

CAROLINE;  
OR, THE  
DIVERSITIES  
OF  
*FORTUNE*:  
A  
NOVEL.  
IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOLUME SECOND.

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CAROLINE,  
OR THE  
*DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.*

CHAPTER XVI.

*The Retreat.*

AS the carriage drove along, ten thousand different reflections, partly afflictive and partly consolatory, filled the mind of our fair heroine. The perfect innocence and goodness of her own heart could not but administer to it the greatest comfort and even pleasure; a pleasure, of which no outward circumstances could deprive it; but those circumstances were perplexed and distressing. She had, from infancy, been accustomed to protection and tenderness. Her disposition was naturally timid, and, though corrected by her understanding, was far from enabling her boldly to enter the world unsupported and alone; a world in which she was only acquainted with one flowery path, and to whose dark and intricate mazes she was wholly a stranger. She had great confidence in the friendship of Doctor Seward and his sister, but the idea of obligation and dependence was irksome to her, and she was sensible that with her slender income she could not, in their manner of living, be independent. To them, however, she determined to go, to consult them upon the steps it would be proper for her to take, and to regulate her future conduct and way of living by her own feelings, corrected by their advice.

After a journey, which, to her, appeared of unusual length, the chaise stopped at Doctor Seward's door, which was opened by Ambrose. "Oh! dear madam, (cried the honest creature,) is it you?" "Yes, Ambrose, (answered Caroline;) how do your master and mistress? Are they at home?" "No, madam, (replied Ambrose,) the Doctor is gone to visit a patient twenty miles off, and will not be back till tomorrow, and madam was sent for last week to take care of her sister, who is very ill, and lives on the farther side of Yorkshire. But pray, madam, walk in, (continued he,) my master will be right glad to see you when he comes home, and the cook will take care to provide a well-aired bed for you the same as if madam was here." Caroline considered for a moment: it might be some weeks before Mrs. Seward returned; her situation would, during that time, be very improper. Yet where could she go? At that instant Nurse Williams entered her thoughts, and she immediately resolved to take up her residence at the house of that honest and affectionate woman. Desiring Ambrose, therefore, to give her best respects to his master, and to inform him that he would probably hear from her in a short time, she directed the postillion to drive the way which led to Farmer Williams's. Upon her arrival she found the whole family out in the fields, it being just the beginning of hay-harvest, except the good woman and her daughter, whose business it was to provide victuals for the labourers.

Sally, whose wonder was excited by the sight of a carriage driving up to their door, ran to it, and, the moment it was opened, exclaimed, "Oh! mother, mother, here is Miss Ashford, it is Miss Ashford herself!" The good woman, who was employed in cleaning up her house, suddenly wiping her face and hands upon her apron, and running up to the side of the chaise, cried, "Oh! dear madam, who could have thought of seeing you?" "I am afraid, nurse, (said Caroline,) I am come at an inconvenient time; but, if you can take me in, and give me a bed for a few nights, I shall be greatly obliged to you, and will give no trouble that shall take you from your business." "Take you in, dear creature, (exclaimed Mrs. Williams;) yes, if my house was no bigger than a nutshell. I hope the time will never come when we shall think any thing a trouble that we can do to serve you." So saying, she endeavoured to open the chaise-door, but, not being expert enough to effect it, was obliged to give way to the footman, who, stifling a laugh at her awkwardness, assisted our heroine in getting out, and appeared not a little surprised to see her embrace a person of such mean rank with great affection, and, ordering her trunk to be unbound and taken into the house, walk in herself with the young woman as if she intended to remain there. Mrs. Williams having seen the trunk taken down, asked the servants to drink, which, notwithstanding their contempt for her appearance, they thought proper to accept. She was then proceeding to desire they would take their horses out of the harness and give them some corn, when Caroline, happening to over-hear her, stepped out and directed that they should be taken to a public house which stood at some distance, adding, that they might return as soon as they thought proper, she having no farther use for them. The fellows, who were just upon the point of accepting Mrs. Williams's offer in order to give themselves an opportunity of tasting a little more of her ale, which was always remarkably good, bowed with a look of some wonder mixed with disappointment, and, remounting their horses, drove away.

Sally had by this time opened the shutters of the parlour-windows; which (the room being only used upon extraordinary occasions) were kept closed to preserve the paper from the effects of the sun. She then removed a couple of spinning-wheels which were standing in it, and, with a clean rubber, dusted every chair, table, and other piece of furniture: which done, she went, by her mother's order, to put on the tea-kettle, to make a dish of that best of all travelling liquors for our heroine after her journey, she absolutely refusing any other kind of refreshment. Nothing could be more truly delicate than her repast. The mahogany board upon which it was placed might almost have served for a mirror, as might likewise the table round which they sat. The butter was fresh from the churn, the bread fine, and the cream the best a dairy could supply. As soon as it was ended, her kind friends were obliged to leave her in order to prepare a supper for their family, which, at this season, was very large. She then took a walk in the gardens, which were extensive. A small part of them was well cultivated for the use of the kitchen; the rest was laid out in shady walks, terraces, and regular quarters, which had been planted with choice shrubs, and ornamented with waterworks and statues. Having been for many years wholly neglected, it was, in some parts, quite overgrown, and little better than a thicket; but, in others, where the walks were wider, the trees and clipped hedges having recovered their natural growth, and shot forth in unbounded luxuriance, formed delightful shades, beneath which the noon-day sun was powerless. Among these romantic mazes, in happier days, Caroline often took a pleasure in wandering: she now viewed them with a melancholy satisfaction as a safe retreat from injury and malice. "Yes," (she cried,)

addressing a group of stately oaks, with all the ardour of enthusiasm, “under your venerable shelter I shall be unenvied and secure. Solitude is the nurse of wisdom and virtue: here will I court her instructions: she shall teach my heart to submit to the hard lessons of adversity, and to endure the vicissitudes of fortune without repining. I will bless the hand that corrects me; and, if the imperfection of my reason and virtue be too great to insure happiness, I will, at least, learn to be content.”

These, and a long train of succeeding reflections, took such intire possession of her mind, that evening stole upon her ere she was aware of its soft intrusion; and she was slowly returning to the house, enjoying the cool breeze after a day of uncommon heat, when she met Sally coming to seek her, who told her that supper was ready, and her mother was afraid she would catch cold by staying out so late. She thanked her for the kindness of her intentions, but told her she was fond of walking late. “Dear me, mame, (said the innocent girl,) I wonder, a fine lady, like you, can venture to be among these places at night; I, who am used to them, don’t much like it when it gets dark, for, they say, some of the walks are haunted. They say a young ’squire once drowned himself for love, and that often, in an evening, sighs and groans are heard: and, indeed, I have heard strange rustlings among the bushes myself.” “You heard the wind blowing, Sally, (answered Caroline;) nothing else, believe me. If so good a girl as you are can escape injury from the living you have nothing to fear from the dead.” “Why, so my mother says, (answered Sally,) and, that it was the opinion of your honoured father, that they neither can or wish to do us any harm: and, in the day, I think so too, but, I don’t know why, at night I can’t help being afraid.”

This sort of chat brought them to the house. The apartment of which Caroline had taken possession was divided, from that part of it which the family inhabited, by a large hall, once the scene of festive plenty, but now wholly useless. Through the door of this room, which was opened for the purpose, she past into the garden, to which it led, without seeing, or being seen, by the people belonging to the farm, which Williams had lately enlarged by renting a considerable quantity of ground adjoining to it. Upon entering the parlour, she saw the cloth laid in the neatest manner, and a variety of things, of which her nurse knew she was fond, placed upon the table. These delicacies consisted of radishes, new cheese, a gooseberry tart, and a fine plate of wood-strawberries, with a bowl of excellent cream. A more delicious repast could not have been placed before our heroine, who had no taste for high-seasoned dishes, and would, at any time, have eaten a tart or a pudding in preference to turtle or venison. After partaking moderately of the agreeable refreshment set before her, she retired to her chamber, which she found in the neatest order, the linen upon her bed being white as snow, and every thing round the picture of cleanliness and comfort.

She lay down with thankfulness. The affectionate kindness of the honest, worthy, people under whose roof she reposed, soothed her wounded mind. Her situation was endeared by the reflection that her revered father, and her mother, whose idea was dear to her heart, had inhabited the same comfortable apartment. She seemed to be placed, as it were, under their protection; and, when from these pleasing elusions her mental eye turned to serious reality, it presented assurances still more satisfactory; the assurance that she was under the immediate care of the best and greatest of Beings. A Being who perfectly knew the heart, and whose favour was only to be obtained by its purity and rectitude.

The sleepless night she had last past at Broomfield, her journey, the long time she had walked in the evening, all contributed to sweeten her repose, and she slept, unconscious of the world and its disappointments, till the morning was far advanced. Upon coming down she found her breakfast placed upon the table in as much order and nicety as the most delicate epicure could have wished. All the family, except Mrs. Williams and Sally, had been in the fields several hours. When, the former hearing her coming down, brought the tea-kettle into the parlour: she inquired, with the greatest tenderness, how she had slept, and whether the bed was made to her liking. Caroline having given her the most satisfactory assurances of the comfortable night she had past, took that opportunity of opening to her the intention she had formed of remaining at her house. She had the evening before told her that, finding Mrs. Seward out, to whom she intended a visit, and, not thinking it proper to remain at the Doctor's during her absence, she meant to pass that time with her. But she now explained some part of the cause which had induced her to quit Broomfield, namely, a misunderstanding with Lady Walton, which she mentioned in general terms, without entering into the particulars that gave rise to it. She then told her that, peace and independence being her first wish, she thought there was no place wherein she could so perfectly unite them as under her roof. That she would give her thirty pounds a year, to be paid quarterly, for her board, and the use of the room she was then in, and the bed-chamber above it. That she should supply herself with tea, wine, or any other little articles of superfluity she might have occasion for; and, as for her food, it would, as her nurse well knew, almost wholly consist of the production of the garden and dairy, for she ate very little else except eggs and fish. Such a boarder could not but be very acceptable to Mrs. Williams, exclusive of the great affection she bore our heroine, as the price she offered was, in that part of the kingdom, uncommonly good. She assured her that it should be their study to render her situation as comfortable as possible, adding, that she should be waited upon intirely by Sally, whom, she hoped, she would consider as her own maid.

These preliminaries being settled, she wrote a note to Doctor Seward, which she requested Mrs. Williams to send to him any part of the day in which she could most conveniently spare a messenger. It was dispatched immediately, and the Doctor, having returned early in the morning, attended her in less than an hour after it had been given to him. The surprise he expressed upon seeing her in her present situation was very great; but still greater was his concern when she had fully explained the cause of her so suddenly quitting the protection of her uncle. He saw the affair in exactly the same light that it had appeared in to her, and execrated the cruelty and artifice of Lady Walton in the severest terms. He offered to go himself to Broomfield and represent it to Lord Walton in its proper colours. To this friendly proposal she returned the warmest thanks; but said she had not, at least, for the present, a single hope of a reconciliation being effected by any possible means. She had already informed Lord Walton, by letter, of every circumstance she had related to him, but her account had been treated as art and falsehood, nor could she expect the same delivered by a person he knew to be her particular friend would have greater weight, or in the smallest degree alter his sentiments and opinion, supposing he really believed her guilty of the follies laid to her charge: but of this she was by no means convinced; she rather thought that he had, in part, submitted to an imposition which he knew to be such, and preferred ease and quietness to justice and humanity.

The Doctor then invited her in the politest and kindest manner to his house, telling her that his sister would, he hoped, be absent but a few weeks, during which time he would engage a young lady of the neighbourhood to be with her by way of companion, as he was obliged to be so much from home. The delicacy of this proposal, as well as its friendliness, was deeply felt by our heroine; but she thankfully declined accepting it, telling him, that she had absolutely resolved to remain where she then was. That independence was necessary to her peace, and that she had laid her plan in such a manner as to enable her to possess it without forfeiting the comforts of life. She then told him the agreement she had made with Mrs. Williams, and the manner in which she was to be accommodated. The Doctor said he could by no means approve of so young a lady living alone, or in so retired a manner: that her residence in his house would be both a pleasure and an obligation conferred upon him and his sister, who would think themselves greatly honoured by her acceptance of their protection. He would, however, refer the matter to Mrs. Seward, who would, he hoped, have influence enough to prevail upon her to comply with their wishes. He then, with the utmost delicacy, inquired if she had any commands with him in the character of her banker, requesting that she would, at all times, consider him as such. Caroline answered that she had money more than enough to supply her necessities till the interest of her thousand pounds became due, adding, that she should take care to live within her income, which the smallness of the expences she should, in her present situation, be subject to, would well enable her to do. The Doctor took his leave, after paying her many compliments upon the strength of her resolution and independence of spirit, qualities of which no man was a warmer admirer than himself. In pursuance of her request, he that evening sent her harpsichord and music-books: and the next morning she received her books and book-case, together with her implements for drawing. In the putting up and arrangement of them she spent the whole day; after which she began to feel herself quite at home, and reconciled to her humble state. The return of Mrs. Seward was the only additional pleasure to which she looked forward, which the Doctor assured her should be hastened as much as her sister's state of health would possibly admit.

Thus had a few short days strangely altered the views and situation of our heroine. From being admired and caressed by every one who approached her, surrounded by ease and affluence, the favourite relation of Lord Walton, and the presumptive heiress of a considerable part of his large fortune, she was suddenly deserted by all these flattering circumstances, and left a defenceless, unprotected, orphan, unsought, unattended; the humble possessor of one poor thousand pounds.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *The Gamester.*

MANY wise men have said, and daily experience proves, that happiness is confined to no situation of life; but that, provided health and the mere conveniences of life are enjoyed, the peasant may be as blest as the prince; but this does not suppose the peasant to have once been invested with royal dignity, and to have tasted all the luxuries and splendours of greatness. In this case the mind will painfully dwell upon past scenes, which regret will paint in colours far more attractive than they ever appeared while in possession. We can hardly persuade ourselves to believe that Dionysius was happy at Corinth. Thus our heroine, though possessed of more philosophy than usually falls to the share of a young beauty, could not sometimes prevent the intrusion of uneasy reflections: upon these occasions her harpsichord was her general resource, and a lesson from some favourite composer would, at any time, reharmonize her mind. Doctor Seward had moreover sent her several new books, of the entertaining kind, which he particularly recommended to her perusal.

There were few days on which she did not spend some hours under the shade of the stately oaks mentioned in the foregoing chapter; and sometimes she would stroll as far as the neighbouring cottages, where her appearance caused the highest degree of transport. Her visits, indeed, were not so frequent as they had once been, because she had less to give, and could not endure to raise hopes which she possessed not power to satisfy. One evening, recollecting a small cottage which stood in a retired corner of a coppice, at no great distance from one of the garden-gates, where a very old woman used to live who was extremely afflicted with the rheumatism, she crossed a couple of fields which divided her from it, in order to inquire if she was still alive, as well as her son and daughter-in-law, an honest labourer and his wife, who had a large family to maintain, besides their aged mother, of whom they always appeared very careful.

She found the little wicket, of the inclosure wherein the house stood, open, as was its door, the inhabitants fearing none of those rapacious intruders who are lured by opulence. Richard and his wife were out at harvest-work, and there appeared to be only three or four children playing about the garden. Caroline called the eldest, a girl of six or seven years old, and asked if her grandmother was alive. The child was, at first, frightened, hung down its head, and remained silent, but the sight of two or three halfpence soon brought her to the use of her speech, and she told her that her grandmother had been dead a long time, adding, that, when she died, her mammy cried sadly, and said she was sure she was gone to heaven. "Well," (replied Caroline, who was fond of amusing herself with the simple prattle of children,) "she should not have cried for that, because, you know, heaven is a very fine place, and your grandmother is a great deal happier there than she was when she lived with you." The child stared with vacant attention. "Did you not love your grandmother?" (said Caroline.) The child made no answer; upon which she repeated the question, and the girl replied, "I loves mammy." By this time the rest of the children were gathered round her, and she was about to put some little questions to some of them, by way of trying if their intellects were stronger than those of the eldest seemed to be, when her attention was entirely fixed by the appearance of a beautiful little face which

she saw peeping out at the door. The part of her frock which was in sight added to her surprise; it was of muslin, and perfectly clean. The child now ventured to shew herself intirely, and the cottagers cried out, all at once, "Oh! there's miss! take her back to madam." "Stay, stay, (said Caroline,) let me speak to her. Will you come to me, my love?" (continued she, with an inviting tone and action.) "Come and see what pretty things I have got." "Yes," (cried the child, running to her with eagerness,) "will you take me a walking?" "That I will, (replied our heroine;) we will go all round this field." And away the little creature ran, with all the rapture of a bird who, having been a short time confined to the narrow limits of a cage, on a sudden regains its liberty.

Delighted with its beauty and activity, Caroline asked it several questions, such as where its mamma was, to which the little cherub answered, "Poor mamma is not well, she is asleep upon the bed. Don't tell her I came out." "Would she be angry with you?" (said Caroline.) "Oh! yes, (answered the child,) she won't let me go out now. I used to go out every day with Molly, but Molly is gone now." "And where did you live before you came here?" (asked our heroine.) The child, instead of answering her question, fixed its eyes upon her watch, which was hanging by her side. "You've got a watch; mamma had a watch, but Molly took it away, (cried the little creature,) and papa's picture, and mamma's pretty pins, she took all, and has left mamma hardly any thing." "Shall I come and see your mamma?" (cried Caroline, who began to feel strongly interested in the distress of this unknown person.) "Yes, (replied the beautiful prattler,) as soon as she is awake, but she told me not to make a noise because she was very sleepy." This and such kind of little chat brought them round the field to the house again; whence, while at a small distance, Caroline heard a female voice speaking in much agitation. "Which way did she go?" (exclaimed the unseen inquirer.) "With a lady! What lady? Tell me which way." So saying, she came out of the little inclosure into the field, where our heroine, to her great surprise, beheld an elegant-looking young woman, dressed in the most fashionable manner, though her clothes were rather soiled and carelessly put on. The moment she beheld her little one, joy flushed her pale cheeks; and she met and kissed her with tenderness, half-mixed with anger, for her running out without permission: but in a moment, casting her eyes upon Caroline, confusion covered her face with crimson. "Can you pardon, Madam," said our heroine, "the theft I have been guilty of? I have at least strength of temptation to plead in my excuse; for never did I behold so lovely a little creature!" The countenance of the fond mother brightened at this compliment paid her child: she thanked her in the politest terms; and, taking hold of the hand which her little daughter held out to her, bid her wish the lady a good night. Caroline kissed her with great affection; and, taking hold of her other hand, said, "But when, my dear little new acquaintance, shall I see you again? Will you ask your mama, if she will give me leave to call upon you? You know you promised to introduce me to her." 'Alas, Madam!' answered the lady, 'I have no place, no accommodations to receive a person of your appearance. You see,' continued she, pointing to the cottage, 'you see our only habitation: and how long we shall be suffered to shelter ourselves there, Heaven knows!'

The tear of involuntary pity glistened in the eyes of Caroline. "Your situation, "Madam," cried she, "appears to be indeed unworthy of you; but we every day visit those who are unworthy of their situation; why, then, should we shun the reverse, when it so seldom falls in our way?" 'Do, come in,' exclaimed the little one; 'pray do; you shall have some of my bread and milk; shan't she, mama?' So saying, she pulled her towards

the door, through which our heroine had too much inclination to pass, greatly to oppose her; especially as the lady did not seem unwilling that she should enter.

The description of this cottage would have adorned a pastoral poem. The walls were white; the thatch neat and good; both were almost covered with woodbine, which, though not yet in flower, made a very pleasing appearance. The hedge round great part of the inclosure was made of sweet brier, here and there intermixed with hawthorn; which being in bloom, together with its fragrant neighbour, scented the air. The garden was very clean, and well stored with useful vegetables. The house consisted of two rooms upon the ground floor, and a kind of cock-loft above, to which you ascended by means of a step-ladder. The furniture of the first room was such as one might expect to see in so poor a habitation, which, the number of children considered, was kept in very decent order. Through this room they passed to an inner one, which was rather larger, and perfectly clean; but furnished exactly in the same style. There was nothing that struck the eye as uncommon in such a place, except a large travelling trunk, which stood on one side of the room, and a very fine damask napkin, that was spread over an old three-legged stool, which served by way of table.

As soon as they entered, the lady, in the most polite and obliging manner, reached the only chair the room afforded for our heroine, seating herself upon the side of a small uncurtained bed, and taking her child upon her lap. Then addressing her fair guest with a faint smile, "It is probably the first time you ever sat in such an apartment," said she. 'By no means,' answered Caroline; 'though I must acknowledge that it is the first time I ever met with such an apartment so inhabited.' "You are, no doubt, Madam," said the stranger, "surprized to find a person of decent appearance in so wretched a place. As nothing but the goodness of your disposition can interest you in my affairs, I have no way left in my power to return the kindness of your pity, but by gratifying so natural a curiosity.

"A few words will suffice to give you a general knowledge of my follies and misfortunes. My father is a Baronet; you will pardon my waving his name; I have already sufficiently disgraced it. His profuse manner of living greatly reduced his fortune, and rendered his house a continual scene of dissipation, in which I and one sister, older than myself, were educated. Of his son he was more careful; he was early committed to the tutorage of a respectable gentleman of small fortune, whose education, abilities, and turn of mind, rendered him particularly well qualified for the office of preceptor; while we were left to the care of an ignorant French governess, whom my father hired at a small salary, more for the appearance of improvement than the reality; well knowing that the latter was not within her power to bestow. Our studies were such as you will suppose; learning bad French, reading novels, dressing, and, as we began to grow up, frequenting public places.

"In spite of all these disadvantages, my sister became a sensible elegant woman; she had understanding enough to despise the way of life into which she was initiated, and resolution to change it. She requested that my father would dismiss our French instructor, and give us leave to be attended by a good master of that language, and another who could properly improve us in the knowledge of our own: in which, as her plan was attended with no additional expence, she was indulged. This alteration was by no means agreeable to me, who began but too much to relish the pleasures, as I then thought them, in which we had been accustomed to live: and what added to my chagrin, my sister would scarce ever appear to any of my father's parties; so that I was deprived of the company of

a gentleman who had begun to render himself but too pleasing in my eyes. His person and manner were as agreeable as his morals and conduct were despicable. Mr. Forester was a man of family; who, having lost a good fortune at the gaming-table, had acquired the art by which his ruin had been effected, and now subsisted by stripping others, as he had once himself been stripped. He was not much younger than my father; but his person was fine: and he so completely possessed the art of pleasing, that nobody ever thought of inquiring his age. I was not ignorant of his profession; but the horror it should have excited, was in me not merely weakened, but quite obliterated, by constantly mixing with such characters, and seeing them treated by my father with friendliness and distinction. I entered into secret engagements with him; and in a few months after our acquaintance first commenced, suffered him to conduct me to Scotland, where we were married.

“Upon our return to town, my father refused to see us; and was as much offended by my misconduct, as if he had bestowed upon me the best education, and set me the most perfect example. I was at first affected by his displeasure; but my husband’s fondness, and the light manner in which he treated the affair, often saying he did not want money, and cared for my father as little as he could for him, in a short time wholly dissipated my chagrin. We took a house in Portman-Place, furnished it in the most elegant manner, bought a handsome coach, and in every respect lived like people of large fortune. This, however, did not continue long; our coach, and every thing valuable in the house, was seized for the payment of a play-debt, and I was removed to a ready-furnished lodging in St. James’s-street. Here for some months we experienced numberless vicissitudes of fortune; sometimes rolling in affluence, and sometimes wanting the necessaries of life.

“During this uncertain state, the dear child, who now sleeps upon my lap, was born. The sight of her seemed at once to open my soul to a new perception of every thing around me. While I gazed upon her dear face in speechless fondness, I felt all my follies; and my anguish was equal to my love. What tears have I not shed, while the sweet innocent lay by my side, unconscious of the pangs I endured!

“My husband expressed neither pleasure nor sorrow at the sight of her; he seemed, indeed, to regard her only as a useless expence and incumbrance! nor could all my tears or entreaties prevail upon him to permit me to nurse her! he absolutely forbade me to think of it; swearing he would not live in the compass of a lodging with a squalling brat, for all the women in Europe. At the end of six weeks, therefore, I was obliged to part with my little darling, and to deprive her of that sustenance which nature intended much longer for her support. You are not a mother, my dear Madam,” continued Mrs. Forester; “and though the tears you now shed, prove you to possess the most tender of hearts, yet can you not feel the tortures mine endured, when I took the dear infant from my breast, and committed her to the care of a mercenary hireling. I will not pain you, by attempting to describe it; but only observe, that Mr. Forester, who was present, appeared absolutely unmoved, called me a fool, and said I should in a day or two be as glad as himself that the troublesome little thing was out of the way.

“Before the event I have just related, by awakening maternal affection, had roused my soul to a sense of rectitude and virtue, Mr. Forester and I had lived together in an amicable manner. When in good humour, he was very fond of me; and when his temper was ruffled, I generally left him to fret alone, and sought, among a numerous acquaintance of such dissipated beings as myself, relief from uneasy reflections. When he

was rich I shared his affluence, and when poor, I was forced to submit to a temporary inconvenience, in hope that Fortune, who, we had good reason to know, was prone to change, would soon smile again. But I now saw things in a different light: my husband's profession appeared to me not more precarious than disgraceful; and I was constantly insinuating my opinion, and pressing him to lay out the next sum of money that fell into his hands, in the purchase of some post, which would afford us a regular maintenance, and put it into his power to alter his way of life, and in some degree retrieve his reputation. He at first laughed at, and rallied my seriousness; but finding my sentiments continue the same, and that I had altered my mode of living in conformity to them, he treated my methodism, as he used to call it, with the utmost contempt, and took a pleasure in expressing such opinions and resolutions as he knew would shock me; particularly that of quitting the kingdom, and leaving our dear child behind him, to take its chance in a work-house; which he more than once, when he was in an ill run, declared it was his intention to do. Upon these occasions, I never failed to assure him that I would stay behind, and sing ballads about the streets to maintain it: to which he would answer, that I might begin the experiment as soon as I pleased, for he did not believe it would be long in his power to support us.

“One day, as I was sitting full of uneasy reflections, happening to cast my eye upon a newspaper that lay near; the first paragraph which met it, was an account of the marriage of my sister. I found she had married a foreign nobleman, and was in a few days to set off for the Continent. I immediately resolved to write her an account of my present sad situation. While she continued in my father's house, I knew it was in vain to solicit her assistance; I knew she possessed no more money than was absolutely necessary for her expences, and that she had not the smallest influence over him that could be at all useful to me, were she ever so well inclined to exert it in my favour: but it seemed now probable that her power was enlarged: and, from my knowledge of her natural disposition, and the affection she always professed to bear me, I had little reason to doubt of her kindness. This hope, like a ray of light breaking into a gloomy dungeon, for a moment illumined my soul; but upon examining the date of the paper, I found it was five weeks old, and of consequence she must have left England long before that time. My disappointment was excessive; the tears were still falling from my eyes, when Mr. Forester, whom I had not seen since the morning before (such absences being frequent) entered the room. I asked him if he had never heard of my sister's marriage? ‘Yes,’ answered he, ‘long since.’ “Why did not you inform me of it?” said I; “from this paper, which came to my sight by mere accident, I have received the first and only account of it.” ‘And so,’ answered he, ‘with all your goodness and patience, you are crying because your sister is a Countess! Come, Mary, confess the truth; is not that the case?’ As I had not for a long time seen him smile, or look upon me with any degree of kindness, I endeavoured to be cheerful, and only answered, that when I married him, I would not have accepted of a Duke.—‘We won't inquire,’ said he, seating himself by me, ‘into the different meanings of the words *then* and *now*. I,’ continued he, with some emotion, ‘have not always used thee as thou deservest; but we must forgive each other in turn.’ Then after a moment's pause, ‘Tell me, my dear Mary,’ said he, ‘can'st thou forgive me, who have ruined and treated thee so unkindly?’

“I was startled at a conduct so new: I readily assured him of my forgiveness, nay of my tenderest affection; for I still loved him. He then began to talk upon indifferent

subjects; telling me several particulars of my sister's marriage; which I found had been celebrated with great pomp. He continued all the morning in the house; and when dinner-time approached, asked me what I had provided? adding, that he should dine at home. My amazement increased: I could not remember the time, except when we were first married, that he had ever dined at home when we had no company. I had only one servant, a girl who had always seemed particularly attached to me: I immediately sent her for something which I knew he liked; and he appeared to eat with great comfort and satisfaction. A bottle of wine was ordered after dinner; for as several months had passed since he had eaten a meal with me before, and I had disused myself from the habit of drinking that liquor, on account of its expence, I had not one to set before him.

“When the glasses were removed, to my utter astonishment, he proposed a walk to see our little girl; to which, you may be sure, I gladly consented. The house in which she was nursed was not more than two or three hundred yards from Buckingham-Gate; which situation I had chosen, both on account of its airiness and nearness to St. James's-street. It was my custom to walk to see her twice every day. Indeed, I might be said to have nursed her; for I often staid two or three hours at a time, during which she was never out of my arms. I had the pleasure to see her as healthful and thriving as I could wish; and when she began to distinguish one person from another, her constant and open preference of me to every one, afforded me delight which I have no words to express. As soon as she began to prattle and run alone, I was always met by her at the door; for she perfectly knew the rap I was accustomed to give, nor would she ever leave me for a single moment till I quitted the house.

“Pardon, my dear Madam,” continued Mrs. Forester, “my detaining you with a relation of such trifles; they are what the heart of a mother dwells upon with particular delight, and I am apt to forget that they cannot interest any other so deeply. But I will conclude my story.

“In walking across the park, he desired me to take hold of his arm. As we were going forward, I saw two gentlemen approaching, one of whom I instantly knew to be my father: I trembled; the blood forsook my cheeks, and I could but just totter to a seat which happened to be near us. My father cast his eyes upon us as he passed by; he started at the first view: but disdain succeeded surprize, and he gave me a look so full of contemptuous severity, that my heart sunk within me, and I fainted away.

“Upon my recovery, I found myself in the house of my child's nurse; my husband, with concern in his countenance, supporting me, and my dear little Mary crying at my knees. I soon began to grow better; and the sight of Mr. Forester, sitting with his little cherub on his knee, was a cordial to my spirits. He ordered tea, and sent for cakes to treat her with; asked many little questions, and appeared highly pleased with her prattle; often declaring, he never before saw so lovely a child; and once adding, that he wished he had known how engaging the dear little creature was sooner. I seized that opportunity to propose our having her home: to which he readily consented, telling me, that if I liked it, we might take her with us that evening.

“At that moment, I thought myself perfectly happy; I was in a delirium of joy: I embraced my husband with transport, then my child; and thanked him again and again for the permission he had given me. He accordingly paid the nurse all that was due to her, and calling a coach, we got in; and when the door was closed upon us, I thought that

small wooden vehicle contained every thing within it, and that all the rest of the world was a noisy nothing.

“Our little Mary was so lively and entertaining, that it grew late before we could prevail upon ourselves to part with her. At last, tired out with the constant exercise of the day, she fell asleep in her father’s arms; who carried her up stairs; and when I had opened the bed, laid her gently upon it. Never did he appear in my eyes so manly, so amiable! I seemed to be beginning a new life; to be almost in Heaven! After talking some time about the beauty and understanding of our dear little one, we agreed to follow her. I accordingly went up to my chamber, where (our bed being very large) she slept. After offering up my prayers and praises to the awful Disposer of events, I went to bed; where, in a short time, I was followed by my husband.

“Soon after five, the next morning, we were awoke, by some one rapping loud at the door. My husband started up, and began to dress himself in haste.—“Are you going out so early?” said I. ‘Yes,’ replied he; ‘I have promised to take a walk with Major Darnley: it is he who is at the door.’ “Will you be back to breakfast?” said I. ‘I hope so,’ replied he; ‘but don’t wait for me; I shall probably take a long walk. Perhaps,’ continued he, after a moment’s pause, ‘you may want money before I return; I’ll leave my purse behind me: that, and this pocket-book, which I will likewise give to your care, contain all my worldly possession.’—By this time he was dressed, when, stepping to the side of the bed, he tenderly embraced me, and imprinted a kiss of cordial love upon the lips of his sleeping Mary. As he left the chamber, stopping short, as it were, to take one more look, a sigh burst from him, which seemed to issue from the bottom of his heart.

“Judging of his feelings by my own, I easily attributed such a proof of concern to regret for past follies: and, as sorrow is the parent of penitence, I felt the most lively hope that I should soon see the fruits of so desirable a change; a change which I now fervently longed for, though want and beggary were to be the consequence.

“In this soothing disposition of mind I fell asleep, after having followed my husband’s example, in tenderly kissing my little darling, who lay by my side a picture of innocence and peace.

“In this blessed state I remained, till I was awakened by my servant’s suddenly rushing into my room, exclaiming, ‘Oh, Madam! Madam! my master is killed! he’s killed in a duel!’ How I arose, supported myself, unassisted as I was, to the dead body of my wretched husband, and went through all the dreadful scenes that followed, I hardly know; nor will I pain myself to relate, or you, Madam, to hear. Next to the support of Heaven, I believe, I owe to my little Mary the strength of mind which was inspired, by the desire of preserving and protecting her.

“I will pass by the whole melancholy train of events which took place during my short stay in London. My petition to my father; his cruel reproaches and utter refusal of assistance; the coolness of my friends, and the severity of my enemies;—let it suffice to say, That when I had fully answered all the demands which were made upon me, I found myself in possession of rather more than thirty pounds, besides my own watch and my husband’s, a few diamonds, and some valuable trinkets.

“After much consideration, I resolved to quit London; where I knew this small sum would last but a short time, and go to the house of a relation, who lived at the distance of a few miles from this place. I set out accordingly, full of hope that I should be received with some kindness, as she was very rich, my godmother, and had, in the

younger part of my life, been very kind to me. Add to which, that she was remarkable for her fondness of children; having had several of her own, which she had lost. All these circumstances gave me the most comfortable reliance upon her protection. Judge then of my disappointment, when I was informed at her door, that she had been dead upwards of six months, and her fortune (having died without a will) fallen into the hands of her nephew, who was then in London; and none but servants, upon board wages, left in the house.

“I had come in a stage-coach all the way from London, which, passing through the further part of this village, set me down at a small inn; from whence, with a boy, to whom I promised a shilling, by way of guide, I walked to Glendhall, the house of my relation, without once thinking of making any inquiry about her; which, had I taken the precaution to do, I might have saved myself much loss and vexation. On my way I was particularly struck with the situation and appearance of this cottage, and ardently wished that, furnished with the mere conveniences of life, I could end my days in such a retreat. I found the walk longer than I expected; but hope supported me. On my return, however, I had no such comforter; and it was with much difficulty that I crawled along. Just as I was crossing this field, almost ready to faint with fatigue, the mistress of the cottage, with one or two of her children, were going in. I called to her, and asked if she would give me leave to rest in her house for a few minutes? which she readily permitted me to do. I was no sooner within the door than I fainted away; and, upon my recovery from the fit, found myself so very ill, that I was incapable of moving. With considerable difficulty I wrote a few lines to my servant, ordering her to bring Mary to me, and my trunk; which I did not choose to have left at a public-house.

“The clean honest appearance of the people with whom I was, pleased me more than the confusion, dirtiness, and imposition of an ale-house: and I resolved, as they told me they had a room they could spare, to stay with them till I was able to pursue my journey. The honest man of the house went with the boy, and assisted in bringing my trunk; in which I had some linen, both for the bed and table.

“This room, into which my hostess conducted me, was quite clean. She told me, her mother, who had seen better days, and lived housekeeper in many good families, used to sleep in it; but that, since her death, which was about three months, it had never been used. A pair of my own sheets being put on the bed, I drank a bason of balm-tea; which the good woman assured me, was the best thing in the world for a cold or fever: and indeed I found it both an agreeable and efficacious medicine.

“I was rather better the next morning; but finding myself so very quiet, and having no particular place where I had resolved to go, I determined to remain where I was, till I was perfectly recovered.

“When I had been here three days, and could just get up and walk about, my servant began to make heavy complaints of the wretchedness of her accommodation, though the poor children had given up their bed to her, and lay themselves in the kitchen upon straw, which they brought in at night for the purpose, and regularly removed every morning. I told her, she must not expect with me the comforts she had been accustomed to, as I no longer had them for myself; but that we should soon go back to town, where, if she chose to leave me, which I would advise her to do, I would be ready to give her such a character as, I hoped, would secure her a better place. She made no answer; only muttering something about fine folks and poor servants. I went to bed early in the

evening, being still very weak, and took my little Mary with me. I had a good night; and when I awoke, was about to call Molly, as usual; when, to my great surprize, I beheld my trunk open, and all the things tossed and tumbled in a strange manner. I called the woman of the house, and asked where Molly was? To which she answered, that she could not think; for they sat up for her till it was light in the morning, but she never came home. Upon asking when she went out? I was told, in about an hour after I went to bed: That she came out of my room, and told them she was going to the public-house, to fetch some things that I wanted; and should be back in a couple of hours.

“I instantly got up, and, upon looking into my trunk, found that a purse, which contained all my money, except one guinea and some silver that happened to be in my pocket, was gone. She had likewise taken my diamonds, some valuable lace and trinkets, among which was a picture of my husband, set round with brilliants. And casting my eyes upon the table, where my watch generally lay, I perceived that was gone likewise.

“This, my dear Madam, completed my misfortunes, and left me in a situation the most forlorn and wretched that ever poor creature was reduced to. I have not a friend in the kingdom to whom I can apply for a single guinea in my extremest necessity: I know not where to write either to my brother or sister; the former being at this time upon his travels. Had not this distressing event taken place, it was my hope to have lived upon the little of which I was possessed till his return, which will be in a few months. Upon the benevolence and generosity of his disposition I place my last and only dependence. At the age of twenty-five, of which he now wants but a short time, he will, by the will of an uncle, be possessed of five thousand pounds a year, independent of my father: and, if an absence of six years (for so long it is since he left England) has not greatly altered his temper and affections, he will not suffer a sister to feel distress, which it is in his power to relieve.”

Here Mrs. Forester ended, apologizing to our heroine for having detained her so long with a tale so melancholy and little interesting. Caroline assured her, in the kindest manner, of her pity; adding, that every assistance in her power to give, she should command. The close of the evening warned her to shorten her stay; and she took leave, after having promised, with the permission of her new acquaintance, to call again the next day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *The Pleasures of Benevolence.*

THE attention of our heroine was wholly occupied during the night by the affecting little story she had just heard. Her own situation, compared with that of Mrs. Forester, was affluence and happiness; but she sighed for the power to remove her distress, to soothe her afflicted heart, and restore her to the ease and independence she had once enjoyed, and which her present altered disposition rendered her more than ever worthy to possess; but she was not one of those who could satisfy themselves with sighing for the misfortunes of others, or fancy, as many good-natured people do, that when they have wished relief to the unfortunate, they have done all benevolence can demand: nor did she think that, because it was not in her power wholly to supply the wants of the necessitous, she should therefore withhold the little she was able to bestow. Upon her arrival at home she unlocked the drawer wherein her cash was deposited, and counting it over, found it amounted to nine guineas and a half. In about three months, the interest of her thousand pounds would be due from Doctor Seward; and she had already paid in advance for her first quarter's board, thinking the money would be better employed in the hands of Farmer Williams, than by keeping it locked up in her drawer. Upon this review of the present state of her finances, she thought five guineas might be spared without inconvenience; and accordingly placed that sum in an elegant little French box, which she resolved to present her new favourite, the beautiful little Mary, with the next morning.

Full of the pleasing hope of bestowing comfort, she rose early, and could hardly allow herself time to breakfast; so impatient was she to repeat her visit to the cottage; but just as she entered the field in which it stood, recollecting that it was probable Mrs. Forester would not be up, at least that her little chamber would not be in such a state as her delicacy would let her think proper for the reception of a visitor, she turned back, and seating herself under the shade of one of her favourite trees, pulled out a book (a companion she never was without) and amused herself, till her watch informed her it was eleven o'clock. She then gathered a nosegay of rose-buds, which flourished in abundance throughout every part of the garden, and again bent her course to the habitation of her new friend.

There is nothing that endears a worthy fellow-creature to a benevolent heart so much, as the power of doing him good. The pleasures resulting from conscious virtue and active goodness, are far greater than can be felt by the object who is benefited from their effects; or, to speak in the expressive language of him whose wisdom was only equalled by his benevolence, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' With a heart full of kindness, and a countenance dressed in smiles such as angels may be supposed to wear when sent on errands of mercy, she approached the cottage; the native inhabitants of which, strangers to want or care, were playing about the door, as the day before. "Sorrow," said our heroine, as she gazed at them, "is the offspring of refinement; health, food, a sunshine-day, or warm hovel, are all that simple, untaught nature requires." Thus reflecting, she entered the house, and seeing the door of the inner apartment half-open, was going to knock, in order to give notice of her coming; when little Mary, hearing a noise, came to it. The moment she beheld her, she cried out, in a rapture, "The lady,

mama! the lady!” and ran to her with open arms. Caroline took her up, and kissing her lips and cheeks, gave her the flowers; which she had no sooner received, than struggling to get down, she flew back to her mother, crying, “Look, look, mama! see what I have got!” At that moment Mrs. Forester appeared. “It is in vain,” said she, smiling through a tear, “to strive to make my poor chamber fit for your reception. Should I put every thing away that offends the eye, I should strip it of all its wretched conveniences; but Miss Ashford has goodness to enter as it is; I will therefore open the door without apology, as the best compliment I can pay to her benevolence.”

Caroline was surprized to hear her name mentioned; which, however, she would not have been, had she considered the many visits she used to pay to this and the neighbouring cottages, while an inhabitant of Elmwood. Mrs. Forester assured her, that the compassion she had the last night expressed for her sufferings, had greatly soothed her mind; and the liberty of relating them had seemed to remove part of the load with which it was oppressed. In return, her fair comforter said all that was kind and worthy of her understanding and goodness: she gave it as her opinion, that as Mrs. Forester had no place to which she particularly wished to go, and was so well satisfied with the honesty and civility of the people with whom she then was, it would be the best measure she could take to remain in her present humble habitation, till she heard of her brother’s arrival in England. To this she readily assented; but said her only fear was, that her little stock would not hold out to pay the small weekly salary she had promised for her room, exclusive of bread for herself and child. Caroline replied, that it would be hard if so small a sum could not be procured; then rising to take leave, she invited her and her little one to drink tea with her at Mr. Williams’s. “You will there see, Madam,” said she, “that mere comforts are all I possess: I have known some changes of situation as well as yourself, though none so painful as yours.” Mrs. Forester willingly promised to attend her; and Caroline having directed her to the garden-gate, at which she engaged to meet and conduct her to the house, stooped down to kiss her little favourite before her departure; and slipping the box, which contained her present, into her hand, quitted the house, with a request that they would make her an early visit.

With a heart much the lighter for the loss of her guineas, Caroline returned home; she no longer felt herself poor, she had something to spare for the distressed; and if she could not do all she wished, at least she resolved to omit nothing within her power to do. As soon as dinner was over (which, in order to consult the convenience of her nurse, she now eat at one o’clock) she began to prepare for the entertainment of her expected guests, by gathering a small basket of cherries and another of apricots, of which (Williams being a good manager of his trees) the garden produced a considerable quantity. At the appointed hour she repaired to the gate where she expected to meet them, and in a few minutes after she had opened it, they appeared.

It would be difficult to paint the confusion, the gratitude, which appeared in the countenance of Mrs. Forester when she approached our heroine: her feelings were too strong for words; and only could express themselves in tears. At length, somewhat recovering, “Generous Miss Ashford,” cried she, “how shall I thank you! how shall I express my gratitude!” ‘If I can be happy enough to serve you, my dear Madam,’ interrupted Caroline, ‘the pleasure it will afford me will ten thousand times pay me for the trifle, which nothing but the narrowness of my present circumstances can excuse my having offered you. Your acceptance of it is a favour done to me; and I beseech you to

consider it as such.' She then began to caress and gather flowers for her little blooming favourite, in order to divert the thoughts of her mother from what so entirely possessed them.

From this evening, which was spent in the most cordial manner, a perfect intimacy took place between them; and they seldom spent a day apart. Besides the present which Caroline had made her new friend, she was constantly sending her every thing that she thought would contribute to her health and comfort: and the extreme delicacy with which all her kindnesses were bestowed, doubled their value. Her chamber became convenient, by the number of little things which she received from her: and not only the table upon which she eat, but the viands that were placed upon it, were daily proofs of her attention and friendship. Little Mary became every day more and more dear to her: she lived more with her than with her mother; passing many succeeding nights with her little mama, as Caroline had taught her to call her.

About a month had passed in this manner, when, one evening upon which Caroline was gone to the cottage, to ask her friends to dine with her the next day, upon some delicacy which Dr. Seward had sent her, and was walking with them backward and forward in the field before their habitation, she saw Sally running, with unusual swiftness, across the meadow, from the garden-gate. Believing that something extraordinary must have occasioned this haste, she kissed Mary, bade adieu to Mrs. Forester, and walked with a quick pace to meet her. Half out of breath, Sally informed her that an old lady in a fine coach, with all the servants in mourning, was at their house, inquiring for her: and, upon hearing that she had walked out, desired she might be sent for immediately. Caroline was lost in conjecture: she knew not any person who, in the smallest degree, answered the description given by Sally. She therefore entered the house in a considerable degree of solicitude and perfect uncertainty.

She was met at the door of the parlour by a pleasing venerable-looking old lady, dressed in deep mourning. A genteel middle-aged woman, who seemed to be her attendant, was standing behind her. Caroline courtesied upon entering, in the most graceful and respectful manner; which was returned by the old lady, with a look of mixed surprize, pleasure, and affection. "Are you Miss Ashford, my dear?" said she, in the tenderest accent. 'I am, Madam,' replied our heroine. 'May I beg to know the cause to which I owe the honour of seeing you in this retirement?' "It is my child!" exclaimed Lady Ashford; "for it was no other: it is the daughter of my poor unfortunate Henry! Her voice, her manner, all are his!" So saying, she embraced her with inexpressible affection, while our heroine sunk at her feet, dissolved in tears, and speechless with surprize and joy. 'Are you then, indeed, Madam,' sobbed she, 'the revered mother of my dear, dear father? her of whom I have so often heard him speak with such duty and affection? And will you permit his poor forlorn child to ask your blessing—to claim your parental love?' "Yes, my child," replied her Ladyship, again, embracing her in the fondest manner: "the love, the protection I was not suffered to extend to thy dear father, shall be thine. My house shall be thy home; nor shall all the malice of thy enemies rob thee of thy natural right in my heart and fortune. See here, Mrs. Ausburn," continued she, turning to her companion. "Behold the deformed, weak, untaught girl I have been persuaded to expect! I always knew Marmaduke was mean and selfish; but I did not before believe that he was capable of framing such malicious falshoods. If she has been guilty of some levities; at her age, with such a person, they are excuseable, and have been too severely punished."

The tears which fell from the eyes of our heroine, and wet the hand of her grandmother, which at the conclusion of this tender speech she raised to her lips, spoke the grateful sensations of her soul. She was at a loss to explain the meaning of her last words, till she understood that her grandfather, being dead, and of consequence his widow freed from those ties which separated her from her brother, he and his lady, who were before upon terms of intimacy with the present Sir Marmaduke and his family, paid her a visit; and by them she was informed of the many follies her granddaughter had been accused of; and of her leaving her uncle's house in consequence of a slight reprimand she had received from Lady Walton. This account, which was given by the last-mentioned lady, with all the false colouring of malice, could not wholly deceive the penetration of Lady Ashford. Removing the facts from the glaring light in which they had been placed, by one whose interest stood in opposition to that of the accused, and with whose character and manners she was by no means satisfied, what had been alledged against Caroline more than a few youthful follies, such as she by no means thought sufficient to justify her relations in abandoning a young creature, who stood so much in need of their protection and assistance. She had often privately inquired about her and her brother, during the lifetime of her husband; when to inquire was all in her power to do; and had been told that she was much deformed, and very deficient in her understanding: but questioning Lady Walton upon these particulars, she learnt that Caroline was reckoned handsome, and that her understanding was very good: that lady adding, That if her heart and disposition were equal to her sense, she would do very well. Thus, Lady Ashford finding she had been in part deceived; and having, as was before observed, no very high opinion of Lady Walton, resolved to judge for herself, by going immediately to the place where her granddaughter resided. If she found her amiable, it was her resolution to bring her back with her, and to treat and provide for her as one of her children: if otherwise, to see that she was accommodated with all the comforts her disposition and degree of understanding would admit of; and, by settling a proportionate annuity upon her, to secure them to her for the remainder of her life.

Such being the intentions and disposition of Lady Ashford, it is easy to conceive the pleasure her granddaughter's uncommon beauty and elegance of manner afforded her. She was never tired of gazing upon her; and when at her particular request she gave her a full account of all that had occasioned her quitting Broomfield, and shewed her the note she received from Lord Walton, upon the morning of her departure, her indignation flashed in a pair of eyes which had once been remarkably fine, and still retained much of their native lustre; and she walked two or three times across the room, in an agitation of spirits very unusual to a temper so gentle. At length, composing herself a little, she again sat down by the side of Caroline; and looking upon her with inexpressible tenderness, "Is it possible," said she, "that any human creature could wish to injure thee? But there are some who disgrace the species to whom they belong. It shall be my care to put thee beyond the reach of their malice." Then, after a moment's pause, "You must return with me tonight, my love," continued she: "never mind your things, bring such as are of most value; and if the people of the house have been civil to you, leave the rest as a reward for them."

Caroline then told her in whose house she was, and the unbounded respect and kindness she had received from the worthy inhabitants of it. She then gave her a short sketch of the story of Mrs. Forester, as well as her manner of meeting with her; and

proposed to Lady Ashford that she and her daughter should take possession of the apartments her goodness was about to take her out of; adding, 'I can afford to maintain them out of the little fortune I am possessed of, a part of which will now be unnecessary to me.' "There spoke thy dear father! voice, sentiment, and soul!" exclaimed Lady Ashford. "Do as you think proper, my love; I will not rob you of so much pleasure as I perceive this arrangement gives you. Dispose of your present little income as you think proper; it will not be necessary to you in future."

Just as they were settling these affairs, Mrs. Williams and Sally brought in dinner, which they had prepared on purpose for the strangers, though Caroline had been too much taken up in conversation to request them to do so. Lady Ashford thanked them for their kindness to her child, who, she said, would now have it in her power to reward them for it. Tears of pleasure trickled down the face of the affectionate nurse, which were almost converted into sorrow, when she learnt that her dear lady (as she usually called her) was to go away that very night. Caroline asked the kind-hearted woman if she should have any objection to boarding Mrs. Forester and her daughter for ten pounds a quarter? To which she replied, that she should be very glad to do it. And upon being informed that they would be with her the next morning, promised to have every thing in readiness for their reception. She then wrote to Doctor Seward to inform him of the good fortune that had befallen her; to thank him for all his and his sister's goodness to her, and to request that he would pay the interest of her thousand pounds to Mrs. Forester, who, she told him, was her particular friend. Lastly, she wrote a letter to that lady, in which she repeated the first-mentioned piece of information; then told her of the regulation she had made for her, requesting that she and her dear little Mary would the next morning take possession of the quarters she was about to quit. As for the trifles of furniture which she had from time to time supplied her with, she requested that they might be left as a present to the honest people, with whose behaviour, during her residence in their little habitation, she had so much reason to be pleased; and, wishing her every comfort that health and peace could bestow, concluded in terms the most friendly and affectionate. She then gave Williams directions about the packing of her books, harpsichord, and the two pictures upon which she set so high a value, and which her grandmother was as desirous of possessing as herself. Her book-case, and what other things she had there, were, by the old lady's direction, left behind; who likewise gave Caroline a ten-pound note to present to her nurse before she left the house: a command which was most readily and cheerfully obeyed. The rest of her cash was distributed among the people of the family; and she followed her grandmother into her coach, amidst the tears and blessings of all who were present at her departure.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *A Family Party.*

AFTER sleeping one night upon the road, our travellers arrived at Crayfort, the name of the Dowager Lady Ashford's jointure-house. It was a small elegant retreat, fitted up with great neatness, and well suited for the residence of a lady of her age and disposition. Sir William and herself had lived at it for many years, having given up their principal house, which stood at about five miles distance, to their son, upon his marriage. Her house was not proportioned to her income, which was large; her fortune having been a very good one. Besides a jointure of three thousand pounds a year, Sir William had left her twelve thousand pounds, to be disposed of at her pleasure, together with the furniture, &c. of the house she lived in; expressing, at his decease, a respect for her virtues, which, during his life, he had too much neglected.

Her daughter had an apartment in her house, which she called her home; but the principal part of her time was spent at Ashford Park, where she saw more company: a loss at which her mother did not repine, their tempers, sentiments, and opinions being too different to admit of pleasing society.

Mrs. Ausburn had lived with her as a companion, ever since her removal to Crayfort. Her husband, a clergyman, having died young, and left her unprovided for, she gladly accepted Lady Ashford's invitation to reside in her house; and being remarkable for the inoffensiveness of her temper, at the same time that she possessed a very tolerable understanding and considerable knowledge, reading being her principal enjoyment, she had kept friends with every part of the family, without being under the necessity of cringing to any of them; and was much esteemed and beloved by Lady Ashford, for whom she had the highest reverence.

An elegant apartment was immediately assigned to our heroine, and a genteel young girl hired to attend upon her. Nothing was omitted that could render her situation agreeable; and her sweetness of temper and manners, together with the constant attention and respect, united to ease, cheerfulness, and affection, which she preserved towards her grandmother, endeared her so much to the heart of that indulgent parent, that she could scarce endure her to be a moment out of her sight: and often, during the short and unavoidable absences, would declare to Mrs. Ausburn, that the company of that dear child had renewed her youth, and that she never was happy before. These tender expressions, which were constantly repeated to Caroline, afforded her the most heartfelt pleasure, and redoubled those endeavours to oblige and please, which never failed of their full effect.

A fortnight had passed in this comfortable manner, before they either saw or heard any thing of the family at Ashford Park; an absence which being unusually long, the old lady attributed to their displeasure at the late addition she had made to her family, by bringing Caroline home. One evening, however, as our heroine was sitting at her harpsichord, a servant arrived with a card, implying that they intended themselves the pleasure of spending the next day with their mother. The moment Mrs. Ausburn had read the card, which she did aloud, the colour forsook the cheeks of Caroline; her fingers refused to strike the keys, and she was near fainting. Her grandmother observing her

agitation, took her hands, and looking with pity and affection, "Why is my dear child so much fluttered?" said she; "it is your relations who should be afraid of seeing you: why should you fear them?" "I do not fear them," answered Caroline; "but my uncle——" "I am not surprized," interrupted the old lady, "that you should have contracted an aversion to him; but you must endeavour to conquer it. I need not preach the doctrine of forgiveness to a disposition so gentle and good as yours." "I do forgive him, Madam," answered she; "and had he only injured me, could respect him; but his enmity to my father——" "I feel for you, my love," cried her kind parent; "but from my Caroline I expect something superior to what common minds are capable of. I am sure you will oblige me by concealing, and, if possible, overcoming your dislike to my son." "His being such," replied our heroine, "shall entitle him to my respect; my affections are not in my power." "It is enough," answered the old lady; "you are too just to carry your resentment beyond the person of the offender; his wife is a respectable woman; and though Eleanor is not a Caroline, she is generally reckoned a fine girl, and will, I hope, deserve your affection."

During the whole morning preceding their expected visit, Caroline felt the most uneasy sensations; every noise set her heart in a palpitation; and when the coach stopped at the door, she could scarce breathe. The first person who entered was Lady Ashford. Her dress (for that is the first thing which strikes an observer) was fashionable, but put on rather with neatness than taste: her person was little and plain; her aspect reserved, and a certain stiffness thrown over her whole appearance, by no means pleasing; but upon conversing with her, this in some measure wore off, and you could often perceive an apparent goodness of disposition which excited esteem. Her favourite subject of conversation was books, though she knew very little about them, and often made gross and laughable mistakes in her quotations, and sometimes in her pronunciations; for having been educated in the most confined manner by a father, whose sole object in life was saving money, at her marriage with Sir Marmaduke Ashton she was very ignorant and awkward; nothing but her vast fortune could have induced that family to receive her among them; but a hundred thousand pounds was not every day to be obtained; and as their younger son had been absurd enough to refuse it, no way was left to secure it, but by uniting its possessor to the eldest. During the first months of her marriage, she was treated by her sister-in-law, Miss Ashford, with airs of superiority, bordering upon contempt. She took upon her to direct her in every thing, and to let her understand that no alterations must be made in the smallest article of the accustomed way of living at Ashford Park. For some time she patiently submitted to her management; till finding her situation become little better than mere servitude, with an exemption from manual labour, she began to rebel against this usurped authority, and to hint to Miss Ashford, that she chose to command in her own house. This occasioned an absolute quarrel between them; which was carried to such a height, that the last-named lady was several years without entering Ashford Park.

Mrs. Ashford (as she then was) by degrees wore off the rusticity of her manner; but in its place a stiffness succeeded, almost equally distant from gentility, though less offensive to it. Public places and large companies being awkward and unpleasant to her, she staid much at home; and becoming very intimate with the Rector of the parish and his wife, a couple of good kind of bookish people, she began to regret her own want of education, and by constantly puzzling herself over books of their recommending, great

part of which she could not comprehend, became a complete pedant, and thought nothing valuable but learning, or worth attending to but books, or the improvement of the mind, as she used to call it. It was now several years since a reconciliation had taken place between her and her sister, who had in a great measure relinquished the care of the family, and taken upon her that of her niece, of whom she was very fond, or rather vain, and whose disposition she had in many respects contributed to spoil.

Sir Marmaduke we have already described in a former part of this work.—Time had made some alteration in him; he was less violent and less whimsical, though his temper was still strongly tinctured with both these defects: but what he had lost in warmth and fickleness, was amply compensated by another quality, which, when once it gets possession of the mind, every day gathers strength, increases with age, and seldom loses any part of its influence but with the loss of life: I mean avarice; by which he would now have been wholly swayed, had not vanity and excessive pride formed a balance in his bosom against that prevailing passion. His health had for some years past been very moderate, having been troubled with a nervous disorder, which added peevishness to the rest of his amiable characteristics. A gloomy day threw him into the horrors! and a ride in the morning, and the cardtable in the afternoon, were necessary to his very existence. He never had liked the person of his wife; and her understanding and manners he despised: but a regard to the opinion of the world, and large pin-money, which was settled upon her at marriage, one half of which she never demanded, kept him upon terms of civility; though he often attempted to display what he thought wit at her expence, and would sometimes, with an affected good humour, expose her ignorance, when it would otherwise have passed unobserved.

His sister still continued nearly what she was twenty years before, except that the wrinkles of fifty now adorned a face which even in youth could boast no charms. She was envious to excess of the beauty of every handsome woman she saw; not on her own account, for time had now put all chance of conquests even beyond her hope, but on that of her niece, who was her little idol; and of whose fancied perfections she was as vain as ever she had been of her own. Every man who approached this little phoenix was, in her idea, a lover; and she formed to herself the most extravagant expectations of her future settlement in life. Since the death of her father, having lost all right to the appellation of Miss Ashford, she had taken that of Mrs.; and would have been as much offended at any one who now addressed her by the former title, as she would three months before have been, had they made use of the latter.

As for Miss Ashford, she was what her grandmother had styled her, a fine girl. She was of the middle size; rather inclined to plumpness, with a tolerable complexion, dark eyes and hair, agreeable features, and an air of fashionable self-consequence. She had been educated in Queen's Square; and knew something of all the branches of modern female improvement. Dancing was that in which she most excelled, and the only one of which she was at all fond; for she disliked her harpsichord, and had been so much teased by her mother about reading, that she hated the very sight of a book. Although she had been three years at home since her education was said to have been completed, she still, in many respects, retained the manners of a school-girl, seldom joining in a general conversation, but drawing some one into separate chat. She was fond of relating stories and anecdotes; but they were generally delivered in such a confused and roundabout manner, that nothing but politeness could induce any one to attend to their conclusion.

From her appearance, a stranger would have judged her to be good-natured; but it was an appearance only; for her natural disposition was vain and selfish.

Such was the party to which our heroine was introduced by her grandmother. Lady Ashford received her with civility; Sir Marmaduke with a hurrying kind of negligence; her cousin with extreme coldness; and her aunt, with a broad stare of curiosity and insolence.

As soon as they were seated, Sir Marmaduke began to complain of the heat; said the dust of the roads was intolerable. This introduced an account of one of the horses which had fallen lame. A subject that continued till dinner was announced, when the whole family left the room in a kind of party, leaving Caroline to follow with Mrs. Ausburn; which the old lady observing, addressed her in the kindest manner; and during the whole repast, treated her with particular attention.

It was the Dowager's custom, every day after dinner, to retire to her apartment for an hour, where she usually slept: a custom, of all others, the most refreshing and beneficial to old age; and Caroline had, ever since her coming to Crayfort, regularly attended her up stairs, placed a handkerchief over her head, and let down a curtain to shade the sofa upon which she reposed. She now arose and followed her, as usual: and having performed these little filial offices, returned to the drawing room; where the ladies, attended by Sir Marmaduke (who, not knowing how to amuse himself alone, seldom favoured them with his absence) had removed at the same time that their mother left them. Upon entering, she observed a smile of contempt exchanged between Mrs. Ashford and her niece. Sir Marmaduke was walking backward and forward across the room; and neither honoured nor offended her by a single look: but Lady Ashford, laying down a book which she had in her hand, asked her if she had ever read Homer? As this was the first word any of the family had condescended to address to her, she was for a moment unable to speak; but recovering, she answered, that she had read Mr. Pope's translation of that admired poet, with particular pleasure. "And pray," said her Ladyship, "do you like his Iliad or Æneid best?" "I greatly admire the writings both of Homer and Virgil," answered Caroline. "And what do you think of Mr. Pope's translation of the Rape of the Lock?" asked her Ladyship; "is it not the finest thing that ever was written?" "The Rape of the Lock," answered our heroine, scarce able to suppress a smile, "is certainly a very beautiful poem."—"You seem to have a great deal of taste," exclaimed Lady Ashford. "I suppose you have spent much of your time in reading?" "Reading is an amusement of which I am fond," said Caroline. "By the Heavens!" exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, "I would rather hear of plague and famine, than be constantly stunned with the names of a parcel of antiquated writers, with whom every school-boy is familiar. What, in the name of folly, can you find so entertaining in perpetually repeating, 'This is fine, and that's beautiful?' Can you find nothing new to say, which may at least make your subject supportable?" "If every master of a family," answered Lady Ashford, "was as great an encourager of ignorance as yourself, we should soon plunge again into Gothic barbarism!" "Better be ignorant than pedantic," returned her husband; "a pedantic woman is the greatest pest of society. By the Heavens, I would advise a young man who is about marriage, to seek out for a girl who has never been taught her letters." "It is a pity but you had done so, Sir Marmaduke," replied her Ladyship, with some warmth. "Nay," answered he, "if ignorance could have preserved me from such a misfortune, I stood as fair a chance to escape it as most men. But 'faith I believe the surest way is to tease a girl well

with masters! I warrant Eleanor now will never be a pedant.” ‘If it is in your power to make her so,’ cried Lady Ashford, ‘she will be illiterate enough; but I see no harm a little knowledge does to women: why should not they be made companions for their husbands, and be able to fill up their time, without cards, or sauntering about; wearying themselves, and every body else, with the sight of them?’

Much of the same kind of entertaining conversation passed between the husband and wife; which, as soon as it ended, seemed to be forgotten by both. Indeed, such kind of dialogues were so frequent between them, that they were little remarked by their particular friends, who knew it was their way, and never interfered. The entrance of the old lady now put an end to the dispute, and a more general conversation took place; in which her grandmother took care that our heroine should bear a part; which she did in such a manner, as induced even her uncle to pay her some attention. But Mrs. Ashford continued throughout the whole day to preserve the most contemptuous silence towards her; often endeavouring to look and speak in such a manner as should confuse and fright her.

The coach drove early to the door; for the old lady not having admitted cards into her sight since her widowhood, the evening appeared tediously long to Sir Marmaduke and his sister; and they took their leave, after Lady Ashford had requested her mother to spend a day with her the next week, and to bring Caroline with her; from whom she parted in a very gracious manner.

After they were gone, the old lady expressed some resentment at the behaviour of her daughter. “I perceive with pleasure,” said she, “how much you gained upon the good opinion of Sir Marmaduke and Lady Ashford: I rejoice to see it; for should I be taken from you, which is an event you must every day look for, who can you so properly reside with, while you remain single, as them? I wish,” continued she, “my grandson was returned from his travels; I have great hope in him; he is the reverse of his, and the image of your father in every thing. How happy should I be to see you his wife! At all events, you will be independent of them; and if you cannot live happy in their house, you must go back to your worthy friend Mrs. Seward.” Caroline replied, that she hoped many happy years would pass before she should be deprived of the protection of the dear maternal friend she now possessed. “You must not think of that, my love,” answered the excellent lady: “every night that I close my eyes, I conceive it a matter of great uncertainty whether they will ever again be opened; and were I not anxious for thy safety and comfort, I should likewise esteem it indifferent.” So saying, she embraced and left her; it being her custom to spend some time alone in her dressing-room every night, before her woman came to undress her.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *A Removal.*

WHEN Caroline came into the breakfast-parlour the next morning, she was surprized to see no table laid, nor any preparation making. She had not stood more than a moment, before Mrs. Ausburn appeared: her eyes were red, and her countenance much discomposed. Caroline eagerly inquired the cause of her disturbance; and, after some hesitation, and a fresh burst of tears, she learnt that her revered grandmother was found dead in her bed by her woman, who went as usual to assist in dressing her. The shock our heroine felt was inexpressible; she turned pale; her limbs trembled, and she sunk upon the floor in a state of perfect insensibility. While she was in this condition, Sir Marmaduke and his lady entered, followed by Mrs. and Miss Ashford; they had been sent for the moment their mother's decease was known; and setting out immediately, arrived before Caroline had recovered from her first surprize.

Mrs. Ausburn gave them the few particulars of their first discovering the melancholy circumstance; and Sir Marmaduke, his lady, and Mrs. Ashford, went up stairs; but Eleanor not chusing so dismal a sight, remained still below. Caroline by degrees recovered her senses; but such was the oppression she felt, that she was unable to speak or look up. Two of the servants assisted in lifting her up, and seating her upon a sofa; which they had just effected, when Mrs. Ashford, whom a short view of her excellent mother had satisfied, returned into the room, with a handkerchief held to her eyes. The moment she entered, casting them towards Caroline, she exclaimed, in a voice of anger, "What, is not this farce ended yet?—But she has reason to be grieved; this sudden death cuts off all hope of her promised independence."

So entirely had our heroine been absorbed in the loss of a beloved parent, that the thoughts of fortune had not mixed themselves at all in her distress; but this cruel triumph of her aunt's, painfully reminded her of the double misfortune she had sustained: the latter, however, made but a slight impression upon her mind, which, at that moment, resentment hardened against despondency. She rose, and with some dignity walked out of the room; and going to her chamber, indulged a plentiful shower of tears, which greatly relieved her spirits. 'Yes,' cried she, 'I will return to my humble habitation; since there, and there only, I shall meet friendship and kindness.' Her greatest disturbance arose from the thoughts of removing Mrs. Forester from the comforts she at that time enjoyed, and obliging her again to submit to the narrow limits of her cottage. She hoped, however, that her presence would make her some amends for the change.

While she was ruminating upon these things, some body knocked at the door; and, upon opening it, she, to her no small surprize, saw Lady Ashford, who, with much kindness, asked her to accompany them to Ashford Park; telling her, both her uncle and herself thought it was quite improper for her to remain behind, as she had now no interest there. Caroline severely felt the latter part of her words: she hesitated a moment; but recollecting the wish her grandmother had so warmly expressed of their living upon terms of amity, though she scarce believed it possible to be accomplished, resolved that the fault should not rest upon her stiffness and prejudice, however well founded. She therefore thanked her Ladyship politely for her invitation, and promised to attend her in

half an hour. No sooner was she left alone, than giving her maid orders to put up a few necessaries to be taken with her, and telling her that she should not want her attendance during her stay at her uncle's, she went softly to the apartment of her grandmother, where she found only Mrs. Ausburn, who was sitting at some distance from the venerable remains of her benefactress, reading. Caroline approached the body: her heart overflowed with tenderness: she knelt by its side; and gazing for a few moments upon it with reverential awe and love, she arose. Then stooping down, she imprinted a kiss upon the cold pale lips, and retired, without speaking a word.

A flood of tears, upon her return to her chamber, somewhat relieved her full heart; and after reflecting a short time upon the affecting sight she had just quitted, happening to turn her eyes upon her watch, she perceived the half hour, in which she had promised to attend Lady Ashford, was expired. She therefore directed her maid to carry the parcel she had put ready down to the coach; and desired the rest of her clothes, &c. might be packed up in readiness, as she did not know how soon she might have occasion to send for them. At the same time, she desired Kitty to look out for a place that would suit her; telling her she could no longer afford to keep a servant.

These affairs being regulated, she walked down to the breakfast-parlour. Just as she reached the door, Mrs. Ashford was speaking in an elevated tone. "I tell you sister," said she, "you will repent what you are about to do; it is easier to bring incumbrances into your house than to get rid of them." 'I think,' replied Lady Ashford, 'it is our duty to take care of the poor thing; she has never done any thing to offend us; and it would be cruel to leave her here.' "I think Lady Ashford is right," said Sir Marmaduke; "the world would blame us; and she need stay with us as little time as you will."

Caroline, who despised the meanness of listening, now opened the door. "Are you ready, Miss Caroline?" said Lady Ashford. 'Yes, Madam,' replied our heroine; 'for a few days I will have the honour of waiting upon you; after which, I am resolved to return to the valuable friends from whom my dear grandmother lately took me.' "I am glad to hear you have any friends to go to," answered Mrs. Ashford; "as you have now nothing else to depend upon, it is a fortunate circumstance." 'Independence, Madam,' answered Caroline, 'doth not consist in the largeness of fortune, but in the turn of mind of its possessor. He who can resolve to be independent, is so.'

There was a firmness, a superiority of understanding, and dignity of manner, conspicuous in the voice and looks of the fair speaker while she pronounced these words; which silenced, and even awed her cruel insulter.

The whole party got into the coach, without uttering another word. Mrs. Ashford, who went in first, took her place in front; her Ladyship then requested that Caroline would follow, which she accordingly did, placing herself by her aunt's side. Lady Ashford sat opposite to her sister, and Miss Ashford to Caroline; but when Sir Marmaduke appeared, who had stopt to give some directions to a servant, the aunt and niece looked at each other; the latter with a half-laugh, the former with a discontented shrug, and lifting up of the eyes; at the same time crying in a peevish accent, "Come, come, Eleanor, you must sit here," making room for her between herself and Caroline; "we shall be charmingly packed!" Miss Ashford did as she was requested, often apologizing to her aunt for the necessity she was under of crowding her; without taking the least notice of Caroline, who suffered the same inconvenience.

After a tedious ride they arrived at Ashford Park; for Sir Marmaduke never would suffer his carriage to move at more than the rate of three miles an hour. As they drove up a long avenue leading to the house, Miss Ashford exclaimed, "Bless me! there's a travelling chaise at the door!" And her father, putting out his head, replied, 'I warrant, it's William!' Joy sparkled in the eyes of Lady Ashford; and even his aunt and sister appeared pleased at the expectation of seeing him. They were scarce alighted from the coach, when a fine-looking young man flew to meet them; and Caroline immediately knew, by the pleasure they all expressed, and the names of son, brother, and cousin, which she heard pronounced, that their conjectures were not ill-founded.

Mr. Ashford had no sooner paid his respects to those present, with whose right to demand them he was acquainted, than turning to Caroline, he asked if he might not hope to be honoured with an introduction to that lady? "That is your cousin Caroline Ashford," answered his mother. 'Then,' returned the young gentleman, 'I will take the liberty of introducing myself. The name of cousin, my dear Madam,' continued he, approaching her, 'is my privilege.' So saying, he saluted her in the most respectful manner; adding, with a smile, 'If all my cousins resemble you, I should wish to be introduced to them to the hundredth generation.' Caroline could not speak: the perfect resemblance she saw of her father deprived her of all power but that of gazing. The difference of years excepted, she beheld his very image before her: so he looked, so he walked, and so he spoke!

The good-humour into which the arrival of Mr. Ashford had put the whole family, seemed to have obliterated every remembrance of the event which had so lately taken place, and might have been expected to have occasioned at least an appearance of seriousness among them; but, except in our heroine and Lady Ashford, who several times declared, during their ride, that she had lost one of her dearest and best friends, no alteration seemed to have been made in the tempers or spirits of the family, after the moment they left the house of their deceased mother. But when the circumstance of her death was told to her grandson, the strongest expressions of surprize and grief took possession of his countenance; and he hastily quitted the room, with every appearance of real sorrow.

"William was always very fond of my mother," said Sir Marmaduke. 'He would have been very ungrateful if he had not,' answered Lady Ashton; 'for never parent loved a child more than she did him.' "She was always fond of favourites," answered Sir Marmaduke; "but I wonder she did not fix upon a younger son, according to custom." 'I think,' said Miss Ashford, addressing her aunt, 'I must have some new mourning, because you know my best suit is really got shabby. What do you think of a crape chemise?' "Nothing can be more elegant," replied Mrs. Ashford. "Do you mean it to be black or white?" 'A chemise!' exclaimed Lady Ashford; 'you know I never could bear you in your gauze one: you looked a mere bundle!' "A bundle!" replied the aunt; "who ever said she was a bundle? I think no girl ever looks well that's taller than Eleanor; they are always awkward." 'I wish she would attend a little to the improvement of her mind,' returned her Ladyship, 'and less to dress and dissipation. There's the Roman History unopened, though I had taken the trouble to mark the most beautiful passages.' "I wish," interrupted Sir Marmaduke, "she would attend a little to her expences! Her bills last quarter ran shamefully high; and I must and will have them lowered." 'I am sure,' answered Mrs. Ashford, 'she had nothing but what was absolutely necessary; and surely, brother, you can now afford her a little more. Consider, you have three thousand pounds

added to your income; besides, probably, a considerable sum of ready money; for, as my mother has made no will, you know her personality will be divided between us.' "I rather believe," answered Sir Marmaduke, "that you will find the whole is mine. You have been lucky enough; for had not your father reserved to himself the power of disposing of the sum settled upon younger children, according to his own pleasure, your fortune would have been but half so large as it is." Caroline felt her colour heighten at these words: she no longer wondered at the enmity her father had experienced from his family, since their interest and his were so directly in opposition. But her aversion to them all, Lady Ashford excepted, in spite of herself, increasing every hour, she resolved to spend but one more day among them, but to hasten back to her old retreat; where, in comparison to her present situation, she was perfectly happy.

Accordingly, at breakfast the next morning, she informed Lady Ashford, that she intended to leave her about that hour the next day. Her Ladyship made some opposition to her design; and Mr. Ashford protested against it with the utmost earnestness: but she was steady to her purpose; and anticipated the comfort of quitting a society, who seemed to think wrangling the principal use of conversation, and who were united together by no tie but that of consanguinity. The generosity of her grandmother had made her very rich; and she was delighted with the thought of visiting her old friends and dependents with a full purse.

The moment breakfast was over, Mrs. Ashford and her niece proposed to each other a stroll in the shrubbery; and after a little consultation about which walk they should chuse, arose and left the room; only asking Mr. Ashford, as they passed by him, if he would come along? To which he only answered by a shrug of his shoulders, and an expressive negative in his countenance.

A servant then appeared, to inform Sir Marmaduke that Mr. Alton, an eminent attorney in the neighbourhood, had just called at the door, and left a note for him; which, upon opening, he read with some surprize, that he had in his hands a will, made by the late Lady Ashford, some little time before her death, which he was ready to produce, whenever Sir Marmaduke should chuse to have it read. This piece of information seemed not at all agreeable to the selfish Baronet; who now began to fear that there were sharers in the treasure he hoped wholly to possess. Mrs. Ausburn was the person he most feared; for he had no doubt of its having been made prior to her personal knowledge of Caroline. However, as it was proper that all her relations who were immediately upon the spot should be present when it was read, he desired Caroline to delay her journey till the funeral was over; and in a note to Mr. Alton, fixed the day after it for his attendance on that business.

Mr. Ashford expressed the highest satisfaction in the prospect of enjoying her company three days longer; and asked if she would allow him the pleasure of attending her into some part of the grounds, the present cloudiness of the morning being particularly suited to walking. Caroline politely inquired if Lady Ashford would not favour them with her company? To which she answered, that she had entirely disused herself to walking; and therefore requested they would leave her, without ceremony, as she could always find in a book a delightful and improving companion.

Their walk was long and pleasant: they conversed upon a variety of subjects in the most agreeable manner, among which some family ones were introduced and discussed. Mr. Ashford lamented the unfortunate division which had so long subsisted between the

several parts of it; adding, that, as was the case in all domestic disputes, resentments had been carried to the most unreasonable lengths, and the innocent and worthy became the sufferers.

Caroline was much pleased with the candour and understanding of her cousin, and he was charmed with her beauty, sweetness, and sensibility. Thus mutually satisfied with each other, they returned to the house; and he took care to renew the pleasure he had enjoyed, by proposing a stroll every morning and afternoon; to which, being fond of exercise, she never objected. At other times, he was never from her side; and appeared to enjoy so much delight in her society, that it would have raised the suspicion and jealousy of her uncle and his sister, had she been intended to remain long in the family: but as her stay was to be only three days, they let things take their own way; thinking no serious consequences could be feared from so transitory an intimacy.

Thus passed the days, till the burial of the worthy old lady was over, and that arrived upon which her will was appointed to be opened; for which purpose the whole family were assembled in Sir Marmaduke's library; every one, our heroine excepted, in high expectation of a handsome legacy. Sir Marmaduke thought that, as his mother had made a will, he must expect some deductions from what he conceived to be his natural right; but he had no doubt of finding the principal part bequeathed to him, as her heir and only son. She had always shewn great attention and kindness to Lady Ashford, and therefore she did not think it impossible but she might be handsomely remembered. Mrs. Ashford, as a daughter, who had devoted her whole life to her family, out of which she had never been prevailed upon to transplant herself (though it was well known she had been addressed by a German Count, and two Irish gentlemen of large fortune) thought she had a right to every thing of which her mother died possessed; and could not help wondering at the mercenary unreasonable temper of her brother, in thinking himself entitled to any share. Miss Ashford hoped her grandmother would not quite forget her; especially as she knew that her father's close temper occasioned her often to want a number of little things which a young woman of fashion ought to have. Two or three thousand pounds would quite set her up; and she should be able next winter to equal the finest of them! As for Mr. Ashford, he felt very indifferent about the matter: and Caroline, having no hope of advantage, would gladly have been excused from giving her attendance at so uninteresting a ceremony.

Such was the disposition of mind in which each individual attended, while Mr. Alton perused the parchment which was to satisfy or disappoint their hopes. He began with a legacy of one thousand pounds to Mrs. Ausburn! at which Sir Marmaduke knit his brows, and Mrs. Ashford drew up her head. Then followed small bequests to all her servants, and several of her acquaintance, altogether amounting to another; at which the contraction became a perfect frown, and the bridle a toss. Lastly, all and every thing besides, of which she died possessed, she bequeathed to her beloved granddaughter, Caroline Ashford, as a small proof of her maternal affection, and amends for the many injuries her father and herself had received from several of their relations.

Never was astonishment and disappointment greater than that of the mercenary expectants! They gazed upon each other; upon Mr. Alton and Caroline, with looks almost of incredulity; nor was the object of their envy less amazed and confounded.

How long the silence might have lasted is difficult to affirm, had it not been broken by Mr. Ashford; who, going up to his cousin, with pleasure in his eyes; wished

her joy of her fortune; assuring her, that he was much better pleased with the disposition his grandmother had made of it, than he should have been had she bequeathed it to himself.

It was some time before any other part of the family could prevail upon themselves to follow his example. At length, Lady Ashford paid her a kind of stiff congratulation; and Sir Marmaduke, reflecting that the thing was past recal, condescended to tell her that, as his mother had thought proper to put her and her fortune under his care, he should consider it as his duty to direct her in the best manner: and that he thought she had for the present, till her affairs were properly regulated, better remain in his house. Caroline thanked him for the promise of his protection, and said she would in all things be ready to follow his advice.

Mrs. Ashford and her niece made no attempt to conceal their chagrin and resentment: and while Sir Marmaduke was speaking, left the room, with every mark of both. Caroline retired to her apartment; where a shower of tears, shed in grateful love to the memory of her to whom she owed her present comfortable prospects, was succeeded by fervent thanks to the Giver of all good; who can, in a moment, convert sorrow to gladness; the tear of affliction into the smile of triumph.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *A Sudden Journey.*

Notwithstanding the dislike with which our heroine was regarded by some part of her family, she found her treatment much mended by the change in her circumstances. She was no longer a poor dependent; one whose situation reproached the opulence of her relations. By the time every thing was properly disposed of at Crayfort, and the legacies paid, she found herself in possession of upwards of eleven thousand pounds, which, together with that in the hands of Doctor Seward, made a fortune, which, though far short of the expectations she had once entertained, was fully equal to her wishes. She settled the terms of her continuance in her uncle's house, in such a manner, as to keep her free even from the shadow of obligation. It was agreed that she should pay two hundred pounds a year for the accommodation of herself, a woman servant, and a footman: in consequence of which, a genteel apartment was assigned her; her books, harpsichord, &c. sent for, together with the two pictures she so highly valued; all the rest of the family ones she presented to her uncle, only reserving one of her grandmother, which, at the request of Mr. Ashford, had been taken by an eminent painter, about three years before her death. As for that of her grandfather, Sir Marmaduke, Mrs. Ashton, and a long list of great aunts and uncles, she most willingly parted with them all, and they were esteemed by the Baronet a valuable present.

The three she retained, were placed in her dressing-room; where, as at Elmwood, she collected every thing that could afford amusement to her retired hours, and in which she regularly spent a part of every morning. This custom was the greatest comfort and relief to her; for though Mrs. and Miss Ashford began to treat her with rather more civility than when she first came among them, their conversation, even when they wished to be agreeable, was by no means suited to her taste; and when otherwise, which was oftener the case, their insolence was intolerable. She therefore made a practice, the moment a family wrangle was commenced, to leave the room, and seek more peaceable society among her books; where, if she sometimes met with disputes, they were carried on with some method and order, and her ear escaped the horrible dissonance of Mrs. Ashford's voice, which, when raised a little above its natural key, was, beyond measure, harsh and unpleasant.

With her Ladyship she every day became a greater favourite. She really possessed what Lady Ashford wished for, and esteemed the first of all attainments, an extensive knowledge of books: of this she was so far from making any parade, that a person who had no taste for reading, might be very frequently in her company before they suspected her of having any; but she never declined to speak of them when she conversed with any one with whom they were a favourite subject. She frequently took pains to explain passages to her, with which she was more than usually puzzled; and often, by a timely hint or assistance to her memory, would prevent her becoming an object of ridicule; and though Lady Ashford had not sensibility sufficient to guard her against exposing the ignorance of which she ought to have been conscious, she possessed enough to render her grateful for these little kindnesses; and the obliging attentions of Caroline, which were the common and natural effects of her sweetness of temper and disposition, formed too

strong a contrast to the insolence of her sister, and the carelessness of her daughter, not to be remarked by her, and every one who visited in the family.

Mr. Ashford was constantly of his mother's parties, because he was there more likely to find our heroine than with his aunt and sister, who generally made a separate one for themselves. They had a few favourites in the neighbourhood, and were constantly rude to every other person who came to the house. Sometimes, if they were people of little consequence, such as the Rector and his wife, or the family of a country gentleman of small fortune, they would never appear at all; or if they did, scarce condescended to speak, but in whispers to each other; whereas Caroline and Mr. Ashford were the favourites of the whole country, and by their talents for conversation, rendered Ashford Park far more cheerful and pleasant than it had ever before been.

Every body began to foretell an attachment between the cousins, and to pronounce that they were made for each other. Mr. Ashford was often told the opinion of the neighbourhood, and secretly wished that the event might do credit to their discernment. Every day afforded him fresh occasion of esteem and admiration. Her heart was the temple of virtue; the graces had clothed it in so lovely an exterior, that every one who beheld it was, at least for the moment, irresistibly impelled to become her votary; and he who had always professed himself of that number, then adored his divinity with double ardor. With such a wife, such a friend, and companion, how sweetly would life glide away! how little should he value the greatness, pomp, and pleasures of which the world was so enamoured! His father, perhaps, might oppose his happiness. What then? Why, he would follow the example of his uncle Henry, and be happy in spite of paternal tyranny. But was he sure that he should be equally fortunate? Would the charming object of his passion afford him the dear much wished-for opportunity of sacrificing prudence, cold, unfeeling prudence, to love? Of this he was doubtful, and this was his only doubt. He determined not to remain long under its tormenting pressure, but to embrace the first opportunity of declaring the situation of his heart to the fair tyrant who enslaved it.

His feelings, indeed, were a secret to none but her. Sir Marmaduke had again and again warned him against the folly of an imprudent marriage; and his aunt had given him the whole detail of Caroline's ill behaviour at Broomfield; adding, that Captain West was not the only one she used so ill; that Mr. Craven, a man of the first fortune and consequence, had met with the same treatment, and that she was the veriest coquet and jilt that ever deceived by false appearances. But all these warnings were vain; he treated them as the offspring of malice, who is the never-failing attendant of envy, and capable of giving a dark hue to innocence itself.

An opportunity soon offered for the desired purpose of opening his heart to her who so entirely possessed it. During a walk upon a delightful morning, he introduced the subject of love. Caroline said she hoped she never should have any lovers; because she did not think her heart was at all formed for the entertainment of that passion. "If you would not inspire love," replied Mr. Ashford, "you must be less amiable, or converse only with the stupid and insensible. But you will pardon me, if I cannot believe that a heart, susceptible of every generous worthy sensation, can be incapable of admitting the perfection of them all: if so, happy had it been for your unfortunate friend if he had never enjoyed the dangerous pleasure of beholding you! never had been flattered by your friendly smiles; which, while they warmed and delighted his heart, inspired it with a

passion the most tender and fervent. Yes, my dear cousin; the whole future happiness of the man before you, depends upon the degree of estimation with which you honour him.”

‘If,’ replied Caroline, ‘my highest esteem and warmest friendship can afford you the smallest satisfaction, be assured you entirely possess them; but to more, you have already heard me declare, my heart is a stranger; and if I have any knowledge of its disposition, will for ever remain so.’ Mr. Ashford used many arguments to persuade her to admit his addresses; to permit him to hope that time, and his persevering constancy and attention, might prevail upon her to alter a resolution so unnatural, so prejudicial to her own happiness, and so destructive of his; but she absolutely refused in future to listen to any thing he might wish to say upon the subject; and intreated him to forget that he had ever thought of her in any light, except that of a friend: a character in which she should always be proud to be considered by him.

Grief and disappointment were visible in the countenance of Mr. Ashford; and Caroline was extremely hurt to see a tear of mortified sensibility fall from his eye. She endeavoured to change the subject of conversation to something amusing and indifferent; but sighs were the only answer he was capable of making: so that seeing how deeply he was distressed, she forbore to increase his pain, by attempting to divert it; and they walked in silence to the house; where, the moment they entered, Mr. Ashford retired to his chamber; and our heroine finding herself wholly unfit for company, disposed of herself in the same manner.

Caroline was no sooner alone than she began to reflect upon the occurrence which had just happened; and could not help accusing Fortune, who seemed to delight in persecuting and disturbing her repose. No sooner was she fixed and reconciled to one situation, than she was obliged to relinquish it for a new one. She had no doubt but her uncle or Mrs. Ashford would soon discover her cousin’s partiality, and the consequence would be her immediate removal from Ashford Park. She was by no means attached to it, or its inhabitants; but there was something disreputable in being thus discarded, first by one family of her relations, and then by another: and though conscious rectitude was the first object of her attention, she by no means despised the good or bad opinion of the world, in which Providence had placed her; but, on the contrary, greatly desired to preserve the one and avoid the other. She loved her cousin as a brother: had she considered him less in that light, he might perhaps have had more room to hope for a higher distinction in her heart. Perhaps, too, his resemblance to her father, while it endeared him as a friend, in some degree prevented his good fortune as a lover. Upon the whole, she felt it impossible to receive him in that character, though she knew nothing in him to which she could reasonably object, except the dislike his father would express to such an union; and this she believed would have been sufficient, had her sentiments in his favour been more tender. After much reflection, she resolved to leave Ashford Park for some weeks, and pay a visit to her good friends, the Doctor and Mrs. Seward, who, she was certain, would receive her with joy: and during this absence, she hoped the good sense of her cousin would enable him wholly to conquer a passion prejudicial to his interest, and unsupported by hope.

This resolution, which she determined to execute the very next day, soothed her mind, with the hope that no disagreeable consequence would happen from this displeasing affair; and she ventured into the breakfast-room, though half-afraid to encounter the eyes of Mrs. Ashford. Mr. Ashford’s servant appeared soon after her entrance, with his

master's request, that they would not wait for him, as he should breakfast in his apartment. In a few minutes he returned, presenting a letter to Lady Ashford, which he said was brought from London, by a special messenger. She immediately broke the seal, and perused it; then giving it to Sir Marmaduke, "See here, my dear," said she; "you will find that my uncle Harvey is very ill, and desires to see me immediately." "Oh, go by all means," answered the Baronet: 'a few of his thousands will suit me exactly: just at this time, I want to make a purchase; and he could not die at a better.' "You see," said Lady Ashford, "I shall be expected immediately." "Well," answered he, 'you had better set out this afternoon; sleep upon the road, and get to London by dinner-time to-morrow.' "That will do very well," replied her Ladyship. "I suppose, Eleanor, you will have no objection to going along with me?" "Dear mama," answered Miss Ashford, 'how can you ask me such a thing? what could I possibly do in town at this season? It would be quite ridiculous! I should be ashamed to put my head out of the coach-window, for fear of being seen.' "Sure, sister," cried Mrs. Ashford, "you are not in earnest? Would you shut up Eleanor in the horrid dust and heat of the city? I think your uncle lives in Bishopsgate-street:—a very proper summer-residence for Miss Ashford, truly!" "I fancy," exclaimed Sir Marmaduke, 'she will have no objection to city-money. By the heavens, the folly of women is without bound or termination! What harm will the city air do her for three or four days?' "I should not wonder," replied Mrs. Ashford, "if it threw her into a fever. People who have been used to such close wretched places, may endure them well enough; but where there is the smallest delicacy——" "If fat be a sign of delicacy," interrupted her brother, 'Eleanor may claim it: I know no other pretensions she has to make.'

"Pray, don't press her to go against her inclinations," cried Lady Ashford; "she will do nothing but grumble, and be out of temper the whole journey, if she does. Besides, I think I can procure a more agreeable companion; one who will venture herself into the city air, though she has been no more accustomed to it than Miss Ashford. Will my dear Caroline," continued she, turning to her, "favour me with her company?" "I will attend you with pleasure," answered our heroine, bowing. "Then I shall have cause to thank Eleanor for her refusal," cried her Ladyship: "however, when she next wants an extra bill to be discharged, I may remember her present behaviour."

Breakfast was no sooner over than Lady Ashford and Caroline retired to their apartments, in order to give directions for their journey. At dinner-time Mr. Ashford joined them: he appeared very grave; and though desirous of concealing his chagrin, disappointment and vexation were deeply characterized in every look. He spoke little; till hearing of his mother's intended journey, and by whom she was to be accompanied, his countenance brightened up at once; and he told her he would certainly attend her. Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Ashford appeared alarmed, and opposed the measure strongly. Their opposition, however, would have had very little effect, if a look from Caroline had not given him to understand that she disapproved his intention. It was with reluctance he submitted even to her; to her only he could in this affair think of submitting.

All things being in readiness, Sir Marmaduke conducted his lady, Mr. Ashford, and Caroline to the coach. Just as they got in, the former said, he thought in their way back, they had better take the opportunity of calling upon Mrs. Murray: adding, "If you can bring me an account that she is dead, and has left me half her estate, I shall not follow her with grief." When they were seated, and the carriage drove away, Lady Ashford told

our heroine that Mrs. Murray was a very old lady: that she was first-cousin to the late Lady Ashford, and worth at least sixty thousand pounds. She added, That she had several relations equally near, who were all striving to ingratiate themselves into her favour: That she was a woman of a masculine mind and manners, and rendered insolent by the flattery of her relations, whom she generally treated with the greatest rudeness. She then informed her, that her uncle Harvey, who now lay ill, was likewise worth a large sum of money: that he was a bachelor, who had gained his fortune in trade; from which he had been a few years retired: and having no relation so near as herself, she had reason to believe every shilling of which he died possessed would be hers.

Their journey was safe and pleasant. Upon the second day, about noon, the great city appeared in view, of which our heroine had heard so much; and a little before three they were set down at the house of Mr. Harvey, in Bishopsgate-street.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### *A Fright.*

LADY Ashford found her relation very ill, though not in the immediate danger she expected, and perhaps wished. He expressed great joy upon seeing her; and requested that she would stay with him till he was perfectly recovered, or the reverse. In the latter case, he said all his fortune and effects would be her own; and he wished her to be upon the spot, in order to superintend her own affairs, and take care of her interest.

The day after their arrival, Caroline told Lady Ashford that she had an uncle in London, the only brother of her mother; and that she was resolved, if possible, to find out where he lived. Her Ladyship asked what was his profession? To which our heroine answered, that he was a soap-boiler. A Directory being then inquired for, they soon discovered that Saunders, Whitehouse, and Glynn, soap-boilers, lived in Mincing-lane. Caroline was not greatly pleased with the name of the street in which his house stood; she feared it did not speak his circumstances to be very good: "but if they are otherwise," said she, "I can afford to assist him, and will to the utmost of my power: it is the only respect I can now pay to the memory of my dear mother."

Lady Ashford had requested that Caroline would make use of her coach in the same manner as if it was her own, and order it upon all occasions, without scruple; for as she should go very little out, the horses and servants would have nothing to do but attend upon her. Of this privilege she availed herself, and directed the coachman to drive to Mincing-lane. They stopped at the number she had mentioned; the outside appearance of which gave our heroine no very pleasing presage of what she should find within. Upon asking if Mr. Saunders was at home, she was told that he was not; but that she might see one of his partners. To which she replied, That would not do; but if Mrs. Saunders was within, it would equally answer her purpose. "Oh, Ma'am," replied the man, "this is only the manufactory: Mr. Saunders lives in Ely Place, Holborn." Caroline thanked him for his information, and ordered the coach to Ely Place.

They stopped before an elegant-looking house, the door of which was opened by a servant in livery: and being informed that Mr. and Mrs. Saunders were both at home, she alighted, and was shewn into a handsome parlour, where she was told Mrs. Saunders would wait upon her immediately. In a few minutes entered a little fat fair woman, with great good humour in her countenance, who begged she would be seated; and requested to know her commands. Caroline told her, she had the honour of being nearly related to Mr. Saunders; that her name was Ashford, and that, being in town upon business, she could not excuse herself from paying her duty to her uncle and his family. "Oh," cried Mrs. Saunders, "I have heard my husband speak of his sister, who married the son of a very great gentleman; for which he was disinherited. My husband says, she was as fine a creature as ever eyes were laid upon; but that she never looked up afterwards; but a few years after her marriage she died of a broken heart." 'My uncle has been misinformed, Madam,' answered Caroline: 'my mother and father lived in the happiest manner, till my unhappy birth put an end to the life of the former; but the great distance at which she lived, and no correspondence being kept up between them after the death of my grandfather, Saunders, easily accounts for such errors.' "And so you are her daughter,"

cried, Mrs. Saunders. "Well, my husband will be right glad to see you; for he has often wished to know what family your mother left behind her, and how they were provided for: it was not always so well with him as it is now. Since his marriage with me, he can afford to live himself and help others: and many is the one that he hath helped. Yes, yes; my first husband left a fine business behind him; and between that and the alley, he turns a pretty sum in the year. There are not many warmer men between Temple Bar and the Royal Exchange."

Caroline assured her, that she felt the sincerest pleasure in this account of their prosperity; of which she wished them a daily increase. Just as she spoke these words, the door opened, and a tall handsome man, of about forty, made his appearance. "Look here, my dear," cried his wife; "here is your sister's daughter, Miss Ashton." "You need not tell me so," answered Mr. Saunders; she is her very picture. I am glad to see you, my dear. But whose coach is that at the door with a bloody hand upon it? no fashionable doings I hope?" "That coach, Sir," answered Caroline, "belongs to my uncle Sir Marmaduke Ashton, in whose family I now live." "That's well," said Mr. Saunders, embracing her with affection. "Be your situation what it will, if you are a good girl, I am heartily glad to see you. Pardon my suspicions, my dear," continued he, "such faces as yours are not seen every day; and our great folks are upon the watch for the destruction of beauty and innocence. But where is Charlotte? Does she know that her cousin is here?" At these words he rang a bell; and a footman appearing, ordered him to tell Charlotte he wanted her immediately "Her music-master is at present with her, Sir," said the man. "No matter," replied his master; "tell her I want her."

Chocolate now was brought in; and while our heroine was drinking a dish of chocolate, Miss Charlotte entered. She was a handsome-looking girl, good shape, and her features open and agreeable; but there was a boldness, a certain sauciness diffused over her whole appearance, which disgusted a delicate and sensible mind. "Lord, papa," said she, without observing any person was in the room, "how could you call me away in the middle of a lesson? You complain that I don't come on, how should I, when you won't let me mind it?" "I sent for you," replied her father, "to see your cousin, Miss Ashford, who has been so good as to call upon us." "Yes, my dear" cried Mrs. Saunders, "that young lady is your cousin, the daughter of your father's handsome sister, of whom we have often heard him speak; and he says, she is so like her, that he should have known her, if he had never heard her name."

Caroline now advanced towards her cousin, who courtesied, and said she was very glad to see her in London; to which compliment our heroine replied, she was happy in an opportunity of becoming acquainted with such near relations, to whom she had long greatly wished to be known. "That's very obliging," answered Mrs. Saunders, "and I am sure we are very glad of the pleasure of your company, and shall be happy if you will come and be with us as long as you stay in town." "Yes," rejoined her husband; "if you will come and spend a few weeks with us, we will take you about a little, and make it as pleasant as we can." "Oh! pray do come, cousin," exclaim'd Charlotte, "and then my papa will let one go out a little. Do you know I have been only twice at Ranelagh, and once at Vauxhall, this summer! and we haven't seen the inside of the Little Theatre since it was opened, though Mrs. Alderman Perks offered to take me every night; and no body has genteeler parties, which my papa very well knows: but if you will come, he can't refuse our going every where. Pray do come!" Caroline thanked them for their kind invitations,

but excused herself, on account of Lady Ashford, who she said it was impossible for her to leave; but she promised often to see them during her stay in town. She then received an invitation to dine with them the next day, of which she readily accepted; and, taking leave in the most friendly manner, ordered the servants home.

It was a great and unexpected pleasure to our heroine, to find her maternal relations in such happy circumstances; and the satisfaction was greater, from her expecting the reverse. She was much pleased with the appearance of her uncle: and the love he bore the memory of her mother, made her willing to overlook and excuse the little defects she had observed in his wife and daughter, which she thought originated rather from want of information, than any thing wrong in the heart, or materially in the head. While she was busily amused with these reflections, the horses, which were wholly unused to the hurry of a great city, suddenly took fright, and running full against a post which stood at the corner of a small street, tore off one of the wheels, and threw the coachman from his box. They were galloping along at full speed, amidst the cries of a multitude of people, and our heroine every moment expecting to be dashed in pieces, when a gentleman, who was coming in an opposite direction, with a courage and strength which astonished every one, caught violently hold of the reins of one of the horses, and, plucking him suddenly on one side, stopped their dreadful career: the mob flying instantly to his assistance, the furious animals were secured from the danger of further mischief. The gentleman then flew to the door of the coach, in order to see who his resolution and bravery had rescued; where he beheld the lovely Caroline all pale and breathless, sunk to the bottom. He instantly bore her in his arms into a large silversmith's shop, the master of which, and his wife, having beheld the whole affair, readily conducted him into a back parlour, where they did every thing that could contribute to her recovery.

In a short time she opened her eyes; and the blood began to revisit her face, which, when perfect sensibility returned, rushed there in unusual quantities, upon beholding herself supported in the arms of a stranger. She clearly recollected every thing that had passed; and gently withdrawing her hand from his pressure, "Is it to you, Sir," said she, "that I am obliged for my escape from so dreadful a death?" "Faith," cried the master of the house, "it was an escape, indeed! I believe this gentleman may boast of an act which no other man in London would venture to do. How you came off, Sir, without being killed on the spot, I cannot imagine!" "Are you hurt, Sir?" exclaimed Caroline. "I hope not: I shall never be happy, if you suffer by your humanity." "I don't know," replied the gentleman, half-smiling; "I believe I am a little." "Bless me! where?" cried the affrighted Caroline. "Do, send for a surgeon! Is it your arm?" "Do not be alarmed, my dear Madam; I need no surgeon," said the gentleman: "as soon as you find yourself able to remove, I will have the pleasure of conducting you safe home." At these words Caroline arose and, finding herself perfectly recovered, said she was ready to go; and asked if the coach was waiting? The master of the house told her that it was too much damaged to be fit for present use: that the servants had taken it home; and her footman said he would be back immediately, but was not yet come. The gentleman then begged she would trust herself to his care; which he said he should esteem the highest compliment he could possibly receive: and, as she made no objection, sent for a hackney-coach, into which, after thanking the people of the house for their civility, he handed her; and, at her desire, directed it to be drove to Ely Place; she choosing that, as being nearer, and which

rendered her choice necessary, not being able at that moment to recollect the name of Bishopsgate-street.

The family were much surprized and alarmed, by seeing her return in so different a vehicle; and expressed much joy at her escape. Mrs. Saunders said it was a wonderful deliverance indeed! and that the least she could do was, to give her heart to the gentleman, in return for his bravery. The cheek of our heroine was crimsoned over by this speech; and the stranger observing her distress, instantly removed his eyes from her face, and replied, that it was impossible to express the happiness he felt at having been the means of safety to so charming a lady; and that, however long or happy his life might be, he should always number that among his most fortunate days. Upon his rising to take leave, he respectfully begged that he might be permitted to call and inquire after her health the next morning; saying, that however well she now appeared to be, he could not help dreading the effects of such a fright, upon a frame and mind so apparently delicate. To which Mrs. Saunders replied, by inviting him to dine with them the next day; saying, she thought they could not shew too much respect to a person who had saved the life of their cousin; especially as it was easy to see that he was a gentleman, whose acquaintance would do them honour. The stranger thanked her, in the most polite and grateful manner, and, promising to attend them the next day, took his leave.

He was no sooner gone than Charlotte exclaimed, "I'm glad he comes to-morrow; for I never saw so handsome a man in my whole life! Don't you think him very handsome, cousin?" "I really do not know," replied Caroline, with an affected indifference; "I took but little notice of his person; but his gallantry and courage I never ought to forget."—"Well," answered Charlotte, "I wish with all my heart I had been in your place. What eyes he has! and how charmingly he smiles! I am sure you have made a conquest of him. If you had seen how he seemed to admire you, and what a look he gave you at parting! But you did see that; for you coloured as red as scarlet!" "Sure you mistake," cried Caroline, the blood again diffusing itself over her cheeks: "yet, ought not my looks and words to express my gratitude for such a service?" "To be sure they ought," replied Mrs. Saunders. "I don't think you coloured a bit too much: and I am sure, if I can believe eyes, the gentleman thought so too; for I'll be sworn, his sparkled with joy."

While they were thus conversing, a coach, attended by Caroline's footman, drove up to the door. In it was Lady Ashford's woman; whom she had sent to conduct her back, being afraid she would not like to come alone, after such a fright, the servants having related the accident which had happened.

Our heroine having therefore again taken leave of her relations, and renewed her promise of being with them the next day, once more set out for Bishopsgate-street; where she arrived without further accident.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *A Fracas.*

THE moment breakfast was over, our heroine retired to her apartment, and began to look over her clothes, in order to select a dress for the day: She had brought but few with her; none of them pleased her. There was not time to procure new ones; she wished she had brought greater choice; an elegant cap and hat might be had, and she resolved to send Kitty for them. But how could she trust to her taste? She would go herself. No, that would not do, she should not then have time to get her hair properly dressed; for she was to dine exactly at four. It was at length resolved that John should order a milliner to send a number for her to look at. This being settled, and a gown put in readiness, she sat down to have her hair dressed. Kitty found her unusually exact; she always dressed with great taste, but to-day she was scarce to be satisfied; one curl dropped too low, another was stiff; and though her head looked uncommonly well, she could hardly be persuaded that it was not frightful.

When the milliner arrived she tried first one cap and hat, then another; at last she fixed her choice; and having directed the white plume, with which it was ornamented, to be placed a little different, when her dress was completed, she looked elegance and beauty itself. Never did a birth-night belle look in her glass with more attention and anxiety, till unable to find any more faults, she was forced to be content; and the coach being ready, with job horses (Lady Ashford resolving not to use her own again during her stay in town) she drove to Ely Place.

It was not more than half an hour past three when she arrived; but she had promised to come early, and wished to be there before the stranger, upon whom her thoughts were every moment involuntarily turning. She was taken up stairs to a handsome drawing-room, where every thing that money, without much taste, could supply, was seen in profusion. A moment after, Charlotte entered: she was in a summer half-dress, made, trimmed, and put on in the very extreme of the fashion. "Dear me," cried she, coming up to Caroline, "how sweetly you are dressed! but why don't you put on your hat more on one side? Don't that plume hang lower than they wear them?" "I like to dress a little like other people," answered Caroline; "but I do not think it necessary to adopt all their whims and absurdities, or entirely to give up my own taste. In short, my dear," continued she, smiling, "I like to have a few follies of my own, and not constantly to follow those of other people." "Well," returned Charlotte, "so I am but in the fashion I don't care; if things are ugly it is the fault of the fashion-makers, not mine." "Very true," answered Caroline, smiling, "it is a method which certainly saves you much trouble." Just as she pronounced these words the door opened; her heart fluttered; but it was not the stranger, it was Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter.

After many compliments, and much ceremony, they were seated; and being joined by Mrs. Saunders, inquiry was mutually made after their husbands. Mrs. Perks assured her friend, that the Alderman fully intended himself the pleasure of dining with Mr. Saunders; but a Court being that day held, he was obliged to attend, and hoped they would have the goodness to excuse him. She then turned to Charlotte, crying, "Well, my dear, and how do you do? Why don't you let her come a little more among us, Mrs.

Saunders? We were last night at Hughes's. Upon my word, his exhibition is very entertaining; we saw Chilliby, the wild horse, rode. Sir Timothy Glymp was there and his lady, and the three Miss Glymps, and Mr. Clare of Bondstreet, who is, they say a humble servant to Miss Molly. We were the most comfortable party you can imagine, and were very well amused indeed.' "Well," cried Charlotte, "I long to see Chilliby rode, of all things, and so my mama and papa know very well, and yet they never will let me go; but they hate for me to go any where." 'Upon my word, Mrs. Saunders,' answered Mrs. Perks, 'you should let her go out a little more, it does young people good to see the world, and the manner of genteel places. Let her come with us to Sadler's Wells on Monday; we have taken two boxes, and shall be quite snug.' "I can make no promises without her father's consent," answered Mrs. Saunders, "if I do, he'll be sure to unsay all the agreement. If he likes for her to go, I never makes any objections when she is in proper company, that's all I cares about. Let her go in proper company, and go every day in the year, with all my heart."

Charlotte was about to reply, when the door was opened again, and Mr. Rivers was announced. As the name was strange to all present, a momentary suspence took place; but it was quickly put an end to by the entrance of Caroline's preserver. The flutter she had felt before now returned with double violence; and she was so much agitated by his appearance, that it was with difficulty she could answer his tender and respectful inquiries about her health, or renew her thanks for the life she owed him. Her confusion, however, wearing off by degrees, she entered into that easy kind of chat, partly made up of trifles, and partly of sense and information, which she was so remarkably qualified to support, and in which she found Mr. Rivers excelled any man she had ever conversed with. At dinner he placed himself next to her; but his attention was not so utterly ingrossed by her as to prevent his treating every one present with politeness, and the young ladies with what a common observer would have styled a greater degree of gallantry than he shewed to our heroine; though it was easy for one of more penetration to perceive, that she was his principal object. The attention he paid to all she said was greater: he was more careful of what he addressed to her; and above all, his eyes spoke an admiration which rendered words perfectly unnecessary.

Nor was Caroline, on her part, less pleased and interested than himself. The gratitude she owed him gave a licence to her esteem, to her admiration. And how slight the distinction is between these united and Love, I leave to the casuists in that passion to determine. She found in Mr. Rivers that something which she had in vain sought in all others; that mixture of ease and respect, of tenderness and spirit, which, in her estimation, constituted the finished character. Short as had been their acquaintance, she had experienced, in her own person, that he possessed two of the noblest qualities that can adorn the human heart,—Courage and Humanity: qualities with which vice is almost incompatible. His manners were inexpressibly pleasing: he was well informed: she had no doubt but he was learned and accomplished. His sentiments were manly and generous: and last, perhaps not least, his person was remarkably graceful; and his face possessed a share of masculine beauty not often to be met with.

After dinner Mrs. Perks proposed their going to Vauxhall. Caroline would have preferred the theatre: but every one appearing pleased, she only requested Mrs. Saunders to permit her to send a note to Bishopsgate-street, to let the family know that she should not be at home, having been prevailed upon to stay at her uncle's all night; which done,

and an early dish of tea being ordered, soon after eight Mrs. Perks's coach drove to the door, which was followed by Mr. Saunders's: and the whole party set off in the highest good-humour to this scene of general amusement. There were no gentlemen attendants but Mr. Saunders and Mr. Rivers: and Mrs. Saunders told Caroline, in a half-whisper, that Mrs. Perks was remarkable for proposing parties of pleasure when her husband was absent; by which means she and her daughter escaped free of all expence; and that, tho' they were constantly in public places, she did not believe it cost them five guineas in diversions the whole year round.

The lights, the music, and the gay happy appearance of every one around her, gave Caroline, upon her first entrance, a sensible pleasure; but she soon perceived a mixture of company and manners which disgusted her. She had none of that pride which stands aloof, and turns from those whom Nature made equal, with scorn and derision. She could descend to poverty, and even rusticity, without feeling that she had merit in so doing: but vulgar merriment and finery were what she loathed to mix with; and there was too much appearance of that kind, to permit the place to afford her much pleasure.

Among those who appeared to figure as the principal bucks of the night, one party rendered themselves particularly conspicuous. They talked louder, swore faster, looked fiercer, and stared more confidently than any in the gardens. Every time they passed, Caroline, from a natural aversion to such kind of beings, had turned aside her face; and Mr. Rivers observing her fear, had constantly put himself between her and the enemy. At last, however, one who seemed to be a principal leader of the band, coming close up to our heroine, and looking under her hat, exclaimed, "By Heaven, it is her! It is Miss Ashford herself! This is an unlooked-for felicity!"

Caroline instantly recollected the voice of Captain West, and, recovering a little from her fright, received a torrent of compliments, and such kind of extravagant fine things as he was remarkable for saying. It was easy to perceive that he was in a state of half-intoxication; and she could not but esteem him a disgraceful acquaintance; but it was impossible to get rid of him. He insisted upon being her escort for the evening; saying, with a fierce look, that he believed no man in the gardens could pretend a greater right to that honour; and if any such would come forward, he was ready to answer them, and let them know that he was a gentleman, and would act as such, be they what they would. These words he addressed full to Mr. Rivers; who had at first, seeing Caroline acknowledge him as an acquaintance, drawn back, and, to her no small mortification, resigned her, as it were, to superior pretensions; but now observing her distress, he again advanced, and told Captain West he was not entitled to inquire the cause of a preference which that lady might think proper to favour any other with: but he would defend her from insult, though a prince should offer it; and would chastise upon the spot any man who should so far forget what belongs to his character, as to give her the smallest disturbance. "And who are you?" cried West, "who so valiantly set up for her defender?" "Sir, I am her old acquaintance, her old friend, her old lover, Sir; what do you say to that?" "If the lady admits your claims, Sir, I have nothing to say," answered Mr. Rivers. "What! What is all this about?" exclaimed Mr. Saunders, interposing. "I know no claim either of you have to my niece. What the devil! are we to be made the gaze of the whole gardens, because a couple of hot-headed young fellows don't know what they would be at? Nay, you need not look fierce, I shan't fight either of you: I shall only take the liberty of conducting the girl safe out of your reach. Come, Mistress, bring your charge,"

continued he, addressing his wife; 'I warrant I'll rescue them both from the present danger.' So saying, he took the arm of the trembling Caroline under his, and, followed by the rest of the party, quitted the gardens unmolested.

They were no sooner in the coach (each family going in their own, separate roads) than Charlotte began to grumble at her father, for bringing them home so soon. She said he might easily have put an end to the quarrel without leaving the gardens: that she did not see why both the gentlemen might not have supped with them; for the Captain seemed a charming man; only a little too warm. "Thy ideas of men," replied her father, "will never extend beyond the lace upon their coats, and the powder on their heads! But observe me: I'll have no more Vauxhall; a place only fit for young rakes to stare at modest girls, till they become as impudent as themselves. For your part, Miss, I see their stares give you no concern; you can stand and almost return them." 'Lord, papa!' cried Charlotte, 'you'd have one like a country milk-maid, blushing at every man who looks at one. Truly, one should have enough to do in London.'

Poor Caroline was too deeply mortified to be able to utter a syllable: Nothing could have happened more unfortunately. She had probably lost the good opinion of the only man she ever saw, relatives excepted, whose good opinion she was anxious to obtain. No doubt he must despise her; despise her too much ever to give her an opportunity of clearing herself. The vexation she endured was far more painful than any she had ever before experienced; and she felt a dislike to Captain West, little short of aversion. This unpleasing train of reflections effectually banished sleep. She arose without having closed her eyes; and the moment breakfast was over, requested that a hackney-coach might be sent for: and one of her uncle's servants attending her, she returned once more to the house of Mr. Harvey.

Finding that Lady Ashford was in her chamber, she went to it, and, knocking gently, was let in by her woman; who told her that her lady had a bad headach, and was laid down upon the bed. She therefore took up a book which her aunt had been reading, and waited in the room till she awoke. As soon as she raised her head, seeing our heroine, she told her she was glad to see her again: that if she had not returned that morning, she intended to have written, to let her know it was her intention to leave London the next day; the heat and closeness of it being very hurtful to her health; and her uncle so far recovered, as no longer to stand in need of her attendance. Caroline readily agreed to accompany her; saying, with a sigh, that she believed the air of London was indeed infectious. Orders were accordingly given for their leaving town the next morning; and in the afternoon she returned once more to Ely Place, to bid adieu to her relations there. They all appeared extremely sorry to part with her; and pressed her much to let her aunt return alone, and spend a few weeks with them. She was once upon the point of accepting their invitation, as the only possible means of ever again seeing Mr. Rivers; of clearing up the seeming mystery or impropriety of her conduct; yet, recollecting how ungentle her behaviour to Lady Ashford would be, in suffering her to travel alone, when the professed purpose of her journey was to accompany her; and sensible that she ought rather to combat than encourage a passion for a man, to whose family, connections, and real character in life she was an entire stranger; summoning at once all her resolution, she bade them adieu, and returned to Bishopsgate-street; from whence, early the next morning, they set out upon their way to Ashford Park.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *The Dependents.*

I HAVE before mentioned, that it was Lady Ashford's intention to make a short visit to Mrs. Murray, a rich relation of her late mother-in-law's. She accordingly gave orders to drive to her house, which was rather more than five miles from the main road. Upon their arrival, her Ladyship desired a servant, who attended at the gate, to let his lady know she was there, and begged the favour of being permitted to see her. This message, which was received in a surly impertinent manner (the fellow saying he did not suppose his lady would let her come in) was taken up stairs; and after they had waited at least a quarter of an hour, he returned, telling them they might alight, if they pleased; and if his lady found herself well enough by and by, she would see them. This permission, almost unhopd for, was received by Lady Ashford in the most gracious manner: and she followed him into the house with as much alacrity as if she had been going to take possession of it. They were shewn into a large parlour, almost unfurnished. Mrs. Murray not having quitted her chamber for many years, the lower part of the house was of course exposed to the depredations of her servants, who had pretty nearly stripped every part of it. She was wholly governed by her housekeeper and butler, who were husband and wife; and ruled her in every thing, so far as the natural suspiciousness and obstinacy of her temper rendered her managable. Here they waited till any patience, except that of a dependent, would have been exhausted; but Lady Ashford felt herself quite in that predicament (for she was not wholly free from her husband's foible, covetousness) and therefore uttered not a word expressive of impatience, till a full hour had escaped, when the door was opened by the housekeeper; who informed her, with some shortness, that her lady was ready to see them. "And how do you do, Mrs. Broome?" said Lady Ashford, with great condescension. "How does your husband and family do? I expected to have seen you at Ashford Park before this time: I thought the last time I was here, you promised to come." Mrs. Broome thanked her with rather more complaisance than she had used in speaking to her before; but said she was greatly confined; for her lady thought well of nothing but what she did; and she could hardly get out three days in the year. "Upon my word," answered her Ladyship, "that's somewhat hard: I think you ought to go out a little for the sake of your health. I shall desire my aunt to part with you for a few days; and then you must come, and bring one or two of your children; the change of air will do them good."

By this time they were arrived at the chamber-door; which Mrs. Broome opening, desired them to walk in. Mrs. Murray was sitting in a large easy-chair, with her foot, which was violently swelled by the gout, resting upon a covered stool. She was muffled up with flannel, from head to foot; and being a masculine figure, with hard features and a dark beard, made a most forbidding appearance. Though the day was one of the warmest in July, there was a fire in the grate; and upon the sides of the Bath-stove stood several saucepans; and a small table, which was placed before her, was covered with various messes, which she chose to have cooked under her own inspection. Before the fire lay a large female spaniel; and in one corner of the room was a piece of old carpeting, which three of her young ones were sleeping upon. The windows, not being ever permitted to be

opened for the admission of fresh air, the closeness of the chamber, out of which its principal inhabitants never moved, was almost intolerable.

Lady Ashford approached her rich relation with all the respect that she could have paid to an empress; telling her, that it was so long since she had heard from her, that Sir Marmaduke and herself began to grow uneasy; and she had resolved to make personal inquiries after her health, as being more satisfactory than any other. "Well," replied Mrs. Murray, "I am here yet, and here likely to be. I suppose you was in hopes to find that I was upon the point of slipping off? And faith, if that was the case, I don't believe, with all your speeches, that one among you would lend a finger to keep me up." 'I am sorry,' replied Lady Ashford, 'that you should have so bad an opinion of us as to think we could wish to lose so valuable a relation and friend. What can make one amends for the loss of a friend? Not all the wealth they can possibly leave one.' "As for friends," replied Mrs. Murray, "I believe money is the best in the world; and if I was not possessed of a little, neither Sir Marmaduke nor yourself would trouble your heads about me. As it is, I don't doubt but you'd be both glad to see me potted." 'I am sure,' cried Lady Ashford, without betraying the least signs of impatience or resentment, 'my dear aunt cannot think so ill of her relations. People indeed who spend all before them, and can never get enough to supply their extravagances, may become such wretches; but that is not the case with Sir Marmaduke, he always lived within his income, and need not wish the death of any body.' "I am glad of it," answered Mrs. Murray; "then he needs the less from me: I hate to give to them that have too much already." 'I did not mean to say,' rejoined her Ladyship, 'that Sir Marmaduke's income was large: on the contrary, he is often distressed for money, and has younger children to provide for: and I should think, a person of my dear aunt's prudence and understanding, would wish to leave her fortune where it will be well used, and not be thrown away upon mistresses, gaming-tables, and such kind of fashionable methods.' "I am not going to leave it to any body," answered Mrs. Murray; "and so you may all make yourselves easy upon that head. I may very likely marry, one of these days, and disappoint you all. Which of you, I wonder, will come after me when I have got a flock of children running about the house? I warrant 'dear aunt' and 'good Madam' will be changed into 'old fool.' What say you, young woman?" continued she, addressing Caroline; "would it not be serving them as they deserve?" 'I think, Madam, you have a right to consult your own happiness,' replied Caroline. "Well said!" answered the old lady; "if you are rich, child, get married, and have a family of your own, or else you see what will be your lot: all your relations will gape round you, as if they could get no breath till you lost yours: and, if you don't take care, it's ten to one but they grow impatient, and pot you before your time!"

Caroline could not help smiling at this representation; the truth of which she in some degree witnessed. Lady Ashford, in order to give a change to the discourse, was beginning to inquire if she had much pain from her foot? and was prepared to rejoice or lament, according to the account she received, when Mrs. Broome made her appearance, and told her lady that a fine young gentleman was at the door, in a beautiful vis-à-vis; who said he was one of her near relations, and begged to be permitted to pay his duty to her. "What! more relations!" exclaimed the old lady: "I shall be assassinated! Bid him get about his business; I want none of his duty." 'Nay, Ma'am,' cried Broome, 'he says he has come a great way, on purpose to have the honour of seeing you; and he knows by the coach, that stands by the gate, that you have company with you. Do let him come up; you

can't think how handsome he is.' "Well," replied her mistress, "he may come if he will; since I am to be plagued, its as well have all as some." The house-keeper immediately went down stairs, and in a few moments returned to open the door, as she had done for Lady Ashford, when who should enter but Caroline's Bath admirer, Lord Danby. He started upon seeing our heroine, but instantly recovering himself, went up to Mrs. Murray, and in the most gallant and respectful style, thanked her for the honour she had done him, in admitting him into her presence, and assured her that he had long panted for the happiness he now enjoyed. 'And pray who may you be, who have so vast a regard for me?' asked Mrs. Murray; 'tis amazing how I inspire people with so much love and respect, before they have ever seen me!' His Lordship apologized for the solecism, in etiquette, of which he had been guilty; and having informed her of his name, and the degree of relationship to her, in which he had the happiness to stand, begged she would in future give him leave to number himself among those whom she honoured with her friendship.

He then turned to Lady Ashford, with whom he was not acquainted, and bowed in respectful silence. Passing from her to Caroline, "Need I express the pleasure I feel at this unexpected happiness," cried he: "where have you concealed yourself so long? I quitted Bath in a week after you; there was nothing left that could detain me. I hope you had an agreeable winter in town?" 'I spent the whole of last winter in Westmoreland,' answered Caroline. 'Then my loss was not so great as I imagined,' replied his Lordship. "I was absolutely forced into a party to the south of France, which obliged me to abandon the hope of meeting you in London, and I now lived upon that of seeing you next season." 'And so you are a Lord,' interrupted Mrs. Murray. 'Are you rich?' "That is a question, my dear madam," answered his Lordship, "not very easily answered. In comparison to many, perhaps, I ought to account myself so; but if to be rich signifies to possess as much as we wish to use, I answer No: on the contrary, I am not many degrees removed from absolute poverty." 'And so a few thousands would do you no harm,' said the old lady. "My dear madam," replied Lord Danby, "I did not wait upon you with an intention to trouble you with an account of my wants: perhaps there are some among them," continued he, glancing his eyes upon our heroine, "which even thousands could not supply. I am ambitious of being known to a lady, to whose most valuable character I have long ceased to be a stranger; and if I am happy enough to gain the lowest place in her esteem, I shall for the present think myself rich enough."

Mrs. Murray appeared highly pleased at a strain of flattery, to which she had not been accustomed; and looking with more than usual cheerfulness, she told him that he might not be the worse for his disinterestedness. Lady Ashford began to grow uneasy; she saw that Lord Danby was in a fair way to become a professed favourite, and had gained more upon the good graces of the old lady, in half an hour, than she had ever been able to do in many a tedious and mortifying visit. She endeavoured to divide her attention, by drawing a part of it to herself; but in vain. She would answer nobody but Lord Danby, and paid attention only to him. Her Ladyship coloured with vexation, which the old lady perceiving, exclaimed, "What, jealous! why I told you just now, that I had thoughts of marrying; and who knows but here is my match? What if I should take it into my head to leave him my whole fortune, who do I wrong? Did I ever promise to leave it to any of you?" Lady Ashford was about to reply, when Mrs. Murray again resumed, "I would not have you think that I am angry with you, or dislike you more than I used to do; but if I

chuse to have a favourite I'll have one; perhaps I may have more than one. I am apt to take likings at first sight; if I don't then, I never do. And so as I think your visit has been quite long enough, you are at liberty to take leave as soon as you please. I have something to say to this young man alone, and will excuse all the dear aunts and good madams that you are about to say; so farewell; take yourselves down stairs."

Lady Ashford was now constrained to rise. She said she knew no affront was intended, and therefore she should take none; and wishing her aunt all possible increase of health and happiness, got out of the room as fast as possible, fearing to be overtaken by something more gross and abusive than she had yet experienced.

It would be difficult to say, whether Lady Ashford was most mortified, or our heroine diverted, by the scene they had just quitted. The latter, however, could not help reflecting, with disgust, upon the mercenary disposition of mankind, when she saw persons of Lady Ashford's and Lord Danby's rank and fortune, paying court, in the most servile, abject manner, to a woman, whose person and mind were equally objects of aversion. She could not but wonder to see those, who were not only independent, but possessed even superfluity of wealth, still craving to swell the unnecessary heap, as was the case with the former; while, like the latter, others cringed and fawned upon those they despised, and stooped to all the drudgery and meanness of gross flattery, in order to acquire that which, when possessed, they flung away with undistinguishing carelessness.

The first question with which Sir Marmaduke saluted his lady upon her stepping out of the carriage, at Ashford Park, was, "Well, Eleanor, what news from the city? Are we to look out our sables, and pull out our white handkerchiefs?" "You may, for the present, save yourself that trouble," answered she, "my uncle is nearly recovered; however I have had an absolute promise from him of all he shall die possessed of, let it happen when it will." "Well, that's something," replied he, "the sooner promises are fulfilled the better, you know." He then condescended to ask Caroline, if she had had a pleasant journey; but, without staying to receive her answer, told his wife that he believed they should not see Lord and Lady Walton that summer; that they had sent to excuse themselves, on account of the latter not being very well, but that Miss West arrived the night before. Caroline, who had not heard a word of Lord and Lady Walton's intention of visiting Ashford Park, felt as though she had escaped something that would have given her uneasiness. The thought of seeing Miss West was not perfectly agreeable to her, her brother's late behaviour, and its apprehended effects, had heightened her dislike to a family from whom she had suffered so much; and she retired to her apartment, instead of following Lady Ashford to the drawing-room, wishing for a few moments to compose her thoughts. She was there met by Kitty, who presented her a letter, which she said came by the last night's post. She immediately knew the hand of her good friend Dr. Seward, and trembled to observe the black wax with which it was sealed. It was natural to suppose that his sister, who had been ill in Yorkshire, was dead. Yet she feared something worse, and her fears were prophetic. The doctor, in terms of the deepest, though manly, regret, informed her of the death of her beloved friend, which happened in consequence of catching the fever and sore throat, with which her sister was affected.

The distress of our heroine was greater than words can describe; she was deprived of the only friend for whom she felt a sincere union of esteem and affection; the only friend in whom she could repose perfect confidence, or from whom she expected comfort or assistance, should she stand in need of them. Her spirits, not high before, now sunk to

the lowest ebb. She was unable to mix in any company, had it been ever so agreeable, much less to encounter the party now assembled in the drawing-room. She therefore ordered her maid to give the doctor's letter to her footman, and direct him to deliver it to Lady Ashford; at the same time requesting that she would excuse her remaining alone for the rest of the day. She then resigned herself up to tears and sorrow. The loss of her friend deeply wounded her affectionate heart, and, joined to the other loss she believed herself to have sustained, quite overwhelmed her: her tears flowed in abundance. She believed they all flowed for her dear Mrs. Seward; but the amiable, and to her equally lost, Rivers had his share. The vacancy she now felt in her heart was inexpressibly painful. She appeared to herself a poor forlorn wanderer in a dreary world; one in whose sorrows no gentle bosom participated, and whose prosperity was interesting only to herself.

These melancholy reflections, for more than half the night, banished sleep from her eyes: at length, worn out by the fatigue of a journey, and the want of that soft restorer of nature, she sunk into a profound repose.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### *The Resolution.*

IT was late the next morning before our heroine awoke; and Kitty informed her that Lady Ashford had been at her door to inquire how she rested; and that the young 'Squire seemed very uneasy about her. She still felt the strongest objection to going down; and told Kitty to bring her up a dish of tea, being very hot and thirsty; and let Lady Ashford know that she was too indifferent to venture down, but would be happy to see her in her dressing-room. In a few moments her maid returned with Lady Ashford's love to her; and to let her know that she and all the rest of the ladies would come up to see her after breakfast.

This was a compliment which Caroline could well have excused; however, it was better than going down to them; and having drank her tea, she leaned her head upon her hand, in which she held a cambrick handkerchief, with which her face was half-concealed, and resting her elbow upon the corner of her toilet, indulged that soft and bewitching melancholy to which genius and sensibility are ever prone. She had not long enjoyed this dangerous pleasure, when she was disturbed by the entrance of Lady Ashford, her daughter, her sister, and Miss West. At a little distance, as if fearful of offending, they were followed by Mr. Ashford; who could not resist the inclination he felt to see his cousin, and convince himself of the real state of her health; for which he began to entertain many tender apprehensions.

Lady Ashford, in the kindest manner, inquired how she did? and expressed much concern upon feeling her hand, to find it so hot and dry. She said she was sorry that she had quitted her bed; and thought it would be best for her to return to it: in which opinion Mrs. Ashford joined; adding, with more than common civility, that she was sorry to see her so ill. They had scarce done speaking, when Miss West, with an air of the most perfect ease and unconsciousness, asked her if she did not recollect her old acquaintance? Caroline, roused by her uncommon assurance and insensibility, answered, That was she subject to want of recollection, too many circumstances had impressed the name of West upon her memory, ever to endanger its being lost in forgetfulness. Miss West coloured, in spite of the happy sangfroid which she had the art of assuming at pleasure; but instantly recovering her wonted air of self-satisfaction, she began to admire the room; declaring that the taste in which it was fitted up, was remarkably pretty; and though so much less expensive, in her opinion, more than equalled the Countess of ——'s, about which such a fuss was made. "Yes," rejoined Mr. Ashford, who had just paid his compliments to Caroline; "as much as the amiable planner of it excels that Countess, about whom such a fuss is made." "Oh," replied Miss West, "the Countess is certainly very handsome." "So I think," replied Mr. Ashford. "You really pay the handsomest compliments, friend," said Miss West, "of any body I ever met with; but they are often lost, for want of sensibility in the receiver." "For want of vanity, you mean," replied he: "nothing makes a woman so quick-sighted to a compliment as that." Just as he spoke these words, she cast her eyes upon the pictures, which were small half-lengths, in oval frames, and hung at equal distances, on one side of the room. "Bless me," cried she, "what have we here? your picture, Mr. Ashford! and Caroline's, I protest! hung on each side of the good old lady

your grandmother. What are we to think of this?' Mrs. and Miss Ashford, who had neither of them been before in Caroline's room since she had altered the taste of the furniture and ornaments, instantly turned their eyes towards the pictures; and with looks of anger and surprize, exclaimed, "I protest, and so there is!"

Mr. Ashford was divided between surprize at the circumstance, and concern for her to whom he believed himself indebted for so high a compliment. He longed to throw himself at her feet, to thank her for the favour she had bestowed even upon his shadow; when our heroine, with great composure of look and accent, informed them that the picture they had mistaken for Mr. Ashford's, had been painted for her father; as the other, which they supposed to be hers, was for her mother. This explanation at once put an end to their surprize and poor Mr. Ashford's triumph. He hung his head, in silent mortification; and felt how much happier it is never to hope, than to be subject to the cruel pangs of disappointment!

After a few remarks upon the wonderful resemblance between Mr. Ashford and the person from which the portrait they had mistaken for his was painted, Caroline received all their good wishes for her better health; and Lady Ashford told her she should order some whey; and begged she would go to bed, and keep quiet.

As soon as they were gone, our heroine, finding the heat and thirst, by which she was opprest, increase, and her head begin to grow painful, resolved to follow the advice she had received; and, in pursuance of it, immediately put on her night-clothes, and, drinking a bason of white wine whey, which Lady Ashford's woman brought for her, resigned herself to external quietness and inward perturbation.

Caroline had not continued in this state more than hour, when, some one knocking softly at the door, she heard Lady Ashford ask whether she was asleep? "Is it you, Madam?" said Caroline. "I am not at all inclined to sleep. Do walk in." Her Ladyship then came into her bed-chamber, and asked her if it would be disagreeable to her to see Doctor Layton, who had just then called? "I am afraid you have given yourself the trouble of sending for him," said Caroline. 'No,' replied she; 'he came quite by accident; and upon inquiring where you was; and being told you was not well, he requested to see you: so fearing that if I sent up a servant you might be disturbed, I came myself to see how you are, and to know if you choose to see him.' Caroline thanked her for her kind attention, and said, as the Doctor was there, she would take his advice. He was accordingly called up; and after the usual ceremony of feeling the pulse, and prescribed what he thought would be proper for her disorder, John was immediately sent to a neighbouring apothecary, to have the medicines made up.

The Doctor having chatted a little, and told all the family-news that was stirring in the neighbourhood, arose to take leave; upon which Lady Ashford, at Caroline's previous request, offered him his usual fee; but he absolutely refused to touch it; saying, he intended only a friendly call, and had visited Miss Caroline at his own request, not hers; and therefore could not think of being paid for it. His moderation surprized our heroine, as well as Lady Ashford; he being remarkable for never refusing a fee.

As soon as they were gone, Caroline directed Kitty to let down one of the window-curtains; for she felt herself sleepy, and wished to indulge the comfortable propensity. While she was executing her orders, "I am sure," said she, "I am glad the Doctor came; for I hope now, Ma'am, you will soon be better. It was very good of the young 'Squire to send for him, without saying a word to nobody." 'Did my cousin send

for him?’ asked Caroline. ‘How do you know?’ ‘Why, Ma’am,” answered Kitty, “I saw him send his man off the moment he came down from your room; and in about five minutes after his return, the Doctor came. So I asked Charles; for I thought where he had been: and he owned that he was sent to the Doctor with a note; and he says he is sure there was money in it.”—This accounted for the Doctor’s deviation from his general rule of practice.

Caroline was grateful for her cousin’s kindness and solicitude about her. She sighed that she could only be grateful. “How perverse a heart is mine!” whispered she in thought: “a worthy and amiable man sighs to possess it in vain, while it has most improvidently bestowed itself upon one who neither knows that it is his, nor probably wishes it to be so.” A few tears accompanied this thought, and in some degree relieved the oppression under which she laboured; but the sleep she hoped for was entirely flown, nor, till she had taken a composing-draught, could she obtain any. A gentle moisture, which, soon after she had taken it, diffused itself over her whole frame, removing the restless weariness she had before felt, she insensibly sunk into a sweet and refreshing slumber, which continued for several hours; and from which she awoke entirely free from any symptoms of fever, or other bodily disorder. And as the mind will ever partake the good or ill its earthly partner enjoys or suffers, hers felt greatly strengthened, and eased of much of the restless anxiety it had the day before endured. She was, upon recollection, ashamed of the extreme weakness she had betrayed; and resolved, let the effort be ever so painful, to drive from her heart a passion which, if indulged, she perceived would rob it of all that was amiable and worthy, and render her a poor forlorn restless creature, useless to others, and a burthen to herself.

In this resolution she arose and dressed herself, with her usual elegance, went down to breakfast, and resolved no longer to indulge herself in that dangerous luxury of tender thought wherein she had lately so much delighted; but, by keeping as much as possible engaged in company and conversation, to escape from ideas too pleasingly intrusive.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *A Disappointment.*

UPON entering the breakfast-room, she found the ladies engaged in earnest conversation. Something more than common seemed to be the subject, by the important swell of Mrs. Ashford, the simper and affected carelessness of her niece, and the extreme good-humour of Sir Marmaduke. Inquiries after her health being over, she took her place among them, and began to chat with Mr. Ashford, who appeared the only person disengaged; the rest being all in half-whisper consultations, about which she felt not the smallest curiosity, and wished to avoid the appearance of listening. At length Miss West, turning from Miss Ashford with an air of affected half-anger, "Well, well, my dear little Countess," said she, "if you will be obstinate, there's no help for it: but, if I know any thing of the matter, you'll change your mind yet." 'No, that I shan't,' cries Miss Ashford; 'you'll see if I do. I'll tell you what, West,' continued she, and then another whisper succeeded, which occasioned a laugh from both.

"I think," said Mrs. Ashford, "we ought to tell Miss Caroline this affair." 'By no means, if it is any secret,' answered our heroine. "Oh, it is no secret," replied Mrs. Ashford, with a significant look; "I hope Miss Ashford will never have any secrets of this nature: it is an affair of which she has no need to be ashamed; an affair that would do honour to the first young woman in England. In short, Eleanor will very soon be married to one of the first young noblemen in the kingdom: she will probably be a Countess before this day week." 'No, positively, aunt,' exclaimed Eleanor; 'not under a month, at the very soonest.' "Don't tell me!" answered Mrs. Ashford: "when my Lord comes to plead for himself, you will never be able to resist." 'So I tell her,' cried Miss West. 'In short, who can resist one of the handsomest men in England, when he throws his fortune, title, heart, and person at one's feet! Don't be jealous, my dear little Countess; but I was once more than half in love with him myself; and so was Caroline too, though she looks so demure.' "With whom?" replied our heroine. "Who do you mean?" 'Why, our old Bath acquaintance, Lord Danby,' replied Miss West. 'Don't you remember him?' "Lord Danby!" exclaimed Caroline. "Is my cousin, Eleanor, going to be married to Lord Danby?" 'Yes, to Lord Danby,' answered Mrs. Ashford; 'where pray is the wonder? She is not the first Ashford who has married a nobleman; and if her person and accomplishments will not procure her something above a shabby commoner, it is hard indeed! Besides, she will now be one of the first fortunes in England, and will be entitled to figure with the first women in town. See here,' continued she, presenting a letter; 'this will explain the matter fully; and then you will know what we are about.' Caroline took the letter, and, with some difficulty, made out the following words:

"Sir Marmaduke Ashford,

At the request of my nephew, Lord Danby, I sit down to inform you, that he is fallen violently in love with your daughter, and wishes to marry her. In case you will consent to the match, and she is willing, I will immediately give them up forty thousand pounds; and the rest of my fortune, which amounts to twice that sum, I will settle upon

them after my death. Let me know, by return of messenger, whether you like the proposal. If so, Lord Danby will be with you on Thursday, with deeds ready signed.

ANN MURRAY.”

The surprize of our heroine was visible in her countenance; which Miss West observing, exclaimed, “I protest Caroline is disappointed! Oh, I had forgot that he danced with you once or twice: however, we must both be content; I fear it is neither of our fates to be Countesses.” ‘What signifies dancing-acquaintance,’ cried Mrs. Ashford; ‘you may dance with a man for ever, and never make any impression upon his heart. You see, one glance from the eyes of Eleanor (for he never, that we know of, saw her but once) could do more than all the dancing upon earth.’ “I sincerely wish my cousin every possible kind of happiness,” said Caroline; “but I must confess that Lord Danby is one of the last men from whom I should have expected such an attachment.” ‘And why so?’ exclaimed her aunt. ‘What, because he has indulged himself in a few fashionable liberties? Mere trifles in a man of his consequence!’ “If you think them so,” answered Caroline, “it is very well; but in my opinion, such habits must be the ruin of all domestic happiness.” ‘Oh,’ cried Mrs. Ashford, ‘when he is united to the woman of his choice, reformation comes of course.’ “Oh certainly,” said Miss West; “but Caroline is jealous; I see that plain enough.” ‘Jealous!’ repeated Eleanor, with a scornful smile and toss of her head. “Aye jealous, truly,” exclaimed Mrs. Ashford. “I hope she has too much sense to make any such pretensions. Exclusive of Miss Ashford’s other accomplishments, she will be one of the first fortunes in the kingdom. Of fifty thousand pounds, the half of her mother’s fortune, my brother cannot hinder her: she will have every shilling of which I die possessed; and I make no doubt but Lord Walton, and several other relations, will leave her large legacies; so that I estimate her fortune, at least, an hundred thousand pounds.” ‘Well, that’s a bribe for Lord Danby certainly,’ said Mr. Ashford coldly. “A bribe!” exclaimed his aunt: “he wants no bribe. I have not the smallest doubt but he would marry your sister, if she had not a guinea in the world.” ‘He is much obliged to you, however,’ said Mr. Ashford, ‘for such a presumption in his favour.’

Sir Marmaduke here interposed.—He said that was an idle question, and had nothing to do in the business: That if Lord Danby liked Eleanor in her present circumstances, it was enough, as there was no great danger of their being altered. “There is but one thing,” continued he, “that gives me uneasiness; and that is, my promise to Sir Charles Beaumont.” ‘Of what consequence is that?’ answered Mrs. Ashford; ‘the man is dead, and cannot claim it.’ “True,” replied the Baronet; “but he recalled his son from his travels, on purpose to fulfil the engagement: and I know, in a letter he wrote to him upon his deathbed, he made it his last request that he would do so. I have likewise written to him since the death of his father, and invited him here; which certainly amounted to nothing less than a renewal of the agreement; and I have every reason to expect him shortly to claim my promise.” ‘Well,’ answered Mrs. Ashford, ‘it cannot be helped: nobody can wonder that we should give the preference to a nobleman.’

“Upon my word, Madam,” cried Miss West, turning to Eleanor, “a Viscount and a Baronet at your feet at one time! Do, bestow some of your superfluities upon your poor friends! you can have but one, you know; and here are a couple of poor forlorn damsels, who cannot procure one between them.” She had scarce pronounced these words, when

Sir Marmaduke, rising and going to a window, cried, 'Whose carriage can that be which stops at the porter's lodge?' Miss West, immediately taking up a small perspective which lay upon the chimney-piece, and fixing it to her eye, exclaimed, "It is the most beautiful vis-a-vis I ever beheld; four fine horses; and one, two, three servants in rich liveries." 'Whose can it be?' cried Eleanor. "I warrant," exclaimed Mrs. Ashford, "it is your Lord: too impatient to stay till to-morrow." 'Bless me!' exclaimed Lady Ashford, 'we are sadly unprovided in the larder: I must give orders immediately.' So saying, she hurried out of the room.

"Yes, yes," cried Miss West, still looking through the telescope, "I now see the coronet." 'Oh, let me see,' exclaimed Eleanor; 'let me see it!' "Aye, aye," said Mrs. Ashford, with a look of inexpressible triumph, "it will be no rarity to you by this day month." The carriage now approached. Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Ashton went out to meet their guest, while the ladies ran to a large looking-glass, and adjusted their hair and handkerchiefs. As for our heroine, she retired to a further corner of the room, conceiving herself perfectly uninterested in the affair; and, on account of the insinuations which Miss West had thrown out, wishing to appear what she truly was, wholly indifferent about it.

In a few minutes the gentlemen returned, introducing Lord Danby. As they entered, Sir Marmaduke was concluding a speech about the honour his family was receiving; and his Lordship at the same time muttered something concerning happiness, attachment, and many other fine things, which he seemed to feel better than arrange or express. He was first presented to Lady Ashford, who was just slipped into the room. She appeared half-frightened while he paid her his respects: next, to Mrs. Ashford; who, willing to display her superior address, and make amends for the deficiency of her sister, overwhelmed him with compliments. He was then let up to Eleanor; while the sparkling eyes of her aunt followed him, in hopes of beholding raptures the most lively and transporting; but what was her surprize to see him only bow respectfully, and, quitting her in a moment, hurry to the other side of the room, where our heroine stood.

Approaching Caroline with the most impassioned look, he took one of her hands, and, before she could disengage it, kissed it, with every appearance of delight. "Have I then at last the happiness to hope for your smiles?" said he. "Am I allowed, before our mutual friends and the whole world, to declare the passion which took possession of my heart the very first moment I beheld you?"—He was proceeding, when Caroline, withdrawing her hand, exclaimed, 'What do you mean, Sir? It is my cousin to whom these compliments should be addressed; I am not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Ashford.' The countenance of Lord Danby expressed astonishment; but his feelings were faint in comparison of those endured by the group on the opposite side of the room. Rage, which decency could hardly suppress, blazed in the little gray eyes of Mrs. Ashford. Amazement seemed to have stopped the breath of her niece and sister. Sir Marmaduke had drawn himself up with a frown of haughty reserve and observation; Mr. Ashford appeared in a state of uneasy suspense; and Miss West sunk behind, turning away her face to conceal a violent inclination to laugh, with which she was seized.

"Not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Ashford, Madam!" exclaimed Lord Danby. "By what means have I been deceived? Sure you only wish to amuse yourself at my expence!" Then turning to the company, "What am I to believe?" said he. "Is it possible that I can have been led into so strange an error?" 'Yes, you have been deceived indeed,' cried Mrs. Ashford, almost choaked with rage: 'you have mistaken a poor dependent for

one of the most accomplished young women and largest fortunes in England. See here, Sir,' continued she, 'this is Miss Ashford; as much superior to the doll you have been complimenting, as her fortune and expectations are greater.' "In what degree of relationship then does this lady stand to you?" said his Lordship, addressing Sir Marmaduke. 'She is my niece, Sir,' answered the Baronet, 'the daughter of a disinherited brother.' "I am sure," continued Mrs. Ashford, "if you will consult your own eyes and understanding, there is no comparison between them, no more than there is between a bare maintenance and an hundred thousand pounds. Your Lordship will take a little time to consider upon it; and if you should, as I have no doubt but you will, repent of your mistake, I will undertake to intercede with my niece in your behalf."

'I am greatly obliged to you, Madam,' said Lord Danby; 'but I have only mistaken the rank, not the person of the woman I admire. My affections are irremovably fixed; nor can difference of situation ever alter them. I came here, Sir,' continued he to Sir Marmaduke, 'to demand, as I believed, your daughter: I am sorry for the mistake that hath happened; which I hope you and your family will do me the justice to believe was far from being a wilful one. I am still ambitious of becoming a relation to so ancient and respectable a house; and if this lady,' turning to Caroline, 'will permit me to hope for her favour, I am sure Mrs. Murray will continue firm to her agreement: the forty thousand pounds she means to give, shall be considered as her fortune; and settlements be made accordingly.' "I am sure," exclaimed Mrs. Ashford, "my brother will never consent to any such thing! What! join in the insult which hath been offered to his daughter, and rob his own children to enrich a worthless girl, who has already stripped them of so much? Sure, Sir, you think us fools! people who know nothing of the world! If Mr. Ashford had a spirit worthy the ancestors from whom he descended, he would before this time have interposed, and let you see that the lady you have dared to affront in this outrageous manner, wants not friends to defend her honour and that of her family, who are all injured in her." 'I fancy,' replied Mr. Ashford, 'my sister would not wish to be forced upon Lord Danby. As for insult, I cannot think any hath been intended or offered; and for my cousin's acceptance of his last offer, it must surely rest entirely with herself; nor do I see any thing my father, or any of us, have to do in her decision.' "Mean-spirited wretch!" cried his aunt, half-frantic with passion; "and so you will tamely suffer your sister to be rejected with scorn and contempt, while a little pityful puss, who is maintained by the charity of the family, triumphs in her disappointment, and puts on the Countess under her very nose!"

'If that is all which disturbs you, Madam,' said our heroine, advancing with modest gracefulness, 'I will instantly make you easy. For the compliment your Lordship hath paid me I cannot do less than return my thanks,' continued she, addressing Lord Danby. 'I am sorry the unaccountable error you have fallen into has led you so much further than prudence would otherwise have suffered you to proceed; and am sure that, in a few hours, you will thank me for declaring, that were you a prince, and would enrich me with half your dominions, I would reject the offer, as I now beg leave to do that with which you have honoured me.' So saying, she courtesied respectfully, and quitted the room.

She had not been in her apartment more than twenty minutes, before she saw Lord Danby's vis-a-vis draw up, and his Lordship get in. He was attended to the door by Mr. Ashford, with whom he appeared to part in much civility.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *The Surprise.*

IT hath often been said, "That perfect rectitude is a stranger to fear."—In the present instance, however, theory is contradicted by experience. Our heroine was as much afraid of encountering Mrs. Ashford and the rest of the family at dinner, as if she had actually committed some considerable crime, or done them a wilful and material injury. It was with difficulty she prevailed upon herself to go down; and when she arrived at the door, her feet made an involuntary stand. Mrs. Ashford's voice was loud. "I tell you, sister," said she, "there will be no peace in the house while she stays in it. To how many more insults will you expose your family, by your foolish partiality?" "It is surely very hard," said Lady Ashford, 'to punish her, because she is handsome! and I can really find no other fault you have to accuse her of.' "True," answered Mr. Ashford: "it would indeed be cruel!" "Oh, you are always ready to take her part," cried Mrs. Ashford: 'you are ready to defend every thing but your own honour! Had I been a man, Lord Danby should not have left the house before he had given me satisfaction, or made my sister amends for the affront he offered her.'

As she spoke these words a servant appeared in view, and Caroline was obliged to open the door; which she did with a trembling hand. The moment she entered, Mr. Ashford met her, and, with a more than usually cheerful countenance, led her to a chair; and when, in a few minutes, they were informed that dinner was ready, he conducted her to the dining-parlour in the same manner; and, seating himself by her side, endeavoured to prevent her observing the scornful and angry looks of his sister and aunt. They were, however, too visible to escape her notice.

Mrs. Ashford was every moment throwing out something which she thought would vex Caroline. Something about prudes and jilts, and paltry dependents coming into families to rob and disturb them. This treatment was so very disagreeable, that she suddenly resolved to make an excursion for a week or fortnight; by which time, she hoped, things would be at least in their old state again; or if, upon her return, she still found her aunt and cousin in the same bad humour, to quit her uncle's house entirely, and seek among strangers that peace and affection she found it vain to expect from her own relations.

In the course of the evening Caroline communicated her intention to Lady Ashford, who greatly approved it; saying, she was very sorry for the unreasonable behaviour of her daughter and Mrs. Ashford; but added, "You know, my dear, I have no power over them: the utmost I can do is to live with tolerable peace among them. If it was not for the amusement and consolation that books afford, I should find my life not the most comfortable."

Caroline was but too sensible of the truth of what she said. At her earnest request she promised to stay only one fortnight; and that evening dispatched her servant to the neighbouring town, to order a post-chaise to be at Ashford Park by six the next morning. She then gave Kitty directions to put up a good quantity of habit-linen, as she meant to take no other dress, it being her intention to pass the time she wished to be absent from her uncle, with Mrs. Forester and her favourite little Mary; for whom she took several

presents, such as afford children of her age inexpressible delight; a large dressed doll being one of the number.

After as pleasant a journey as the want of a suitable companion would permit it to be, she arrived at the house of Mr. Williams; where she was received with inexpressible joy by every inhabitant. She had the satisfaction of finding Mrs. Forester and her beautiful little daughter perfectly well, and quite pleased and comfortable in their new habitation. Her friend Dr. Seward was soon apprized of her arrival. The sight of him again revived the tender sorrow which the loss of her beloved friend had so lately occasioned. He presented her with a miniature of his sister; which was received by our heroine as the most valuable present he could possibly have made her.

Having continued the time she at first intended in this retreat of neatness, peace, and comfort, her promise to Lady Ashford obliged her to return; and quitting it with the utmost reluctance, after an absence of fifteen days, she again beheld Ashford Park.

Upon alighting at the door, she inquired whether her aunt was at home? The servant, who perfectly understood that she meant Lady Ashford (it never being her practice to use that appellation when speaking of her to whom it properly belonged) answered, that her Ladyship was in her dressing-room. She therefore sent her maid to inform her of her arrival, and to say that, if she was at leisure to see her, she should be glad to inquire after her health.

Caroline received for answer, that Lady Ashford would be happy to see her: upon which she went directly to her apartment. Nothing could be more kind than her reception: and after the first compliments usual upon meeting were over, Lady Ashford told her she would be received quite graciously by her aunt and cousin. "We are all in high good-humour," continued she: "we have got a new lover, who is worth ten thousand of Lord Danby: handsomer, more gallant, sensible, and accomplished. In short, Eleanor says she shall never be thankful enough for her escape from the last proposal; and that, were a Duke to offer himself, she would prefer Sir William Beamont."

'I rejoice to hear it,' cried Caroline: 'I hope indeed she will be a great gainer by the exchange, and have a much better prospect of happiness with this gentleman than she could have had with Lord Danby.' "I hope so too," answered Lady Ashford. "His character is uncommonly good; and, if one may believe appearances, he is possessed of every possible good quality."

While she was yet speaking, Mrs. Ashford and Eleanor entered. They said, hearing that Caroline was returned, they came to inquire how she did. They were uncommonly civil; but excused themselves from staying long; saying, Sir William expected them in the drawing-room: that they had just had a delightful walk, and must soon dress for dinner. Soon after they left Lady Ashford's room, our heroine followed their example, and retired to her own, in order to make similar preparations. As she wished to live, if possible, upon tolerable terms with them, she resolved not to appear stiff and distant now they seemed inclined to some degree of sociability.

The prospect of Eleanor's marriage was very agreeable to Caroline. She concluded that her aunt would remove along with her: and made no doubt of living in the most comfortable and easy manner with Lady Ashford when they were gone; and as she hoped that would be very soon, determined to exert every possible effort to continue in a state of amity with them till their departure: An event of which she made herself quite certain. No sooner, therefore, was she dressed, than, without waiting for a summons to

dinner, as was her usual custom, she walked down to the drawing-room, which finding quite empty, she sat down upon a sofa, and took up a book to amuse herself; but her mind being more inclined than usual to wander upon forbidden subjects, she threw it aside, and opening a door, which communicated with a smaller drawing-room, in which an organ was fixed, sat down and played several lessons in her usual masterly style. By degrees her mind was perfectly composed and harmonized. She sung; and the softness which, in spite of all her efforts, hung about her heart, added to her natural taste and expression, gave a pathos to her charming voice, which entered the very soul. She had just finished an elegant and affecting air, when she heard the words, charming! admirable! spoken behind her, in a voice of extreme rapture. She startled; and suddenly turning round, beheld Mr. Rivers. The moment he saw her face, his surprize appeared equal to her own; but it was quickly changed into fright and concern, when he saw her pale and almost insensible. He flew to her assistance, and, catching her in his arms, placed her upon a sofa, still holding her, with a gentle pressure, close to his bosom. She was but half-revived, but half-disengaged from his embrace, when the appearance of Lady Ashford, her aunt, and Eleanor, threw her almost into as bad a condition as that out of which she was recovering.

“Bless me! What have we here?” exclaimed Mrs. Ashford. “What is the matter, Sir George? Sure this girl has not been practising her old arts upon you?” “The affair, my dear Madam, is a mere accident,” answered Sir George. “This lady was playing upon the organ; drawn by the fineness of her voice and execution, I approached too unguardedly, and her fright occasioned the effects to which you have been a witness.” “She’s wonderfully delicate, no doubt,” rejoined Miss Ashford; “these kind of airs are really very ridiculous.” Caroline was, by this time, pretty well recovered, and apologized to Lady Ashford for the alarm she had occasioned. Her heart, however, still fluttered with astonishment; and she longed to know by what magic Mr. Rivers was become Sir William Beaumont. To this change she should have had no particular objection, had not Sir George Beaumont been the professed lover of Miss Ashford: a circumstance, upon which she could not reflect without anguish. During dinner, and the remainder of the day, he took little notice of her; the greatest part of his conversation was directed to Sir Marmaduke and Lady Ashford. It was impossible to imagine him the lover of Eleanor; Miss West seemed rather the object of his attention; but he was more complaisant to Mrs. Ashford than to either of them. If his eyes met those of our heroine, he instantly withdrew them; and, when she spoke, his attention generally seemed to be taken up some other way; and he affected to speak of something foreign to whatever she had mentioned.

How different was this from what she had experienced when she saw him last? when every word was compliment! every look admiration! Could the circumstance of Captain West’s rudeness occasion such a change? She could assign no other. But why should she trouble herself about the cause or its effects? What was he? What could he ever be to her? Ought she not to thank him for a behaviour which must so much assist her efforts to conquer an ill-placed passion? Yes, she would conquer it! Had she not reason to resent his conduct, in introducing himself to her under the disguise of a feigned name? Had his designs been such as honour would warrant, concealment of any kind had been unnecessary. No, it was plain, in spite of his pleasing manners and apparent goodness, that his attachment to her had been as dishonourable as his present one was mercenary,

and that he feared to acknowledge his past acquaintance with her, lest it should injure him in the opinion of her uncle and his family.

After much reflection, and often changing her resolves, she determined to see him as little as possible; never to mention her having met with him before; and, let her foolish obstinate heart feel what it would, suffer things to take their natural course, and patiently behold him the husband of Eleanor.

In pursuance of this resolution, Caroline seldom appeared but at meals, and then retired again the very first opportunity; in which she was never opposed by any of the family. She often spent an hour or two in Lady Ashford's dressing-room; who acknowledged to her that she wished the marriage of her daughter well over; but she feared it was at a greater distance than they had some time back believed. She said, when Sir George first arrived, he appeared willing to conclude the affair; but, after a few days, as if the knowledge of Eleanor had cooled his ardor, he became more indifferent; and lately avoided to speak at all upon the subject, either to her or to Sir Marmaduke; and she should not wonder if it yet came to nothing.

Returning one morning from a visit of this kind, she found the door of her dressing-room open; and happening to turn her eyes to that side on which the pictures hung, she missed that of her mother. Kitty was summoned; and the room, as well as her bed-chamber, carefully searched; but in vain: the picture was nowhere to be found. Kitty was ordered to inquire among the servants, and to offer each, separately, five guineas, if they could find out where it was, and restore it to her again.

A week had passed since this accident, and she had lost all hope of ever recovering her beloved picture, when, happening to walk in the shrubbery rather late in the evening, a favourite pleasure with her, she saw Sir William Beaumont reclining upon a seat, at a small distance from the place where she stood. The moon shone full upon him; and she distinctly saw it in his hand. He gazed stedfastly upon it, then kissed and pressed it to his heart. After he had repeated this several times, he carefully put it up, and walked to the house in a musing posture, his arms folded across his bosom.

Our heroine was irresistibly impelled to seat herself for a moment upon the bench he had quitted. A thousand tender thoughts crowded into her mind: but starting up, as from a dream, and reproaching herself for this momentary weakness, she endeavoured to amuse her imagination with other ideas. She began to think how she should recover her picture; and resolved, if possible, to get it out of his hands, both on account of the value she set upon it, and the great impropriety she conceived there was in its remaining in his possession.

At supper she watched his looks with more attention than she had lately allowed herself to do; but none of them were directed to her. In vain she strove to read the characters of guilt, meanness, or art, in his countenance: all there was openness, sense, and honour. Puzzled by facts and appearances so contradictory, she retired to rest,—or rather rest's worst foe, Reflection.

The following evening was serene and pleasant, beyond what is common to a northern climate; but Caroline resolved to trust herself with no more walks by moonlight. How are the wisest deceived! if indeed any man who loves can pretend to wisdom. To avoid giving nourishment to the dangerous passion whose influence she dreaded, she flew to its very food.

The little drawing-room in which the organ stood, had a large window fronting the rising moon, which now being in the full, shone with unclouded majesty. Hither our heroine came; and, carefully shutting the outward door, as well as that of communication between the two rooms, she drew down the window, that not a sound might issue forth: and to avoid even the possibility of intrusion, turned the key which stood on the inside of the door. Fully satisfied of her safety, she sat down, little dreaming that the care she had taken to exclude danger had only put her more absolutely in the power of an inclosed enemy.

She had not ventured to touch the organ since the fright she suffered from Sir William. The little air she then played presented itself to her fingers; she rejected it, and played another. Again it recurred; and so often, that at last she could not withstand its solicitation; yet, when her fingers had run over a few bars, they could move no longer: her voice faltered, and she burst into tears.

Long might Caroline have remained in this state of tender sorrow, had not a rustling, which she heard in the room, roused her attention. Looking round, with an eye of apprehension, what was her amazement when she beheld Sir William Beaumont at her feet!—"Be not alarmed, most lovely of women," said he, respectfully, taking one of her hands; "this is no intended intrusion. I saw you enter, beheld the caution with which you secured yourself, and have enjoyed a state of luxury which an eastern monarch might envy. It was my intention to have suffered you to depart, without knowing that I was present; but those tears, who could see them unmoved! Why, loveliest of women, why are you unhappy? Can my life, my fortune——" 'Hold, Sir,' exclaimed Caroline; 'neither of them can be useful to me. You have ungenerously intruded upon my privacy, and witnessed emotions I would die to conceal. But add not insult to rudeness, nor further disturb a mind already too much agitated.'

At these words she disengaged her hand from his grasp, and was about to open the door, when, gently opposing her intention, "Stay!" exclaimed he; "stay a moment, I beseech you! I know not what I would say! Sure, nothing but innocence and purity can inhabit such a form!" 'Let me go, Sir,' said she. 'What would my cousin think, if she beheld you now?' "Your cousin," replied Sir William, "is nothing to me: I am not such a villain as to think of marrying one woman, with an unconquered preference for another in my heart. When I first came here, I believed that I had power to subdue it; but I now find my mistake; and, from this moment, quit her for ever. It is my comfort that no declaration has ever passed my lips; for I never could prevail upon myself to make any, and that the natural insensibility of Miss Ashford secures her from feeling any pains, except those of vanity. Thus, if Fate has put an irremovable bar between me and happiness, I may at least escape misery."

Scarce had he uttered these words, when their ears were suddenly assailed by a violent knocking at the door; at the same time Mrs. Ashford's voice, at its highest pitch, exclaimed, "open the door this moment! open it I say! insolent creature, come out!" She went on, but the attention of Sir William was wholly taken up with his fair companion, who, all pale and trembling, exclaimed, "What will become of me! Oh, Sir William, what a situation have you brought me into!" 'I will protect you, my life,' cried he, 'from every insult.' "Unlock the door," answered she, recovering from her fright, "and at least do me the justice to inform my uncle of the truth." The door was then opened, and in rushed the whole family. "Are you not ashamed to look us in the face?" cried Mrs. Ashford; "what is

the meaning of such behaviour? what, must you lock yourselves up to abuse the family, under whose roof you are sheltered? As for that girl, after what has passed, I wonder at nothing she does; but for you, Sir William! a man of honour, a gentleman, and one received into the family as you have been!" 'In justice to this innocent sufferer by my folly,' answered Sir William, 'I must explain the cause of your present disturbance.' He then related the whole circumstance, just as it had occurred. The moment he had done speaking, "Very well, very fine," cried Mrs. Ashford. "Now pray how do you explain your words? what do you say to the disrespectful things I heard you utter about my niece?" 'I will, Madam,' answered Sir William, 'in a few words explain my whole conduct. A few weeks since, fortune (I then thought it good fortune) introduced me to this lovely woman. I had several times the dangerous pleasure of being in her company, though from whim, and a desire of being attended to for my own sake, without the sound of a title, I appeared before her under a false name and character. What my intentions then were, or why I have altered them, must remain for ever a secret in this bosom. Whatever impression she had made upon my heart I believed it was wholly effaced, and that nothing was wanting to restore my tranquility but another attachment, more fortunate. In compliance with the request of a dying father, and the invitation of Sir Marmaduke, I came to Ashford Park; but I came not as a slave, who was forced to take what others had chosen, but as a free man, unbound in honour or inclination, and at liberty to make my own election. That liberty, that honour, are still my own; I have entered into no engagements; I am fettered by no promise: my visit has been merely one of friendship: and I take my leave, in the full persuasion that I have done nothing to forfeit my pretensions to a continuance of that honour.'

He then turned to Caroline, who stood pale and motionless. 'To you, loveliest of women,' said he, 'before I take leave of you, perhaps for ever, let me declare, that whatever may be my future disposal in life, you, and you only, can possess my heart; and that honour never obtained a harder victory than it now can boast, in tearing me from you!'—The last words were almost inarticulate: and he quitted the room, casting upon our heroine a look, at once expressive of love, pity, and regret.

The whole group stood, for a moment, lost in passion and amazement. Mrs. Ashford first recovered the use of that never-failing instrument of disturbance, her tongue. "Very well!" said she; "this is complete! this crowns all! I hope, sister, you will still defend your favourite; still keep her in your house, that your daughter may receive a few more insults! But mark this: Either she or I leave this house to-morrow morning; I will not sleep a second night under the same roof with such a dangerous incendiary."

"You are right sister," replied Sir Marmaduke: "I have been a fool too long, to harbour a serpent that has so often stung me!" Then turning to Caroline, "Young woman," said he, "I have done with you. I see you know how to make friends for yourself. You must choose another guardian. From this hour you are a stranger to me; nor after to-night do I ever permit you to sleep again under my roof." So saying, he walked out of the room, with a severe and stately air. Even Lady Ashford followed him out in silence, not having a single word to utter in defence of her poor *protegee*.

Only Mr. Ashford ventured to hazard his father's displeasure, by staying behind. Approaching our heroine with a look of pity and affection, "Do not think," said he, "that you are yet without one friend in this inhospitable house. Tell me, my dear cousin, where will you go? Oh, that these arms might afford you shelter! but be assured, wherever you

go, there is one man in the world, whose heart, hand, fortune, and life, are at your command.” ‘Generous Mr. Ashford,’ exclaimed Caroline, ‘how shall I thank you! how be ever able to return the obligations I owe you! but be not uneasy on my account; I am resolved to chuse my mother’s brother for my guardian, and in his house, which is a respectable one, I shall probably for some time remain.’

Having afforded Mr. Ashford this satisfaction, she hurried to her own apartment, where she directed Kitty immediately to put up her clothes for a journey; telling her she should make a long stay, and want every thing she had. She then ordered John to bespeak a post-chaise, to be at the door by five the next morning; hoping, by setting off at that early hour, to avoid the pain of again seeing Mr. Ashford. She next sent her maid to Lady Ashford’s dressing-room, to request that she would permit her to take leave of her before she quitted the house; but received for answer, that her Ladyship was extremely sorry she could not have the pleasure of seeing her, as she had been obliged to promise Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Ashford to the contrary; that she wished her a good journey, and should always be happy to hear of her prosperity.

All things being in readiness for the next morning, Caroline went to bed, where, as might be well expected, she passed a sleepless night. The day scarce began to dawn ere she was up, and had waited some time before the chaise drove to the door: she stepped in, and, without a sigh, took leave of a house, where she had experienced little but trouble and vexation.

END OF VOLUME SECOND.