

FULLERTON GEORGIANA

ELLEN
MIDDLETON—A
TALE

Georgiana Fullerton
Ellen Middleton—A Tale

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Ellen Middleton—A Tale:

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INTRODUCTION

"From each carved nook, and fretted bend,
Cornice and gallery, seem to send
Tones that with Seraph hymns might blend.

"Three solemn parts together twine,
In Harmony's mysterious line,
Three solemn aisles approach the shrine.

"Yet all are one, together all,
With thoughts that awe but not appal,
Teach the adoring heart to fall."

CHRISTIAN YEAR

"But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high-embowered roof,

With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light;
There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness through mine ear
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes."

MILTON

"What child of sorrow
Art thou, that com'st wrapt up in weeds of sadness,
And mov'st as if thy steps were towards a grave?"

OTWAY

It was on the 15th of October, 18 – , that one of the best and most respected clergymen in the town of – , and a canon of the cathedral, turned his steps towards the western door of that ancient pile. It was a little before the hour of evening service; the rays of the declining sun were shining brightly through the windows of painted glass, and producing that mellow and

chastened light that accords so well with the feeling of religious awe, which a gothic edifice, the noblest of the works of man, is calculated to inspire; a work where he has been enabled to stamp on what is material an indelible impress of that spirit of devotion, which unites the utmost simplicity of faith with the highest sublimity of creed.

Mr. Lacy's attachment to this particular cathedral had grown with his growth and strengthened with his years. In his youth he had learnt to love its long deep aisles, its solemn arches, its quaint carvings. During the pauses between the several parts of divine service, his childish imagination would dwell upon the topics of thought suggested by the histories of saints and martyrs depicted in the glowing colours of the stained glass windows, or in the intricate workmanship of the minster screen. The swelling peal of the organ, the chaunting of the choristers, awoke in his young mind strange and bright imaginings of those things "which the eye of man has not seen, nor his ear heard, and that it has not entered into his heart to conceive."

To wander in the cloisters, and gather the flowers growing there among the old tombstones, and to think the while of the lilies of the field, which Solomon in all his glory could not equal; or of the wilderness that blossomed like the rose, at the word of the Lord; to collect in his own hands at Christmas as much holly as his puny strength could carry, and add it to the shining heap already standing at the cathedral door; to follow it in, with timid steps, and watch with wondering eyes, the adorning of the

altar, the pulpit, the stalls, and the pews; to observe with childish glee two tall branches, all glowing with their coral berries, placed by the bench where he knelt in church with his mother; to sit at home by that mother of an evening, and with his Prayer Book on his knee, learn from her lips how that glorious hymn which he so loved to chaunt in church, and which spoke of angels and martyrs, of saints and apostles, of Heaven and earth, uniting in one concert of adoration, had been bequeathed to the holy church universal by a saint who had served his Creator from the days of his youth, and never wandered from the sacred shade of the sanctuary; for the baptism of another, who, after straying far and wide in the ways of sin and the maze of error, followed the while by a mother's prayers and tears, returned at last to the foot of the cross,* [* The Te Deum is supposed to have been composed by St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, for the baptism of St. Augustine.]

"With that free spirit blest,
Who to the contrite can dispense
The princely heart of innocence;"

to hear her tell how the three solemn parts of his beloved cathedral, all approaching the shrine in distinct majesty, and in mystical union, were a type and an emblem of the "Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity," so devoutly worshipped in the opening verses of the Litany; to be often reminded by her, when the deep melodious bells of the old tower spoke their loud summons to the

house of God on festival and holiday, of the time when the faith in Christ was a matter of danger and of death, and the sanctuaries were laid among the vaults and the tombs – when in darkness and in silence Christians knelt on the cold stones, and a short hurried bell from the altar alone warned them of the moment when the blessed pledges of salvation were consecrated there. These were the joys of his childhood. These were the thoughts and the feelings which entwined themselves with his very being, and wound themselves round his heart; blending the memory of the past with the hopes of futurity. And when Mrs. Lacy, whose health had been gradually declining, died soon after her son had received the sacred rite of confirmation, and for the first time knelt by her side at the altar; it was not before her trembling lips had pronounced a blessing on the child, who, with her hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on hers with the steady gaze of earnest, but, as far as this world was concerned, of hopeless affection, had given her the assurance that her people should be his people, and her God his God; that where she had lived there would he live, there would he die, and there also would he be buried.

As soon as his age warranted it he became a priest; and in the course of time, a canon of the cathedral of – . What had been the joys of his boyhood, became, afterwards, the safeguards of his manhood, and finally the support and comfort of his declining years. The business of his life was prayer, and the exercise of the most unwearied and ardent charity. Its ruling

principle, love to God, and to man. In the few hours of relaxation which he allowed himself, he found his pleasures in the study of ecclesiastical architecture, of the lives of saints and martyrs, above all, of everything that was in any way connected with the foundation, and the history of the several parts of that minster which he loved with all the holy love which men are wont to feel for the country of their birth and for the home of their youth, and, moreover, with a feeling akin to that which made Jacob exclaim, as he rose from his resting-place at Bethel, "This is the house of God, and the gate of Heaven!"

As I am not writing Mr. Lacy's history, it is unnecessary to enter into further details respecting the events of his life, if events they can be called, that chiefly consisted in the casual opportunities vouchsafed to him, of soothing some extraordinary sorrow; of recalling to the fold of Christ some wandering sinner, and of performing works of mercy and self-denial such as are seldom met with or even heard of in this luxurious and self-indulgent age. I will, therefore, revert to that hour of evening prayer which this chapter began by describing, as it will introduce us at once to the subject of this story.

Mr. Lacy had seated himself in his stall, and his eyes were glancing over the small congregation that had gathered together, on a week-day, for divine worship, when his attention was attracted by a woman who was sitting on one of the benches generally occupied by the poorest inhabitants of the town. She was very simply dressed, in deep mourning; but there was

something about her attitude and countenance which I plainly indicated that she belonged to the higher classes of society. It was impossible to guess at her age; for although the slightness of her figure and the delicate beauty of her features gave her the appearance of youth, her face bore a wild and haggard expression that we seldom see in those who have not far advanced on their pilgrimage through life. Her arm was thrown against one of the adjoining pillars, and just before the beginning of the service she laid her head upon it, and neither stirred nor looked up during the time the prayers lasted. She neither knelt when others knelt, nor stood when they stood. Once only, when the organ sounded the first notes of one of the most beautiful anthems of our church, she rose from her seat almost mechanically, and an instant after resumed her former attitude. At the conclusion of the service, when the worshippers had all left the cathedral, Mr. Lacy passed near the place where the stranger still remained in a state of apparent abstraction; the sound of his approaching footsteps startled her; she hastily withdrew, and walked rapidly out of the church, and down one of the small streets that faced the entrance door. Two or three times during the succeeding fortnight, Mr. Lacy noticed the same person occupying the same place, and conducting herself in the same manner. His interest was powerfully excited, but he neither ventured to address her, nor could he succeed in ascertaining from the vergers, or from one or two other persons whom he questioned on the subject, anything respecting her. Chance, however, as it often happens in

such cases, threw the information he sought in his way.

He was sitting one evening in his room, busily engaged in preparing his sermon for the Feast of All Saints, which occurred on the ensuing day, and on which it was his turn to preach, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door, and the subsequent entrance of an elderly woman, whom he had known for many years, and who had been in the habit of consulting him whenever any little scruple of conscience disturbed her in the exercise of her line of business, which was no other than that of lodging-letting. Mr. Lacy was so well acquainted with the character of his old friend, and with the nature of the difficulties usually submitted to him, that, after begging her to sit down, and draw her chair close to the fire, (for the last day of October was ushering in with suitable severity the first of November,) he immediately began —

"Well, my good Mrs. Denley, any more drunken lodgers, whom you keep on, for fear that no one but yourself would help them up to their rooms, and see that they did not spend the night in a less comfortable place than their beds? or are you still doubting as to the propriety of giving notice to quit to the gentleman who spoils your furniture, and never pays his rent, thereby keeping you from sending Johnny to school, as you had intended?"

"No, no, Sir; it has nothing to do with drunken lodgers, or with poor dear Johnny's going to school, or with not getting the rent paid, and all that, what's disturbing me now; but only just

the contrary."

As it was difficult to understand, without farther explanation, how the contrary of these three things could be disturbing Mrs. Denley's mind, Mr. Lacy looked at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"You see, Sir, it is not exactly, as one might say, any business of mine; and I mind well what is said in St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, that women should not be tattlers and busy-bodies; but for all that, I hope it is no sin to wish a young creature that's under one's roof, and that's dying by inches – of something – the Lord only knows what – for Dr. Reid doesn't. He saw her walking in, Sir, the other day, and I made so bold as to ask her if she wouldn't speak to him, but she wouldn't; and he says as how he can't guess what's the matter with her; and if he can't, why, who should? Well, as I was saying, Sir, I hope it isn't a sin to wish the poor young thing not to die, without medicine for her body, or means of grace for her soul."

"Assuredly, you are quite right in forming such a wish, and in endeavouring to prevent so terrible an occurrence. But who is the person you are alluding to?"

"She is my lodger, Sir, and has been for the last six weeks."

"What is her name?" inquired Mr. Lacy.

"Mrs. Rodney, Sir."

"Has she no friends that you know of? How came she to hear of your lodgings?"

"Why, she stopped (on a Monday, I think it was) at the 'Rose,'

and she asked Mr. Chapman if he could tell her of a quiet kind of respectable lodging in the town; now, Mr. Chapman is always willing to do one a good turn. It was him, Sir, that sent Johnny back to Ashby, on Tuesday last, in a return post-chaise, after he had sprained his ankle. A very good man, and a neighbourly, is Mr. Chapman; and, as I was saying, he likes to do one a good turn; so that when the lady asked for decent respectable lodgings, he said he knew of the very thing as would suit her; and sure enough, the next morning she came to see the rooms, and took them at once; and nothing would serve her but to pay down at once the rent for six months; and when I made so free as to say she had better not, for fear of changing her mind about them, she grew quite savage like; for all that she is a gentle-looking creature, and said as violent as could be, 'It must be so – take the money.' Well, thought I to myself, may be she fancies I don't like her for a lodger; so I just said, in an easy kind of manner, 'Well, Ma'am, and I hope, when the six months are past, that you may take them on for another half-year.' But 'No,' says she; 'six months will do,' which, to be sure, was a natural thing enough for her to say; but I take it, that if you had been there, Sir, and had heard her say it, you would not have thought it quite natural either."

"Is this lady whom you are speaking of in deep mourning? and does she occasionally attend the cathedral service?"

"She does. Sir; and is always dressed in black. She sits near the pillar where Mrs. Jones used to sit, poor soul, when she was alive."

"I have remarked her; she does indeed look both ill and unhappy. Do you know anything of her history?"

"Not a word, Sir; she wears a wedding-ring, but her clothes are marked with an E. and an M., for all that she calls herself Mrs. Rodney."

"Does she ever enter into conversation with you?"

"Sometimes, a little. Last week, Joe Irving, the undergardener at Clomley lodge, brought me, as a present, a large nosegay of dahlias and china-asters. I carried them upstairs, and while Mrs. Rodney was in church, I put them into jars, on the table, and on the chimney-piece, and very bright and pretty they looked. So when she came in, she noticed them and thanked me, and spoke quite cheerful. As she was standing a-talking to me about them, an insect ran out from between the leaves, and I tried to kill it, but she caught my hand and stopped me; and *her* hand, Sir! – why it was more like one of those bits of hot coal there, than the little white soil thing it looked like, and when I looked at her face, there was a bright fever spot on each cheek, and her lips were as white as could be.

"'You are very ill. Ma'am,' says I to her; 'your hand is burning-hot.' She put it to her forehead and 'it does not feel hot to me,' says she, and walks away to the window and opens it, for all that it was almost as cold and raw as to-night. But, now, and that's what I'm come about. Sir, she has taken to her bed, and is in a very bad way indeed, I take it."

"What! and has not she seen the doctor?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Lacy; she won't as much as let him come into the house. When she found herself so ill, that she could not do for herself, she sent me to get one of the hospital nurses; and as Mary Evans was to be had, the girl that you was so good to last year when she broke her arm, I got her to come, and she has been with her these two days."

"Has she never spoken of seeing a clergyman?"

"Why, to say the truth, Sir, I made so bold as to ask her on it; it was yesterday when Mary Evans and I had been a-begging of her to let us fetch the doctor. 'No, no,' says she, 'he can do me no good;' and she fell to crying, which I had not seen her do before. 'Well, Ma'am,' says I, 'if he can do you no good, I know some one that would.' 'And who is that?' says she, sitting up in her bed, and looking hard at me. 'Mr. Lacy, Ma'am,' I said, 'the clergyman that read prayers last Sunday afternoon.' She laid down again, disappointed like, and I went on to say how you was quite a saint and a martyr, and a luminary of the church, as Johnny's schoolmaster says..."

"Hush, hush, my good Mrs. Denley; take care how you apply, or rather misapply, such names as those. But did Mrs. Rodney decline seeing me, or any other clergyman?"

"She did, Sir, and begged me not to mention it again."

"This is, indeed, a sad case: a woman young, friendless – dying, perhaps, and probably labouring under some mental affliction, and yet refusing to have recourse to the consolations of religion, and the ministry of the church," said Mr. Lacy,

speaking rather to himself than to Mrs. Denley. "Have you," added he, turning to her, "any reason to suppose that this poor woman, notwithstanding her occasional attendance on the cathedral service, is a dissenter?"

"No, Sir, I think not; she has a small prayer-book, which I sometimes see lying on her table."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Denley," said Mr. Lacy, after a few moments' reflection; "we must both pray that God, of his infinite mercy, may dispose the heart of this young creature to turn to Him, and to the means of grace, which He has Himself appointed. To-morrow, when we kneel in the house of God, rejoicing with joy unspeakable over the glory of the church triumphant, and meditating on the blessedness of that holy multitude

'Who climbed the steep ascent to Heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain,'

each in our place, we will bear in mind this suffering lamb of the fold, and pray earnestly that to her, as well as to us,

"Grace may be given, to follow in their train."

"I will, Sir: I will," replied the good old woman, with tears in her eyes. "But won't you try and see her?"

"I cannot force myself into her presence," answered Mr. Lacy; "but every day I will call at your house to inquire after her health, hoping and trusting that the hour will come when she will cease

to shut her doors against one commissioned by our Lord, to bear words of peace to the wretched, and of pardon to the guilty. Whatever you can do to hasten that moment, I know you will do, my good friend, and so farewell to you."

"Good-night to you, and thank you kindly, Mr. Lacy; it must be a heavy heart indeed, that goes away from you no lighter than when it came to you;" and so saying, Mrs. Denley put on her cloak, took up her lanthorn, and trudged home, through the dark streets of the old town.

The next morning Mr. Lacy's thoughts were divided between the joyful contemplations which the holy festival it was ushering in was calculated to inspire, and the painful solicitude which the conversation of the preceding evening had left on his mind. In church, however, the latter feeling subsided, and gave way to that earnest calmness, and that intense devotion, which absorb for the time the cares and troubles of the soul, "like motes in light divine." When from the pulpit this aged minister dwelt in glowing words on the communion between the saints above and the saints below; on the link that unites the church militant here on earth with the church triumphant in Heaven; above all, when in terms of the deepest reverence and of the intensest love, he spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prayed that he himself, and all those who joined with him in prayer that day, might each, in God's own time, enter into the fulness of his presence, and worship in his courts evermore, yea in time and in eternity, there was something so ardent in his aspirations, and yet so chastened

in his devotion, that the assembled multitude heard him with a reverence, mingled with awe; they felt as if Elijah's car of fire might bear him away from their sight; from the shelter of the sanctuary on earth to the glories of the new Jerusalem on high.

After the conclusion of the sermon, Mr. Lacy remained absorbed in earnest prayer, till the last of the worshippers had withdrawn, and the parting strain from the organ had died away on the walls of the cathedral. As he was slowly descending the aisle, he paused before the place where Mrs. Rodney had been seated some days before; as he stood musing on the account which he had heard of her from Mrs. Denley, he observed a few lines written in pencil on the column against which she had been in the habit of leaning. They were so faintly marked, and had probably been so much effaced since, that he found great difficulty in making them out. At last he succeeded in doing so, and they were as follows: —

"My aching heart is breaking,
My burning brain is reeling,
My very soul is riven,
I feel myself forsaken.
And phantom forms of horror,
And shapeless dreams of terror.
And mocking tones of laughter,
About me seem to gather;
And death, and hell, and darkness
Are driving me to madness."

It would be difficult to describe the revulsion of feeling which Mr. Lacy experienced on reading the expression of a despair that contrasted so strikingly with the joy and the peace which had been filling his own heart. There was also something which indicated a kind of reckless helplessness in the fact of leaving that confession of mental agony to be scanned, perhaps, by indifferent eyes. It must have been done in one of those moments when the tortured heart would break if it did not in some mode or other give vent to its anguish. Mr. Lacy, after some minutes' consideration, took out of his pocket a pencil and a bit of paper, and transcribed upon it the lines he had found, and then carefully effaced them from the pillar on which they had been written. As he slowly walked out of the cathedral, and towards Mrs. Denley's house, he revolved in his mind the means by which he would be most likely to gain admission to Mrs. Rodney's presence. It struck him that if she could be made aware that he had read the words that were now in his possession, she would feel less reluctance to enter into communication with him: but it was difficult to convey this fact to her without wounding her feelings. When he reached the house and knocked, he was still undecided as to the course he should pursue. Mary Evans, the girl who was in attendance upon Mrs. Rodney, came to the door; and when Mr. Lacy inquired after Mrs. Rodney's health, answered: "Why, Sir, she says as how she is wonderful better to-day, and so strong that she's been a getting up and walking about her room; but, I

take it, her strength is fever strength, for her cheeks are red as crimson, and she seems as if she could not sit still."

"She should not be allowed to exert herself in that way," observed Mr. Lacy; – "she may do herself much harm."

"Indeed, and that's quite true, Sir; but there's no persuading her when she's in one of her ways. She speaks as gentle as a lamb in common, and never scolds or complains; but when she gets into a tantrum about something as one wants her to do or not to do, she grows to look quite wild like. It's just now that Mrs. Denley saw you a-coming down the street; and says she to Mrs. Rodney (Mrs. Denley had stepped up to see how the fire was burning. Sir,) – well, says she to Mrs. Rodney, 'There's Mr. Lacy a-coming down this way Ma'am; I think he'll be after asking to see you:' and Mrs. Rodney on that turns round and says so sudden, 'If I am to be persecuted in this manner, I shall leave the house at once,' that Mrs. Denley let fall the coal-scuttle, and she says as how it gave her quite a revulsion. But won't you walk in, Sir?"

"No; I came only to inquire after Mrs. Rodney's health; and as, from what you have just told me, she certainly would not be inclined to see me, I shall send up no message on the subject." And so saying, Mr. Lacy took his departure.

On the Sunday following, a few minutes after the beginning of evening service, he saw, gliding to her usual place, with a noiseless step, the poor woman who during the past week had so much occupied his thoughts. Her shrunken form and flushed

cheeks revealed the fatal progress of a disease which betrays its victims all the more surely, by imparting to them, at certain stages of its course, a false strength, that lures them to exertions only serving to accelerate its fearful termination. As Mr. Lacy mounted the pulpit, he breathed an ardent prayer that something in the words he was going to utter might carry a token of peace to this poor creature's breast, a ray of light to her mind. In the course of his sermon he introduced the following sentences: —

"When the heart of man is breaking, and his brain is reeling, to whom should he turn, but to Him who said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?' When the soul of man is shaken, and he feels himself forsaken, to whom should he turn, but to Him who once cried out upon the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' When phantom forms of horror, and shapeless dreams of terror, assail the soul of man, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was once in such great agony, that his sweat fell like drops of blood upon the earth? When mocking tones of laughter are wildly ringing round him, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was jeered at, and reviled on the cross, because others he saved, but himself he could not save. When death, and hell, and darkness, are driving man to madness, to whom should he turn, but to him who took from the grave its victory, from death its sting, and from hell its prey? — to Him who died and rose again the third day, in order that death, and hell, and darkness, should never more drive men to madness."

On the evening of this day, Mr. Lacy received the following note. It seemed written at once with difficulty and with rapidity, and in parts was somewhat illegible.

"If you still wish to see me, Mr. Lacy, – if you are not wearied with vainly seeking admittance to one who is not worthy to wipe the dust from your feet, come to me now. You spoke to me to-day, though you never turned your eyes towards me. I looked into your face, and it seemed to me as if it had been the face of an angel and when your lips uttered the words that my hand had written, I hung upon your lips. It was as a voice from Heaven; my heart melted within me, and I wept; not as I have often wept, for my eyes are worn out with crying; not tears that scorch the eyelids as they flow, but tears that seem to loosen the iron band that binds my temples, and to melt the dull hard stone in my breast. I came home, and knelt by my bedside – my Prayer-book was in my hand: I opened it, and these words met my eyes, 'The order for the Visitation of the Sick.' I closed the book, and read no more. Mr. Lacy, I am sick in body, and sick at heart. Will you come and visit me? You will not question me; you will not ask me why my sorrow is like no other sorrow; but you will pray for me, and by me. Perhaps you may say some words like this morning's – not words of comfort, words of hope, but words that will make me weep, as I wept then.

Ellen."

The next morning at twelve o'clock, Mr. Lacy was at the door of Mrs. Denley's house. His Prayer-book was in his hand, and as

he entered, he slowly pronounced the appointed blessing, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." Mrs. Denley led the way up stairs, and opened the door of the room, where Ellen was lying on a sofa, supported by cushions. Her face was paler than the day before, but a sudden flush overspread it as Mr. Lacy entered.

"You are welcome," she said, extending to him at the same time her thin transparent hand. "It is kind of you to come, and kind of you (she added, tuning to Mrs. Denley, and to Mary Evans, who were standings by,) to join in these prayers. There are responses to be made, I believe."

Mr. Lacy perceived that she was anxious that he should begin the service at once, without previously entering into conversation with her; and feeling deeply himself that no words of his could bring such powerful consolation to the soul, if burthened with sorrow, or so forcibly awaken the sense of sin, if guilt and remorse were troubling it, as those which the Church supplied him with, he knelt at once by Ellen's couch, and with more emotion than he had perhaps ever felt before in the exercise of this portion of his sacred ministry, he read the solemn prayer for mercy, with which this service opens.

After the Lord's Prayer, in which Ellen had feebly joined, Mr. Lacy and the two women, who knelt opposite to him, repeated alternately the impressive sentences of the Litany, which immediately follows it.

There was something in these supplications that seemed to

accord, in some extraordinary manner, with the state of Ellen's mind. When the minister prayed "that her enemy should have no advantage of her," she started convulsively, and gazed wildly about her, as the women responded, "Nor the wicked approach to hurt her." When the words "From the face of her enemy," were uttered, she hid her face in her hands, and a slight shudder shook her frame. After a pause, Mr. Lacy read the prayers that follow, and then rising from his knees, turned towards Ellen, and addressed to her the beautiful and touching exhortation, that forms part of the service; but when towards the end of it – "Forasmuch as after this life there is an account to be given unto the Righteous Judge, by whom all must be judged, without respect of persons" – he required her to examine herself and her estate, both towards God and towards man, so that accusing and condemning herself for her own faults, she might find mercy at our Heavenly Father's hand for Christ's sake, then Ellen trembled. When he rehearsed to her the Apostles' Creed, and asked her if all these articles of the Christian faith she stedfastly believed, she bowed her assent. And now they had arrived at that solemn period in the service when the minister was bound by his sacred office to examine whether she truly repented her of her sins, and was in charity with all the world; – when he was to exhort her to forgive from the bottom of her heart the persons that had offended her; and if she had offended any other, to ask of them forgiveness; and where she had done injury or wrong to any man, to make amends to the uttermost of her power. He did

so in words of awful warning, and at the same time of soothing tenderness; but no answer came from her lips – she turned her face towards the wall; and, to use the expressive words of Holy Scripture, she lifted up her voice and wept.

Mr. Lacy directed Mrs. Denley and Mary Evans to leave him alone with Ellen, but to remain within call in case their presence was required.

When the door was closed he addressed her in the following words: – "Your conscience is troubled with some weighty matter – the heaviness of guilt is on your soul, ay, and that of deep anguish too," he added, as the heart-rending expression of her countenance, which she suddenly turned towards him, revealed the acuteness of her sufferings. "Perhaps, too, you may have been more sinned against than sinning. Perhaps the hand of man has been against you, and you have wandered, young as you are, through the wilderness of the world, and found no rest for the sole of your foot. You have longed, perhaps, like the dove, to flee away and be at rest."

In a hoarse voice Ellen murmured, "There is no peace for the wicked!"

"But there is pardon for the penitent, and peace for the pardoned," rejoined Mr. Lacy.

"Pardoned! pardoned!" exclaimed Ellen, pressing her hand to her forehead, "I shall never feel myself pardoned! Mr. Lacy, I have sometimes opened the Bible, and I have read in it words of pity, words of mercy, words of promise, and for a moment they

seemed to bring comfort to my soul; but the dark spirit within me would still whisper, They are not written for thee, – not for thee. O God! O God! when shall I ever feel forgiven?"

"When, laying aside all human pride, all human fears," solemnly replied Mr. Lacy, "in meek distrust of your own judgment, in deep humility of spirit, you make, as the Church requires, a special confession of your sins to one, who, if you truly repent and believe, can absolve you from them, by the authority committed to him by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ellen listened to these words in deep silence, and Mr. Lacy did not interrupt her meditation. After a long pause daring which she seemed absorbed in the most intense thought, she once more extended her hand to him, and said, "I think, I hope, that a change has come over me. Thoughts are crowding upon my mind, that never came there before, and things begin to appear to me in a new light. Perhaps it is from the approach of death, which since yesterday has seemed to draw very near to me; and to one who has suffered as I have suffered, death, if it could be robbed of its terror, ought not to be very dreadful. I have often said, 'Would that I could lay myself down and die;' but now, now that I see death coming in its stern reality, I would fain shrink from it; and yet nothing but the cold hand of death will ever still the passionate throbbings of my heart, and teach it to love less wildly, or to hate less fiercely. Forgive me, forgive me, Mr. Lacy! Oh, do not turn away from me! God has sent you to me as an angel of mercy, not as the minister of his wrath. You bade me confess

my sins. See, I confess them! I will kneel to you!" and Ellen, in spite of Mr. Lacy's efforts to prevent her, flung herself on the ground at his feet, and clung to them in an agony of tears. He instantly raised her, and, replacing her on the sofa, with a voice of authority desired her to be calm, and to compose herself. She obeyed, and in a few minutes, and with an altered manner, she again addressed him. "I cannot confess my sins without revealing the history of my life; my guilt and my sorrows are so closely linked together, that they cannot be separated: but I wish to keep no secret from you – you have brought a vision of peace and of hope before me; and perhaps, when you know how miserable I have been, though how guilty, you may not think me utterly unworthy of it."

"None are unworthy of pardon in the eyes of our adorable Saviour," said Mr. Lacy, "who heartily repent and sue for it; but remember that we must forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

"Since I have seen you and heard you," said Ellen, "I can pray, I dare pray, and I will pray that God may change my heart, and teach me to forgive as I hope to be forgiven: and now as I am not strong enough to speak much at a time, and that I wish to open my heart to you without reserve, I will put into your hands a history of my life, which, during days of solitude and nights of weary watchings, I have written – and which will disclose to you all the secrets of my soul; it is the most complete confession I can make. When you have read it, Mr. Lacy, you will return to me. By that time, perhaps, the grace of God will have quelled the

storms within me, and I may then hear from your lips the blessed words of absolution."

The following history was contained in the manuscript which Mr. Lacy carried home with him.

CHAPTER I

"What thousand voices pass through all the rooms, What cries and hurries! My cousin's death sits heavy on my conscience; hark! In every room confusion, they're all mad. Most certain all stark mad within the house."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

I was born and educated in the house of my uncle, Mr. Middleton, one of the wealthiest squires in D – shire. He had received my mother with kindness and affection, on her return from India, where she had lost her husband and her eldest child. She was his youngest and favourite sister, and when after having given birth to a daughter she rapidly declined in health, and soon after expired, bequeathing that helpless infant to his protection, he silently resolved to treat it as his own, and, like most resolutions formed in silence, it was religiously adhered to. At the time of my birth, my uncle was about forty years old; a country gentleman in the most respectable sense of the word.

Devoted to the improvement of his tenants on the one hand, and to that of his estate on the other; zealous as a magistrate, active as a farmer, charitable towards the poor, and hospitable

towards the rich, he was deservedly popular with his neighbours, and much looked up to in his county. He had been attached in his youth to the daughter of a clergyman of eminent abilities and high character, who resided in the neighbourhood of Elmsley. For six years his father had opposed his intended marriage with Miss Selby, and when at the end of that time he extorted from him a reluctant consent, it was too late to press his suit; she was dying of a hopeless decline, and to cheer her few remaining days of life by every token of the most devoted affection, and after her death to mourn deeply and silently over the wreck of his early hopes, was the conclusion of an attachment to which Mr. Middleton had looked, as to the source and means of all his future happiness. At the age of thirty-five he became possessed, by his father's death, of the manor-house of Elmsley, and of the large property adjoining to it. In the happiness which his wealth gave him the means of diffusing around him, in the friendly attachment with which he was regarded by those among whom he now fixed his residence, he found subjects of interest, and sources of gratification, which gradually obliterated the traces of his early affliction.

From what I have already said, it will be plainly perceived that my uncle was a man that one could not fail to esteem; though whether or not it was as easy to love him, may be questioned. To the strictest principles of religious morality, he added a heart full of kind feeling for others, and an invariable serenity of temper, but an unconquerable reserve, a want of confidence in

others, and an absence of sympathy in their tastes and pursuits, interfered with the expression, if not with the existence, of those affections, which his merits and his kindness would otherwise have been so well calculated to inspire. I never remember his taking the slightest interest in any of my childish pleasures, or his uttering any but the most formal phrase of commendation when my performances were submitted to his inspection. Young as I was, I felt this want of sympathy, in the only person who was really interested in my welfare, and would have gladly agreed to be less calmly reprov'd when I was wrong, and more warmly praised when I was right.

Till the age of six years old, I am not conscious of having loved any human being. From accidental circumstances my nurses had been so often changed, that I had not had the opportunity of attaching myself to any of them; and as to my uncle, I believe he might have left Elmsley for days, weeks or months, without causing me the slightest sensation of regret or solitude. He did not often absent himself from home, but on one occasion he did so for three months, and a few days before his return, my nurse informed me that he was married, and that I should soon see my new aunt. The announcement caused me neither pleasure nor pain; and curiosity was the only feeling with which I anticipated the arrival so eagerly looked forward to by the whole of my uncle's establishment. When Mrs. Middleton arrived I was immediately summoned into the drawing-room. The tenderness of her manner, the expressions of fondness with which she

greeted me; the emotion which her countenance betrayed, were all so totally different from anything that I had ever witnessed, that I felt as if a being from another world had come among us. There was something heavenly in the expression of her countenance, there was something original in every word she uttered; in her gaiety there was a bubbling joyousness, an intense enjoyment in enjoyment, that was irresistibly attractive, and in sorrow or in emotion, her tears fell unconsciously from her eyes, and would trickle down her cheeks without any of the disfiguring grimaces which usually attend the act of weeping. I loved her from the first instant I saw her, and my childish heart clung to her with all the strength of feeling that had lain dormant in it during the first years of my existence. To use a familiar expression, we took to each other instantaneously; I do not know that she was fond of children, as it is called; she did not stop to caress those we met in our walks, and of romping and noise she grew very soon weary; but there was so much originality in her understanding, and so much simplicity in her character; she was so in earnest about every employment and amusement which she admitted me to share, that, superior as she was, I never felt that she was making an effort to bring herself down to my level, and consequently in her society never experienced the weariness which children are apt to feel, from those flat and unprofitable attempts to amuse them, which are so often made and so often fail. She required sympathy; it was as necessary to her as the air of heaven, and what she so much needed herself, she amply yielded to others, I

never met in my life with any one who entered into the feelings of those about her as she did.

Altogether, she was a person more calculated to diffuse happiness than to enjoy it; perhaps to inspire more enthusiastic feelings of affection, than she herself often experienced. Be that as it may, she opened a new era in the history of my childhood; and, during the six or seven years that followed the epoch of my uncle's marriage, my life was as happy as that of a human creature can be. About a year after that event, Mrs. Middleton was confined of a girl, and this circumstance, far from diminishing my happiness, served but to increase it. My aunt was not a person capable of being engrossed by an infant, and though greatly pleased at the birth of her little girl, her affection for me suffered no diminution. The cares which little Julia required – the task of entertaining her, which often fell to my share – formed a delightful amusement; and I do not remember, till the time when she was eight and I fifteen, having ever felt, or, indeed, having had cause to feel, one jealous pang on her account.

Mrs. Middleton took great pains with my education, – at least with those parts of it which were congenial to her taste and mine; for, to follow with ardour whatever was the impulse and fancy of the moment, was at once the charm and the danger of my aunt's character. She could not resist the temptation of initiating me, perhaps too early, into those studies which captivate the imagination and excite the feelings. German and Italian we studied together. The most romantic parts of history –

all that was most interesting and bewitching in poetry, furnished materials for those hours which we devoted to reading. Reading! that most powerful instrument in the education of the heart! – silently searching into its secrets, rousing its dormant passions, and growing sometimes itself into a passion! But there was scarcely less excitement in conversing with my aunt, than in reading with her. She never took a common-place view of any subject, or shrunk from expressing her real opinion upon it, whatever it might be. With regard to her own feelings, she took nothing for granted; she never persuaded herself (as so many people do) that, because it would be right or desirable to feel and to act in a particular manner, she did so feel and act, while her conscience bore witness to the contrary. She was a great searcher into motives, and fearfully true in her judgment of people and of things: had not her character been one of the noblest, and her mind one of the purest that ever woman was gifted with, there would have been something startling in the boldness of her opinions, and in the candour of her admissions. Had she been within reach of any associates whose feelings and understandings were in any way congenial to her own, she would not, in all probability, have treated me, rather as a pupil and companion, than as an intimate friend. She would not have poured out her thoughts, to me with the most unbounded confidence, or taught me to feel that I was essential to her happiness; but, as it was, (for at Elmsley she had neighbours and acquaintances, but no friends,) she did all this, and the intense gratification which I

derived from my constant intercourse with one whom I loved with the tenderest affection, kept me in a state of highly wrought excitement, which, while it subdued, and even effaced, the trivial faults of that early age, exercised on my character an influence far from beneficial to my future happiness. One of the subjects on which Mrs. Middleton would often speak to me with eagerness and eloquence, was the self-deception with which most people persuade themselves that their affections flow in their most natural channels, without proving their own feelings by the stern test of *reality*. Fully aware of her partiality to me; aware, too, how unattractive a child my cousin Julia was, and how unsuited to my aunt's nature and taste must be the cold, sluggish, selfish disposition which her daughter evinced, and which she seemed painfully alive to, I never for an instant doubted that her affection for me exceeded in kind, as well as in degree, that which she felt for her own child. Often would she lament to me that Julia gave no promise of future excellence of mind or character; that in her she never expected to find the sympathy, the responsive tenderness, that characterised our intimacy, and which shed such a charm over every detail of life. The selfishness inherent in the human heart, superadded to the exclusive nature of a passionate attachment, made me listen to these forebodings with a secret satisfaction, laying, meanwhile, the flattering unction to my soul, that nothing but the purest spirit of devoted tenderness led me to rejoice that I could fill a place in my aunt's affections, which would prevent her suffering from the disappointment which my

cousin's repulsive and apathetic disposition would otherwise have caused to a heart as warm, and a spirit as ardent, as hers.

A few years (the happiest of my life) carried me rapidly to the verge of womanhood. I attained my fifteenth year, and began to form acquaintances, and to mix in the society which occasionally met at Elmsley. It chiefly consisted of relations of my uncle and of Mrs. Middleton, who came at certain intervals, and spent a few weeks at the old Priory, which then became the scene of more active amusements than were customary in our usually retired mode of life. Edward Middleton, a nephew of my uncle, and Henry Lovell, a younger brother of my aunt, who were college friends and constant associates, were among our most frequent visitors. The latter, who had lost his mother several years before the time I am speaking of, and whose father held a situation in one of the government offices, which obliged him to remain in London almost all the year round, had been in the habit of spending first his holidays from Eton, and subsequently the Oxford vacations, with his sister at Elmsley. There he formed an acquaintance with Edward Middleton, which soon grew into a close intimacy; and both at college and at Elmsley they were inseparable. As it so often happens in such cases, there was hardly any perceptible bond of sympathy between them; they were so strikingly dissimilar in character and in tastes, that one could scarcely understand the pleasure they took in each other's society. It is necessary to the subsequent unfolding of my story that I should give some account of them, and of the feelings with

which I regarded, at that time, these two men. They were both several years older than myself, but the disparity was not enough to prevent my considering them as friends and companions. They had both left Oxford some two or three years before the time I am speaking of. Henry Lovell was at once like and unlike his sister, Mrs. Middleton; he was exceedingly attractive; there was no denying the charm that existed in the rapid intelligence, the quick conception, and the ready humour that lit up his eyes and countenance, and sparkled in his repartee. His powers of captivation were as great as hers, but he knew that power, and even used it for an end; while in her it was spontaneous as the bubbling of a stream, as the song of the birds, or as the joy of childhood. Both had a keen perception of the ludicrous, but in her it never amounted to ill-nature: she was as severe upon herself as he was upon others; while she penetrated into their motives she judged them kindly, and was at ready to detect evil in her own heart as he was to suspect it in theirs. His smile was sarcastic, and his remarks were often bitter. If he had not been charming, he would have been odious; and to have been loved at all, he must have been passionately loved, for no feeling short of passion could have withstood the withering influence of his profound selfishness. He was well versed in the language of feeling, in the theory of enthusiasm; he could speak of "whatsoever things are pure, of whatsoever things are lovely, of whatsoever things are honest, of whatsoever things are of good report." Where there was virtue, and where there was praise, there was he ready to

descant with eloquence, to discuss with ability; there he was at home, at least in conversation, for, in the varied range of human affections, his intellect conceived what his heart did not feel.

At the time that I am writing of, when he and Edward Middleton were the two persons who most occupied my thoughts, and interested my girlish imagination, it would have been difficult for me to describe what I thought of each. For Edward I felt an involuntary respect, which made me shrink from expressing, before him, any opinion, or any sentiment which he was likely to condemn; he seemed inclined to judge me with peculiar severity, and I sometimes felt provoked at the calm sternness of his manner on these occasions, especially on comparing it with the smiling indifference with which he would listen to Henry Lovell's satirical remarks, which I secretly felt to be more deserving of blame than my own thoughtless observations, little as I could withstand myself the extraordinary fascination which his peculiar tone of mind and conversation exercised on those about him.

In the summer of the year 18 – , my cousin Julia had a long and severe illness. For some days she lay at the point of death; and, for the first time in my life, I saw the expression of anguish in the face I loved best in the world. Mrs. Middleton's grief seemed out of proportion with the degree of affection she had hitherto apparently felt for her child; and there was a wildness in her sorrow which surprised as much as it affected me. Long afterwards, it struck me that something of remorse, at the

preference she had so openly shown for me, and at the coldness with which she had regarded her daughter, might have added to the misery she then experienced. But, at the time, this idea never occurred to me; I thought I had underrated the strength of my aunt's feelings, and only wondered at the intensity of an affection which had never betrayed itself to that extent before.

After a few anxious days and nights, my cousin rallied, and by degrees recovered; but did not regain the state of robust health which she had previously enjoyed. My aunt's devotion to her was unceasing: she patiently watched over her, and attended to every wish and fancy that she expressed. Julia's temper, which had never been good, grew gradually worse; and it required all a mother's forbearance to endure her continual waywardness and caprice. She had never seemed to feel much affection for me, but now her indifference grew into positive dislike, and nothing I could say or do ever succeeded in pleasing her. When left in my charge, she would invariably insist upon doing something or other which I was obliged to prohibit or prevent; and the slightest opposition to her will would instantly produce such fits of passion, and of crying, that my aunt at her return found her frequently in such a state of hysterical nervousness, or else so pale and exhausted by her own violence, that it was some time before she could be restored to anything like calmness or good-humour. I can truly say that I made every possible effort to gain the affection of my little cousin, and I was seldom betrayed into any irritable expression, or sign of impatience, much as I was

daily and hourly tried.

Once or twice I had observed an expression of displeasure in Mrs. Middleton's countenance, on overhearing Julia's screams, on some of the occasions alluded to; and I had sometimes noticed a sudden cloud pass over her brow, and an abrupt change in her manner, at the moments when she was on the point of giving utterance to those expressions of tenderness which she was wont to bestow upon me: but that tenderness was so evident; it had been spoken in words; it had been proved by deeds; I had read it in every look of her eyes; I had traced it in every tone of her voice, during so many years, that I should as soon have doubted that the rays of the sun cheered and warmed me, as that my aunt loved me.

I am now come to an epoch of my life, the events of which, in their minutest details, are engraved on my memory as if a burning iron had stamped them on my brain. I will not anticipate, but, with unflinching resolution, record every particular of the day which changed me from a happy child into a miserable woman.

Some description of Elmsley Priory is requisite to the understanding of my story, and I will endeavour to make it short and clear.

The house itself, formerly a monastery, was built on the brow of a steep hill; irregular in shape, it seemed to have been added to, bit by bit, according to the increasing size of the convent. A verandah or balcony of modern date, followed the sinuosities of the old pile, and, from its peculiar position, while at one

extremity it was on a level with the grounds, at the other it overhung a precipitous declivity. This bank shelved down to the edge of a rapid stream, which chafed and foamed along the base of the hill against which the house stood.

At one of the ends of the verandah was a rough flight of stone steps, much overgrown with moss, at all times difficult to descend, and, after rain, positively dangerous, from the slippery nature of the footing it afforded. It led to the edge of the river down the bank already described. A longer and more circuitous path began at the opposite extremity of the verandah, and ended at the same point.

The view which this balcony commanded was one of the most beautiful that can be conceived; and in the first freshness of a spring morning, in the intense heat and repose of a summer noon, in the glorious beauty of an autumnal sunset, or in the grandeur of a wintry storm, we were wont to stand and revel in the varying aspects which this lovely landscape presented to our eyes. It was a combination of wood, stream, and mountain, with a few cottages scattered here and there, as if a painter's hand had placed them where they stood. Altogether, they formed a picture which the eye loved to dwell upon, and which memory strives to recall.

It was on one of those glorious days, when existence in itself, and apart from all other circumstances, is felt to be a blessing, that I stood leaning against one of the pillars of the gallery I have described.

There had been a thunder-storm, and torrents of rain, in

the night, but then the sky was perfectly cloudless; that thin transparent haze, which in England sobers without obscuring the brightness of a hot sunny day, hung lightly on the horizon; the lights and shades played in the stream below, and the busy hum of insects was the only sound that reached my ears. The rose of May, and the slender jessamine, twined round the pilasters, near which I stood. They were giving out all their sweetness, and seemed to be rearing their graceful heads again, after the storm that had so rudely shaken them.

I had thrown back my bonnet, to enjoy more completely the warm perfumed breeze; and was so absorbed by the beauty of the scene, that it was only on being called to for the second time, that I turned round, and saw Julia, standing on the edge of the stone parapet, with her arm round one of the columns. The dangerous nature of her position immediately struck me; I told her to come down, and, on her refusing to do so, took hold of her, and placed her on the ground. She instantly set up one of her loudest screams, and, exclaiming that I had hurt her, she rushed past me, and ran into the drawing-room, one of the recesses of which formed an angle in the building. A small paned latticed window, which opened on the verandah, was at this moment imperfectly closed, and from the spot where I stood, I could hear every word that was spoken in that recess. I heard Julia complaining to her mother of my unkindness, in a voice broken by sobs, and tremulous with passion. The child's statement of the facts that had led to my interference, was totally false; for

an instant I felt inclined to follow her, in order to contradict it, but the bane of my nature, *pride*, which always made me hate an explanation or a justification, restrained the impulse, and I then caught the sound of Mrs. Middleton's voice; she was speaking in a low earnest manner to her husband.

"This cannot last," she was saying; "it cannot be suffered to last; these children must be separated, and the sooner the better."

"But what can be done?" was the reply; "Ellen has no home but this."

I listened breathlessly for the answer. It seemed to me, at that moment, as if my life depended upon it; my breath seemed to stop, and my whole frame to quiver.

"She might go to some good school for a year or two," was the answer: "it would be painful to decide on such a step; but nothing can signify to us in comparison with Julia's health." I did not hear any more, but, snatching up my bonnet, I rushed along the verandah till I came to its farthest extremity. I knelt, and leant my head against the stones of the parapet. Every vein in my brow seemed swelled to bursting, and I felt as if I had waked from a happy dream to a state of things which my understanding could scarcely master.

Was it indeed my aunt? was it Mrs. Middleton? who had spoken of sending me away from her – away from Elmsley? Was it she that had said I was *nothing* to her in comparison with the selfish child whom, for her sake alone, I had endured? It was even so – I was *nothing* to her; I felt convinced of it at once; and

it seemed to me in that moment as if a sudden chill struck to my heart, and crept through my whole frame. I have often wondered whether the sensation of moral suffering is as nearly allied to physical pain in every one else as in myself. The expression of an *aching* heart has always appeared to me to have a literal as well as a figurative sense; there is a sort of positive pain that accompanies certain kinds of mental sufferings, different in its nature from the feeling of grief, even in its highest degree; and disappointment in its various forms is perhaps the species of suffering which generally produces it.

I was, at the moment I have described, experiencing this kind of pain in its acutest shape. I felt reluctant to move from where I stood; the sound of my own quick breathing was oppressive to me. My eyes were closed, that the light of the sun, in all its glorious brightness, should not reach me. The sounds, the smells, that I was enjoying a few minutes before, were growing intolerable to me. No voice could then have been welcome to me (for the voice I loved best, the voice that had ever spoken peace and joy to my heart, I had just heard utter words that had destroyed at one blow the fabric of bliss which my heart had so long reared for itself); no voice, I say, could have been welcome to me; but when I heard the sharp and querulous tones of Julia, God in mercy forgive me for what I felt. She was again standing at the head of the stone steps, that I have described as forming one of the extremities of the verandah; and as she placed her foot on one of the moss-covered slippery steps, she called out,

"I'm going down – I'll have my own way now." I seized her hand, and drawing her back, exclaimed, "Don't, Julia!" on which she said, "You had better not tease me; you are to be sent away if you tease me." I felt as if a viper had stung me; the blood rushed to my head, and I struck her; – she reeled under the blow, her foot slipped, and she fell headlong down the stone steps. A voice near me said, "She has killed her!" There was a plunge in the water below; her white frock rose to the surface – sunk – rose again – and sunk to rise no more. Two men rushed wildly down the bank, and one of them turned and looked up as he passed. I heard a piercing scream – a mother's cry of despair. Nobody said again "She has killed her." I did not die – I did not go mad, for I had not an instant's delusion – I never doubted the reality of what had happened; but those words – "She has killed her!" "She has killed her!" – were written as with a fiery pencil on my brain, and day and night they rang in my ears. Who had spoken them?

There was the secret of my fate!

CHAPTER II

"Whence is that knocking?
How is 't with me when every noise appals me;
What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

SHAKESPEARE

"In the wind there is a voice
Shall forbid thee to rejoice;
And to thee shall night deny
All the quiet of her sky;
And the day shall have a sun
Which shall make thee wish it done."

BYRON

I know not how long I remained in the same place, rooted to the spot, the blood rushing at one instant with such violence to my head, that it seemed as if it would burst from my temples; and

the next I felt a cold sweat on my forehead, and a horrible fear creeping over my heart. I could not move, and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth; my eyes felt as if they were starting out of my head, and I sought to close them and could not. There was that torrent before them; it roared, it foamed; and the foam looked like a shroud; and the roaring of the waters sounded like a scream; and I screamed too – a dreadful scream – and then all at once I grew calm; for there were hurried steps on the gallery, and terror paralysed me. It was the housekeeper and the doctor; as they came, the latter said: – "Take the other child to her, – perhaps she will cry when she sees her." And as I was trembling violently, and did not seem to hear what they said to me, though I did hear every word, the man took me up in his arms, and carried me like a baby into the drawing-room. Mrs. Middleton was there with a face paler than a sheet; when she saw me her mouth quivered, but she did not speak or cry; she waved her hand, and then laid her head again against the open door, and seemed to listen with her heart. I felt as if I could hear it beat where I sat. Five or six minutes passed, and then Mr. Middleton rushed into the room. She looked up into his face and shrieked – the same fearful shriek I had heard once before. He took her hands, which she was wringing wildly, and putting his arm round her, he whispered, "Now, Mary, all is over; show me that you believe in God." She struggled for a moment, her chest heaved convulsively, and then she burst into a violent fit of hysterical crying. He supported her out of the room, and they went away

together. The housekeeper came up to the sofa where I was, and taking one of my hands, she said, "And where were you when the poor thing fell?"

I started up as if she had shot me; I rushed out of the room, across the hall, through the winding passages, and up the stairs into my own room. I locked the door, and falling on my knees with my face against the bed-post, I pressed my temples with my hands as if to still their throbbing. During the next two or three hours, each knock at my door made me jump as if a cannon had gone off at my ear; each time I opened it I expected to be accused of Julia's death, – to be told that I had killed her; and once, when it was my uncle's step that I heard approaching, I opened my window, and was on the point of throwing myself out of it: strange to say, the only thing that stopped me was the fear of adding to Mrs. Middleton's anguish. I suppose it was the excessive terror that I felt of being denounced, or of betraying myself, that saved me from a brain fever; the very intensity of this anxiety subdued the extravagance of my despair, and I calmed myself that I might appear calm. I took some food, because I instinctively felt that I needed strength and support. It never occurred to me, it never once crossed my mind, to reveal what I had done. I felt that if any one accused me, I must have died on the spot – fled, destroyed myself – I know not what; but at the same time there was a rigid determination in my soul, that as in the first moments that had followed Julia's death, I *could* not, so now I *would* not, speak. Each hour that elapsed confirmed this

resolution; for every hour that passed by in silence, every word that was uttered by me, or before me, on the subject, made the act of self-accusation grow into a moral impossibility.

When it became dusk the solitude of my room grew intolerable to me, and I wandered through the house seeking for companionship, and yet starting off in a different direction, if the sound of steps or of voices drew near to me. At last I found my way unobserved into the drawing-room, and sat there, or paced up and down for a length of time, till at last the door opened, and my uncle came in.

He walked up to me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and said, in a voice of subdued emotion "You are now our only child, Ellen."

I suppose my countenance bore a very wild expression at that moment, for he looked at me with surprise, and then added in a still more soothing manner, "Go to your aunt, my dear Ellen; she will not feel herself childless while you are spared to us."

A choking sensation rose in my throat, and a cold sweat stood on my forehead, but I got up, and walked resolutely to my aunt's room.

She was overwhelmed with grief; her hands were feverish, and her head burning. I sat down by her, and silently employed myself in bathing her temples with cold water. She now and then laid her aching head on my shoulder, and burst into an agony of crying, which seemed to relieve her.

She asked me where my uncle was; and I could have told her, for I had heard the servants say, as I was coming up stairs, that

he was returning to the river side, to make one search more after the body of his child.

The moon was shining brightly, and several men were employed in dragging the deep and rapid stream; I pointed that way, and she seemed at once to understand me, for a deep groan was her only answer. Once she said, "Pray for me, Ellen;" and then for the first time remorse took its place by the side of terror in my mind. I felt I could not pray – no exactly-defined idea of guilt presented itself to my mind, and yet there was a murmur in my ears, the burden of which was, "She has killed her – she has killed her;" (and as when standing on a dizzy height, with a firm hold on some railing or plank of support, something whispers to one, "If I should let it go!") I felt afraid that the next moment I should say out loud, "I have killed her."

The idea of prayer made me tremble. Once I said mechanically, "O God! forgive me," and then shuddered. It sounded to myself like a confession of murder. I dared not address God as I had done the day before. One instant I thought of myself as of a guilty wretch, unworthy to live, unworthy to lift up her voice in prayer, or to raise her eyes to the calm and cloudless sky. At other times I felt as if God had dealt too hardly with me: I pitied myself, and my heart waxed rebellious in its grief. I said to myself, like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" and then I almost cursed myself for having thought of Cain – for I had not murdered my cousin, though somebody said I had killed her. For one instant anger had maddened me; without

thought, without intention, I had struck her – one hasty blow was given, and now my youth was blighted, my peace of mind was gone; the source of all pure joys, of all holy thoughts, was dried up within me. I should never stand again in the sacred silence of the solemn night, and feel as if its whispering winds were bringing tidings from a better world to my soul. And in those days of glowing beauty, when streams of light intoxicate the eye, when all nature breaks into song, or blossoms into flower, never again should I feel myself as in past years, a part of that bright creation, longing only, in the fulness of my heart, to prostrate myself in fervent adoration before Him who gave to the birds and to the streams a voice to praise Him; to the glorious heavens a charge to magnify Him; and to man, enthusiasm, emotion, poetry, music —*all* that lifts the soul above itself and the material world around it, to the wide fields of enraptured contemplation.

But now a chain would evermore weigh down my spirits – a dark remembrance would ever stand between me and the sunny skies – a tone, as of the dying and the dead, would ever mingle with the sounds of melody, with the voice of love, with the words of affection. Yes —

"All bright hopes and hues of day
Had faded into twilight grey;"

or rather into the darkness of night. I wept over myself, over my blighted youth, my destroyed happiness, my lost innocence

— and I was only sixteen!

There I sat, that long night through; my aunt had sunk into the heavy slumber of exhaustion, her hand in mine, her head on my shoulder. I dared not move — scarcely breathe; hot searing tears were slowly chasing each other down my cheeks, and the storm within was raging wildly in my breast — but I did not pray; I could not: a sheet of lead seemed to stretch itself between me and Heaven; and when the light of day broke slowly into the chamber of mourning, I closed my eyes, not to see the sun in its calm majesty, dawning on the first day of changed existence.

The first days that follow a great and sudden misfortune carry with them a kind of excitement that keeps off for a time the stunning sense of desolation from the soul. My uncle returned on the following morning, bearing with him the body of his child, which he had at length succeeded in rescuing from the bed of the torrent, which had carried it down far below Elmsley.

The preparations for the interment in the village church seemed to rouse the afflicted parents to exertions, that, though intimately connected with the loss that had befallen them, were almost a relief to Mrs. Middleton, after the inactivity of the last twenty-four hours.

I had hardly left her room all day, and when she told me that my uncle expected us all to meet him at dinner, I felt it would be impossible to go through the trial; but, as she was going to make the exertion, I could not refuse to follow her.

When we entered the drawing-room together, Edward

Middleton and Henry Lovell were both standing before the fire-place. It was well for me that our meeting took place while the catastrophe of the day before was so recent, that the agitation I betrayed could pass under the garb of sorrow and nervousness. I was trembling violently; I felt a degree of conviction, that amounted to moral certainty, that one of those two men had witnessed the frightful scene, which resembled more a hideous dream than an actual reality. Both were coming to me with outstretched hands. Could they both mean to take mine? Did not one of them know what that hand had done? A mist rose before my eyes, and I fainted.

When my senses returned, I found myself in bed, my aunt by my side, and a number of restoratives employed to bring me back from my swoon. I recovered, and the next morning, on awaking after some hours of feverish and restless sleep, I heard a noise in the court under my windows.

I rose hastily, and saw the funeral procession moving slowly from the house across the grounds, and taking its way towards the village church. The little coffin was carried by four of the grey-headed servants of the house; my uncle and aunt were walking on foot beside it, and my cousin and Henry Lovell were following them. The rest of the servants, among whom was Julia's nurse, and almost all the inhabitants of the village, closed the procession. I watched the funeral train till it was out of sight, and for the first time I forgot myself, for a few minutes, and my own dreadful share in this calamity, and thought only of my

aunt, and of her misery. I called to mind too the image of that child, whom I had so often nursed to sleep in her infancy, whom I had carried in my arms, and held to my bosom. When I pictured to myself the little body laid in its narrow grave, and thought how short a time ago life was strong within it, and that it was *my* hand that had sent her to her watery grave, my agony grew so intense that I wonder it did not kill me, or drive me to some desperate act of madness. It did not; and pity for myself soon hardened my heart against the sufferings of others. I ceased to weep for Julia; she was dead indeed; but was not death a blessing compared to such a life as mine would be? My aunt had lost her child; but was not her sorrow as nothing in comparison with mine – mine, who had made her childless? And now a sudden thought flashed on my brain. Why was I at home? Why was I alone? Did they suspect me? Had the master of my fate, the witness of my crime, warned them to keep the murderess away from the grave of their child? Was I already become as a monster to them? Did they loathe the sight of me? Would they send me to prison? or would they turn me out of their house; and should I fly along dusty roads, and through dark alleys and crowded streets, and would the mob follow, as I once read that they followed a woman who was thought to have murdered her child, and point at me, and hoot, and groan, and cry "There goes the wretch that murdered the child?" I fell on my knees; it seemed as if there was a sound of footsteps behind me – a shout of execration in my ears. It was a waking nightmare; I was growing delirious,

and when I felt something touch me, and a warm breath on my shoulders, I gave a piercing scream, and fell with my face on the ground. A low moaning roused me from this state. I looked up and saw my great Newfoundland dog, who always slept in my room; he was licking my hands and neck. His kind eyes were looking at me from under the rough hair that shaded them; and he moaned gently as he did so. I was still *almost* a child, for I suppose that none but a child would have found comfort in this creature's mute sympathy. As it was, I flung my arms wildly round its neck, and sobbed. He did not struggle, but patiently stood there, though my tears were falling fast on his head. "Poor, poor Hector I you never will be told what I have done; you never will turn away from me with horror, though all the world should do so. Poor, poor Hector! my good, my kind dog!" This little incident had done me good, and the tears I had shed had relieved me. I dressed myself, and when my aunt entered my room at her return from the funeral – when she embraced me with much emotion – when she told me how she and my uncle had hoped that I might have slept over the last trying hour – when she tenderly reproached me for having left my bed – when she drew me to her, and, parting the hair that hung loosely and heavily on my forehead, laid her cold hand upon it, and then pressed me to her bosom – I felt a relief that for the moment *almost* resembled joy. Under the influence of this momentary reaction I followed her to the dining-room, where we found my uncle sitting in mournful silence; he pressed my hand as I approached him,

and we all sat down to eat, or try to eat, the breakfast prepared for us. This melancholy meal over, I withdrew to the furthest end of the drawing-room, and sat down at my embroidery frame, which stood near to an open window, and began to work with something like composure. From this moment everything about us resumed its former aspect, and the habits of our daily life seemed to have experienced scarcely any change. My uncle's reserve and gloom were, perhaps, somewhat deeper than before; and Mrs. Middleton at times gave way to uncontrollable bursts of grief; but her elastic spirit, bowed down for awhile by the pressure of sorrow, rose again with the buoyancy which affliction can repress, but hardly destroy in a nature like hers, to which happiness seemed almost a condition of existence. A sorrow which would have broken this spring within her must have killed her – but this did not; and the full flow of her affections seemed to return in what had once appeared to be their natural channel – she clung to me with a fondness that seemed every hour to increase. Superior as she was, there was about her a kind of dependence upon others – upon their love and their sympathy – which was inexpressibly endearing. In those early times of sorrow I received her caresses, and listened to the words of love which she addressed to me, with something of the spirit with which I can imagine that the Holy Françoise de Chantal may have pressed to her bosom the burning cross, that stamped upon her breast the sign of salvation,* [* Madame de Chantal, the Founder of the Order of the Visitation, impressed upon her breast, with a

burning iron, the sign of the cross.] – at once the object of intense adoration and the instrument of acute torture.

My cousin and Henry Lovell staid on at Elmsley, and nothing, in the manner of either, gave me the least clue to discover which was the possessor of my dreadful secret. Both were kind to me, and both seemed to regard me with more interest than usual. In Edward's countenance I sometimes read a look of severity, which made the blood forsake my heart; but then at other times his voice was so gentle in speaking to me, his countenance had so much sweetness in it, as he turned his eyes full upon me, that I felt re-assured, though, at the same time, intensely miserable.

With Henry I felt more at my ease – why I cannot tell, but he was the only person with whom, since the fatal day of Julia's death, I could speak in the same manner as I did before. There was something soothing to my wayward feelings in the thoughtless gaiety which he soon resumed. In the course of a few weeks I persuaded myself nearly, if not entirely, that fancy, allied with terror, had conjured up, in that fatal hour, the cry which had sounded in my ears; at least I pacified my fears by repeating this supposition to myself. It was like a sedative, that numbs without removing the pain we feel. It made me better able to endure what I had to go through. Church was a terrible ordeal to me. I went of an afternoon only, for several following Sundays, because I could not bear to hear the commandments read; and yet I hated myself for my weakness. One Sunday morning Edward said to me, across the breakfast-table, "Pray, Ellen, have you made a

vow never to go to church of a morning?" I felt myself turning pale, but answered quietly, "I am going now;" and I went, and God only knows what I suffered there.

Biding grew into a passion with me at that time. There is such excitement in the rapid motion – in the impatience of the animal that bears one along – in the sense of power – in the feeling of life, which is never so strong within one, as when, over a common, or a wild muir, one can dash along at the horse's full speed, with the wind in one's face, and the turf under one's feet. In every weather I rode; the more heavily it rained, the more wildly it blew, the more I enjoyed excursions that lasted several hours, and after which I returned home, fatigued in body, excited in mind, and able to sleep at night from sheer exhaustion. Henry was my constant companion on these occasions, and indulged every fancy I formed, as to the length and direction of these excursions. He applauded my courage when, arrested by no obstacles, I cleared fence after fence, or waded through rapid streams, in order to arrive, a quarter of an hour sooner, at some point I had fixed upon. His talent for conversation was great, and he possessed the art of captivating the attention to an extraordinary degree. Intercourse with him became to me, in a moral point of view, what riding was in a physical: It was an exercise of the mental faculties, that stilled the process of self-tormenting within me. He admired me – I saw it plainly, and far more than he had done before the change that had come over me; at least I fancied so; and one day, as I was turning over the leaves of a blotting-paper

book, in the library, I found the following verses:

"She was a child, and in her dreamless eyes
There slept a world of unawakened thought —
And in her voice, her laughter, and her sighs,
No spirit lingered, and no magic wrought;
For as the haze that veils the glorious skies
At morning prime; or as the mist that lies
On ocean's might: or as the solemn hour
Of Nature's silence, when the Heavens lower,
Such was her childhood; but its hour is past;
The veil is drawn, the mist has cleared at last.
And what though with a storm! Who does not find
In wind, in waves, in Nature's wildest strife
With things material, or in man's own mind,
A deeper and more glorious sense of life
Than in the calm of silent apathy?
Who would not stand within the Sun's full blaze,
Though scorched and dazzled by his burning rays?
Oh, we can watch with ardent sympathy.
The stormy floods of rising passion roll
Their swelling surges o'er the silent soul!
And we can gaze exulting on the brow
Where restless thoughts and new, are crowding now:
Each throb, each struggle, serving but to feed
The flame of genius, and the source of thought.
Be mine the task, be mine the joy, to read
Each mood, each change, by time and feeling wrought,
And as the mountain stream reflects the light

That shoots athwart the sky's tempestuous track,
So shall my soul, her soul's impassioned might,
As in a broken mirror, image back."

I read these lines with a strange mixture of sensations. "Does he know the truth?" was my first thought; and it made the blood rush to my cheeks. The next was, "Whether he knows it or not, he admires me." I smiled with bitterness indeed, but still I smiled; and as I read these verses, over and over again, they seemed to change the current of my feelings. For the first time, I said to myself, "There are things in the world yet worth living for, besides those I have forfeited – peace of mind, and an untroubled conscience. – There is genius, which, as he says, thrives in the atmosphere of suffering; there is the power which genius gives to 'ride triumphant, and have the world at will;' there are the powerful emotions of the soul when struggling for mastery, when intoxicated with success, when revelling in homage. If sorrow, if guilt, if despair, have made my eyes more bewitching, and my voice more thrilling; if they have roused the latent spirit within me, it shall not be in vain; I will drink deeply at these new sources of enjoyment, if not of happiness; I will cast behind me the burden borne in such anguish; I will break with the *past*, the dreadful past, and begin a new era." And, seizing the paper which was lying on the table, I walked quickly across the library. As I turned the corner of the recess which formed the eastern end of the gallery, I saw Edward sitting by the window, where

often, during the preceding summer, we had watched the sunset together. The last rays of the departing light streamed upon him, as he sat absorbed in thought; a book was on his knees; it seemed to have dropt from his hand in the depth of his abstraction; his faultless features, his chiselled mouth, the peculiar colour of his hair, and the light which shed around him a kind of halo, made him at that moment resemble the pictures of saints which Raphael and Domenichino have painted.

It seemed to me like a vision; in the highly excited state in which I then was I almost fancied it such; and the restless tide of thought within me took a new direction; the tears sprung into my eyes, and I turned away, with a softer feeling at my heart than I had known there for a long while. As I moved towards the door, the rustling of my gown disturbed Edward; he called to me to come and admire the glowing colours of the sky, where clouds over clouds of red and purple hue were floating in an atmosphere of burnished gold. I went to him, and we stood together for several minutes, till the sun descending quite beneath the horizon, left the room in comparative darkness. I then withdrew, but it was not till I reached my room that I found I had dropt the paper on which Henry's verses were written. I felt annoyed at this, and retraced my steps to the library door, but before I reached it, I met Edward, and in his hand he held the very paper I was come in search of. I did not venture to claim it from him, but he held it out to me at once, and said coldly, "Is this your property?" I felt confused, neither venturing to deny, or liking to admit the

fact. In my embarrassment I muttered something about a copy of verses that Henry had written out for me, and, hastily stretching out my hand for the paper, I took it, and walked away without further explanation.

On the evening of this day we were all sitting round a table, on which work, books, and implements for writing were spread about. Henry Lovell was even more than usually animated, and spoke well and eloquently on a variety of subjects. Mrs. Middleton joined eagerly in the conversation; Edward listened attentively, but spoke seldom. I remember every word he said that evening. Once Henry requested us all to say what it was we hated most, and what it was we valued most. I forget what I said, what he said, what my aunt said, but I know that to the first question, Edward answered, *duplicity*; and to the second, *truth*; and as he pronounced the word *truth*, he fixed his eyes upon me, accidentally perhaps, but so sternly that I quailed under his glance. A few minutes after, Henry read aloud from a little book that was lying before him, the following question: "Qu'est-ce que la vie? Quel est son but? Quelle est sa fin?" "I will write my answer on the margin," he cried, and wrote, "Jouer et puis mourir;" and then handed the book to me. I seized the pencil, and hastily added these words, "Souffrir, et puis mourir." Edward read them, and looked at me less sternly than before, but with an earnest inquiring expression of countenance; then lightly drawing a line with a pencil across the two preceding sentences, he wrote this one underneath them, "Bien vivre, pour bien mourir," and

gave me back the book.

In general he spoke little; but there was much meaning in what he said. His reserve gave me a feeling of embarrassment with him, which, at the time I am writing of, was particularly irksome. He forced one to *think*, and I preferred dreaming alone, or drowning thought in talk with Henry. With the latter I became more intimate than ever: we read together, and it seemed to me that he always chose such books as excited my imagination to the utmost, and wrought upon my feelings, without touching on any of the subjects that would have painfully affected me. I tried to write too. From my earliest childhood I had felt great facility in composition, and it was one of Mrs. Middleton's favourite amusements to look over my various attempts, and to encourage the talent which she fancied I possessed; but now I vainly tried to exert it; my mind was not capable of a continued effort. I believe it is Madame de Staël who remarks (and how truly) that to write one must have suffered, and have struggled; one must have been acquainted with passion and with grief; but they must have passed away from the soul ere the mind can concentrate its powers, and bring its energies to bear on the stores which an experience in suffering has accumulated within us. And it was this very helplessness of mind, this fever in the intellect, which threw me, with such fatal dependence, on the resources which Henry Lovell's conversation and society afforded me. If he left Elmsley for a single day I felt the want of them so keenly, that I welcomed him back in a way that may have deceived others,

deceived him, deceived myself perhaps – I know not – I lived but for excitement, and if the stimulus failed, I sunk for the time into momentary apathy. We sung together sometimes, and my voice seemed to have gained strength during the last few months – the old hall at Elmsley vibrated with the notes which, with the impetuosity that characterised everything I did at that time, I threw out with the full consciousness of power. Often of an evening I sat down at the organ that was placed in the gallery of the hall, and, forming various modulations on its deep melodious keys, soothed myself into a kind of dreamy unconsciousness.

One day I had gone there as usual; it was towards dusk, and I was just come home from a long ride on a cold December day. I began playing, but, gradually overcome by drowsiness, I fell asleep, my hand still on the keys of the organ, and my head resting against the edge of the high-backed chair I was sitting on. Whether it was the uneasiness of this posture, or my damp uncurled hair that was hanging on my face, or else that in sleep we discern, though it awakes us not, when something is moving near us, I know not, but my sleep was painful in the extreme. I felt as if there was a hard breathing close to me; but, turn which way I would in my dream, I could see nothing. Then I felt as if some one was laying hold of me, and I tried to scream, but could not. Then I seemed suddenly to stand on the steps of the fatal stairs, (I had often since the day of Julia's death dreamt the fearful scene over, and the impression which the dreadful reality had left on my mind was such that I had never since ventured to stand

on that spot,) but now it was not of Julia that I dreamed. I was being dragged down myself to the bottom of the precipice, and the person who was forcing me along into the yawning gulf wore the form of Henry Lovell, and spoke with his voice. I called to him to stop – I entreated him with frantic violence to forbear, but just as we were reaching the hollow he suddenly turned round, and there was Edward Middleton's face looking ghastly pale, and frowning upon me fearfully. I fell back, and the movement I must have made at that moment probably awoke me. I roused myself with that uneasy feeling which a terrific dream leaves on one's mind, and timidly looked about me. I was alone; there was the music-book before me, and the two candles burning as I had left them, but by the side of one of them was a coarse bit of paper, and on it was written (oh my God! how fervently I prayed at that moment that I might yet wake, and find I was still dreaming) – on it was written in large round letters "BEWARE! I KNOW YOUR SECRET!"

There have been so many dreadful moments in my life, all turning upon the one event that put the stamp upon it, that I will not vainly endeavour to describe the misery of each; but this was one of the worst. I knew not what to think – what to suspect. Was it indeed some one else, and not Edward Middleton or Henry Lovell, who had seen the share I had had in Julia's death? But no, it could not be. No servant of the house was at hand, no visitor could have been there, for it had been difficult in the extreme, at the fatal moment, to procure any help; and every person in

the house had accounted for their absence in some way or other. Why, too, should they have been silent till now? And this paper, these words, there was no demand, no extortion in them – a simple intimation.

I remained frightened, bewildered, and wholly unable to rally against this new source of anxiety. I kept my bed for two days, confined there by a feverish attack. On the third the doctor pronounced me better, and able to go into the drawing-room. As I was lying there on the sofa, my aunt, who was sitting by me, nursing me as usual with the tenderest solicitude, said, "I have just received a note from Edward, which takes me quite by surprise. You know he left us on the day after the one upon which you were taken ill, to go for a week or two to London, and now he writes me word that he is going abroad for a year, and that he will not be able to return to Elmsley to take leave of us. Such a flighty proceeding would be very like you, Henry, but I do not understand it in Edward."

Gone, and for a year! the day after I was taken ill, too! Quick as lightning a sudden thought Hashed across my mind. I drew a deep breath, but forced myself to say, "Had he told you of this plan, Henry?"

"I have had a letter from him also," was his answer; "and I thought he looked graver than usual."

Later in the afternoon, when we were left alone, became and sat down by me, and drawing a letter from his pocket, he said, "Ellen, I wish you to read this letter, and to tell me frankly

what you think of it – I own I do not understand it. He alludes to some secret, to some sorrow, it would almost seem, that he cannot disclose, and that has rendered Elmsley unpleasant to him. There is but one conjecture that I could make; but as nothing in his manner or in his way of going on corroborates it, I cannot seriously entertain it, and that is, that he is in love with you; but you will judge for yourself." Edward's letter was as follows: —

"My dear Lovell,

"A circumstance which I can neither explain nor dwell upon, and which had better remain buried in oblivion, has made a further residence at Elmsley so painful to me, that I have come to the decision of going abroad immediately, and of remaining absent for a year at least. To your sister I have written to announce my intentions, and at the same time to express my deep sense of her own and my uncle's constant kindness to me. To you I do not wish to disguise the fact, that my resolution is not founded on *caprice*, — that I have a *reason* for what I do, however unnecessary it is to state what that reason is. Our friendship makes it incumbent upon me to be so far explicit; but I beg that you will never allude, by word or by letter, to the cause of my absence, and that you will never question me on the subject. I have left in my room a book which I wish you to give Ellen from me. I dislike leave-takings, and shall therefore proceed to Dover from hence, without returning again to Elmsley.

"Sincerely yours,

"Edward Middleton."

It was as I had thought, then. There was the secret I had so anxiously sought to discover. He, Edward Middleton, was the possessor of mine! He had never, then, since the day of Julia's death, looked upon me, or thought of me, but as the murderer of his little cousin – as a wretch whom nothing but his forbearance could keep in the house, from which she ought to have been turned out with horror and execration. He had, however, forborne to ruin, to destroy me; and a feeling of tenderness stole over my heart at the thought. But that paper – that dreadful paper; was that his last farewell to me? Did he wish to make me feel that I was in his power? – that he held the sword of vengeance suspended over my head, and that present, or absent, I was to tremble at his name? This was unlike Edward Middleton; this was unworthy of him. He should have come to me and charged me with my crime. He should have stood before me with that stern commanding brow, and pronounced my sentence; and I would have knelt to him, and submitted to any penance, to any expiation he might have enjoined; but an unsigned, an unavowed threat, a common anonymous letter – away with it! away with it! Base, miserable device for him to resort to! My very soul sickened at the thought; and in the midst of all my other sufferings, I suffered at feeling how low he had fallen in my estimation.

I was so completely absorbed in these reflections, that I was only aroused from my abstraction by Henry's asking me, in an impatient tone, "Well, what do you gather from that letter, every word of which you seem to have learned by heart?"

"Nothing," I replied, "except that Edward is as incomprehensible as he is unsatisfactory."

He seemed tolerably satisfied with my answer, and taking away the letter, did not allude again to the subject, and only sent me by my maid the book which Edward had desired him to transmit to me. It was the "Christian Year," that wonderful, that all but inspired book. I opened it with emotion, and perhaps it might have made a powerful impression upon me, had I not found the passages in it which allude to guilt and to remorse carefully marked with a pencil, and thus, in a manner, forced on my notice. This seemed to me the sequel of the menacing words so cruelly addressed to me, and the pride of my soul – dare I also say, the native integrity of my character – rose against such a system of secret intimidation. My heart hardened against the book, and against the giver, and I thrust it impatiently out of my sight.

Although sick at heart, grieved in spirit, and humbled to the dust at this solution of the mystery which had hung over me, yet there was some repose in the degree of security it afforded against any sudden revolution in my destiny. I was somewhat calmer, and sometimes, for a few hours together I shook off the burden from my breast, and, in outward manner at least, resembled my former self.

CHAPTER III

In virgin fearlessness, with step that seemed
Caught from the pressure of elastic turf
Upon the mountains, gemmed with morning dew,
In the prime morn of sweetest scents and airs;
Serious and thoughtful was her mind, and yet,
By reconcilment, exquisite and rare,
The form, port, motions, of this cottage girl,
Were such as might have quickened or inspired
A Titian's hand, addressed to picture forth
Oread or Dryad, glancing through the shade,
What time the hunter's earliest horn is heard
Startling the golden hills.

"EXCURSION" – WORDSWORTH

On one of those mild days, which occur now and then during the winter, and which bear with them a peculiar charm, Mrs. Middleton and I had strolled out together, after breakfast, into her own flower-garden. She was making a winder nosegay of the few hardy flowers that had outlived the frost, and that seemed reviving in the strange softness of this January day.

"What a morning for a ride! my own Ellen," said my aunt, as

we leant on the stone wall, which felt quite warm with the rays of the wintry sun. "What do you say to ordering the horses, taking a long gallop, and coming home with me with a bloom on your dear cheeks, which look too often like that flower, and too seldom like this one;" and she showed me, with a smile, a white camellia, and a China rose, which she had just gathered in the green-house.

"I will do as you wish, dear aunt – please myself, and have the merit of obedience into the bargain; and I shall take these flowers too, to put in my hair this evening. But where shall I ride?"

"If you have no choice, my darling, I will give you an errand. You know Bridman Manor?"

"O yes! the ruins of the old hall, which my maid used to call the 'ghost-house,' – the old-fashioned gardens, with their broken statues and evergreen alleys, that always put me in mind of your favourite lines, by Mary Howitt —

'O, those old abbey gardens, with their devices rich;

Their fountains and green solemn walks, and saints in many a niche.'

I shall like of all things to go there to-day; but what is your errand?"

"Why, I do not know if I ever told you that your uncle had been so kind as to give up to me that pretty cottage of his, that stands on the east side of Bridman-terrace wall, for old Mrs. Tracy, who was my nurse, and afterwards Henry's. You have seen her, have you not, Ellen?"

"No," I answered; "but I have often heard you mention her."

"She was a person of some importance in our family at one time. You know that my mother died in childbirth, and that Henry's life as an infant was only saved by this woman's unwearied devotion. She was passionately attached to Henry, and her singular disposition and turn of mind gave her a hold upon him which he did not entirely shake off even when he was taken from under her care. I believe her temper was violent; but as a child he never suffered from it, and quite idolised her. She had a great deal of natural cleverness, and her manners and language were always different from those of persons in her rank of life. I shall be curious to hear what you think of her."

"What made you think of establishing her at Bridman?"

"Her son and his wife, who had gone out to India three years ago, and left their children in her care, had both died of a fever at Madras. She felt anxious to remove from the neighbourhood of London, and to settle in this part of the country. She came to me last summer, and asked my advice on the subject. I felt much interested about her, for it was an only son she had lost, and his children are, with the exception of Henry, the only objects of interest she has in the world. Her voice trembled with emotion whenever she mentioned them; and though she is tolerably well off as to money, I believe, I felt glad to afford her, in her affliction, a quiet and pleasant home. Your uncle agreed to her living in Bridman Cottage, and I hear she settled there a short time ago. I should like to send her a kind message, and to hear how she is going on."

"I shall be delighted to be your messenger, and will instantly prepare for the ride. As you are going back to the breakfast-room, pray tell Henry to be in readiness."

At twelve o'clock the horses came round; we mounted, and set off at a brisk gallop across the Park. As I turned into the lane that led in the direction of Bridman Manor, Henry asked me where I meant to go.

"To pay a visit."

"To whom?"

"To an acquaintance of yours."

"Who can you mean?"

"A very old acquaintance of yours."

"My dear Ellen, you are taking quite a wrong road: this lane leads to no house and to no cottage that we are acquainted with."

"I beg your pardon; it leads to Bridman Manor, and I am going there."

"Who do you know there?"

"Nobody; but I am going to make acquaintance with your old nurse, Mrs. Tracy."

He muttered something which sounded to me like an oath, and as I turned and looked at him, I was astonished at the singular expression of his countenance. He smiled, however, and said:

"You will be making acquaintance in that case with one of the most insupportable women that ever lived. I strongly recommend you to keep out of her way. She wears my life out with her querulous temper and tiresome complaints; and as I do not want

to go through a scene with her, you would greatly oblige me, Ellen, by giving up this project."

"I am going there with a message from Mrs. Middleton: but you need not appear. Hide yourself in the manor woods, if you dare not face your nurse, and I will join you there on my way home."

Henry looked both vexed and provoked, but made no answer. He soon rallied, however, and began again talking and laughing in his usual manner. As we were slowly mounting a hill, his horse suddenly stumbled; he jumped off, and, calling to me to stop, he examined his foot; and finding, or pretending to find, a stone in it, he set about vainly endeavouring to knock it out.

"I cannot go on any further, Ellen: all I shall be able to manage will be to get home without laming this horse; so pray turn back now; – you can take this message some other day."

"Sit down on that bank, 'that mossy bank where the violets grow,' my dear Henry, and muse there in sober sadness, while I face the dragon in her den." And saying these words, I galloped off without further discussion. I had not gone far before he overtook me; and quoting the words of Andrew Fairservice in "Rob Roy," which we had been reading lately, he cried out:

"Well, a wilful man maun have his way: he who will to Curragh, must to Curragh!" and we proceeded on our road.

On passing the gates of Bridman Manor, we skirted the edge of the woods till we came to a terrace, where the ground was laid out in quaint patterns; and vases, some broken, some in tolerable

preservation, were still ranged with some sort of symmetry. By the side of what had once been a fountain sat a group which attracted my attention by the picturesque effect which it afforded. On the back of one of those nondescript semihuman monsters, whose yawning mouths once formed the spouts of the fountain, sat a girl whose features struck me as perfectly faultless, and delicate almost beyond what one could have fancied possible in a living creature of real flesh and blood. She resembled the *ideal* of a sculptor; her little hand was laid on the moss-stained marble, and though not very white, its shape was so perfect that it was pleasant to gaze upon it – as it is upon any rare work of art. Near her was a little boy, apparently about three years old, who was standing on tiptoe, and thrusting his curly head into the cavity of the sphinx's mouth; another boy, who might have been ten or twelve years of age, had climbed up to the vaulted top of the fountain, and was looking down from that position at a little trickling thread of water, which still found its way into the basin below, though its passage was nearly choked by the moss and the creeping plants that intercepted its course.

As we were passing them the girl looked up, and, suddenly rising, curtsayed; and, taking hold of the little boy's hand, said, "Mr. Henry."

Henry stopped his horse, and, bowing to her in a manner that rather surprised me, in a voice that sounded to me unlike his usual one, he asked her if her grandmother was at home.

"Yes, Sir, she is," was her answer.

He turned to me and said, "That is Alice Tracy, Ellen; you can make acquaintance with her, while I speak to that boy there, who seems in a fair way to break his neck."

Dismounting hastily, he threw his horse's reins over one of the spikes of the adjoining railing, and sprang up to the spot where the boy was perched.

"Is that pretty child your brother?" I inquired of the beautiful girl who stood before me.

"He is," she answered; and lifting up the blushing boy, who was hiding himself behind her, she turned his reluctant glowing little face full towards me, in spite of his struggling efforts to thrust it into her lap, and then bent down to kiss his forehead, saying at the same time, "Naughty Johnny!"

"Will you come to me, Johnny?" was my next attempt at acquaintance.

"No, I won't," was the answer.

"What, not to ride this pretty black horse?"

"Yes, I will," was as resolutely pronounced; and soon the little fellow was hoisted up to my knees, and began amusing himself by vigorously pulling at my Selim's black mane.

"I am come with a message to your grandmother from Mrs. Middleton; she is anxious to know how you like Bridman."

"I dare say grandmother likes it very much; and Mrs. Middleton is very kind."

"Do you like it?"

"O yes."

"Better than the last place you lived at?"

"That was very nice, but this is better."

"What do you like better in it?"

"Many things."

At this moment I saw the boy who had been speaking with Henry dart off suddenly, and scamper away in the direction of the village. Henry at the same time joined us.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you have contrived to tame that unmanageable little savage, who always screams when he sets eyes on me. Well, suppose you give him a ride up to the entrance of the village, and then Alice can walk home with us, and introduce you to her grandmother."

Alice made some objections to Johnny's lengthened ride, which he (Johnny) resented by pushing her most stoutly away, when she attempted to remove him from his post; and victoriously shouting over her discomfiture, he shook the bridle with exultation, and we proceeded towards the village. As we arrived in sight of Bridman Cottage, the boy who had preceded us came running back to meet us; and I heard him say in a low voice, as he came up to Henry, "Granny's in, and I've done your bidding."

Henry then advised me to get off my horse; and lifting down the child first, he helped me to dismount, and we walked to the cottage. It was one of those lovely little homes that we rarely see but in England, and that look (would that they always were!) like the chosen abodes of peace and happiness. The low thatched roof

– the bright square-paned little windows – the porch overgrown with clematis, jessamine, and honeysuckle – the garden, where gooseberry bushes and stately hollyhocks grow side by side. Of this description was Bridman Cottage, and one of the loveliest that I ever set eyes upon.

As we entered, an elderly female came to the door, and, making me a curtsy, said, in a formal manner, "This is an honour I had not looked to, but I know how to be thankful for it, Miss Middleton. Mr. Henry, I hope I see you well?"

"As well as usual, thank you (he replied). Miss Middleton has brought you a message from her aunt."

"Yes," I immediately said; "Mrs. Middleton is very anxious to know that you find yourself happy and comfortable here, and would have come herself to see you, if she had been able to leave my uncle for so long; but he has been ill lately, and she scarcely ever goes far from the house."

"Tell Mrs. Middleton, Ma'am, that the house is good; that the children are well; and that I am grateful to her."

There was something chilling in the manner with which this was said, and the glassy eyes and thin lips of Mrs. Tracy were far from prepossessing.

I made, however, another effort, and said, "If you could manage to get as far as Elmsley, my aunt would, I know, be glad to see you."

"I have nursed her at my bosom, and carried her in my arms, and I do not care less for her now than I did then; but if it was to

save her life, I would not go to Elmsley and see – "

"Me there," exclaimed Henry. "I told you, Ellen, that I should have to go through a scene, and now, I suppose, it must come to pass. Go upstairs with Alice while I make my peace;" and as he spoke, he almost pushed me out of the room, and shut the door.

Alice followed me, and said, in her gentle voice, as I stood at the bottom of the narrow stairs, somewhat puzzled and at a loss what to do,

"If you will come to my room, Miss Middleton, I can show you some of the reasons that make me like Bridman so much."

I gladly assented. She led the way, and opened the door of a small room, in which there was no furniture, but a little bed, with dimity curtains of snowy whiteness, a deal table, and two straw chairs.

"This is a nice room," she said; "but come to the window, and you will see one of my reasons."

She threw up the sash, and pointed with her little hand to the village church, which rose in quiet beauty from among the leafless trees.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked, with a smile.

"Very pretty," I answered; and as I used her own simple words, I felt that there was that in them, said as she said them, that is often wanting in pages of impassioned eloquence, in volumes of elaborate composition, —*reality*. She was happy in this place, because of her little room, and because of the view of the village church, which she could see from its window. How pure must be

the mind, how calm must be the life, when such a circumstance can give a colouring to it.

"Alice, have you no books? I see none here."

"I have a few; do you wish to see them?"

"Yes, I do; I should like to know what books you like."

"Then I must show you another of my *reasons*," she said, with one of her sweet, calm smiles, and opened the door of another very small room, which had no other entrance than through her own.

There was a little table in it, and a wooden stool; both were placed near the window. Upon the table lay two books – one was a Bible, the other a large prayer-book, bound in red morocco, and illustrated with prints. A shelf hung in one corner; "Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying," the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Bishop Heber's Hymns," and a few more books besides, were ranged upon it. Among them, a small one, which I was well acquainted with, called "Birds and Flowers," attracted my attention. I asked Alice if she had read it through.

"Yes, I have," she replied. "Mr. Henry gave it me a few months ago."

I involuntarily started, and looked up into her face, as she said this; but not a shade of embarrassment was to be seen there.

She went on to say – "He gave it to me because I was so fond of this poor flower;" and she pointed to a sickly creeping plant, that grew out of a pot, which was placed on the window sill.

"You would not know it again now," she continued; "but last

summer it was growing against the wall in the little patch of garden we had at Bromley, and a beautiful flower it was."

"But what had it to do with this book, more than any other flower, Alice?"

"It is a little story, but I will tell it you if you wish it. I sprained my ankle last summer, and could not walk for many weeks. Granny or brother Walter used to drive me in my chair to the open window, to breathe the fresh air, and look at the flowers in our little garden. There was nothing else to look at there – nothing but roofs of houses and black chimneys; but up the wall, and as high as my window, grew this very plant, that looks so dead now, poor thing. Day after day I watched its flowers, though I did not know their names, till I got to see in them things that I thought nobody but me had ever noticed."

"What things, Alice?"

"Across, a crown of thorns, nails, and a hammer."

"The Passion Flower!"

"So Mr. Henry told me one day when he found me reading my new kind of book. It was like a book to me, that pretty flower; it made me think of holy things as much as a sermon ever did."

"And Henry brought you then this book, because of the poem in it on the Passion Flower?"

"He did, and read it to me out loud. It felt strange but pleasant to have one's own thoughts spoken out in such words as those."

"And you brought away your Passion Flower with you?"

"Yes, but it is dying now; and this gives me thoughts too, which

I wish somebody would write about. I should like to hear them read out."

I took up her book, and drawing a pencil from my pocket, I rapidly wrote down the following lines: —

"O wish her not to live again,
Thy dying passion flower,
For better is the calm of death
Than life's uneasy hour.

Weep not if through her withered stern
Is creeping dull decay;
Weep not, If ere the sun has set,
Thy nursling dies away.

The blast was keen, the winter snow
Was cold upon her breast;
And though the sun is shining now,
Still let thy flower rest.

Her tale is told; her slender strength
Has left her drooping form.
She cannot raise her bruised head
To face another storm.

Then gently lay her down to die,
Thy broken passion flower;
And let her close her troubled life
With one untroubled hour."

Alice read these lines as I wrote them. When I had finished, she shook her head gently, and said, —

"These are pretty words, and pretty thoughts too; but not my thoughts."

"Tell me your own thoughts, Alice; I would fain hear them."

"I can't," she said.

"Try."

"I think as I see the flowers die so quietly, that they should teach us to die so too. I think, when I see my poor plant give up her sweet life without complaining, that it is because she has done what she ought to do, and left nothing undone which she ought to have done. I planted her in my little garden, and she grew up to my window; she gave me buds first, and then flowers — bright smiling flowers; and when I was ill she gave me holy happy thoughts about God and Christ. And therefore I wish to do likewise — to do my duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call me; and then to die quietly, when it shall please Him, like my passion flower."

As she was finishing these words, I was startled by the loud and angry tones of Henry and of Mrs. Tracy, who seemed to be disputing violently. They were speaking both at the same time, and his voice was quite hoarse with anger. I overheard these words: — "I tell you that if you do not command yourself, and behave as I desire you, I will never see you again, or put my foot into your house."

A tremendous oath followed this threat, and then their voices subsided. I looked at Alice; she seemed concerned, but not surprised or agitated, at what was going on down-stairs, and merely closed the door of her room, which had been left open. At that moment, however, Henry came half-way up the stairs, and calling to me said that it was late, and that we had better be setting out again. I complied, and in coming down into the room below I was civilly greeted by Mrs. Tracy, who thanked me for my visit, and muttered something about hoping we should soon meet again. Had it not been for Alice, who had interested and charmed me to an extraordinary degree, I should have formed exactly a contrary wish, for I had never more heartily agreed with any opinion than with that which Henry had pronounced about his former nurse; and her civility was to my mind more repulsive still than her ungraciousness. I took leave of her coldly enough, but earnestly pressing Alice's hand as I mounted my horse, I whispered in her ear, "Alice, I like your poem better than mine," and rode off.

We took a different road from that we had come by, and skirted the edge of a small lake that lies on the eastern side of the Bridman Woods. The day was altered, and dark clouds were beginning to gather over the sky; the wind was whistling among the bare branches, and Henry was unusually silent and pre-occupied. I felt depressed too, and we did not speak for some time. I was revolving in my mind what possible cause there could be for a man of Henry's character and habits entering

into such a violent altercation with a person of Mrs. Tracy's age and inferior rank in life. His temper was generally good, and his manners peculiarly gentlemanlike; his conduct, therefore, (however provoking she might have been,) appeared to me unaccountable. I could not help wondering also, that he should have associated on evidently intimate terms with that lovely Alice, and yet had never mentioned her to any of us, even in casual conversation. There had not been a word, however, or a look, of his or of hers, that could, for an instant, have allowed one to suppose that there had been anything in their intercourse which either could have wished to hide. As to her, I could as soon have suspected of impurity the pearly drops that hung lightly on each twig of the hawthorn bushes that we passed, as her young life of one evil action, or her young mind of one evil thought. The deep blue waters of the little lake that lay stretched at our feet, were not more calm and more pure than her eyes; and in the marble paleness of her fair brow – in the divine purity of her child-like mouth – in the quiet innocence of her whole demeanour, there was that which seemed to speak of

"Maiden meditation, fancy free."

We were going at a brisk pace alongside the water, and the rapidity of our motion was an excuse for silence; but as we turned away from the lake, and began ascending a steep acclivity, which led to the moors we had yet to cross on our way home, we were forced to slacken our pace; and as we did so, I asked Henry in a half-joking manner, "Have you recovered the passion you were

in just now? Your forebodings seem to have been fully realised."

"Thanks to you," he answered in a short dry manner.

"Come, come," I said, "do not visit upon me Mrs. Tracy's disagreeableness. Indeed I think you are not as patient with her as you ought to be, considering she is an old woman, and was your nurse. You were speaking to her with inconceivable violence."

"You overheard what I said to her?"

"Only a few words, and a dreadful oath."

"I was not aware that you were listening at the door. Had I imagined that you had stationed yourself there, I should certainly have been more guarded in my expressions."

I felt the colour rising into my cheeks, for the tone of his voice had something in it still more insulting than his words; but I answered carelessly, "It is a pity you did not think it worth while to controul your temper, whether you were overheard or not."

He coloured in his turn, and bit his lips; but suddenly changing the subject, he abruptly said, "How do you like Alice?"

"As I like all the beautiful things which God has made, and that man has not spoil."

"She is very pretty; and she has a kind of cleverness too; but there is something tame and insipid about her, notwithstanding. In fact, I do not understand her."

"How should the serpent understand the dove?" I muttered to myself, and then my heart smote me for my unkind thoughts of Henry. I felt myself guilty of ingratitude, nay more, of hypocrisy, in thinking evil of one whose society I so much valued, and who

certainly devoted himself to me with no common assiduity. I never could exactly explain to myself what my feelings were with regard to him at that time. As I said before, it would have been a severe trial to me had he left Elmsley, even for a short time.

Hour after hour I spent in conversation with him, hardly aware of the lapse of time, so great was the fascination that his powerful, original, and, withal, cultivated understanding, exercised over me; and yet, at the same time, an involuntary feeling of mistrust – an unaccountable shudder of repugnance – now and then shot over me as I listened to the sound of his voice, or as my eyes met his – and yet they were beautiful; his eyes, with their deep-gray colour that looked black by candle-light, and the fringing of their dark lashes. There was something reined in the shape of his small aquiline nose – in the form of his wide but well-formed mouth, both of which, when he was eager, bore an expression which I can only compare to that of a fiery horse when he tosses his mane, and snuffs the air of the plain which he is about to scour. Then why was it, that as I looked on his beauty, day by day, I found pleasure, if not happiness, in his devotion to me – why was it, that, now and then, the words *fearful*, *false*, and *heartless*, darted across my mind as I thought of him? and were instantaneously followed by a thrill of self-reproach, for I was *false* to him, not he to me; false in the contrast between my outward demeanour and my secret and involuntary impulses. It was I that was heartless, in feeling no real attachment for one whose life evinced an unvarying devotedness to me.

False! Heartless! Was I really so? Resentment had hardened my heart against Edward Middleton, and every kind feeling I had ever entertained towards him was turned to bitterness. Painful associations, and fearful remembrances, had thrown a dark shade over the pure and holy love of my childhood – the enthusiastic affection I had felt for my aunt; – and as to Henry Lovell, whose society I eagerly sought, and whose attachment I appeared to return, I was forced at times to confess to myself that there was not a grain of tenderness in the feverish predilection I entertained for him. I felt to hate myself for the deadness and coldness of my heart. I despised myself for the inconsistent impulses of my soul. Abased in my own eyes, condemned by my own judgment, I often applied to myself the words of Holy Scripture; and in bitterness of spirit exclaimed – "Unstable as water, I cannot excel. Wasted with misery; drunk, but not with wine, my heart is smitten and withered like gnus. I was exalted into Heaven: I am brought down to Hell." These thoughts occupied me during the remainder of our ride.

When Henry uttered the remark which led to this train of reflections in my mind, we had reached the summit of the hill, and coming upon the wild heath that lay between us and Elmsley, we put our horses into a rapid canter, and arrived before the hall-door just as it was getting dusk.

CHAPTER IV

"How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immoveable —
Looking tranquillity. It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold.
And shoot a chiliness to my trembling heart."

"MOURNING BRIDE." – CONGREVE

During the ensuing three or four months, nothing occurred in the course of our daily life, in any way worth recording. I had spoken to my aunt of Alice Tracy in such a way as strongly to excite her interest and curiosity about her, and from this reason, as well as from the wish to give me pleasure, which was at all times an all-sufficient inducement to her, she wrote to her grandmother to request that if she herself did not feel inclined to come to Elmsley, she would at least allow Alice to come and spend a day with us.

Mrs. Tracy wrote a brief answer to the purport that Alice was

gone away on a visit to some relations of her father, and was therefore out of reach of the honour intended her.

My uncle received now and then a letter from Edward Middleton, but never communicated its contents beyond the mere facts that he was well, and was staying in this or that town on the Continent.

Henry still remained at Elmsley; and nothing was changed in the state of things between us. The only new feature in our domestic affairs, was the growing dislike which my uncle seemed to feel towards him. He had never appeared much to like him, but now he seemed hardly able to endure his protracted residence at Elmsley, and often inquired of my aunt and myself, if Henry did not mean soon to begin the study of the law; which was the profession he was destined to pursue.

As to Henry himself, he never alluded to it, and seemed to look upon Elmsley as a permanent home. My uncle was too much attached to his wife, and by nature of too kind a disposition, to mark more plainly, than by occasional hints, his displeasure at this line of conduct; but he could hardly conceal his satisfaction, when, at last, a letter from his father obliged Henry to take the subject into consideration.

It became arranged that he should leave Elmsley in three weeks; and I was surprised, and even mortified, at observing how little he seemed grieved or annoyed at this rather abrupt separation, and with what indifference of manner he took leave of me on the day of his departure.

A few days afterwards, there arrived a letter from Mrs. Brandon, a sister of my mother and of Mr. Middleton, containing an urgent request that I might be allowed to spend a few weeks with her in Dorsetshire.

I had only seen this aunt of mine once or twice during the course of my childhood; and she had left no other impression on my mind than that she was a short, pretty-looking woman, with large dark eyes, and a peculiarly gentle voice.

I had dreaded so much the void which Henry's absence would have made in my life, that I welcomed with pleasure the idea of entering upon a new scene. I had also a vague indefinite hope that far from Elmsley – away from the material objects which recalled to me continually my fatal secret – I should, perhaps, shake off, in some degree, the sense of oppression that weighed upon me. I was only seventeen, and prematurely miserable as I was become, still there remained something in me of the spirit of youth, which pants after new scenes, new companions, and new excitements. I therefore expressed a strong wish to accept Mrs. Brandon's invitation, and this was, as usual, enough to secure Mrs. Middleton's acquiescence, and my uncle made no objection to the plan.

Accordingly, on one of the first days of the month of June, in a small open carriage, accompanied by a lady who had once been my governess, and who had undertaken to escort me to Brandon Park, I left Elmsley, in tears indeed, for as my aunt pressed me to her bosom, I returned her embrace with an intense

emotion, that seemed to resume in itself the history of my past life; but still with the eager impatience of the bird who wildly takes his flight from the perch to which he is still confined, and hopes, by the keen impetuosity with which he soars, to shake off the dead weight which chains him down to earth. The day was beautiful: white fleecy clouds were flitting rapidly across the sky; and the mild breeze that fanned my cheek was scented with the perfume of the fields of clover, through which our road chiefly lay during the first stage of our journey. The sky, the air, the smells, the sounds, the rapid motion of the carriage, were all sources of the keenest enjoyment. Fortunately for me, Mrs. Hatton, my travelling companion, possessed the qualification of finding amusement in herself, and by herself, to an extraordinary degree. I have never met with so thoroughly good-humoured a person. She always liked best whatever was proposed to her to do, and never liked at all anything that others were not inclined to. Whatever happened to be ordered for dinner, was invariably the thing she preferred; but if, by any mischance, it did not appear, and something else appeared in its stead, she as suddenly recollected that she liked the new dish a great deal better than the one that had failed. Even the weather received at her hands very different treatment from that which it is accustomed to meet with. A black frost she considered wholesome and bracing; a cutting east wind, she described as a fresh breeze; snow, rain, and hail, had each particular merits, in her eyes. When the sun shone, it was fortunate; when it rained, it was a piece of luck,

for she had ever so many letters to write; and there was nothing like a rainy day for getting through business. And if the weather was without any other apology, "Still," as I heard her once say, "it was better than no weather at all."

I never heard her admit that anything was a grievance; that anybody was tiresome. Her friends' misfortunes, indeed, she felt heartily sorry for; but, with respect to them, she found consolation in the fact, that, in proportion to their extent, she could bestow a fuller share of sympathy, a more ample measure of kindness than ever, out of the ever-springing sources of tenderness, with which her own heart overflowed.

Poor Mrs. Hatton! she was the best of women, but not the wisest of governesses. During the years that she superintended my education, she had never been able to disagree with me, as to grammar and arithmetic being dull and perfectly useless studies; or help agreeing with me that Sir Walter Scott's novels improved the mind infinitely more than Goldsmith's History of England; and so I read novels to her, and she listened with delighted attention – I wrote poetry, which she read aloud, and declared was the best that had ever been written – I put aside all the books that bored me, all the exercises that puzzled me, and she heartily concurred with me, in pronouncing them all highly unprofitable and superfluous.

Dear Mrs. Hatton! she was not wise; but such guileless, warm-hearted lack of wisdom as hers, often supplied the place of those mental qualifications which are too seldom united to a perfect

singleness of heart and simplicity of character.

She was, indeed, a capital travelling companion; as we passed the gates of Elmsley I said to her, "Do you know, dear Mrs. Hatton, that I am apt to be very silent in a carriage; shall you mind it?"

"It is the very thing I like best, dear, to drive along and look about me, and not have the trouble of talking. The very thing I like best; there is nothing so tiring as to talk in a carriage." And settling herself in her corner, she gave herself up to looking about her; and she was right; for what in the world is so pleasant, as a living German authoress says, as "on a fine summer morning through a lovely country rapidly to fly, like the bird, that wants nothing of the world but its surface to skim over. This is the really enjoyable part of travelling. The inn life is wearisome; the passage through towns is fatiguing. The admiration due to the treasures of art, to the wonders of science, is a task from which one would sometimes gladly buy one's self off, at the price of a day of wood-cleaving or water-carrying. But to lean back in perfect quiet in a carriage while it rolls lightly and easily along a good road; to have a variety of pictures pass before one's eyes as in a dream, each remaining long enough to please, none long enough to tire; to allow the thoughts that spring from the magical connection of ideas to flit across the mind, in unison with the visible objects before us; to be tied down by no earthly cares – sure to find a meal wherever one stops; and should one happen not to find a bed, to have nothing worse in store than

to sleep *à la belle étoile*, rocked by the carriage as in a cradle; ever to hear the rolling of the wheels, which, like the murmur of a brook, the clapping of a mill, or the splash of oars in the water, forms, by its uniformity, a soothing accompaniment to the everlasting fluctuation of thought in the mind. This is a bliss, which, like that of love and lovers, genuine travellers alone believe in; and, except genuine lovers, there is nothing more seldom met with in the world than genuine travellers. For those who travel from curiosity, from ennui, for health, or for fashion, or in order to write books, belong not to them, and know nothing of that intoxicating repose." * [* "Aus der Gesellschaft," by the Countess Hahn-Hahn.]

Such was the enjoyment in which I hoped Mrs. Hatton found ample compensation for my silence. She was no doubt a genuine traveller; for she must have been genuine in every character she assumed; though I fear that her notion of the happiness of not talking, and of looking about her, would have fallen short of the German countess's ideal of a traveller's bliss.

After a journey of about eighty miles, at five o'clock in the evening we reached the town of Salisbury, where we were to sleep that night. We ordered dinner at the inn, and I then walked to the cathedral. I had never seen one before; and when I came in sight of its tower, and then of the whole of its beautiful structure, tears rushed into my eyes, and I stood entranced in contemplation before it. My hands involuntarily clasped themselves as in prayer, and I longed to fall on my knees and adore there the God who

had given to man's heart to desire, to his mind to conceive, and to his hand the power of raising, such shrines for His worship.

Salisbury Cathedral stands in the middle of a close, where evergreens and shrubs of all kinds rise from the smooth green grass that grows quite up to the foot of its walls. The door was closed; but while I sent to procure the key from the sexton, I walked slowly round the exterior of the cathedral, and paused for some minutes in a spot where, in a recess formed by the angles of the building, I stood with nothing round me but the beautiful gothic walls – nothing above me but the blue sky. It seemed a spot fitted for holy meditation, for heavenly aspiration; it was a spot that might have been selected when the Saviour's visible presence was withdrawn, by that Mary who chose the good part which was never to be taken from her. It might have been the resort of that Hannah who departed not from the Temple but served the Lord with fastings and with prayers day and night. It might have been the chosen retreat of one who, amidst all the blessings of life, day by day made preparation for the hour of death. The vision of such a life, of a course of sacred duties, of holy affections, of usefulness in life, of resignation in death, of humility in time of weal, of peace in time of woe; such a vision passed before my eyes even then, and my lips murmured: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his."

The sexton arrived with the key; and entering by the great portal door, I wandered for nearly an hour through the aisles, and lingered in the choir and in the chapel, though there was

scarcely light to do more than just to trace the outlines of the masses of columns which rise in severe simplicity, and arch above one's head at a height which, in the dimness of the twilight, was scarcely discernible. After having visited the cloisters, and been so beguiled by their beauty as to forget that dinner was to be on the table at six o'clock, and that it was now verging on the half-hour past, I hurried back to the inn just as the first set of mutton-chops were coming up the stairs, and had just time to close Mrs. Hatton's mouth with a kiss as she was beginning to assure me, in answer to my apologies, that there was nothing in the world she liked so much as waiting for dinner.

The weather had grown close and warm; and we were glad, immediately after we had finished eating, to have the table cleared, and to draw our chairs to the open bow-window. It commanded a view all down the street, which at that moment bore the peculiarly dull and dusty appearance which streets in provincial towns are apt to present on a summer's evening. Two or three children were playing at marbles before one door, and screaming at each other in that particular key which games of this description call into exercise. Now and then a small cart drove by, and a few people on foot occasionally walked past the window. The clouds were gathering rapidly over the sky, and the air was becoming every instant more sultry and oppressive. Heavy drops of rain began to fall one by one in large round spots on the dusty pavement. Red and darkgreen umbrellas began to be unfolded; the carts to drive by more briskly; the marble players

to withdraw into the house after sundry vociferations from some neighbouring window; and the whole scene fairly assumed the hopeless character of a rainy summer's evening. Meantime two men had stationed themselves under the projecting roof of our inn at the outset of the shower, and kept up between themselves a conversation, of which a few words occasionally reached my ears. One of the speakers was a man seemingly of fifty or thereabouts, of a heavy, dull character of countenance; his dress that of a tradesman, not of the better sort. The other was a young man who would have been handsome had it not been for a scowl which disfigured his otherwise well-shaped features. The oldest of the two men said to the other, apparently in answer to some inquiry, "Not till the old un dies, which he will soon."

"Is he as bad as that comes to?" returned the other. A cart rambled by at that moment, and I heard nothing more, and would have probably left the window had not the next words that were spoken arrested my attention.

"So Alice is here?" observed the youngest of the two speakers.

"And are you still after that ere spec?" was the answer.

I immediately identified the Alice they were speaking of with Alice Tracy, and I could not help listening on with the wish to hear something that would corroborate or destroy this idea.

"She'll never have you, take my word for it," continued the same man.

"May be not, while the gemman's a-courting her; but he's after other game, I take it, now."

"I seed him here, with my own eyes, not four days ago," said the first speaker. – "Old mother Tracy has him in her clutches, I'll warrant you. She didn't come down with the shiners for nothing."

"He's a limb of Satan; and if he were the devil himself, I'd tear his eyes out first," retorted the younger man with a fearful volley of oaths.

"And he'd snap his fingers at you, and give you into a policeman's charge. That's no go, my hearty – "

"But if the old un is dying; as you say, and the lass comes in for the cash, he'll not be such a d – d fool – "

"Ay, ay; but mother Tracy, with the bit of paper you know of, would prove an awkward customer for that ere chap! But I'll tell ye, my lad, – you 've but one chance – "

Here the speaker's voice sunk into a whisper, and I did not catch another word. The two men soon took a reconnoitring glance at the weather; and after looking up the street and down the street, and up at the sky, where nothing was visible but a thick mass of gray clouds, they seemed to awake to the thorough hopelessness of the case, and walked off, muttering imprecations on the weather.

I remained by the window absorbed in thought, till Mrs. Hatton apprised me that tea was come. There was, indeed, matter for thought in the few words these men had uttered; and the thoughts they suggested were perplexing in the extreme. It was of Alice Tracy they had spoken, for I had twice distinctly heard her grandmother's name pronounced. She was in Salisbury at

this very moment, it appeared; these two rough and somewhat discreditable men were acquainted with her. A gentleman (to use their own expression) was after her; but the youngest man of the two had expressed a hope that he was at present devoting himself to some other person. Could this gentleman be Henry Lovell? Had he been base, vile enough to attempt the ruin of the lovely girl whose beauty and innocence had seemed to me to belong to a higher sphere than that of this world of ours? Was his devotion to me what was alluded to in the conversation I had overheard? Who was the person whose death they seemed to expect? I was lost in a maze of doubts and conjectures; among which the most distressing was the one that presented to my mind the idea of Alice becoming a victim to the infamous pursuit of Henry Lovell. But again, what could they mean by his (the gentleman, whoever he was,) being in Mrs. Tracy's clutches? I vainly racked my brain to form some conjecture which would account for the different parts of this short conversation. Poor Mrs. Hatton must have thought me apt to be silent, not only in a carriage, but out of one, too, if she judged by my taciturnity on this occasion. When the waiter came in to fetch the tea-things away, I asked him if he knew of any person living in Salisbury, and bearing the name of Tracy? He did not know of any such, he said, but would inquire if I wished. As he was going out of the room, he turned back, and holding the handle of the door with one hand, and passing the other through a bushy head of hair, he added: "I suppose it's quality you are asking for, Ma'am?"

"No; any persons of that name: do you know any?"

"There's an old Miss Tracy, Ma'am, lives in the next street here; she was sister to the grocer that died two years ago."

"Do you happen to know if she has had any relations staying with her lately?"

"I think she has. Ma'am; for she hired a bed, a chair, and a table, some three months ago, of my brother, who lets out furniture; and she'd not go to expense for nothing: her late brother's money is safe enough in her keeping."

As I still looked interested in the subject of Miss Tracy's expenses, the waiter, who was evidently of a communicative turn of mind, closed the door and came back to the table to wipe off some nearly imperceptible crumbs that were lying on the smooth, bright mahogany.

"It was a curious thing enough, Ma'am," he resumed; "nobody in the wide world knowing that the grocer in – street, – old Tracy, as he was called, – had scraped together thirty thousand pounds, and never had been the better for it while he lived."

"Nor when he died," I thought to myself; and inquired if the whole of that sum had been left to the lady who certainly would not go to expense for nothing?

"No, only half, Ma'am," was the answer; "fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash her brother left her; but it is not many folk in Salisbury that have seen the colour of her money. She'll keep adding on to it as long as she lives."

"And where did the other fifteen thousand pounds go?" I

asked.

"They was lodged in some Lunnon banker's hands, Ma'am, I fancy. It's said he left that other half of his money to some relations that lived thereabouts, but I can't tell for sure."

I longed to ask him, if he knew what kind of people had been staying with Miss Tracy, and to find out, if possible, if it was Alice, and whether she was still in Salisbury; but I felt ashamed of questioning on, and, during the pause that ensued, my informant gave one more general polishing to the table, pushed one or two chairs out of their places, poked the fire, which did not want poking, and with a side bow left the room. My curiosity was so strongly excited, that I could not refrain from asking Mrs. Hatton if she knew anything of the Mrs. Tracy, who, in old times, had been my aunt's maid, but she had never seen her, and could give me no information on the subject. We were to start the next morning at nine o'clock, and I resolved to make an effort to satisfy myself as to the state of the case by calling at Miss Tracy's door before setting off. At eight o'clock accordingly, having ascertained from my friend, the waiter, the name of the street and the number of the house, I set out, and as I approached it, my heart beat with a strange mixture of shyness, anxiety, and curiosity. I pulled the bell, and was almost tempted to run away when I heard some one walking heavily to the door to open it. It opened however before I had made up my mind to bolt, and I asked the slip-shod, red-faced girl who appeared, whether Miss Tracy lived there?

"Yes, she does (was the answer). What's your will, Miss?"

"Is Miss Alice Tracy staying with her?"

"Yes, she is."

"Is she at home?"

"No, she aint, she's in church, but her grandmother's at home."

I did not feel courage enough to renew my acquaintance with Mrs. Tracy, whose reception of me at Bridman Cottage I well remembered, and whose forbidding countenance had remained strongly impressed on my recollection. I therefore drew a bit of paper from my pocket, and hastily writing my name upon it, I was just handing it to the girl, when it struck me that it was possible, that, after all, there might be two Alice Tracys in the world, and that I had better not leave my name at a venture. I therefore tore off the bit of writing, and on the remaining slip of paper I drew a passion flower, and requested the girl to give it to Miss Alice Tracy when she came home.

"But what's your name. Ma'am?" she inquired.

"Never mind it," I replied. "Miss Alice will know it immediately, if she is my Miss Alice, and if she is not, it does not signify," and I walked off, leaving the puzzled portress with her mouth wide open, my sketch in her hand, and her intellect evidently employed in balancing the probabilities as to the sanity of mine.

The britschka was at the door when I got back to the inn, and Mrs. Hatton with her veil down, and her boa round her neck, was waiting for me in the little sitting-room. We hastened into

the carriage and rattled off through the streets of Salisbury, and were soon after ascending at a slow pace the hill that lies on the west side of the town. After a few hours of uninteresting driving along the high road, we turned into a lane which brought us at once into a new kind of scenery, quite different from any that I had yet been acquainted with. On either side of us rose, in gentle acclivities, a boundless extent of down, diversified by large patches of gorse, tall clumps of broom shining in all the gorgeous beauty of their yellow flowers, and spreading beds of fern, that loveliest of leaves, as beautiful in its form, and almost as architectural in its natural symmetry, as the more classical acanthus.

As we advanced into the very heart of the country, the character of the scenery changed, and became of a more woodland description. Hedges on both sides of the road bounded our view, but there was ample compensation for this in these delicious hedges themselves, in which hawthorn stood out in sturdy independence from among the intricacies of shrubs and brambles, that imprisoned their stems, while they scattered their snowy blossoms on the shining leaves and green patches of grass beneath them; in which the frail but daring eglantine twined its weak tendrils round the withered trunk of some hollow, worn-out oak; in which the wild clematis and the feathery traveller's-joy, as children love to call it, flung their fairy flowers in reckless profusion over the tangled mass from whence they sprung. There was enough in these hedges to make up for the loss of views; but

we had views too, when, for a moment, a gate, a stile, a gap in the hedge itself, opened to us glimpses of such woods and dells as we read of in the Midsummer Night's Dream.

We reached Brandon at four o'clock. It stands in the midst of what was formerly a chase of immense extent, and which now forms a park of extraordinary size, and of singular beauty. The hand of man seems to have done but little to improve that beauty: the house stands as if by chance in the midst of a wilderness of downy hills and grassy valleys, of hawthorn groves, and wild commons, of remnants of forests, and miles of underwood. I was so engrossed by the strange character of this, to me, perfectly novel scenery, that I thought little of anything else as we drove up to the house: and when on reaching the entrance door, the servants rushed to let down the step, and seize upon the luggage, I felt taken by surprise; rousing myself, I took an affectionate leave of Mrs. Hatton, who was proceeding to her own home in the town of — , about ten miles beyond Brandon, and we did not part without my promising her, that, if I could possibly contrive it, I would visit her there before I left Dorsetshire.

CHAPTER V

But ever and anon of griefs subdued,
There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
And slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
Aside for ever.

LORD BYRON

On inquiry, I found that my aunt was out, and as I was not acquainted with a single person staying in the house, I begged to be shown at once to my room, instead of going into the library, where I was told some of the company were to be found. The housekeeper led the way up-stairs, and having established me in a large and very comfortable room, left me to myself. I sat down in an arm-chair, and except the occupation, if it can be so called, of watching my maid, while she unpacked the different parts of my evening dress, I spent the next hour in complete idleness.

At the end of that time, the rolling of wheels and the clatter of horses' feet drew me to the window. I was pleased to have an opportunity of inspecting some part of the society which I was

so soon to be introduced to. First, there stopped at the hall door a pony-chaise, from which Mrs. Brandon and another woman got out; behind them sat an elderly man, tall and dark, not Mr. Brandon, though (as far as I recollected) like him: behind them came galloping up to the steps a riding party, two women and three or four men; among them was Henry Lovell, who was certainly about the last person I should have expected to meet. He looked in high spirits, and I heard him calling out to somebody in the house, "Is she come?" and two or three minutes afterwards, Mrs. Brandon and he came into my room together.

She kissed me most affectionately, and keeping both my hands in hers, and diminishing at the same time her beautiful eyes into the sharpest, but most *caressante* expression (I know no English word which expresses the look I mean), she fixed them on mine and said, "I am so much obliged to you, Henry, and to you for coming, dearest Ellen; but I ought to thank him first, for he taught me to wish to know you, and to love you. It is not a hard lesson," – she added, in the sweetest tone of voice imaginable. I tried to smile and look pleased, but I was out of sorts, though I could hardly tell exactly why. If I had heard at Elmsley that I was to have met Henry at Brandon, I should have probably been glad, but somehow my short journey had put me into a different state of mind. I had been more free from painful thoughts, immediately connected with myself at least, than at any time for a good while past; I had felt an unconscious relief in seeing new faces, and hearing new voices; I longed to feel unwatched,

unnoticed. Then the conversation I had heard between the two men at Salisbury had left a disagreeable impression upon my mind, although too vague to influence my judgment. Then again, why, if Mrs. Brandon's wish to see me, and her consequent invitation, were the result of his praises, had he not talked to me of her? Why had he not said he should meet me at her house? Obligated, alas! as I was myself by my miserable fate, to practise constant dissimulation, I still hated it strangely in others, and I felt aware that I answered Mrs. Brandon ungraciously, and greeted Henry coldly. As usual, he was perfectly self-possessed, but soon withdrew, leaving me alone with Mrs. Brandon.

"Do let us sit down here together, dearest Ellen," said she, drawing me to a couch as she spoke; "I do so long to be well acquainted with you, and I feel to know so well all about you, we shall be great friends soon, I am sure." And she again squeezed my hands, and looked into my eyes with that pretty but over-confidential look in hers.

We talked about my uncle and aunt, on which she said, "Was not dear Mrs. Middleton a little angry with me for seducing you away from Elmsley? But I fancy she is in the secret; is not she?"

"She was much pleased at your kindness in wishing to see me," I answered; quite puzzled as to what the secret she alluded to could be.

"And now, dear Ellen," she continued, "you must treat me quite like a sister, like a friend, not as an old aunt, or I shall be affronted, and very jealous of Mrs. Middleton. You must speak

to me quite openly."

"You are so very kind," I said, while all the time I thought, "What on earth are you at?" The idea of her being jealous of my affection for Mrs. Middleton struck me as perfectly ridiculous, and the very fact of being requested to speak openly, effectually inclined me to shut myself up, in an additional amount of reserve. I tried, however, to be amiable and warm; and after a little more conversation, Mrs. Brandon left me, to go and dress for dinner.

A few minutes after the bell had rung, I went down to the library, and found nearly everybody assembled. I went through a number of introductions. The women that I made acquaintance with were Lady Wyndham, Mrs. Ernsley, Miss Moore, and two Miss Farnleys. The men were standing together in the middle of the room, but except Mr. Brandon (who immediately came to me and made a number of civil speeches), none of them approached us before dinner was announced. Sir Charles Wyndham then took me in.

Just as we were sitting down, Mrs. Brandon called to Mr. Ernsley, who was preparing to place himself in the chair on the other side of me; "Dear Mr. Ernsley, won't you come and sit by me? I do so long to hear what you think of Meldon Hall, which I am told you went to see to-day." And as he obeyed her directions, Henry Lovell slipped into the chair by my side, which accounted to me for the look of intelligence which Mrs. Brandon directed to our part of the table, to which he perhaps responded, but to which I certainly did not. I was not sorry, however, to have an

opportunity of speaking to him, as I felt curious to know how he would account for his sudden change of plans, and I wished also to find out if he had been at Salisbury during the last few days.

He immediately said to me, "Are you surprised at seeing me here?"

"As much," I replied, "as to find that it is to you I am indebted for being invited here at all."

"And if it was so, would it affront you?"

"It would not be particularly flattering."

"You would think it more flattering, would you, that a woman, who has only seen you once, and that seven years ago, should wish to see you again, than that I (and here he spoke in the lowest possible whisper), after such days, such months, as I spent at Elmsley, should have strained every nerve not to lose sight of you."

"Then this has been a scheme of your forming? I hate scheming."

"I was in London; I detested it, and I came here; but I wish to God I had not I (he added, with more of passion than of tenderness in his voice;) for my coming is evidently disagreeable to you, and I cannot brook the coldness of your manner (he continued, in a still increasing tone of agitation). It puts me beside myself, Ellen, and makes a fool of me, which is of all things what I most dislike to be made."

"What is it you most dislike to be made, Mr. Lovell?" inquired Sir Charles Wyndham, who had been restless and fidgetty, till

he could catch at something in our conversation, which would enable him to join in it.

"A fool, Sir Charles," answered Henry, with an expression of countenance, which certainly did not bear in it any consciousness of his own folly.

"The ladies make fools of us all," said Sir Charles, with a bow to me.

"Unless they find us ready made," I heard Henry mutter, while I was obliged to turn round and listen to a string of compliments, and a flow of small talk from my right hand neighbour, which it seemed as if nothing would stop but some lucky accident, some sudden overthrow of the regular course of things, so steady and even was the tenor of its gentle prolixity. He had an eye, the mildness of which was appalling, and a smile of despairing sweetness. As I looked at him, I wished (which had never happened to me to wish before in looking at anybody's face) that he had been very ugly; no ugly face could have been so hopelessly tiresome. If but for a moment he could have looked cross or ill-natured, it would have been the making of him, or rather of me, for then I should have had courage to cut his discourse short, and turn away; but as it was, dinner was nearly over before I had another opportunity of speaking to Henry, who at last brought about the *event* I had pined for, by overturning a pyramid of red and white cherries, which went rolling all over the table in different directions, and for a moment engrossed Sir Charles's benevolent exertions. Henry immediately seized on the

favourable moment, and resumed our conversation, though in an altered tone.

"The fact is, dear Ellen, that, on my arrival in London, I found my solicitor out of town, and my father gone on a visit to some friends of his in Hertfordshire. I have a general invitation to this place; and it struck me (I was wrong perhaps) that it might be, as well as a gratification to myself, a comfort to you, among a set of strangers, to find a friend; and I suppose I may call myself one."

He said all this in such a gentle, earnest manner, and in fact the thought had been such a kind one, that I felt quite ashamed of myself; and in the reaction of the moment, I turned to him with some emotion and said,

"You are very kind to me, Henry, and it grieves me to think that I must have appeared to you ungracious – ungrateful even."

"Only a little capricious," he answered; "and should I prize as much that bright smile of yours, Ellen, if the transient cloud had not made its brightness still dearer?"

At this moment Mrs. Brandon gave the signal for withdrawal. Henry whispered to me, as I was looking for my gloves under the table,

"Now that I have explained my being here, at the expense of a fearful havoc among Mr. Brandon's cherries, I shall be at leisure, when we come to the drawing-room, to give you my opinion of the society here; pray do not make up your mind about anybody till I come."

I left the dining-room in better humour than when I went in,

and sat down with the two Miss Farnleys, at a round table covered with annuals and albums. We entered into conversation, and *got on* (as the phrase is) very well. They were both nice-looking girls; the eldest was handsome. It was not difficult to comply with Henry's request, that I should not make up my mind about any one till he had given me his opinion; for a whole quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he made his appearance in the drawing-room, and instantly came and sat down on the couch by me. Lady Wyndham at that moment begged the eldest Miss Farnley to come and give her advice about some pattern or stitch that she was employed upon, and the youngest went to the open window to speak to Mrs. Brandon and to Mrs. Ernsley, who were walking up and down the gravel walk near the house.

"How do you like your aunt, Ellen?"

"Don't call her my aunt; that is a name sacred to me. I cannot call any one but your sister, my aunt."

"Well, Mrs. Brandon, then; how do you like her?"

"I thought I was not to make up my mind about any one without your assistance?"

"True, but I did not include her; she is an old friend of mine, and I might be partial."

"There would be no harm in biassing me in her favour. I ought to like her, and I'm afraid I don't."

"Don't you?" said Henry, in a tone of so much annoyance and mortification, that I looked at him with surprise. "You will like her," he added, "when you know her."

"But when did you see so much of her? And if she is such a friend of yours, why did you never talk to me of her?"

He did not answer immediately, and I went on.

"But you are very mysterious about all your acquaintances; for instance, you know how delighted I was with Alice Tracy."

I was obliged to summon up all my courage to pronounce her name; how often does one feel that there are subjects which become forbidden ones between people with whom in general there exists no reserve, and which, by some strange instinct, one cannot touch upon without emotion, though nothing reasonable can be alleged to account for it. He started, and his countenance instantaneously clouded over; but I went on with a kind of cowardly courage.

"And yet, I dare say, you have seen her, or heard something about her since our visit to Bridman Manor, and have never told me."

"I have *not* seen her."

"Where is she now?" I persisted, feeling that if I let the subject drop, it would require afresh effort to resume it again.

"I don't know."

"Is she likely to be staying at Salisbury?"

"At Salisbury?"

"Yes, there are some people of that name living there. I called at the house early this morning, and asked for Alice. She was out, but if I knew that she was staying on there, nothing would be easier than to go and pay her a visit one morning from hence,

and I should like it of all things."

"Ellen," said Henry, "you cannot go on seeing Alice, or have anything to do with any of that family. You are quite a child, and childishly headstrong I well know, but I really must insist upon this."

"I do not exactly see the right that you have to insist upon my doing or my not doing anything; but, at least, give me some good reason for this dictation."

"They are people with whom you cannot with propriety associate; at your age you can be no judge of such things."

"It was my aunt who sent me to them, in the first instance; consequently, she can know nothing against Mrs. Tracy; and, as to Alice, you cannot mean that *she*— unless —"

I stopped short; my heart was beating violently. I felt that modesty, propriety, dignity, forbade my hinting at my suspicions; but they were rushing again on my mind with fresh force; and as I looked at Henry, I felt that my cheeks were burning, and my eyes flashing.

"No," he said, as if he had not remarked my agitation, or else that it had calmed his. "No; Alice's character is perfectly good; but, in visiting her, you would be liable to fall in with persons whom it would be in every way unpleasant to be thrown amongst."

I remembered the two men at Salisbury, and felt this might be true; there was something so plain, and indifferent, too, in his manner of doing justice to Alice, that it removed my suspicions;

and when he said —

"Well, now, for Heaven's sake, let us leave off talking on a subject on which it seems we are always destined to quarrel."

I smiled, and made no effort to pursue it farther, but listened to his account of the society at Brandon.

"Lady Wyndham (he said) is as you can see in looks, the very reverse of her husband — quite guiltless of his insipid comeliness. I have never found out anything beyond that; for she is as stern and as silent as he is communicative, perhaps on the system of compensation, and from a strict sense of justice to society."

"And the Miss Farnleys (I said), we have just made acquaintance; but I am quite disposed to like or dislike them, according to the report you make of them."

"The Miss Farnleys (he replied) have been brought almost entirely abroad, and are, perhaps, not spoilt, but certainly fashioned by this circumstance. The oldest is not the least affected in manner, nor indeed in conversation, except that one is willing to attribute to affectation the very silly things which an otherwise intelligent person is in the habit of saying."

"What kind of things?"

"Why, for instance, she will tell you that she cannot exist without flowers, and therefore keeps loads of them in her room at night, though they give her a raging headache. But don't think her silly (though it is difficult to help it, I own), for this very girl, when she broke her arm last year, submitted to the most painful operation without a groan, in order that her father, who

was ill at the time, should not be agitated or alarmed, though, when he left the room, she fainted from the intensity of agony. Do not think her wicked, if she tells you that she pines to be overturned in a carriage, or to be wrecked at sea; if she boasts that she throws out of window the medicines that are prescribed for her, or that she swallows poison, to try how she feels after it; for she risked her life a few months ago to save a drowning child; and when the village near their country place was on fire, she went about among the distracted people like an angel of mercy. Do not, therefore, think her silly, wicked, or mad, whatever she may say to you, but only wonder where she learnt that to seem so was a charm."

"And her sister, that girl with a Grecian profile and straight eyebrows?"

"That girl, who sometimes is hardly pretty, and at other times perfectly beautiful, is very clever, though she too says silly things now and then, but quite in a different line. She is original and agreeable, though she lisps and drawls, till the spirit within her is roused. She is very provoking if you dislike her; still more so, perhaps, if you like her. In short, I hardly know which to recommend you to do; only, I am sure if you do like her, you will like her very much, and will better spare a better woman – Lady Wyndham, for instance."

"And that little Miss Moore, who is sitting over her book with a look of such intense enjoyment in her large eyes, what account do you give of her?"

"Oh, everybody doats upon the little Irish girl; nobody can tell exactly why. It is, I suppose, because her eyes speak to you whether her tongue does or not. It is because she unites the most contrary extremes, and leaves you to puzzle over them; because she sails into the room, with her little stately manner, and salutes you with a formal curtsy; and then, under all this air of dignity, you discover the very merriest-hearted little romp that ever existed. You must be fond of her. As refined in mind and in manner as the most fastidious could require, she has, at the same time, the humour, the native fun of her country – it sparkles in her eyes – it bubbles in her laugh. She is a little patriot, too: when Ireland is mentioned, you will see her cheek flush, and her spirit rise. It is the only strong feeling she seems to have; for, otherwise, like the jolly miller of Dee, she cares for nobody, and if others care for her, she does not appear to thank them for it. I have often heard men say, how in love they would be with Rosa Moore, if it were not for this thankless, hopeless, remorseless indifference. Now, I think this is a mistake; for I believe her great charm really lies in that very recklessness of what others think of her, or feel for her, in the eager, child-like impetuosity with which she seeks amusement, and in the perfect self-possession with which she treats everything and everybody."

"And Mrs. Ernsley, Henry; what do you say of her?"

"Mrs. Ernsley? It is much more difficult to say what she is, than what she is not; so allow me to describe her in negatives. She is *not* handsome, for her features are bad, and her complexion

is sallow. She is not plain, for she has pretty eyes, pretty hair, a pretty smile, and a pretty figure. She is not natural, for her part in society is pre-arranged and continually studied. She is not affected, for nobody talks to you with more earnestness, or more of natural impulse and spontaneousness; but still, she is always listening to herself. She is the person who is attracting, who is charming you, natural to a fault, unguarded to excess (she says to herself). Then, she is not a bad sort of woman; she has a great regard for her husband, and takes great pains with her little girls; but she is always playing with edged tools; she is always lingering on the line of demarcation. She is eternally discussing who are in love with her – though she is such a very good sort of a woman – and who would be in love with her if she was not? Above all, she is by no means partial to other women, whether they have stepped over the line, or kept within it. She will hate you, Ellen, depend upon it, with an innocent kind of hatred: she will do you no harm, for she is kind-hearted in reality; only it will be nuts to her if anybody says that Miss Middleton is not near so pretty as they had expected; and she will try to put you down whenever you open your mouth; but don't be put down, and then you will remain mistress of the field, for she will grow so fidgetty, (not cross, for she is, in fact, good-tempered,) that she will lose her self-possession, and then all will be over with her."

"I have not the slightest wish to enter the lists with her.

But now, tell me something of the men who are here."

"That will be quickly done; – Sir Charles is a fool; Mr. Ernsley

is a prig; and Mr. Farnley has a broad kind of humour, and a talent for mimicry, but he is coarse and unrefined, which, by the way, is, perhaps, the reason that his daughter thinks it necessary to be so painfully the reverse. Mr. Brandon, your aunt's brother-in-law, is an agreeable man. Mr. Manby is a lout."

"And Sir Edmund Arden?" I inquired.

"Oh, as to Sir Edmund Arden, I entreat you, on the same principle on which pastry-cooks cram their apprentices during the first few days, to talk to him incessantly. Let him sit by you to-morrow at breakfast, at luncheon, at dinner, walk with him, and ride with him; I shall not come near you, in order that he may have full scope for his fascinating powers; you shall be fascinated till you cry for mercy."

I laughed, but secretly thought that something of the severity of his satire proceeded from the fact, that Sir Edmund was the only handsome and pleasing person in the house, and I did not feel inclined to take entirely for granted, that Henry's judgment of him was correct.

Our *tête-à-tête* was soon interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Ernsley, and the arrival of tea. Mrs. Ernsley threw herself into a large arm-chair, flung her bonnet and shawl on the opposite couch, and then began arranging her hair.

"You look tired, Mrs. Ernsley," said Henry.

"To death," she answered. "Dear Mrs. Brandon has been wondering whether the stars are inhabited or not. It is not fair to make one stretch out one's mind so far."

"What did Sir Edmund pronounce on the subject?" inquired Henry.

"That there was much to be said on both sides of the question. I left them at that point."

"Do you like Sir Edmund?"

"I wish you would not ask me."

"Why?"

"Because he hates me, and I won't own to a *passion malheureuse*. He nearly overturned poor Mr. Farnley to-day at dinner, in trying to avoid the chair next me."

"Oh, no; it was in trying to get the one next Miss Middleton," observed Rosa Moore, with an Innocent expression of countenance.

Mrs. Ernsley continued without noticing the interruption, otherwise than by a downward movement of the corners of her mouth – "I had a thousand times rather be hated by him, than be liked in the way in which he seems to like any one, *qui lui tombe sous la main*."

"No doubt," said Henry; "next to being loved there is nothing like being hated."

"You think so too, then?" said Mrs. Ernsley.

"Certainly," he replied. "It gratifies one of the strongest tastes, or rather passions, of one's nature; that of feeling emotion one's self, and exciting it in others. If I could not see the woman I loved agitated by her love for me, I had rather see her tremble, shudder even at my presence, than look as if Mr. Manby had come into

the room."

"What a detestable lover you would make!" exclaimed Mrs. Ernsley. "Always, by your own admission, on the verge of hatred."

He laughed, and said, "It is an old saying, that love and hatred are closely allied."

"Not more so than hatred and contempt," I said; "and in incurring the one, one might, perhaps, gain the other."

Both my companions looked at me with surprise, for I had not joined before in their conversation, and a secret feeling (I was aware of it) had given a shade of bitterness to my manner of saying it.

Mrs. Ernsley seemed to take the remark as personal to herself; but said good-humouredly, though somewhat sneeringly, "Since Miss Middleton has pronounced so decided an opinion, we had better drop the subject. What is become of Edward Middleton, Mr. Lovell?"

"He has been abroad for some months," replied Henry; and Sir Edmund Ardern, who at that moment joined us, said, "The last time I saw him was at Naples last February; we had just made an excursion into the mountains of Calabria together."

"A very unromantic one, no doubt," said Mrs. Ernsley, "as everything is in our unromantic days. Not a trace of a brigand or of an adventure I suppose?"

"None that we were concerned in. But we saw an ex-brigand, and he told us his adventures."

"Did he really?" exclaimed Miss Farnley; "and was he not adorable?"

"Not exactly," said Sir Edmund with a smile; "but some of his accounts were interesting."

"Was he fierce?"

"No, not the least. I fancy he had followed that line in his younger days, more because his father and his brother were brigands, than from any inclination of his own. One of the stories he told us struck Middleton and myself in a very different manner."

"What was it?" I asked, unable to restrain my anxious curiosity.

"I am afraid you may think it long," said Sir Edmund; "but if you are to decide the point in question you must have patience to hear the story: —

"Lorenzo, that was our friend's name, had been engaged in several skirmishes with the gendarmerie, that had been sent into the mountains to arrest the gang to which he belonged; he was known by sight, and had once or twice narrowly escaped being seized. He had a personal enemy among the gendarmes — a man called Giacomo, whose jealousy he had excited some years previously at a country fair. They had quarrelled about a girl whom both were making love to. Lorenzo had struck him, and Giacomo had not returned the blow before they were separated, and his rival safe in the mountains beyond the reach of his vengeance. He brooded over this recollection for several

years; and when he found himself, at last, officially in pursuit of his enemy, he followed him as a hungry beast tracks his prey. One evening, with two or three of his men, he had dodged him for several hours. Lorenzo had made with incredible speed for a spot where, between the fissures of the rock, he knew of a secret passage by which he could elude the pursuit, and place himself in safety. He strained every nerve to turn the corner before his pursuers could be upon him, and mark the place where he disappeared. Between him and that corner, there was now nothing left but a slight wooden bridge thrown over a precipice. As he was rushing across it, Giacomo, with the instinctive feeling that his enemy was escaping him, by one tremendous leap from the top of the rock which overhung the bridge, reached it at the same moment. The shock broke to pieces the frail support; the hand-rail alone did not give way, and to this, by their hands alone, the two men clung. They were close to each other – they looked into each other's faces – neither could move. Lorenzo's eyes were glazed with terror; Giacomo's glared with fury; he was nearest the edge, his men were in sight, and he called to them hoarsely. Lorenzo gave himself up for lost. At that moment, above their heads, on the edge of the rock, something moved – both looked up. A blow, a tremendous blow, fell on Giacomo's head; his features grew distorted, they quivered in agony – a yell of torture escaped him: another blow, and his brains flew upon the face and hands of his foe. A mist seemed to cover Lorenzo's eyes; but he felt something stretched out to him – he clung to it instinctively,

he scrambled, he darted into the cavern, he fainted, but he was safe."

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