change of projects. But it was chiefly the hope of beholding one whose beauty I had heard described in Parisian society as exceeding that of the Duchesses de Montebello—de Rovigo—Madame de St. Jean d'Angely—and other distingir isheil ornaments of the Imperial Court—that induced me, early on the following day, to present myself at the Hôtel de L——.

"Unaware that morning visits are, in Parisian society, the exclusive privilege of intimacy, I made so decided a claim to admittance by presenting to the porter a card bearing the name of the countess's sister, and announcing myself as a relative, that I was immediately desired to pass on.

"'Ces dames sont au jardin,' said the concierge, pointing to an old-fashioned gilded grillage, opening from the court-yard; and following the direction, I found myself in one of those charming retreats which impart to the hôtels of the Faubourg du Roule the charms of a villa or country-house. A gardener was mowing on the lawn the first grass of the season; and in the lady who sat on a rustic bench under the blossomed almond-trees, enjoying the freshness of the scene, I fancied I could recognise my cousin's handsome wife.

"A nearer survey convinced me of my error. The lovely creature towards whom I was advancing was ten years younger, and far more beautiful than her sister. There was something singular in the union of premature intelligence imparted to her countenance by an early encounter with the trials of life, and her air of extreme youth. Her clear brown Italian complexion seemed to derive delicacy from the exquisite regularity of her features; and the softness of her expressive eyes was enhanced by the vivid blushes which almost every word and glance called up into her cheeks. Yet her movements were unembarrassed. The comtesse was the only woman I had then seen, to whom extreme timidity imparted an indefinable charm without the forfeiture of a single grace.

"My intrusion was duly explained, and quickly pardoned. Already prejudiced in my favor by the warm eonemonies of my venerable preceptor—perhaps, even of her sister—the countess seemed to adopt as a relative the man who had been so promptly interested as her friend. She bade me take a place by her side. She inquired with graceful earnestness into my occupations at Paris;—smiled at my enthusiasm—reproved my prejudices. At the close of half an hour's conversation, I felt as though, till that moment, I had never looked upon the face, or listened to the voice, of woman. I held my breath that I might not miss the slightest murmur of her soft, melodious intonation. I was afraid of losing a look—a word—a gesture.

"Such, Walter, such was the influence of your unhappy mother!
CHAPTER XVII.

We met in secret;—doubly sweet,
Some say they find it so to meet;
Not such my creed! I would have given
My life but to have called her mine,
In the full view of earth and heaven.—Byron.

“Briefly, briefly, let me pass over the ensuing time—moments of frantic joy, to be followed by years of anguish and remorse. While attempting to influence my conduct by unworthy means, the Abbé not only defeated his own purpose, but lent his aid towards heaping shame and misery upon my head.

“Though, true to his calculations, I did consent to accompany him to Rome, it was not, as he conjectured, under the influence of the attractions of his fair companion. No! my plans were already matured. For worlds, I would not at that moment have absented myself from Paris. I contrived to have letters awaiting me at Avignon, pretending to necessitate my return to Selwood. He had, of course, no plea to oppose; and leaving the old man to pursue his journey with his lovely charge, I hastened back to Paris—hastened to the side of Benedetta—and under the semblance of brotherly friendship, became her companion, her counsellor, her comforter, her seducer. Do not imagine that, because I thus anticipate the period of her fall, the defenseless and unadvised creature was an easy prey. But the harassed existence to which she had been subjected, rendered her more than other women susceptible to the seductions of tenderness. Of late years, she had dwelt alternately among heartless flatterers, and been exposed to the harshness of a tyrant;—she had never shared the intimate confidence of affection—had neither trusted nor been trusted—neither pardoned nor been forgiven. And now, in the interchange of familiar regard, though still uncorrupted in mind—still unswerving in principles—she confided in me and I in myself, till we were roused from a dream of happiness by the consciousness of guilt.

“Never, never, my poor Walter, may you experience such self reproach as mine, in witnessing the remorse by which that young heart was speedily overwhelmed! Benedetta gave herself up to her sorrow as unreservedly as she had done to her affection; and when, after two months’ absence, Madame Norman returned from her fruitless journey, there was not even a momentary attempt at concealment on the part of her sister.

“‘Stella must know all,’ cried she, on the announcement of her arrival. ‘She shall not enfold me to her bosom believing me to be still good—still pure—still innocent. She shall know all! Then let her heart determine whether she will still accept me as a sister.’

“‘Exert your courage, my poor girl,’ was, on the other hand, Madame Norman’s exhortation on re-entering the apartment of the countess. ‘The general’s application is rejected; your husband is exiled to his estates in Provence. I had an interview with him last week at Aix, and have promised to superintend the sale of his property in Paris, and escort you as speedily as possible to his protection.’

“‘He will kill me!’—burst at once from the pale lips of Benedetta.

“No, not his disposition and character have, on the contrary, undergone a happy revolution. He is now all kindness—all indulgence; reconciled to his losses and disappointments by the hope that domestic peace and affection will comfort his declining years.’

“‘He will kill me!’—persisted Benedetta, in the same wild, incoherent tone. ‘Sister, I, too, am an altered being; an abject, miserable wretch! I have disgraced his name; I am about to become a mother!’

“Fearful was the burst of indignant passion with which this confession was received by the impetuous woman, who had so long and truly rejoiced in the well-doing and fair reputation of her nursing—her pupil—her more than sister. On me and on Benedetta her reviling fell with equal violence. The vehement Italian had scarcely words to convey her scorn of the two-fold perfidy degrading my conduct. I, a husband—a man of honor—a man of noble blood to have stooped to a falsehood, in order to involve her fair and innocent sister in a maze of guilt! She despised me; and made no concealment of her contempt. But while I honored the warmth with which she rejected all palliation
of our fault, I trembled for the consequence of such unre-
lenting violence upon the gentle nature and precarious health
of Benedetta.

"I have already admitted to you, that I had quitted Eng-
land disgusted with my dull home and dreary prospects.
Candor compels me to add that I now proceeded to act un-
generously and unjustly towards my unfortunate wife. As
an apology for conduct utterly inexcusable, I represented in
strong colors to Madame Norman and her sister, not only
my indifference towards Matilda, but her undeservingness
of my affection. I described her as a cold and careless
wife; and the lovely and accomplished women who now
absorbed my affection—already disposed to regard with
abhorrence the heretic bearing my name—whom they could
not persuade themselves to regard as my lawful wife—grad-
ually desisted from their entreaties that I would return
home—return to Selwood—return to Lady Norman—leav-
ing the unhappy Benedetta to the fate which my madness
had embittered!

"It was not, however, of Matilda, that either they or I,
thought at that moment. Our immediate consideration re-
garded the Count de L——. How was he to be tranquil-
lised—how tampered with—how deceived with vain pre-
tences, into sanctioning the prolongation of Benedetta's
sojourn in Paris?—To obtain a medical certifícate of her
indisposition was no difficult matter; for the afflicted crea-
ture was, in truth, so changed, that her nearest friends often
passed her without recognition; and to despatch it to Aix
without delay was urgent—for even Stella admitted lihereou-
viction that, sliould the count conceive the slightest sus-
picion of the truth, no personal danger to be incurred by
breaking through his sentence of banishment would one
moment deter him from hastening to Paris, and wreaking
his vengeance on the offenders!

"'Do not deceive yourself,' said Madame Norman.

"Neither strength nor courage would avail to secure my
poor sister from his violence. Benedetta would be sacri-
ficed—justly, perhaps, but barbarously sacrificed—to the
injured honor of a man, unsusceptible on all other points;
on that, delicate and sensitive as a woman. Do not, I re-
peat, deceive yourself? Let the Count de L—— arrive at
Paris, and my unhappy sister is lost!'

"Though, convinced that the excited mind of Stella saw
things in an exaggerated light, the agitation of her sister's
mind and deportment testified that her terrors, at least, were
real.

"Renouncing, therefore, every suggestion of personal
pride, I hastened to exercise my political influence in every
attainable channel, in order to obtain the sanction of the
English government to the projects of the count. My solici-
tations were successful beyond my hopes. In the course of
the ensuing month, the general was permitted to embark
at Marseilles, for the Isle of Elba—

"Reassured on this painful point, Madame Norman's
next anxiety regarded the disposal of the child about to be
born to Benedetta. She exacted that it should be removed,
at once, from the presence of the young mother. She would
not trust the gentle heart of Benedetta, so much as a
momentary impulse of maternal love; for well did she sur-
mise that, if once permitted to fold her babe to her bosom,
she was likely to hazard all risks to keep it by her side for
evermore. The project of your adoption as my legitimate
offspring was hers, exclusively hers. She demanded the
sacrifice at my hands!—Influenced perhaps, as much by
detestation of the Normans, as by affection for her sister,
she required that, in case Benedetta's child should prove a
son, it should be adopted as the heir of Selwood.

"To prepare Matilda for this imposition would, I feared,
prove no easy task.—Circumstances, however, favored my
plans. Lady Norman was eager to accompany me to
Paris, (where I had solemnly pledged myself to my hum-
bled, sorrowing Benedetta, to pass the period of her trou-
bles;) and in the course of the winter, Matilda acceded to
my entreaties with a gentleness and grace that filled me
with remorse. She consented that "a foundling" should
be imposed upon the world as her son; little dreaming that
the child so designated was the object of my dearest affec-
tion.

"I am to blame, perhaps, my son, for dwelling upon cir-
cumstances better buried in oblivion. But, in addressing
this letter to you, I feel as though I had for the first time
found a friend to whom to unfold the history of my trials;
—and bitter, trust me, were my sufferings throughout that
trying winter—divided between the society of a lovely and
confiding wife, whose merit and triumphs in the world
reflected distinction upon my name; and a woman equally
lovely—equally confiding—whose peace of mind I had wrecked for ever! Day after day did I wander from the side of Lady Norman and the brilliant festivities of the Bourbon court, to the gloomy seclusion of the harassed and suffering Benedetta; perpetually exciting their anxieties, yet incurring the reproaches of neither. Matilda was too gentle, and her rival too deeply bowed, to experience resentment; and I, a source of misery to both—to both a traitor—was by both generously forgiven!—

"In the midst of these perplexities, with the moment drawing near which was to crown my delinquency by a new act of fraud—just as Benedetta's situation became unconcealable and her sorrows more heavy than she could bear, came the news of Napoleon's return!—The Comte de L—— was already in France—the Comte de L—— about to visit Paris!—Stella, who, in her strict seclusion at the Hôtel de L——, had heretofore experienced some solace in the idea of the death-blow she was about to deal to the vanity of Lady Catharine Norman, (who, by a climax of evil fortune, was parading her follies on the continent,) was now thoroughly overcome! Although the General was invested with a command likely to detain him in the south, he might at any moment, be required to march through Paris on his way to the army gathering on the frontiers of Belgium; and between remorse at being compelled to require Matilda's sojourn in an enemy's country at such a juncture, and the anguish of apprehending new perils for my lovely, unhappy, uncomplaining Benedetta, my mind was near-ly distracted!—I knew that the hour which gave birth to her child, was to be that of our eternal separation. I was to receive and bear you at once to the Chateau de St Sylvain, where Lady Norman was residing; and from that hour, to return no more to her presence. On such conditions only, had Stella lent her aid to the concealment of this unhappy affair. She would not hear of any further injury to the unsuspecting General, whose letters avouched the warmest and most heartfelt interest in the indisposition of his wife. Satisfied that the expected heir of Selwood would be reared in the Catholic faith, and tenderly watched over by a faithful domestic of the Marcodani family, now attached to the service of Matilda, the babe and its unfortunate father were to become strangers to them for ever!—

"You may readily conceive that this harsh resolution was dictated by the severe judgment of Madame Norman. It was only under awe of her rigid authority that Benedetta consented to reject her innocent child from her bosom: and in conformity with my previous pledges, and during the insensibility of your mother, I bore you away; and established my beloved son—a second Ishmael—under the governance of a more jealous Sarah.

"Compelled to hourly deception—constant anxieties—to the suppression of every tender impulse—every parental emotion—how often, dear Walter—my babe, my boy, my own, my only son—have I wept in secret over your cradle; endeavoring to trace in your infant features some resemblance to her who was lost to me for ever, and shedding, alas! elsewhere, her tears of repentance.

"From that period, from time to time, a letter was shown to me by Ghita containing the stern inquiry, 'Dost the child yet live?'—and 'The child liveth,' was the only reply which Stella chose that her sister should receive.—I was never again permitted to behold her face. She was hurried away from Paris. The Hôtel de L—— was sold. The second downfall of Napoleon precipitated the count anew from his high estate. But on this occasion he experienced some alleviation. The newspapers apprised me, that, 'in his retirement to his estates in Provence, the Comte de L—— was accompanied by his devoted wife.'

"The sequel, my son, you have learned from others—my prolonged sojourn on the continent—my return to Selwood—the birth of the daughter who came to share without diminishing your father's affection—the perfect fruition, in short, of my culpable plan.

"The fate in store for us, Walter, I have not courage to conjecture. The Abbé O'Donnel—who, apprised by the spies he had set over my conduct at St. Sylvain, of all that had occurred, was reduced to silence only by my threat of withdrawing my support from the Catholic cause in the event of his exposing the secret of your birth—addresses me occasionally from Paris, prophesying a thousand evils from my perseverance in my act of fraud. But I have promised, and will not recede. All to which I ever pledged myself in order to secure your rights, shall be rigidly performed; and should my utmost precautions fail—should the truth ultimately come to light, and this letter..."
reach your hands—then, Walter—then, my beloved boy, pardon and pity your father!

"Should your unhappy mother yet survive, disturb not by importunity the quiet of her latter days. It is for her to decide in what degree she chooses to admit your claims upon her tenderness. The enclosed letter secures you access to her presence; but I charge you, Walter, from the solemn refuge of the grave, recall not the sorrows of her youth by one single anxious hour. To Lady Norman you owe the gratitude—to her, the submission, of a son. Discharge both duties, I implore you, as some redemption of the errors of your affectionate and guilty father!—"

CHAPTER XIX.

Out, out, affection!
All bond and privilege of nature break—
Let it be virtuous to be obstinate.—Shakespeare.

Such was the letter which had searched out the troubled depths of Walter Norman's heart. One or two imperious missives from Madame Norman to Sir Richard, and a single enclosure addressed in his father's handwriting to the Comtesse de L------, completed the packet. At first, uncertain whether, after so considerable a lapse of years, the object of his solicitude still survived, on his arrival in Paris, he discovered, in the cemetery of Père La Chaise, a cenotaph in honor of her husband—promoted in his old age by the events of the revolution of 1830, to the rank of a Field Marshal of France. The inscription on this pompous marble ported that it had been erected to his memory by his afflicted widow. "The intelligence thus conveyed of her survival, was in some degree consolatory; but the terms of the inscription offended the integrity of Walter. He felt that his mother had no right to define herself the "afflicted widow" of the Comte de L------!

The difficulty experienced in obtaining information on the continent concerning even the most eminent private families is scarcely to be credited by those accustomed to the dense and incorporated frame of English society; which, by means of the press, maintains such constant inter-communication. In France, the public is indifferent to the private proceedings of all but its political notabilities. Society is subdivided into myriads of circles, lacking a common centre; and Walter had to repeat his inquiries, till he trembled at the sound of the name of the Comtesse de L------. After all, his discoveries amounted to nothing. The countess might still exist—but she was forgotten. She did not appear at court—possessed no hôtel at Paris. Madame de L------ was probably to be heard of at Aix, at the Château des Mesnils, in the neighborhood of which city her husband had expired.

Thither, therefore, did the anxious traveller direct his steps; and with what emotion, when he reflected that, two years before, he had spent several days in the old Provençal capital—little conjecturing his peculiar interest in the spot.

At Aix, his hopes were realised—intelligence poured in upon him. The memory of the deceased Field Marshal was held sacred in the province where, as a simple peasant, he had joined the army of the convention; and though the military renown which, under the reign of Louis Philippe, rendered him a hero, had nearly subjected him to capitulation under that of Louis XVIII, opposite to the windows of the inn where Walter took up his quarters, a pedestal was actually in progress, destined to support the bust of Field Marshal the Comte de L------.

"His widow—one of the most beautiful women of Napoleon's court—resides upon her estate of Les Mesnils, five leagues off," added the master of the inn, in reply to Walter's interrogations. "Mais ça ne vaut pas la peine d'en parler!—she is no longer worth looking at. Many years ago, the countess changed horses here on her way to the springs of the Mont D'Or; and I never saw a more withered, wasted creature. Since the death of the marshal, the countess has lived quite retired, and receives no one."

"No one but her family, I presume?" added Walter.

"Family!—Madame la Comtesse is a foreigner—an Italian—I never heard of her having a family—nor Monsieur la Mareschal either.—His uncle's and cousins were doubtless to be found among the ramoneurs of Lyons and Paris. Mais pardi—an pareil homme se passe de parentés;—un pareil homme est fils de ses œuvres!"
On the following day, in pursuance of the information thus afforded, Walter betook himself to Les Mesnils; a compact, antiquated little town, washed by the sparkling waters of the river Arc, still retaining its ancient character of feudal dependence upon the adjoining château. A tortuous street, scarcely wide enough to afford more than a footway, formed the only communication between the diminutive Place d'Armes, serving as a market-place, and a vast close containing the collegial church of St. Exupère, spacious and rich enough to adorn a considerable city. Facing the church, divided only by its princely court-yard bounded by a curious low stone wall or balustrade, stood the château; a vast edifice of dingy brick, ornamented with heavy carvings in stone, surmounted by high peaked roofs and towering chimneys, according to the favorite architecture of the reign of Henri IV, and Louis XVII.

Here, resolved to reconnoitre the territory and make further inquiries ere he hazarded an intrusion into the countess's presence, Walter hastened, the moment of his arrival. Although the struggle of contending emotions almost incapacitated him for the task of observation, he was struck by the solemn and cheerless aspect of the place. The vast solitary court-yard—the prodigious range of windows devoid of all vestige of human inhabitants—the wilderness of chimneys, from not one of which smoke was issuing—imparted to the Château des Mesnils the aspect of a religious house, or rather, of an uninhabited palace.

"If you are looking for the entrance to the gardens, mon beau m'sieur," said a crippled beggar who hobbled after him from the church steps in hopes of a gratuity, "you must go round the court to the grille d'honneur, behind the old college. But the gardens are not open to-day. Madame la Comtesse allows them to be visited by strangers only three days in the week. Charité mon beau m’sieur—un petit sou pour Dieu!"

Scurrying understanding the words addressed to him, Walter proceeded in the direction pointed out. But on reaching the spot, a gray-headed porter made his appearance from a lodge adjoining the gates, to announce that the gardens were closed to the public. The offer of a gratuity with a view of bribing admittance seemed to offend the old man's dignity. "The gardens of Les Mesnils were not shown for money. If monsieur chose to return at noon on the following day, he will be admitted."

Still, Walter lingered near the gate—apparently in admiration of the rich parterres of carnations, dahlias, and other autumnal flowers which covered the vast platform before the southern façade of the house, and formed the prelude to its far-famed English gardens. But his eyes were, in truth, directed towards a company of five or six priests, who were sauntering through the gardens as if in possession of the place; reminding Walter of the hint he had already received at the inn, that the "chapeaux cornus" exercised unlimited influence at the château—"que Madame la Comtesse s'était plongée dans la dévotion!"—He had been assured, moreover, by the same authority, "que Madame la Comtesse détestait les Anglais." It was a prejudice—perhaps because they were heretics—perhaps because of the animosities cherished against them by Monsieur le Maréchal; but certain it was that no English family applying to view the château on unprivileged days, had ever obtained permission.

Deterred by this assurance from hazarding an application, Walter postponed till the following morning a visit which he trusted would afford facilities for nearer approach to the recluse. In the course of the day, however, he ascertained, in desultory conversation with a respectable tradesman of the town, that the widowed countess, reduced by prolonged ill health to premature old age, was the slave of the Peres de la congregation attached to the college; that for years past she had lived in strict retirement, and from the moment of the marshal's decease had remained immured in her own apartments.

"I have sometimes caught a glimpse of Madame la Comtesse, sauntering on the terrace with which her rooms are connected," said the man; "and though she is little more than forty years of age, you would take her for sixty;—her countenance is so severe, and her face so pallid. But I am wrong to apply a disparaging word to her! Madame is careful to maintain, as in the marshal's lifetime, all the noble charitable establishments of Les Mesnils; and I have a notion she would live on a more sociable and Christian footing with her neighbors, were it not for the priests. It is supposed that they want her to re-endow the college.—She has already given a hundred thousand francs of the old marshal's succession (beyond the sum bequeathed by his will,) for the reparation of the collegiate church. So much the better! The church is an honor to Les Mesnils!—Still, Vol. II.—17
it would be a happier thing for Madame la Comtesse, if Monsieur le Supérieur and his black brethren did not cage her up among them—terrifying her latter days, and perplexing her household with their authority."

- "Austere devotion!"—"prolonged ill-health!"—Such, then, was the fate of his ill-starred mother. On the morrow, the intelligence Walter had received, was confirmed. A long and leisurely promenade in the gardens enabled him so to win upon the confidence of the venerable concierge, that the old man admitted without much pressing the total subjection of his lady to her spiritual pastors.

"Formerly, said he, "Madame la Comtesse was kind and indulgent. Thirty years have I been porter here!—I was placed here by the agents of Monsieur le Général, on the very day the estates of Les Mésnils was bestowed upon him by the Emperor, as a reward for his good services at Austerlitz!—He was a bachelor then; and it was long enough before the events of the war allowed him to come and take a peep at the château. I had been five years in his service before I saw his face."

"You had no great loss, I fancy," observed Walter, inconsiderately. "I have heard him described as a good soldier, but a harsh, violent, unfeeling man."

"Under your pardon, they lied who told you so!"—cried the old concierge, his withered cheek reddening with indignation; "never was there a kinder master—a better man!—He had not so many finicking phrases and congées, may be, as the fribbles of the old régime who were brought back to us, sir, by Messieurs the red-coats, your countrymen, (small thanks to them for the importation!)—but a right good heart—a right Christian heart!—God be with his soul!"

"I was probably misinformed," replied Walter, in a deprecating tone. "But you were speaking, my good friend, of the countess?"

"I was saying, sir, that when, twenty years ago, or thereabouts, she first visited the château, young and beautiful as she then was, (a pearl, sir, of a woman!) we servants fancied that it was for a month's whimsey—here and away again;—that she would soon weary of the old woods and turrets of Les Mésnils, and be off to Paris. But no such thing!—From that day to this she has never quitted the place;—except once when the general was ordered to try the Vichy waters, and she made it a duty to bear him company."

"Commanding the most distinguished society of the neighborhood," observed Walter, "the countess probably—""""Society?"—interrupted the concierge. "In the marshal's time, it is true, she was obliged sometimes to receive Monsieur le Préfet, the Commandant of Aix; and others of the authorities who came to visit him. But since his death, not a visitor has broke bread in the château, saving their reverences les Pères de la congrégation; and even with them, madame is never well enough to sit at table,"

"Is her health, then, so very much enfeebled?—"

"It is nearly a year since I was in my lady's presence, sir. But as far as my old eyes can judge, she steps out fairly enough when I watch her pacing the terrace of her apartments yonder, early of mornings, or late at evenings."

"I own I am curious to obtain a sight of one whose beauty has been so celebrated," observed Norman, trying to speak unconcernedly. "Could you not admit me into the gardens or the lodge, at an hour when I am likely to obtain a glimpse of her?"

"On public days the gardens are open from daybreak till nightfall," said the old man. "Earlier in the season, when visitors are abundant, Madame la Comtesse never quits her room on those days. But you are the first stranger we have seen here these three weeks; so that, of late, madame has been daily on the terrace."

At the old man's suggestion, therefore, and under a promise of discretion, Walter returned to the château towards sunset. The concierge was already stationed before the grille, on the look out for him.

"Je craignais que vous n'arriviez pas!"—said he; "and I did not dare go to the inn to fetch you. Old Joseph's livery coat is so rarely seen in the streets of Les Mésnils, that it sets people's tongues wagging whenever I do make my appearance. Mais qu'avez-vous, donc, mon bon Monsieur?"—he continued, noting with consternation the sudden change that overspread Walter's countenance, when, from the window of the lodge, he discerned upon the terrace above, on which the setting sun was shedding its lustre, the tall, slender figure of a woman habited in mourning, escorted by an ecclesiastic, with whom she was en-
gaged in discourse. Walter was, in truth, scarcely able to support the conflict of his feelings; for in that woman, he beheld his mother—in that priest, the lawgiver by whose austerity her hours were embittered.

Vainly did he attempt to discriminate through the distance, the features of her face. His eyes were dim with tears. He could trace nothing but two shadowy forms slowly passing through the evening air.

He was recalled to his presence of mind by the voice of the old concierge; who, beginning to fear from the irritability with which his guest motioned away the offer of a glass of water, that he took some deeper interest in the scene than was altogether warrantable, now presented him the book in which it was usual for visitors to inscribe their names.

"I omitted this morning, sir, to request your compliance with the custom of the place," said Monsieur Joseph, consequentially tendering him a pen.

"Does Madame la Comtesse ever inspect this book?" cried Walter, in a tremulous voice.

"Occasionally—rarely, however, till the close of the season."—

"Ecoute, mon cher!" resumed Walter, insinuating into his hand a sum of gold pieces doubling the amount it had ever been the fortune of that withered palm to endorse. "Contrive that madame shall see the signature I am about to inscribe before she sleeps, and the same sum I now offer you, awaits you to-morrow. Do not hesitate; you will confer as great a service on your lady as on myself, by acceding to my request."

The name of "Walter Norman of Selwood" was accordingly legibly traced upon a page seldom inscribed with those of his countrymen; and after some further discussion, old Joseph undertook that the countess's waiting-woman, who was a niece of his own, should present the book that night for her inspection.

On the following day, Walter hastened at an early hour to the lodge to learn the result of this attempt.

"You have brought sad ill-luck to me, sir," replied the old concierge, in a melancholy tone, after pocketing the remainder of his reward. "Monsieur le Supérieur visited me in person this morning before my latch was up, with orders from the countess that the gardens should never again be opened to visitors."

And the old man proceeded to enumerate the beauties of the shrubberies of which he had been so long the cicerone, and the names of the illustrious visitors to whom he had enjoyed the satisfaction of displaying them, as if in attestation of the injury inflicted on him.

"And the book?" impatiently interrupted Walter.

"Ay, ay!—the book—sacred! as if we had not heard enough of the book—the origin of all the mischief!—The book, sir, is thenceforth to be deposited at the château."

"You are certain, however, that it was submitted to the countess?—"

"Certain as of the deluge. Mademoiselle Antonine came down to the lodge last night after dark, to cross question me about my motives for having it shown to her lady. The countess, it seems was furious on reading the name you had written; and instantly sent off one of the footmen to the college, in search of Monsieur le Supérieur, who was closeted with her till nearly midnight."

"Furious!—Her only sentiment, then, on reading my name was anger!"—murmured Walter, as he retraced his steps to the inn. "Such, then, are the impulses of her heart, when the chord is touched to which its fondest affections ought to vibrate!—This woman must be more firmly—more sternly dealt with."

And without a moment's hesitation, he despatched, in his own name, a letter to the château, requesting it in strong but respectful terms, an immediate interview with Madame la Comtesse de L——

A verbal answer was as speedily returned. "Madame la Comtesse de L——was too infirm in health to receive visitors; and regretted being unable to make any exception to her rule." Snatching up his hat, he proceeded straight to the château; and accosting one of the domestics lounging in the vestibule, desired him to acquaint his lady that an English gentleman having family letters of consequence to deliver to the hand of the countess, demanded immediate admittance to her presence.

But this expedient procured only a reiteration of the former answer. "The countess would receive no visits. Any letter with which the English gentleman was charged, must be delivered to Monsieur le Supérieur de la Congrégation."
"Is he in the house?"—cried Walter, every greater emotion giving way to resentful feelings.

"It is not yet the hour of the Supérieur's daily visit to the château," replied the servant; "if Monsieur chooses to return in a couple of hours, he will be sure of meeting him."

Already, Walter had determined otherwise. Proceeding straight to the dilapidated gates of the college, he demanded admittance to one whose sacred functions rendered it impossible for him to issue orders of exclusion.

There is something in the tranquil atmosphere of a religious house peculiarly soothing to those who pass the threshold in a spirit of piety and peace; but to persons predisposed to attribute hypocrisy and evil dealing to its inmates, nauseous and irritating. Ushered by a demure acolyte along a mildewed corridor towards the dismantled study of his Superior, Walter fancied that the denuded condition of the place bore attestation of the interested views of those whom already he regarded as his adversaries. Nor did the inauspicious countenance of Father Cyrilus, the superior of the establishment, serve to disarm his prejudices.

"I present myself to you, reverend Father," said the impetuous young man, not waiting for the lofty interrogatory with which he saw that the priest was preparing to address him, "to demand, through your assistance, access to a lady under your spiritual governance."

"You are, I conclude, the English traveller to whom Madame la Comtesse de L----- (the lady to whom I presume you to allude,) has this morning denied admittance?"

"Admittance was denied me in her name," persisted Walter. "But my claims upon the countess are of such a nature that it is not in the heart of a woman to have issued the mandate I received."

"Madame la Comtesse is mistress of her actions," replied the superior, slightly pointing to a seat, but making no attempt to rise from his own. "Admittance was denied me in her name," persisted Walter. "But my claims upon the countess are of such a nature that it is not in the heart of a woman to have issued the mandate I received."

"You are the countess's confessor—her director!" cried Walter, glancing round as if to ascertain that no eavesdroppers were at hand; "in that sacred capacity, you have become aware of her motives for this antipathy! Know, therefore, that the lover whom Madame la Comtesse may have made it her duty to avoid, has long been numbered with the dead;—I, reverend father, am his only son."

"The name you last night despatched as your introduction to her presence, informed me as much," replied the superior, without displacing a muscle of his sallow countenance; "it is on that account you are more pointedly excluded than others. For two years past, it has been my task to watch over the spiritual condition of the countess; and I have made it my duty, young sir, to prepare the mind of my penitent for such an attempt as you are now meditating. You do not take us by surprise! I charge you, therefore, out of respect to my sacred calling and to the instincts of nature, refrain from molesting one who has long risen superior to the fatal temptation of worldly affections!"

"The temptation of a mother's love!"—scornfully reiterated Walter. "Happy the mortal whose temptations are of no severer nature. But you mistake me and my purposes. You conclude me to be a needy adventurer, having views upon the countess's fortune;—a herede, disposed to withdraw her benefits from the catholic church and its dependencies. Re-assure yourself! I refer you, reverend Père, to your principal at Rome, for attestation of the personal distinctions conferred upon me by the Sovereign Pontiff. Through life, my social position has been equal to that of the Countess de L-----; and at this moment, I am heir to one of the richest commoners and most influential senators of Great Britain."

The demeanor of the reverend Father became suddenly softened by this opportune announcement; the utmost importance being attached by foreigners, (even by reigning sovereigns) to a British member of Parliament.

"I should esteem myself unfortunate, mon fils, if any thing in my words or deportment induced you to attribute to unwarrantable influence the resolution taken by the countess. But you appear to attach strange importance to this interview?"

"Does it need explanation that a son should desire to throw himself at the feet of his only surviving parent?"

"In that case, you are somewhat tardy in admitting the impulse! More than twenty years has the countess abided unmolested under yonder roof!"
"A few months ago," replied Walter, "I was ignorant of her very existence!—But from the hour the fatal secret of my birth was disclosed to me, I have existed only in the hope of looking upon my mother's face!—Let her deny me, and I will not answer for the rash extremities to which I may be driven!—"

"And the secret was disclosed at length?"—demanded the priest, without even noticing his menace.

"By a letter bequeathed by my father. A packet superscribed by Sir Richard Norman's hand, must be delivered to the countess by my own. Be present, if you choose, at our interview; but as God hears and judges me—ere the sun sets, I will reach the presence of my mother!—"

"To remonstrate with the gracelessness of one so reckless would, I perceive, be of small avail," observed the priest, rising and taking his hat from the wall. "Follow me, young sir. To avoid the perpetration of an outrage, you shall see the Comtesse de L------. But you will not gather from her lips sentiments more auspicious than you have received from mine."

Ten minutes afterwards, Walter, after being ushered by Father Cyrillus up the vast gloomy painted staircase of the château, along a suite of antiquated rooms hung with old fashioned tapestry, was requested to wait in a small and more commodiously furnished chamber opening to the terrace already described; while the superior proceeded to represent to the Comtesse de L------ his peremptory pretensions.

CHAPTER XX.

A heart generous and noble—noble in its scorn
Of all things low and little;—nothing there
Sordid or servile!—Rogers.

Vain were it to describe Walter Norman's state of mind as he stood watching the door through which he trusted that the countess was to make her appearance. The chair on which he leaned for support, seemed about to give way under his convulsive grasp. Yet notwithstanding these demonstrations, his emotions were of no tender nature. Stung to the quick by the conduct of the countess, he had so far resumed the mastery over himself, as to resolve that no womanish tear should shame his cheeks—no fond epithet escape his lips. He would stand before the woman who had rejected the yearnings of his filial love, as a judge;—then, having delivered the letter of Sir Richard Norman to her hands, depart for ever from her sight!—

The door slowly unclosed, and Walter's heart beat with unsupportable violence. But his brow remained calm; and he stirred not a step towards the lady who advanced into the chamber, led to a seat in the position furthest from the light, by the hand which she seemed to have selected for the absolute control of her movements. Eagerly as her son had longed to look upon her face, he dared not as yet raise his eyes directly towards her. While obeying the dictates of courtesy by a formal obeisance, he indistinctly beheld a face, pale even to ghastliness, and cold even to severity; and trembled to hear the sound of voice accompanying this austere countenance. She spoke, however—and his alarm subsided!—

"You have business with me, I understand," said the countess, in a firm, but not ungentle voice. "I pray you let it be as briefly as possible despatched—I am an infirm woman—a weak and infirm woman;—anxious only to descend into the grave without disturbance of that blessed peace and equanimity with which the mercy of Heaven and the counsels of pious friends have comforted my latter days."

"God forbid, madam, that I should be the means of ruffling your tranquillity!"—replied Walter, with stern contempt; "and God keep me from desiring such selfish serenity as can be obtained only at the expense of all sensibility to the welfare of others. Trust me, I will hazard no single word—no single look of appeal—likely to endanger your quietude!—But had I dreamed of finding you thus completely self-absorbed, I would have spared myself a weary pilgrimage, undertaken in the hope of exciting momentary sympathy, in the heart wherein my own life's blood is warmly flowing. I would have spared myself the journey. I would have denied myself the fond presentiments by which it was solaced. Yet, if I obtain nothing further by my intrusion into your presence, I obtain a
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lesson;—a harsh one—a cruel one—but valuable as tearing away the last illusion endearing life to my soul!—"

Walter had not intended to speak thus. But the words burst in spontaneous vehemence from his lips; and as he raised his eyes towards the countess at the close of his address, he fancied he could discern a glance of depreciation directed by his unhappy mother towards the superior, as if implying his sanction to her relenting. No sign, however, escaped the priest; nor any token of tenderness the penitent over whom he exercised his iron sway.

"I have had the honor of acquainting Madame la Comtesse," observed Father Cyrillus to the stranger, "that your errand at Les Mesnils is simply to deliver a letter, of which you are the depository."

"It is true that I came hither with the purpose of placing such a deposit in her hands," replied Walter. "But reflection convinces me that the letter in question was addressed by my father to a heart warm with the best instincts of womanly tenderness; and that he would not have desired to waste his confidence upon a soul hardened by the harshness of a taskmaster."

The superior, darting a fiery glance towards Walter, was about to utter an angry rejoinder. But the countess indicated by a sign her desire that the young man should be suffered to proceed.

"I am aware, madam," he accordingly resumed, "that my father has made a fruitless effort in my favor. At the hour when, summoned to the presence of his Maker, the consciousness of his guilt and its results weighed heavily on his soul, Sir Richard Norman anticipated the destiny eventually to fall upon his son. He saw that the time would come, when, cut off from all social ties—all human connections—the wretch born to no community of kindred—the predestined alien—orphans—castaway—would hunger and thirst after the impulses of natural affection—and in vain!—He foresaw me exposed to the scorn of society—to the mockery of the world;—and feeling that all this and more were amply redeemed by the precious ransom of a mother's love, he hazarded in my behalf some allusion to the hopes and promises of those happier days, when, for his child, the father had a right to anticipate a renewal of the affection once lavished upon himself."

As Walter gave utterance to these heart-felt words, gradually laying aside all reserve, he assumed the fervent eloquence of passion; while the countess, as by degrees she raised her eyes towards him, seemed fascinated and spell-bound by the tone and deportment so vividly recalling to her mind the lover of her youth. At length, as he traced the touching picture of his own isolation, she clasped her hands together in anguish; and but for the restraining presence of her director, would probably have arisen and thrown herself upon the neck of her son. The stern glance of the superior served, however, to restore her to submission.

"Fear nothing!" resumed Walter, noticing with contempt the varying expression of her countenance. "I will not presume upon my father's tenderness to enforce my claims upon yours. This shall be the last time, madam, of my intruding into your presence. We have met. I have looked upon the face which, waking or sleeping—in my dreams—in my prayers—in solitude—in society—has, for months past, been the object of my solicitude!—I have heard your voice—my own eyes have witnessed your alienation. Nature has pleaded nothing in my favor. I stand before you even as the child of a stranger; and, since such your heart and sentiments, I will depart in silence, and in silence preserve the memory of your insensibility. My fate will be only a degree more hard—more bitter. But in compensation, madam, I will retain my father's letter, as a token that her, at least, was not callous to the degradation of the humiliated being his errors had culled into existence!"

"Give me the letter!"—cried the countess, twice clearing her voice to speak, ere she could utter an intelligible sound. Walter hesitated.

"I have a claim upon your obedience," persisted Madame de L——.

"Give me the letter!"

When at length after a moment's hesitation, Walter, taking it from his bosom placed it on the table beside her, his hands trembled on finding himself so near his unnatural mother, that their dresses rustled against each other. Indescribably agitated, he stopped short as he was about to recede from the table; and fixed his eyes upon her face, as if his whole soul were concentrated in search of respondent sensibility. Overpowered by this clinging, searching gaze, her bosom heaved with the oppression of her embar-
rassed respiration. She raised her eyes wistfully towards Walter, as if imploring forbearance; but, on beholding in his the rolling tears which a strong effort alone enabled him to retain unshed, a hectic flush traversed her pallid cheeks, and her lips became tremulous with emotion. In another moment, Walter was at her feet, his face concealed in the folds of her dress—and thick coming sobs bursting with frantic violence from his bosom.

Father Cyrillus hastened to disengage the countess from the embraces of her son.

" Leave us," said she, faintly motioning to the superior to desist. " Leave us together. You have nothing to apprehend from my weakness. You perceive that I am mistress of myself. But before I lose sight of him for ever, a few words of explanation must enable him to form a fairer interpretation of his mother."

Without a pretext for refusal, the superior, concealing his vexation under an obeisance of hypocritical humility, retired from the room; and ere Walter had risen from his knees, the countess's arms were flung around him, while a mother's first and only kiss was fervently imprinted upon his forehead.

" It needed no letter to announce you to me!" she murmured, after slowly and tenderly perusing his features; " you are his image—his very image! In you, Sir Richard Norman stands before me! You love him—you venerate his memory. You weigh his fault as light, in comparison with mine. You estimate his parental affection as warm, in comparison with mine. But ere we part, learn at least to appreciate the motives of my conduct. Your father, you say, revealed to you the mystery of your birth; that is, he related the fall of an inexperienced, uncounselled woman, and the fraud to which the impetuosity of my poor sister compelled my assent. Your own experience further reminds you, that for twenty years, your mother has survived that fall—that fraud; yet designed to take no cognisance of your existence! Listen, Walter, to my exculpation!"

" The late Comte de L—— was doubtless described to you by your father, (for thus was he described to him by myself,) as coarse—brutal—jealous—cruel—a man unworthy of, and incapable of preserving the affections of his wife. At the period of my marriage I was fifteen! A thoughtless girl recently emancipated from the nursery, such was the opinion I formed of a man thirty years older than myself—uncouth in person—uncultivated in mind; with all the roughness of the camp about him—enforcing every sentence with an oath—commencing his days' pleasures with a dram, and crowning them with a pipe! I loathed him—literally loathed him; for at that unpractised age, such trivialities exercise a serious influence on the affections. I saw nothing in my husband beyond his superficial blemishes. From the period of my ill-starred marriage, however, to that of my acquaintance with your father, I was not many weeks molested with his society. You know the rest! Young, unadvised and self-reliant, I formed an attachment which soon terminated in guilt and misery.

" I will not describe to you, Walter, the anguish, the terrors, the struggles, the remorse, which agitated my distracted mind previous to your birth; for these, a feeling heart will readily conceive.—All I have now to unfold, regards the incidents of my subsequent existence.

" Three months after your birth, I was brought, by my sister, here to this very chateau; and placed, according to her promise, under the protection of my husband. My heart sank within me as I entered the gates!—But I was not wholly without consolation; I trusted I was come to die—humiliated, heart-broken, I looked forward only to the repose of the grave.—Judge, however, what were the emotions of my soul on entering for the first time, after all that had occurred, the dreaded presence of the Comte de L——!

" This is indeed kind and considerate of you—to visit the old soldier in his exile"—cried he, after imprinting a rough kiss on my cheek in presence of the servants, and holding me at arm's length, as if to examine the changes effected in my person by the lapse of the last three years.—

" Handsomer, mille bombes! —a thousand times handsomer than when I left you for Burgos!—Ah! Madame la Comtesse!—it will be a cruel trial for you to bury all these roses and lilies among the forests of Provence!—"

" My sister, sir, is ambitious only of sharing your retirement," interrupted Stella. " With your permission, she will abide with you at Les Mesnils without dreaming of further change."

" The general surveyed me with a scrutinising, but not unkindly eye.

" Is it so?" was his abrupt inquiry.

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“I earnestly hope to remain here till the end of my days!” said I—it was needless to add that I believed them to be already numbered.

“Then it shall not be my fault if a single one of them is darkened by a care,” cried the count. — Jour de Dieu! je suis bon enfant, moi!—Hitherto, Madame la Comtesse, you and I have misunderstood each other. I was coaxing enough to flatter myself that the lovely girl forced by the emperor into my arms, might take a fancy to my vieille moustache. I am wiser now!—Sounder heads than mine are sometimes mended—instead of being broken—by a downfall, I have learned to look philosophically upon the chances of life, and would fain teach you the same lesson.

Sacrebleu! We have both had our trials—we have still our cares!—Mais du courage, mon enfant—avec le temps on en vient au bout.—The emperor gave you a husband—I offer you a father!

“I accept the offer with respect and gratitude,” said I, seizing the rough hand which he abruptly extended towards me.

“Then there is no reason, morbleu! that quiet days may not be yet in store for us!” said he, glancing significantly towards my sister, a delighted witness of the turn this dreaded interview was taking.—The château is large enough for both of us, without jostling.—Examine it when you will, ma petite femme!—Choose your own suite of apartments and have them arranged according to your fancy. —There, be assured that no one, not even myself, shall ever intrude without your leave. Sacrébleu! on ne passe pas!—le consigne!—toujours respect au consigne!—Qu’en dites vous, Madame la Comtesse?—Are you content with the regulations of the garrison of Les Mesnils?

“From that hour, Walter, the conventions self-imposed by the general were strictly fulfilled. My sister departed for Trieste at the close of the winter, leaving her poor Benedetta in some measure reconciled to her lot. The general never invaded my solitude without previously asking permission to become my visitor; his deportment being at all times, in accordance with his promise, that of an indulgent father soothing the melancholy of a wayward child.

“Des larmes? Ce donc!” cried he, the first time he surprised me in tears. — Alons, alons, ma chère enfant!—If I see more of these briny drops, I shall understand that you are weary of your sojourn here, and invite all the gros bonnets of the province to Les Mesnils to assist me in driving away the blue devils!—"

“Another time, he adduced a still more potent argument by which to dry up my tears. ‘I knew that your courage would fail,’ said he. It was not in the nature of things for a young creature so flattered—to mijnuste by the world—to devote herself to the society of a poor old weather-beaten soldier!—What with gout, rheumatism, and the smart of old wounds, which gall me now and then more than I care to own—I know I am often peevish—often troublesome!—But the reproach of your tears is too much for me. If I see you weep again, ma petite femme, I shall beg you to renounce a task to which your young heart is unequal!’

“God knows he was never peevish—never troublesome! But by such an appeal to my generosity, he knew that he had placed the surest restraint upon the indulgence of my sorrows.

“But this was not all. The intimacy of domestic life under the same roof gradually developed to me the character of the man to whom I was united. Hitherto, I had known him only as the bravest of men, at an epoch when all men were brave. Now learned to what a pitch of love and veneration he had contrived to attach the hearts of his men. On his dismissal from the army, the dissatisfaction of the troops was expressed even to mutiny. He had been an idol among them;—open-handed—open-hearted—sharing their privations as well as their perils;—comforting the hospital, and cheering the infirmary, as well as inspiring the field of battle. Beloved by the aged as a son—by the active as a brother—by the young conscripts as a father—the separation was a cruel trial to them all.

“In the privacy of civil life, the virtues of the old soldier did but experience further development. Devoid of immediate kindred, he had raised the few distant relations remaining to him to comfort and independence. Not a man in his native village was able to say—I am the kinsman, or I was once the comrade, of Archambaud L—, but he is a general—he is wealthy now—and I remain poor and needy!’—During his last campaigns, the general had gradually despatched home to Les Mesnils a host of his disabled veterans, besides settling on his estates the widows and orphans of many of the brave fellows who had fallen at his side; and
on our installation at the château, it was his care to provide fitting asylums for the reception of these protégés—carefully avoiding, however, the aspect and discipline of the almshouse. Cheerful cottages, each with its little garden, were awarded to those who were able to dispense with constant attendance; while an airy infirmary, constructed in a wing of the château, awaited the more ailing; and never shall I forget the look of fatherly affection with which the general regarded me, when, on the installation of our pensioners, I flew from chamber to chamber—almost gay—almost happy—while contemplating the results of his beneficence.

"Bien—mon enfant, bien!" he cried 'C'est très bien! These exertions to create to yourself a new interest in life, are meritorious and honorable. You are doing your best, my poor girl; and the blessing of God is ever prompt upon such efforts. There is no position of life so wretched, so fallen, but that our exertions may render it the foundation of virtue. Remember this. Persevere—and you may yet be happy!" Encouraged by his approval, I devoted myself with ardor to my new duties. The hope of obtaining his esteem animated my courage. I allowed myself no leisure for retrospection. I lived in the present; I dedicated my whole strength, my whole faculties, to the solicitude of others. My husband's precept that it was never too late to be virtuous, seemed to breathe new life into my exertions. Thus occupied, the humility with which I had learned to reverence my husband deepened into affection. While he watched over and encouraged me as a father, I loved him like a child. Any other sentiment would have been profanation to his gray hairs. I was a dishonored woman—he all that was good and true!—From the moment he had learned to estimate in its true light the incongruity of our union, and to condemn his own weakness in having sanctioned the misjudging project of the Emperor, he had ceased to regard me as his wife. I was now his pupil—his daughter—his heir; and he the object of my unqualified veneration!

"Thus, Walter, thus passed my tranquil years; in the discharge of my active duties—in the enjoyment of gratitude and peace—and my youth fled from me unheeded. Wherever I went, I heard blessings lavished upon the name of my husband; and many a death-bed have I knelt beside, where the last breath of the dying recommended to God the happiness of the most princely of benefactors. What was to me now my husband's want of scholarship, or want of polish.—Had he not fulfilled the noblest purposes of existence, by devoting to his country the strength and vigor of his manhood, and to the benefit of his fellow creatures the opulence by which the sacrifice had been repaid?

"Was it for his wife, Walter, to dishonor the roof of that venerable man, by dwelling upon memories of guilty love? Had I hazarded the disturbance of his tranquillity by instituting inquiries into your welfare, I might have broken the heart of one whose life was a source of blessings to thousands!—I held my peace, therefore. I subdued the instincts of nature. I was thus offering up to my husband the only sacrifice of atonement in my power. I noted not the lapse of time. Absorbed in complicated household duties, youth and beauty departed from me, not only unregretted, but unnoticed.

"At the close of eighteen years, old age had laid its hand gently, but firmly, on the venerable head of my husband. The step, long faltering, ceased at last to bear him his round of visits of consolation. The white hair waxed thinner upon his fallen temples. The soldier's rough voice and impatient oaths had given place to words of peace and resignation. Then, Walter, then was it the comfort of his wife to kneel beside the chair of the decaying veteran:—to satisfy him with tidings of his sick—of his poor—and solace him with promises that, when he was gone, I would be unto them all that he had ever been! Expressions of sympathy in his own sufferings he would never receive. 'I am happy,' was his reply, 'I am well;—for feebleness is the health of old age.—Next to death upon the field of battle, calm extinction amid loving and regretful hearts, is the noblest lot vouchsafed to sinful man. And you will regret me, my sweet wife!—You will lament the veteran whose esteem has been the support of your well-doing. The respect earned from the depths of my soul by the perfectness of your love, will be your passport to eternal mercy!'

"Stop!' cried I, driven one day almost to frenzy by a panegyric which conveyed such bitter reproaches to my conscience. 'You deceive yourself! I myself have deceived you!—I am not worthy your esteem—I am not.'

"'Hush!' said he, laying his wasted hand upon my lips, with a beneficent smile—'I know all!—From the first, I
have known all!—I have never been deceived. Your father watched over your repentance, till your husband was able to bestow perfect forgiveness upon his wife. As a recompense for all I have borne, bear with me, dearest, till the end;—then, give a few tears to the old man's memory—and the remnant of your days to happiness!"

"Yes, Walter—from the first he had known all.—But on examining my fault with conscientious scrutiny, pity mingled with his blame;—pity for the young girl flung into his arms, whom he had despised and avoided for her levity, instead of aiding her with the counsels or restraining her by the authority of a husband. Self-convicted, he forgave!—as those who trespass are enjoined to pardon, lest their trespasses call down the vengeance of the Most High!"

"Elevated at the eleventh hour to new distinctions by the revolution which gave liberal governors to France, the veteran did not long survive his promotion to the rank of Field Marshal. It was a dreary hour for your mother that followed the loss of that best of friends. When the passing bell announced his departure, the poor wept their benefactor;—I, alone, was denied the solace of tears!"

"Providence, however, still prospered me by its mercies. A brotherhood of venerable men, drawn by the events of the revolution from their establishment in the capital, took refuge at Les Mesnils. The dilapidated walls of the old college annexed to the château, which, till the completion of our infirmary, had received our sick, were not yet levelled with the ground, and afforded an asylum to the fugitives. Deprived by the decree of government of their office as the instructors of youth, these pious men did not disdain to assuage the terrors of a penitent soul in its time of trouble. Unable to look abroad for consolation, the words of grace, the promises of the church, have maintained, and will, I trust, maintain my courage during the brief remnant of my days. Long concealment of an ever-gnawing care has forestalled for me the epoch of old age; and my decaying health promises me a speedy release from bondage!"

"In this habitation, where every object recalls the memory of my better days and invites me to rejoin my husband in the grave, I should have held it an act of treachery had I devoted my widowhood to the renewal of a tie which, during the life of my benefactor, duty compelled me to disavow. When your writing, Walter, was laid before me, the struggle was great; but I felt that to surmount the temptation thus afforded, was a sacrifice to be tendered to the dead, in requital for years of generous forbearance. My judgment was confirmed by that of my spiritual adviser. Yes!—here, where the echoes of that honest voice still appear to linger, and where the last breath of that noble breast exhaled to heaven—I must not—I dare not—clasp to my bosom the son of Sir Richard Norman!—"

As the countess ceased to speak, Walter raised his head, which had long been declined upon his breast; and his composed but pallid countenance attested the impression produced on his soul by the narrative of his mother.

"Go to yonder church," she continued, pointing to the Gothic towers, discernible through the lofty window. "You will find there a column dedicated to the memory of the dead by the simple earnings of the poor! The banners suspended above it, were taken by royal permission from the Invalides to which they had been consigned by the bravery of the Count de L——. The inscription upon the grave below——

\[\textit{Deo, Regi, pauperibusque carissimus!}\]

was placed there by a public decree. And shall I, in defiance of such trophies, such renown, such virtues, embrace before the face of the world a son born to have been my blessing, had not his birth conveyed dishonor to my husband?"

Walter's reply, when he found courage to reply, was patient and moderate. He saw that it would require time to counteract the strong bias of his mother's opinions, and the influence of designing adversaries. But he had time, he had his whole life before him, for the effort. He affected, therefore, for the present, no opposition, no remonstrance. He trusted to nature to plead for him, and he did not trust in vain.

Already, the countess's mind was relieved as from a heavy burthen, by her affecting explanations. By degrees, she permitted herself to hazard inquiries in return. The tale of Walter's sorrows was unfolded to her, with all the events of his till lately unclouded life. He spoke of Lady Norman, of his sister, of the friends created for him by the
undeserved wretchedness of his situation; and the countess's tears had long been falling ere she was aware of the transgression.

The hours went by unnoticed. Evening came—and Walter was still by his mother's side! The superior was summoned; and read in the countenances of both, his sentence of defeat. The young Englishman was already invited to return on the morrow, in order to inspect the numerous foundations and establishments annexed to the château by its late owner. On the morrow, he was invited to return the following day, for a last farewell.—Before the close of the week, he had been folded again and again in the arms of a mother who, on the precept of her venerable husband that no situation is too fallen to be made the foundation of virtue, was persuaded to institute a belief that maternal love, so indulged as to afford no scandal to the living, no offence to the dead—was but the perfecting of her probation.

The inhabitants of Les Mesnils (saving the reverend members of the College, who, finding nothing to apprehend from Walter's rapacity, judged it wiser to withdraw their opposition, and preserve the secret) were misled by a similarity of name between the young stranger and the countess's sister, in to supposing him her nephew. Leaning upon his arm, their benefactress visited them as usual;—often pausing to point out to her guest the wisdom and tenderness of the deceased maréchal's provisions for their comfort.—They saw her gradually assume a more healthful and happier aspect; and though ignorant that the iron grasp of bigotry which had seized upon her soul in the weakness of affliction, was gradually relaxing under a holier influence, uttered blessings upon the stranger, who seemed sent as a messenger of peace to one whose tears had not been wept in vain!
misfortunes, eloquently pleads the cause of Captain Norman by setting forth a bad education as the source of his follies—the kith and kin, as well as the neighbors and tenants of the Selwood family, have never ceased to regret the banished heir. While Lady Farleigh's daughters, still unmarried, resent the promotion of the conceited Amy, the tenantry complain of the ruinous absenteeism of the Morningtons, who deserted the Manor from the moment of the untoward match—Selwood Manor being at this moment far more desolate and lonely than in the gloomiest days of Sir Richard Norman.

A new day, meanwhile, has dawned upon the precincts of Fern Hill. The eyes of the country are upon the spot—the hopes of happy hearts—the blessings of the poor!—Hand in hand, Avesford and his pupil are pursuing the task of improvement. An official appointment of some moment is about to give ample scope to the development of Walter's talents, and to recall him to London, where Avesford's house is the chartered gathering place of the friends of learning, science, and humanity.

"If it were not for a sight of Matty’s doleful countenance now and then, I swear I should forget that matters were ever otherwise among us than at present!"—said Cruttenden Maule, one day, in one of his flying visits to Wolham rectory. "However, even her long face has grown shorter since she saw her girl so happily settled in life!—The Farleigh dowager has been staying with her at Halsewell ever since Constance and her husband went to settle at Audley House; and they comfort each other, I suppose, by proing over old times and railing at the world. —Old Crutt. used to swear that, egg or bird, Matty would never lose her liking for lords and ladies!—However, as she marred the happiness of her young days by marrying out of her sphere, 'tis fit she should find what comfort she can out of the same troubled waters."

Lady Norman is, in fact, still as ever the slave of her own weakness. Unable to surmount her jealousy of Walter's superior influence with her family, she retires as much as possible from their society; and dissatisfied with herself and others, is not sorry to secure herself from the unceremonious intrusions of her plain-dealing brother, by inviting her titled friend to become her guest. For Lady Farleigh has been driven from the castle and Tuxwell Park, by the untimely death of her husband and the untimely marriage of her son—the earl having lost his life from a neglected fall in hunting, and his successor his place in society, by a match with a public singer of indifferent reputation. Glad to escape from the doleful aspect of their mother’s weeds, Lady Sophia and her sister are spending the period of their mother's widowhood at Brighton, with their spinster aunt, Lady Emily—a patroness of every charity bazaar, and a chartered solicitor for the funds of all the lying-in charities and teetotalisms in the kingdom.

To listen to her friend Sophia’s lamentations over the heartlessness of her daughters and the backslidings of her son, (who is nevertheless, still the countess’s favorite,) affords some comfort to Matilda under her own grievances. Lady Norman is, however, looking forward to a source of consolation at present denied to the dowager—a second generation being about to arise in the promised offspring of the Audleys. Ere long, Matilda will be attracted by new ties, to the neighborhood of Fern Hill; and forget that to the fine young man who already commands there so large a share of popular favor, accusing reminiscences are attached, as in his earlier though not happier days, imposed upon the acceptance of the world as the supposititious Heir of Selwood.

THE END.