

AGUILAR GRACE

THE MOTHER'S
RECOMPENSE,
VOLUME 2

Grace Aguilar

The Mother's Recompense, Volume 2

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Grace Aguilar

The Mother's Recompense, Volume 2 / A Sequel to Home Influence

CHAPTER I

"Who amongst this merry party will become sufficiently sober to assist me in a work of charity?" was Mrs. Hamilton's address, one afternoon, as she entered her daughter's room, where Emmeline, her young friends Lady Florence and Lady Emily Lyle, and even the usually quiet Ellen, were employing themselves in drawing, embroidery, and such light amusements as diligently as the merry speech, the harmless joke, and the joyous laugh of truly innocent enjoyment would permit.

"A case of extreme distress has come before me," she continued, "for which alms and other relief will not be sufficient; clothing is principally required. Can any of you consent to put aside these pretty things for a few days, merely for the sake of obliging me and doing good? I have set every hand to work, and now for further assistance come to you. To whom shall I appeal?"

"To me—to me—to me!" every voice exclaimed spontaneously, and they eagerly crowded round her to know what she required, what case of distress had occurred, for whom they were to work.

Gratified and pleased at their eagerness, Mrs. Hamilton smilingly imparted all they wished to know. The simple tale drew from the artless group many exclamations of pity, combined with the earnest desire to relieve in whatever way their kind friend would dictate, and their task was received by all with every demonstration of pleasure.

"You, too, Ellen," said Mrs. Hamilton, smiling; "I thought you once said you had no time for work."

"Not for ornamental work, aunt! but I hope you have never asked in vain for my assistance in such a case as this," answered Ellen, blushing as she spoke.

"No, love; my words did you injustice. But you appear to have found time for ornamental work also, if this very pretty wreath be yours," said Mrs. Hamilton, bending over her niece's frame, and praising the delicacy of her flowers.

"Oh, I have time for any and everything now," exclaimed Ellen, in a tone of animation, so very unusual, that not only her aunt but her young companions looked at her with astonishment.

"Ellen, you are becoming more and more incomprehensible," said Emmeline, laughing. "If Edward do not come home soon, as I suspect this extraordinary mood is occasioned by the anticipation of his arrival, I am afraid your spirits will carry you half way over the Channel to meet him. Mamma, take my advice, and keep a strict watch over the person of your niece."

"You know, Ellen, you are as full of fun and mischief as I am, quiet and demure as we once thought you," said Lady Emily.

"Is she? I am glad of it," said Mrs. Hamilton, playfully. "Do not look so very much ashamed of your mirth, my dear Ellen, and bend over your work as if you had been guilty of some extraordinary misdemeanour. You know how pleased I always am to see you happy, Ellen," she added, in a lower voice, as she laid her hand sportively on her niece's head, which was bent down to conceal the confusion Emmeline's words had called forth.

Some little time longer Mrs. Hamilton remained with the young party, entering with her usual kindness into all their pleasures and pursuits, and left them perhaps even happier than she had found them.

Ellen's change of manner had been noticed by the whole party assembled at Oakwood; and by most of them attributed to the anticipation of the long-absent Edward's return. That indefinable

manner which had formerly pervaded her whole conduct had disappeared. She no longer seemed to have something weighing on her mind, which Mrs. Hamilton sometimes fancied to have been the case. Cheerful, animated, at times even joyous, she appeared a happier being than she had ever been before; and sincerely her aunt and uncle, who really loved her as their child, rejoiced in the change, though they knew not, guessed not the real cause. Ingratiating herself with all, even the stern Duchess of Rothbury, who, with her now only unmarried daughter, Lady Lucy, had accepted Mrs Hamilton's pressing invitation to Oakwood, relaxed in her manner towards her; and Sir George Wilmot, also a resident guest, declared that if Edward were not proud of his sister on his return, he would do all in his power to hinder his promotion.

Mr. Hamilton and his family had employed the greater part of a very beautiful August in conducting their guests to all the most picturesque and favourite spots in the vicinity of Oakwood. About a week after the circumstance we have narrated, St. Eval and Lady Gertrude joined them in the morning of a proposed excursion, which included the whole party, with the exception of Mrs. Hamilton and Ellen. The Earl and his sister had been instantly enlisted as a most agreeable reinforcement; nor was the young Earl very sorry for an excuse to spend a whole day in enjoying the beauties of Nature *tête-à-tête* with his betrothed, who, since the candid explanation of her agitation on first hearing of Annie's elopement, for which her knowledge of Lord Alphingham's former marriage had well accounted, had become if possible dearer than ever; and this excursion was indeed one of perfect enjoyment to both.

Ellen, for some unaccountable reason, which her young friends could neither penetrate nor conceive, refused to accompany them, declaring that most important business kept her at home.

"Edward will not come to-day, so do not expect him," had been Emmeline's parting words.

The ruralizing party were to dine amid the ruins of Berry Pomeroy, and were not expected home till dusk, to a substantial tea.

It might have been seven in the evening that Ellen quietly entered the library, where her aunt was engaged in writing, and stood by her side in silence, as if fearful of interrupting by addressing her.

"Wait a few minutes, my love, and I shall be ready to attend to you, if you require my assistance in the arrangement of your work," Mrs. Hamilton said, alluding to the parcel of baby-linen she perceived in her niece's hand. Ellen smiled and obeyed. In a few minutes Mrs. Hamilton laid aside her writing, and looked up, as if expecting her niece would speak.

"Well, Ellen, what grand difficulty can you not overcome?"

"None, my dear aunt. My task is done; I only want your approval," replied Ellen.

"Done!" repeated her aunt, in an accent of astonishment. "My dear Ellen, it is impossible; I only gave it you a week ago. You must have worked all night to finish it"

"Indeed I have not," replied Ellen, quickly yet earnestly.

"Then I certainly must examine every little article," said Mrs. Hamilton, laughing, "or I shall decidedly fancy this extreme rapidity cannot have been productive of neatness, which last I rather prefer to the first."

Ellen submitted her work to her scrutiny, without reply, and remained kneeling on a stool at her aunt's feet, without any apprehension as to the sentence that would be pronounced.

"Really, Ellen, I shall incline to Emmeline's opinion, and believe some magic is at work within you," was Mrs. Hamilton's observation, as she folded up the tiny suit with very evident marks of satisfaction. "How you have acquired the power of working thus neatly and rapidly, when I have scarcely ever seen a needle in your hand, I cannot comprehend. I will appoint you my sempstress-general, in addition to bestowing my really sincere thanks for the assistance you have afforded me."

Ellen pressed her aunt's hand to her lips in silence, for an emotion Mrs. Hamilton beheld, but could not understand, choked her voice.

"What is the matter, love? has anything occurred to annoy you to-day? You look paler and more sad than usual; tell me what it is."

"Do you remember what—what chanced—have you forgotten the event that took place this very day, this very hour, in this very room, three years ago?" demanded Ellen, almost inaudibly, and her cheek blanched to the colour of her robe as she spoke.

"Why recall the painful past at such a moment, my sweet girl? has it not been redeemed by three years of undeviating rectitude and virtue? I had hoped the recollection had ere this long ceased to disturb you," replied Mrs. Hamilton, with much feeling, as she pressed her lips to her niece's brow.

"It never can, it never will, unless—unless—" Strong and almost fearful emotion prevented all she had wished to say, and throwing into Mrs. Hamilton's lap a small calf-skin pocket-book, she flung her arms round her neck, and burying her face in her bosom, murmured, in a voice choked with sobs, "The amount of all I took is there—all—all. Oh, take it, and let me thus feel it as a debt which I have paid."

"Ellen, my own Ellen, be composed," entreated Mrs. Hamilton, alarmed by the extreme agitation she beheld. "Tell me, love, what are the contents of this pocket-book? why do you entreat me so earnestly to take it?"

Struggling violently with herself, Ellen tore open the little book, and placed in her aunt's hand bank notes to the amount of those which had once been so fatal a temptation.

"They are mine—all mine. I have gained them honestly; indeed, indeed I have; I have worked for them. It was to gain time for this I refused to go out with you last winter. I had hoped my long, long task would have been done before, but it was not. Oh, I thought I should never, never gain the whole amount, but I have now; and, oh, tell me I have in part redeemed my sin; tell me I am more worthy of your love, your kindness; tell me I am again indeed your own happy Ellen."

She would have said more, but no words came at her command, and Mrs. Hamilton remained silent for a few minutes, in surprise and admiration.

"My Ellen, my own much-loved Ellen!" she exclaimed at length, and tears of unfeigned emotion mingled with the repeated kisses she imprinted on her niece's cheek, "this moment has indeed repaid me for all. Little did I imagine in what manner you were employed, the nature of your tedious task. How could you contrive to keep it thus secret from me? what time could you find to work thus laboriously, when not one study or employment have I seen neglected?"

"I thought at first I never should succeed," replied Ellen, her strong emotion greatly calmed; "for while Miss Harcourt remained with us, I had only two hours before prayers in the morning, and sometimes I have ventured to sit up an hour or two later at night; but not often, for I feared you would discover me, and be displeased, for I could not, dared not tell you in what I was employed. The winter before last I earned so much from embroidery and finer kinds of work, that I thought I should have obtained the whole a year ago; but I was disappointed, for here I could only do plain work, at which I earned but little, for I could not do it so quickly. I had hoped there would have been no occasion to refuse your wish, that I should accompany you and Emmeline, but I found the whole amount was still far from completed, and I was compelled to act as I did."

"And is it possible, my Ellen, you have intrusted your secret to no one; have demanded no sympathy, no encouragement in this long and painful task?"

"I could not have accomplished nor did I commence it, without the kind assistance and advice of Ellis. My dear aunt, I knew, reposed great confidence in her, and I thought if she did not disapprove of my plan, I should not be acting so very independently, and that with her assistance my secret would not be so difficult to keep: she procured me employment. My name nor my reasons for seeking it were never known to those for whom I worked."

"And could she approve of a task such as this, my Ellen? Could she counsel such painful self-denial and tedious labour?"

"She did all she could to dissuade, and at first positively refused to assist me; but at last yielded to my entreaties, for she saw I never should be happy till I could look on the past more as a debt than

—than—" She paused, then added—"My own spirit rebelled enough; that was far more difficult to overcome than other dissuasions."

"And what strong impulse could have urged you to this course of self-denial, my sweet girl? I know not yet whether I shall not scold you for this almost needless infliction of pain, and for the deception it involves towards me," said Mrs. Hamilton, with reproachful tenderness.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me that!" exclaimed Ellen, clasping the hand she held. "I have often and often felt I was deceiving you; failing in that confidence I had promised you should never have again to demand; but I dared not tell you, for I knew you would have prohibited the continuance of my task."

"I should indeed, my Ellen; and tell me why you have done this. Was it indeed because you imagined nothing else could atone for the past?"

"Because I felt—I knew, though I was restored to your favour, your confidence, my conscience was not at peace, because I had read, *'If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity, he shall surely live, he shall not die;*' and I felt, however I might endeavour to be virtuous and good, till I had given again that which I had robbed, I dared not implore the mercy of my God."

It is impossible to do justice by mere description to the plaintive eloquence, to the mournfully-expressive voice with which these simple words were said, betraying at once those thoughts and feelings which had been so long concealed in Ellen's meek and youthful heart, the hidden spring from which her every action had emanated; Mrs. Hamilton felt its power, the sentiment was too exalted, too holy for human praise. She folded her niece to her bosom.

"May the Almighty searcher of hearts accept this sacrifice and bless you, my dear child. Secretly, unostentatiously, it has been done. Pure must have been the thoughts which were yours when thus employed, when such was their origin, and we may hope, indeed, they have been accepted. Had no self-denial attended the payment of your debt, had you merely entreated your uncle to repay himself from the fortune you possess, I would not have accepted it; such a payment would neither have been acceptable to me, nor to Him whom, I firmly believe, my Ellen sought more to please. But when every action the last few years has proved to me, the words you repeated have indeed been the foundation of this self-conquest, I cannot but humbly, trustingly, think it will be an accepted offering on high. Nor will I refuse to comply with your request, my dearest Ellen; I will receive that which you have so perseveringly and so painfully earned; it shall be employed in purchasing prayers for us all, from those whom it may relieve. Let not the recollection of the past again disturb you, my sweet child. Solicitude and pain you indeed once caused me, but this moment has redeemed it all. Continue thus undeviatingly to follow the blessed path you have chosen, and our Ellen is and ever will be deserving of all the love which those to whom she is so dear can lavish upon her."

For a few minutes there was silence, for the solemnity with which she spoke had touched a responding chord; but the thoughts of the orphan arose to heaven, silently petitioning for grace to continue in that blessed path of which her aunt had spoken, in thankfulness for having been permitted to conclude her painful task, and thus obtained the approbation of her more than mother, the relative she so revered and loved.

"And this, then, was the long task which your numerous avocations during the day prevented your completing, and you therefore took the time from that allotted to recreation and amusement—this, which so strongly emboldened my little Ellen, that even my coldness had no effect, except to make her miserable. What do you not deserve for thus deceiving me? I do not think I know any punishment sufficiently severe." Mrs. Hamilton had recalled all her playfulness, for she wished to banish every trace of sadness and emotion from the countenance of her niece. Ellen raised her head to answer her in her own playful tone, when they were both startled by the declining light of day being suddenly obscured, as if by the shadow of a figure standing by the open window near them. It

was, however, so dark, that the outlines of the intruder were alone visible, and they would have been unrecognised by any, save by the eye of affection.

Ellen sprung suddenly to her feet. "Edward!" burst gladly from her lips, and in another second a fine manly youth had darted through the open casement, and the long parted brother and sister were in each other's arms. For a minute only Ellen was pressed in his embrace, and then releasing her, he turned towards his aunt, and even as a devoted mother, a fond and dutiful son, they met, for such had they been in the long years of separation. Frequently had that high-spirited boy been tempted to error and to sin, but as a talisman had her letters been. He thought on the years that were passed, on their last interview, when every word had graven itself upon his heart, on the devotedness of his orphan sister, the misery he had once occasioned; he thought on these things, and stood firm,—the tempter fled. He stood before them erect in youthful beauty, no inward stain bade him turn from those fond looks or shrink from the entwining arms of his young sister. And, oh, how blessed is it thus to meet! to feel that vanished years have not estranged us, distance has not diminished love, that we are to each other even as we parted; to feel again the fond kiss, to hear once more the accents of a voice which to us has been for years so still,—a voice that brings with it the gush of memory! Past days flit before us; feelings, thoughts, hopes, we deemed were dead, all rise again, summoned by that secret witchery, the well-remembered though long silent voice. Let years, long, lingering, saddening years drag on their chain, let youth have given place to manhood, manhood to age, still will it be the same—the voice we once have loved, and deemed to us for ever still—oh, time, and grief, and blighted hope will be forgotten, and youth, in its undimmed and joyous beauty, its glow of generous feelings, its bright anticipations, all, all again be ours.

"Mother; yes, now indeed may I call you mother!" exclaimed Edward, when the agitation of this sudden meeting had subsided, and he found himself seated on a sofa between his aunt and sister, clasping the hand of the former and twining his arm caressingly round the latter. "Now indeed may I indulge in the joy it is to behold you both again; now may I stand forth unshrinkingly to meet my uncle's glance, no guilt, or shame, or fear has cast its mist upon my heart. This was your gift," he drew a small Bible from his bosom. "I read it, first, because it had been yours, because it was dear to you, and then came other and holier thoughts, and I bowed down before the God you worshipped, and implored His aid to find strength, and He heard me."

Mrs. Hamilton pressed his hand, but spoke not, and after a brief silence, Edward, changing his tone and his subject, launched at once, with all his natural liveliness, into a hurried tale of his voyage to England. An unusually quick passage gave him and all the youngsters the opportunity they desired, of returning to their various homes quite unexpectedly. The vessel had only arrived off Plymouth the previous night, or rather morning, for it was two o'clock; by noon the ship was dismantled, the crew dismissed, leave of absence being granted to all. And for the first time in his life, he laughingly declared he fancied being the captain's favourite very annoying, as his presence and assistance were requested at a time when his heart was at Oakwood; however, he was released at last, procured a horse, and galloped away. His disasters were not, however, over; his horse fell lame, as if, Edward said, he felt a seaman was not a fit master for him. He was necessitated to leave the poor animal to the care of a cottager, and proceed on foot, avoiding the village, for fear of being recognised before he desired; he exercised his memory by going through the lanes, and reached Oakwood by a private entrance. Astonished at seeing the rooms, by the windows of which he passed, deserted, he began to fear the family were all in London; but the well-known sound of his aunt's voice drew him to the library, just as he was seeking the main entrance to have his doubts solved. He stood for a few minutes gazing on the two beings who, more vividly than any others, had haunted his dreams by night and visions by day; he had wished to meet them first, and alone, and his wish was granted.

Wrapped in her happy feelings, it was her brother's arm around her, her brother's voice she heard, Ellen listened to him in trembling eagerness, scarcely venturing to breathe, lest that dear voice should be still, lest the hand she clasped should fade away, and she should wake and find it but a

dream of bliss—Edward could not really have returned; and Mrs. Hamilton felt emotion so powerfully swelling within, as she gazed once more on the brave preserver of her husband, the child of her sister, her very image, that it was with difficulty she could ask those many questions which affection and interest prompted.

Edward had scarcely, however, finished his tale, before the sound of many and eager voices, the joyous laugh, and other signs of youthful hilarity, announced the return of the party from their excursion. Nor was it long before Emmeline's voice, as usual, sounded in loud laughing accents for her mother, without whose sympathy no pleasure was complete.

"Do not disturb yourselves yet, my dear children," Mrs. Hamilton said, as she rose, knowing well how many, many things the long-separated orphans must have mutually to tell, and penetrating with that ready sympathy—the offspring of true kindness—their wish for a short time to remain alone together. "You shall not be summoned to join us till tea is quite ready, and if you wish it, Edward," she added, with a smile, "you shall have the pleasure of startling your uncle and cousins as agreeably as you did us. I will control my desire to proclaim the happy tidings of your safe return."

She left the brother and sister together, sending Robert with, a lamp, that they might have the gratification of seeing each other, which the increasing darkness had as yet entirely prevented; and a gratification to both it was indeed. Edward had left his sister comparatively well, but with the traces of her severe illness still remaining vividly impressed upon her features; but now he saw her radiant in health, in happiness, and beauty so brilliant, he could hardly recognise that fair and graceful girl for the ailing, drooping child she had once been. Nor or was the contrast less striking between the Ellen of the present meeting and the Ellen of the last; then wretchedness, misery, inward fever, consumed her outward frame, and left its scorching brand upon her brow. Remorseful anguish had bowed her down; and now he had returned when her heart was free and light as the mountain breeze, her self-inspired penance was completed; and nothing now existed to make her shrink from the delight of devoting hours to her brother.

"Tell James to go over to the Rectory, with my compliments to Mr. Howard, and if he be not particularly engaged, I beg he will join us this evening," said Mrs. Hamilton, a short time after she had left the library, addressing Martyn, then crossing the hall.

"Have you any particular wish for our worthy rector this evening, Emmeline?" demanded Mr. Hamilton, gazing, as he spoke, with admiration and surprise on the countenance of his wife, whose expressive features vainly strove to conceal internal happiness.

"A most earnest desire," she replied, smiling somewhat archly.

"Indeed, I am curious"—

"I am sorry, dear Arthur, for I am no advocate for curiosity, and cannot indulge it."

"Ah, papa, there is a gentle hint for you, and a broader one for me," exclaimed Emmeline, laughing; while conjectures as to what Mrs. Hamilton's business with the rector could possibly be, employed the time merrily till the whole party were assembled.

"You may depend, Emmeline, it is to arrange all the necessary minutiae for your marriage," said Lord St. Eval, who had been persuaded to remain at Oakwood that night. "Your mother has selected a husband for you; and, fearing your opposition, has sent for Mr. Howard that all may be said and done at once."

"I hope, then, that I am the man," exclaimed Lord Louis, laughing; "there is no one else whom she can very well have at heart, not that I see," he added, looking mischievously round him, while some strange and painful emotions suddenly checked Emmeline's flow of spirits, and utterly prevented her replying.

A flush of crimson dyed her cheek and brow; nay, her fair neck partook its hue, and she suddenly turned towards her mother, with a glance that seemed of entreaty.

"Why, Emmeline, my dear child, you surely cannot believe there is the least particle of truth in my mischievous son's assertion?" said the Marchioness of Malvern, pitying, though she wondered at her very evident distress.

"And is marriage so very disagreeable to you even in thought?" demanded Lord St. Eval, still provokingly.

"The very idea is dreadful; I love my liberty too well," answered Emmeline, hastily rallying her energies with an effort, and she ran on in her usual careless style; but her eye glanced on the tall figure of young Myrvin, as he stood with Herbert at a distant window, and words and liveliness again for a moment failed. His arms were folded on his bosom, and his grey eye rested on her with an expression almost of despair, for the careless words of Lord Louis had reached his heart—"No one else she can have."

Lord Louis had forgotten him, or intentionally reminded him that he was indeed as a cypher in that noble circle; that he might not, dared not aspire to that fair hand. He gazed on her, and she met his look; and if that earnest, almost agonized glance betrayed to her young and guileless bosom that she was beloved, it was not the only secret she that night discovered.

Mr. Hamilton was too earnestly engaged in conversation with Sir George Wilmot to notice the painful confusion of his child; and Mrs. Hamilton was thinking too deeply and happily on Ellen's conduct and Edward's return, to bestow the attention that it merited, and consequently it passed without remark.

"Mother, I am sorry to be the first to inform you of such a domestic misfortune," said Percy, soon after entering the room, apparently much amused, "but Robert has suddenly lost his wits; either something extraordinary has happened or is about to happen, or the poor fellow has become bewitched. You smile, mother; on my honour, I think it no smiling matter."

"Never mind, Percy; your favourite attendant will, I have no doubt, recover his senses before the night is over. I am not in the least anxious," replied his mother, smiling.

"Percy, your mother has clothed herself to-night in impenetrable mystery, so do not hope to discover anything through her," said Lord St. Eval, laughing, and the young men continued gaily conversing with Lady Gertrude and Caroline, till the entrance of Mr. Howard and the announcement of tea or supper; of both of which, after a day spent in the country as this had been, the evening meal partook.

"Ellen—where is Ellen?" said several voices, as they seated themselves round the hospitable board, and observed her place was vacant; and Sir George Wilmot eagerly joined the inquiry.

"She will join us shortly, Sir George," replied Mrs. Hamilton, and turning to a servant near her, desired him to let Miss Fortescue know tea was ready.

"I will go, madam. Stand back, James, let me pass," exclaimed Robert, hastily, and he bounded out of the apartment with a most extraordinary failing of his wonted respect.

"There, proof positive; did I not tell you the lad was mad," said Percy, and, as if in confirmation of his words, almost directly after a loud and joyful shout sounded from the servants' hall.

Mr. Hamilton looked up inquiringly, and in doing so his eye caught an object that caused him to start from his seat with an exclamation of surprise and pleasure; while Percy, leaping over chairs and tables that stood in his way, unheeding Lord Louis's inquiry, whether Robert had infected him, shook and shook again the hand of the long-absent relative, in whom both he and Herbert could only recognise the preserver of their father. Herbert and his sisters simultaneously left their seats, and crowded round him. Warmly, affectionately, Edward greeted them one and all, and rapidly answered the innumerable questions of Percy; defended his sister from all share in his concealment, of which Herbert and Emmeline laughingly accused her. The flush of almost painful bashfulness still lingered on his cheek, as he marked the eyes of all fixed upon him, strangers as well as friends; but as he turned in the direction of his aunt, and his eye fell on the venerable figure of his revered preceptor, who stood aside, enjoying the little scene he beheld, as the remembrance of the blessed words, the soothing

comfort that impressive voice had spoken in his hour of greatest need, the lessons of his childhood, his dawning youth, rushed on his mind, control, hesitation, reserve were all at an end; he broke from the surrounding and eager group, even from the detaining arm of his sister, sprang towards him, and clasping both Mr. Howard's hands, his eyes glistened and his voice quivered, as he exclaimed—

"Mr. Howard, too! one of my first, my best, and kindest friends. Ellen told me not of this unexpected pleasure; this is joy, indeed."

"A joy to me, too, my dear boy, equally unexpected; we must thank Mrs. Hamilton for this early meeting. I knew not the pleasure she had prepared for me," replied Mr. Howard, returning the pressure of Edward's hand with equal warmth.

"Nor did any one, my good sir. Never will I say again a lady cannot keep a secret," said the Marquis of Malvern, jestingly. "Mr. Hamilton, as you do not seem inclined to honour me, without asking, I must entreat a formal introduction to that gallant nephew of yours, whose name is not unknown to naval fame, though as yet but one of her junior officers."

"I really beg your pardon, my dear Lord; Edward's sudden appearance has startled me out of all etiquette. To one and all, then, of my good friends here, allow me to introduce to their indulgent notice this said Edward Fortescue, midshipman and gallant officer on board His Majesty's good ship Prince William; and, in order that all reserve may be at an end between us, I propose a bumper to the health and prosperity of the wanderer returned."

"Most excellent, my dear father; one that I will second with all my heart," exclaimed Percy, eagerly. "For that amphibious animal looks marvellously like a fish out of water amongst us all: and here we admit no strangers. Edward, there is a vacant seat reserved for you by my mother's side, who looks much as if she would choose you for her knight this evening; and, therefore, though your place in future is amongst the young ladies, to whom by-and-bye I mean to introduce you by name and character, we will permit you to sit there to-night. Ellen, my little coz, where are you? You must be content with looking at your brother, not sitting by him. I cannot allow such breaches of etiquette; that is quite impossible."

"I am perfectly satisfied where I am, Percy," replied his cousin, laughing, as she obeyed the Marchioness of Malvern's request and seated herself beside her. Every eye was turned on Ellen with an admiration, which, had not her thoughts been engrossed with her brother, would have been actually painful to one of her quick feelings. Lady Malvern longed to hear from her young favourite, in words, the internal delight which was so evident in every feature, and by her kindly sympathy succeeded in her wishes. The young sailor's health was celebrated with enthusiasm; and Edward gracefully, though briefly, returned his thanks, while the kindness of all around him, the easy friendliness of those who were strangers, and the joy of feeling himself once more in the midst of those he loved, soon placed him perfectly at ease.

Ellen looked eagerly round her circle of friends, to mark the impression made by Edward, and even her fond affection was fully satisfied. Sir George Wilmot had not spoken, but his eye kindled with animation as in the gallant young sailor he recalled his own youthful days, while some other sad remembrances kept him silent, and checked his usual hilarity. Lord Malvern appeared almost as interested as Mr. Hamilton. Lady Gertrude's kind glance met hers, and told, by its silent eloquence, how well she sympathised in Ellen's feelings; and Lord St. Eval too, his smile spoke volumes, though his natural reserve prevented his addressing Edward, while the young and lively members of the party seemed to find abundant amusement in the anecdotes and adventures he narrated. Arthur Myrvin gazed earnestly at him, and for a time banished his own distressing thoughts in the endeavour to trace in the fine manly youth before him some likeness to the handsome, yet violent and mischievous boy he had first and last seen in the village of Llangwillan.

"I have heard so much of Edward, from my friend Ellen here, that I am most anxious to cultivate his acquaintance, and trust Castle Malvern will often be graced by the presence of such a gallant young sailor," was the Marchioness of Malvern's kind address, after they had adjourned to the drawing

room, as, leaning on the arm of Ellen, she advanced to the young man, who, from Percy's lively introduction, was playing the agreeable to Lady Florence and Lady Emily Lyle, while Lord Louis, who found something in Edward's countenance that promised a kindred feeling for fun and frolic, was demanding question after question, which Edward was answering in a manner calculated to excite the continued merriment of his companions, till a sign from his aunt called him to her side.

"So I must entreat Admiral Sir George Wilmot to deign to notice my nephew, it will not be given unasked," she said, approaching the aged officer, who was sitting a little apart, shading his eyes with his hand, as if in deep thought. "Sir George, I shall impeach you of high treason against me, the liege lady of this fortress, that on a night when all is joy, you, who are generally the gayest, should be sad. What excuse can you urge in your defence?"

"Is Edward unworthy of the high privilege of being a sailor, Sir George?" whispered Ellen, archly, "or is your wrath against me, for not joining your expedition this morning, to be extended to him? will you not look on him as a brother seaman?"

"Nay, Ellen, I must toil through long years of servitude, I must reap very many laurels, ere I can deserve that title," said Edward. "The name of Sir George Wilmot is too well known on the broad seas for me to hope for more than a word of encouragement from him, or to enable me to look on him with any other feelings than those of the deepest reverence and respect."

"Ay, ay, young man, you wish to surprise the old hulk to surrender; gaily rigged and manned as you are, you think, by a show of homage to me, to surprise me into paying it to you," said the old man, rousing himself from his abstraction, and laughing as he spoke. "Do not deny it, youngster, but I forgive you; for I have been an old fool, Mrs. Hamilton. I plead guilty, and throw myself on your mercy. You, Mistress Ellen, you deserve nothing from me, after rejecting every courtly speech I could think of this morning, to persuade you to crowd sail and steer out under my guidance instead of remaining safe in harbour. Jokes apart, if you, young sir, will feel pleasure in the friendship of an old time-worn servant of his Majesty as I am, I offer you my hand, with all the warmth and sincerity of our noble profession. For your uncle's sake as well as your own, my best wishes and my best offices shall be exercised in tacking on lieutenant to your name."

"And you will do nothing, then, for *my sake*, Sir George, nor for my aunt's, whose dignity your sadness has offended?" said Ellen, smiling, as did Mrs. Hamilton.

"Your aunt would forgive my sadness, my dear child, did she know its cause. I was wrong to encourage it, but I could not look on these bright features," he laid his hand, which trembled, on Edward's arm, "without seeing again past times peopled with those who have passed away. Mrs. Hamilton, I thought again the merry favourite of my old friend, your father, stood before me, the gay, the thoughtless, lovely Eleanor; she was like him, in the bloom of youth and freshness, when I last beheld her; and I thought, as mine eye glanced on this well known uniform, there was another still of whom he reminded me,—the adopted son of my affections, the darling of my childless years, Charles, my gallant warm-hearted Charles! Nearly six years was he with me, when his courage earned him a lieutenant's berth; he changed his quarters and his commander, and I saw him no more. Such was he; such—oh, I thought Eleanor and Charles again were before me, and I longed for the friend of my early years, to recognise in his grandson the features of his Eleanor, the voice, the laugh, and figure of his Charles. Forgive me, my dear children, I have frightened away your mirth, and made myself gloomy."

There was silence as he ceased, and Sir George was the first to break it, by addressing Edward with animation, questioning him as to all his hopes and anticipations with regard to his promotion, which, as his six years of service were now passed, he allowed to occupy his mind, and in such conversation all traces of gloom quickly vanished; and Ellen, interested in their conference, lingered near them in recovered spirits, till the bell summoned all those who chose to join in the evening prayer. All attended, except young Myrvin, who had departed. Herbert felt anxious on his friend's account, for many reasons, which we must postpone explaining till a future page; suffice it now

to say that the young man's conduct not seeming to be such as his profession demanded, a degree of scarcely-perceptible, but keenly-felt coldness was displayed towards him, both by Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Howard. Herbert had this night remarked that his cheek was pale, his eye almost haggard, and his words and manner often confused, and he had endeavoured to elicit the cause of his inward disturbance, but unsuccessfully; the young man, although very evidently unhappy, appeared to shrink from his confidence, and Herbert, though grieved, desisted from his friendly office. That night Mr. Hamilton resigned his place at the reading-desk to the worthy minister, who, both in public and private worship, knew so well the duties of his sacred office. He read the chapters of the evening, with a brief but explanatory commentary on each, and after the usual prayers, broke forth into a strain of earnest thanksgiving for the safe return of him who, since he had last addressed his God, surrounded by his family, had been exposed to the temptations and dangers of the sea, and mercifully preserved through them all, and permitted to return in joy and peace. To all, save to the orphans and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, his words applied but to the terrors of the deep, but they well knew where the thoughts of their minister had wandered; they knew that fervent thanksgiving was offered up for his preservation from those sins which had been his on his last return; they knew he blessed his Maker for the promise of virtue he beheld; His grace had enabled him to overcome temptation, and return to the home of his boyhood comparatively unstained.

Edward contrasted his present feelings with those which he had experienced the first night of his last return, and Ellen thought on that bitter anguish, the public shame which had been hers in that very hall, that very night three years before, and the young hearts of both the orphans were filled with warm and deep thanksgiving. The thoughts of all were composed and tranquillized when Mr. Howard ceased, and in the little time that intervened between the conclusion of the service and the family separating to their rooms, no light and frivolous converse disturbed the solemn but sad impression on the minds of each.

"I cannot part from you for the night, my dear cousin," said Edward, somewhat archly, though in a low voice, as he approached the spot where Caroline and St. Eval stood, "without offering you my warmest congratulations on your future prospects, and without requesting an introduction from *you* to him, in whom I am to welcome a new relative. I have been wishing to do so all the evening, but when I was at liberty I missed you."

Evidently pleased, Caroline looked up into St. Eval's face, but before she could speak, the young earl had warmly pressed Edward's hand, and answered with sincerity and kindness equal to his own. The whole party very soon afterwards dispersed.

Were it ours to follow our young and still, in appearance, childlike friend Emmeline Hamilton to her room that night, we should see that the smiles which had beamed around her lip had passed away, the flush on her cheek was no longer there, and one or two bright drops might have been observed slowly falling on her pale cheek, as she sat in deep musing, ere she retired to her couch. She had dismissed Fanny, alleging that she did not require her aid, and her long silky hair loosened from its confinement, hung carelessly in golden waves around her. Tears fell on her hand; she started, and flung back her tresses, looked fearfully around her, and passed her hand across her eyes, as if to check them—but ineffectually; another, and another fell; she leaned her crossed arms upon the pillow, and her head drooped on them, and she wept, wept as she had never wept before, and yet she knew not wherefore; she was sad, how deeply sad, but that young and guileless spirit knew not why. Child she was still in looks, in playfulness, in glee; a child she still believed herself, but she was no child—that age of buoyancy had fled, and Emmeline was, indeed, a woman, a thinking, feeling, ay, and loving woman.

It might have been nearly a week after Edward's return, when, on entering the library one morning, Mrs. Hamilton observed her husband, Mr. Howard, and Edward in earnest conference, the latter appearing somewhat agitated. She would have retreated, imagining her presence mistimed, but

Edward, the instant he perceived her, sprung forward, and seizing both her hands, exclaimed, in a voice of entreaty—

"Dearest aunt, will not you use your influence with my uncle, and prevail on him to take the sum I have saved at different times, from my prize-money and other things, to replace that which—which was lost three years ago. To obtain sufficient, I have denied myself all unnecessary indulgence; it has checked my natural extravagance; prevented me, when sometimes I have been strongly tempted to play, or join my messmates in questionable amusements. In saving that, I have cured myself of many faults; it has taught me economy and control, for by the time the whole amount was saved, my wishes and evil inclinations were conquered. I look on it as a debt which I had bound myself to pay. I anticipated the pleasure of telling my dear sister, she might banish the past entirely from her mind, for I would not write a word of my intentions, lest I should fail in them ere I returned. And now my uncle refuses to grant my request; Mr. Howard will not second me; and—and I see how it is," he continued, with a return of former violence in his manner, as he paced the room, and a flush burned on his cheek, "my uncle will not consent to look on it as a debt; he will not permit me, even as far as this will do it, to redeem my sister."

"You are quite mistaken, my dear boy," replied Mr. Hamilton, mildly. "Your sister's own conduct has sufficiently proved to me her repentance and amendment; her gentle virtues and faultless conduct have quite redeemed the past, and so has yours. I refuse to take your well-earned savings, merely because they really are not necessary."

"But if it will give me pleasure, if it will satisfy me. Dearest aunt, plead for me; you know not the relief it will be," again entreated Edward, as he paused in his hasty walk, and looked beseechingly in his aunt's face.

"Nay, dear Edward, do not demand impossibilities," she replied, smiling, "I cannot plead for you. That money with which you appear so very eager to part must return to your own purse; your sister's debt is already paid."

"Paid!" repeated Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Howard, in astonishment, while Edward stood, as if bewildered. "How, and by whom?"

"By Ellen herself," replied Mrs. Hamilton; and, addressing her husband, she added, "I should have told you before, but we have been both too much engaged the last two days to allow any time for private conversation; and my Ellen had entreated that only you should know her secret; but she would, I know, have made an exception in Mr. Howard's favour had I demanded it, for his excellent lessons have in all probability assisted in making her the character she is; and as for her brother—why, in charity, he shall know this strange tale," she added, smiling; and briefly, but with affecting accuracy, she related all that had passed between her and Ellen on the evening of Edward's return. Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Howard listened in astonishment, for they knew not the quiet steadiness, the unwavering firmness of Ellen's private character; they guessed not the deep remorse which had been her own, nor for how long it had guided and purified her actions. Edward had concealed his face in his hands, his arms resting upon the table, for he felt in this tale of persevering effort and self-denial, in comparison with Ellen's, as if his had sunk to nothing; the bright lustre of his sister's character dimmed even to obscurity his own.

"And have you questioned Ellis? do you know in what manner she contrived so secretly to render her assistance?" demanded Mr. Hamilton, with much interest.

"I have," replied his wife, "I did so that same night; for even Edward's unexpected return could not banish his sister from my mind. She told me, that at first she did all she could to turn Ellen from her purpose; but when she found her resolution was unalterably fixed by some means to earn sufficient to repay the cause of so much distress, she entered warmly into her plan; and, with the active assistance of Robert, procured her work from the baby-linen warehouses at Plymouth. She first began with the plainest work, but that succeeded so well, finer was given to her. In London she worked embroidery, purchasing the materials from her own pocket-money, and consequently largely increasing her hoard.

Spite of her ill-health, the first winter we spent in London, she perseveringly continued her irksome task, rising even in the coldest weather at six, the provident care of Ellis causing her fire to be lighted almost the earliest in the house. Robert was the messenger employed to and fro, but no one knew her name or rank; for, devoted as we well know he is to Ellen, he took the trouble of changing his livery for plain clothes, whenever Ellis sent him on his mission. Her secret has, indeed, been well preserved both from us and those who employed her. Many, very many silent tears Ellis believes have fallen over my poor Ellen's tedious task; many a struggle to adhere to her resolution, and not throw it aside in despair; and frequently, she told me, after a long, solitary evening, she has thrown her arms round Ellis's neck, and wept from exhaustion, and the misery of hope deferred, for at first it did appear an endless labour; but she persevered unshrinkingly, combating her wishes to accompany me wherever Emmeline visited."

"And it was this, then, that caused her determination to remain at home till next year," observed Mr. Hamilton; "poor child, our harshness was no sweetener of her task."

"It was not, indeed; the night of Emmeline's introduction, Ellis says, she wept as if her heart would break, as if she could not keep her secret any longer; but she struggled with herself, and conquered; although many times, during my estrangement, she has longed to confess all, but the fear that I should forbid her continuing her task restrained her."

"I am very glad she persevered in her secret," said Mr. Howard, warmly; "it is this quiet steady perseverance in a painful duty that has pleased me far more than even the action itself, guided as that was by proper feeling. Extraordinary sacrifices of our own formation are not, in general, as acceptable to Him for whose sake they are ostentatiously made, as the quiet steady discharge of our destined duties—the one is apt to beget pride, the other true humility, but this unshaken resolution in one so young, had its origin from true repentance, and aided as it has been by the active fulfilment of every duty, strengthened as it has, no doubt, been by prayer, I cannot but trust her heavenly Master will look down with an eye of mercy on His young servant. Look up, Edward; you, too, have done your duty. Why should your sister's conduct cause this sudden depression, my young friend?"

"Because," exclaimed he, with an earnestness almost startling, and as he looked up his eyes glistened with tears, "because all my efforts sink to nothing beside hers. I deemed myself becoming worthy; that the conquests over inclination I made would obliterate the past; but what are my sacrifices compared to hers? Weak, frail, sensitive creature as she is, thus secretly, laboriously to earn that sum which, because it required one or two petty sacrifices of inclination, I deemed that I had so nobly gained. What have been my efforts compared to hers?"

"Almost as great to you, my dear boy, as hers were to her," said Mr. Hamilton, kindly; "you, too, have done well. Your past errors have already, in my mind and in that of Mr. Howard and your aunt's, been obliterated by the pleasure your late conduct has bestowed. She has not had the temptations to extravagant pleasure which have been yours; to save this sum you must have resigned much gratification. You have acted thus excellently, in part, to regain the good opinion of your friends, and the kind wish of restoring perfect peace to your sister: in the first, you have fully succeeded; in the second, when your sister knows what has been the secret purpose of your life for three long years, her affections will amply repay you. You are deserving of each other, my dear Edward; and this moment I do not scruple to say, I am proud to feel myself so nearly related to those who, young as they both are, have so nobly and perseveringly performed their duty both to God and man."

Young Fortescue raised his uncle's hand, wrung it between both his own, and impetuously darted from the room.

"That boy would teach me never to despair again, my good friend," said Mr. Hamilton, addressing the worthy clergyman. "When last he left me I had learned to hope and yet to fear, for I dreaded his exposure to his former temptations; and now—glad, indeed, am I to acknowledge myself vanquished, and to own you were ever in the right."

Mr. Howard smiled.

"And now does my husband regret his having adopted my sister's orphans as his own?" demanded Mrs. Hamilton, entwining her arm in her husband's, and looking caressingly in his face.

"No, my dearest wife; once, indeed, when I beheld you in fancy about to sink beneath the accumulation of misery and anxiety both Edward and Ellen's conduct occasioned, I did in secret murmur that the will of my heavenly Father had consigned to us the care of such misguided ones; I fear I looked on them as the disturbers of family peace and harmony, when it was the will of my God. I felt indignant and provoked with them, when I should have bowed submissively to Him. I have been blessed in them when I deserved it not. You ever trusted, my Emmeline, though far greater distress was your lot than mine. You never repented of that kindness which bade your heart bleed for their orphan state, and urged you to take them to your gentle bosom, and soothe them as your own. I know that at this moment you have your reward."

Mrs. Hamilton was prevented from replying by the entrance of Edward, who eagerly inquired for his sister, alleging he had searched every room in the house and could not find her.

"She has gone with Herbert to the village to take the fruits of her own work, some baby linen, to the poor woman in whose fate I am so interested," replied Mrs. Hamilton, and turning to her husband, added—"Now we really are alone, my dear Arthur, will you give a little of your time to inform me in what manner I can best lay out, for this unfortunate being's advantage, the sum my Ellen has placed in my hands? Do not look at me, Edward, as if to implore me to take yours also, for I mean to be very positive, and say at once I will not."

"Come with me, my young friend, and we will go and meet Herbert and Ellen," Mr. Howard said, smiling; "a walk is the best remedy for nerves fevered as yours are at present, and I should be glad of your company." And Edward, with eager pleasure, banishing all traces of former agitation, departed arm in arm with a companion whom he still so revered and loved, recalling with him reminiscences of his boyhood, and detailing with animation many incidents of his late trip. This walk, quiet as it was, was productive, both to Mr. Howard and his pupil, of extreme pleasure; the former, while he retained all the gravity and dignity of his holy profession, knew well how to sympathise with youth. Increased duties in the ministry had caused him to resign the school which he had kept when we first knew him, to the extreme regret of both master and pupils. Mr. Howard regarded young people as the tender lambs of his fold, whom it was his especial charge to train up in the paths of grace, and guard from all the dangerous and hidden pitfalls of sin; their parents might neglect, or, ignorant themselves, pursue a mistaken method, but he was the shepherd placed over the flock, and while untiringly, zealously, he endeavoured to lead the older members of his congregation to the only rock of salvation, the younger were the objects of his especial care. To them all was bright, the world in all its dangerous, because more pleasurable, labyrinths was before them. He saw, he knew their perfect ignorance, and he trembled, while he prayed so to lead them, that the lessons of their minister might check them in the career of imprudence or of sin.

"Were I one of the fathers of Rome I should say, *benedicite*, my children," he said, playfully, as Herbert and Ellen, apparently in serious yet happy conversation approached and joined them, "but as I am merely a simple minister of a simple faith, I greet you with the assurance you are blessed in your charitable office."

"And how, my kind friend, could you contrive to discover such was our employment?" replied Herbert, smiling. "Can my mother have been betraying us?"

"Oh, she has been a sad traitress this morning, betraying all kinds of secrets and misdemeanours," said Mr. Howard, laughing, and casting on Ellen a glance of arch meaning, while Edward could scarcely contain his impatience to seize his sister's arm and bear her off with him.

"And we, too, have been hearing many tales of you, Mr. Howard," she said. "We have heard very many blessings on your name in the cottage we have left, although, alas! events have occurred there of a very painful nature."

"And why, alas, my dear child?" said Mr. Howard, affectionately. "Do you deem it so sad a thing to die?"

"It is wrong, I know, to regard it thus, Mr. Howard," replied Ellen; "but yet, to leave all those we love on earth, to sever the tender cords of affection binding us unto this world, must be, even to the strongest and most pious minds, a draught of bitterness."

"Do not, my dear children," said Mr. Howard, "imagine I deem it wrong to indulge in earthly affections. Far from it; they are given us to sweeten life, to draw our hearts in thanksgiving to him who gave them, and thus indulged are pleasing unto Him. And how did you find poor Nanny to-day?" he added, after a brief pause.

"Suffering very much in body, but in a blessed state of mind," replied Ellen, "which she greatly attributed to you; for she told me, before my aunt discovered them and placed them where they now are, before she saw you, death was a trouble awful in anticipation. She had ever tried to do her duty in life, to remember her Maker in her youth, and believed that she had succeeded; but when she knew that she must die, all appeared changed; the aspect of death was different, when seemingly at a distance to that which it presented when near at hand. She longed for some minister of the Lord to pray for her, to comfort her in those moments when suffering prevented serious thoughts, and it was affecting to hear her bless that charity which had not only placed her soul under your guidance, but provided also so many bodily comforts."

"And you have been exercising the duties of the ministry before you have donned your gown, my dear Herbert," said Mr. Howard, glancing approvingly on his young friend. "Glad indeed shall I be to hail you as a young brother in my sacred office; for with you it will be indeed the service of the heart, and not of interest or compulsion. Would that your friend Arthur possessed one-half of your earnest zeal, or that you could inspire him with the same love for his sacred calling which animates you."

"I know not what to make of Arthur," said Herbert, somewhat sadly, "he is strangely, unaccountably changed the last few months. When he was first settled in his curacy, his conduct was such as to excite the approbation of both my father and yourself; and now, I greatly fear, that he is alienating both."

"Do not condemn him harshly, without good proof, dear Mr. Howard," said Ellen, earnestly. "I, too, have noticed that he is changed, though I scarcely know in what manner; but for his father's sake and for mine, do not treat him coldly before my uncle at least. He has many faults, but surely some good qualities."

"I trust he has; but I wish he would not so carefully conceal them, and suffer his parishioners to have cause to relate so many tales of neglect and levity in their curate," replied Mr. Howard; "but we will not bring forward accusations when the accused is not present to defend himself: and here we are at the Rectory before I had thought we were half way. Will you come in, my young friends, and share an old man's homely luncheon?"

Gladly would they have done so, but Ellen had promised to return to Oakwood in time for that meal, and was compelled to refuse; adding, that both her brother and cousin might, for the Rectory was so near one of the entrances to the park, she could easily return alone; but such was not Mr. Howard's intention. He knew how Edward longed for a few minutes' private conversation with his sister, and playfully detaining Herbert, declaring he could not do without one at least, dismissed the orphans on their walk, bestowing his parting blessing on Ellen with a warmth that surprised her at the time, but the meaning of which was fully explained in the interesting conversation that passed between her and her brother ere they reached the house, and as the expression of approbation in the minister she loved, filled her young mind with joy, while the mutual confidence bestowed in that walk added another bright link to the chain of affection which bound the souls of that brother and sister so fondly together.

CHAPTER II

It was the hour when all in general retired to rest, and the inmates of Oakwood had dispersed for the purpose; but this night thoughts of a mingled and contending nature occupied Mrs. Hamilton's mind, and prevented all wish for sleep. Her guests had the last week increased, and the part of hostess had been kindly and pleasingly performed; but the whole of that day she had longed to be alone, and gladly, gratefully she hailed that hour which enabled her to be so. Shading her eyes with her hand, she gave to her thoughts the dominion they demanded. Maternal ambition, maternal pride, in that silent hour fell before the stronger, more absorbing power of maternal love. But a few brief hours, and the child of her anxious cares, of fervent petitions at the throne of grace, would be no longer an inmate of her father's house, her place in that happy home would be a void. On the morrow, ay, the morrow, for the intervening weeks had fled, her child would be another's. True, but few miles would separate their homes; true, that he on whom that precious gift would be bestowed, was in all respects the husband she would have selected for her Caroline, the husband for whom the involuntary prayer had arisen; virtue and piety, manliness and sincerity were his, besides these attributes, which to some mothers would have been far more brilliant, he was noble, even of exalted rank; but all, all these things were forgotten in the recollection, that on the morrow she must bid farewell to her cherished treasure, the link, the precious link of protection would be severed, and for ever. Thoughts of the past mingled with the present, and softened yet more that fond mother's feelings. Pain, bitter pain, Caroline had sometimes cost her, but pleasure, exquisite in its kind, had mingled with it. No longer would it be hers to watch with trembling joy the dawning virtues which had flourished beneath her eye; a link would be broken between them, a slender one indeed, but still broken,—though Mrs. Hamilton reproached herself for indulging in such feelings of sadness, when so many blessings promised to gild the lot of her child. And yet, alas! what mother devoted to her children as she had been, and still was this noble and gentle woman, could part from a beloved one even for a brief space, even for happiness, without one pang, selfish as it might be, selfish as perhaps it was? for anxiety for the future darkened not the prospects of earthly bliss, her trust in the character of St. Eval was too confiding; it was only her fond heart which for a time would be so desolate. Her ear would linger in vain for the voice it loved; her eye seek in sorrow for the graceful form, the beauteous features on which it had so loved to gaze. New ties would supply to Caroline the place of all that she had left; deep springs of fond emotions, such as she had never felt before, would open in her heart, and then would she still love, would she still look to that mother, as in childhood and in youth she had done? Vainly she struggled to subdue these thoughts, and bring forward in their stead the visions of happiness, which alone had visited her before. Thronging and tumultuously they came, and tears stole slowly from those mild eyes, which for herself so seldom wept; while engrossed in her own reflections, she heard not the soft and careful opening of her door, she knew not that the beloved object of those tears had entered her room, and was kneeling beside her.

"Mother!" murmured Caroline, in a voice tremulous and weak with emotion equal to her own. Mrs. Hamilton started, and her lip quivered with the effort she made to smile her greeting. "Mother, my own mother, forgive my intrusion; I thought not to have found you thus. Oh, deem me not failing in that deep reverence your goodness, your devotedness, have taught me to feel for you; if my love would bid me ask you why you weep, may I not share your sorrow, mother?"

"These are but selfish tears, my own; selfish, for they fall only when I think that to-morrow bears my Caroline away, and leaves her mother's heart for a time so lone and sad, that it will not even think of the happiness I so fondly trust will be hers, in becoming the bride of him she loves. Forgive me, my own Caroline; I had no right to weep and call for these dear signs of sympathy at such a time."

Silently and tearfully Caroline clung to her mother, and repeatedly pressed her hand to her lips.

"And why are you not at rest, my child? you will have but few brief hours for sleep, scarcely sufficient to recall the truant rose to these pale cheeks, and the lustre to this suddenly dimmed eye, my Caroline;" and the mother passed her hand caressingly over her brow, and parted the luxuriant hair that, loosened from the confining wreath of wild flowers which had so lately adorned it, hung carelessly around her. She looked long and wistfully on that young bright face.

"You ask me why I am not at rest; oh, I could not, I felt I could not part from you, without imploring your forgiveness for all the past; without feeling that it was indeed pardoned. Never, never before has my conduct appeared in such true colours: dark, even to blackness, when contrasted with yours. Your blessing is my own, it will be mine to-morrow; but, oh, it will not be hallowed to my heart, did I not confess that I was—that I am unworthy of all your fondness, mother, and implore you to forgive the pain I have so often and so wantonly inflicted upon you. Oh, you know not how bitterly, how reproachfully, my faults and errors rushed back to my mind, as I sat and thought this was the last night that Caroline Hamilton would sleep beneath this roof; that to-morrow we parted, and I left you without once acknowledging I deserved not half your goodness; without one effort to express the devoted gratitude, the deep, the reverential love, with which my heart is filled. Mother, dearest, dearest mother! oh, call me but your blessing, your comfort,—I never have been thus; wilful and disobedient, I have poisoned many hours which would otherwise have been sweet. Mother, my own mother, say only you forgive me—say that no lingering pang I on my account remains."

"Forgive you, my beloved! oh, long, long since have every childish fault and youthful error been forgiven. Could resentment harbour in my heart so long? could memory linger on moments of pain, when this last year not one fault, not one failing of duty or of love has stained your conduct? Even as my other children have you been my blessing, my comfort; the dearer, when I thought on the doubts and fears of the past. Pain you may have once caused me; but, oh, you know not how blessedly one proof of affection, one hour of devotion in a child can obliterate from a mother's heart the remembrance of months of pain. Think no more of what is past, my own; remember only that your mother's blessing, her fervent prayers will hover round you wherever you may be; that, should sickness and sorrow at any time be your portion, however distant we may be, your mother will come to soothe and cheer, your mother's bosom will still be open to receive you."

Caroline answered not, for her tears fell fast upon the hand she held; tears not of sorrow but of emotion, blessed in their sadness. She bowed her head before Mrs. Hamilton, and murmured—

"Bless me, my mother!"

"May the God of infinite love, the Father of unclouded mercies, who hath been so unchangeably merciful to his servants, look down from His resplendent throne and bless you, my beloved! May he sanctify and bless that event, which promises to our darkened eyes so much felicity! May He guide my child in His own paths, and hearken to her mother's prayer!"

"We will not separate this night to pray each in solitude, my child; let us read, and address our heavenly Father together, as we were wont to do, when it was my task to raise your infant thoughts and simple prayers to Him who heard and answered. I cannot part from you till these agitated feelings are more composed, and prayer will best enable them to be so."

Willingly, gladly Caroline lingered, and their private devotions, which ever attended their retiring to rest, were performed together. Their blessed influence was mutually felt. He whom they so fervently addressed looked down upon His good and faithful servants, and poured upon the mother's soul and on that of her child the calm and tranquillizing dew of His blessing.

The morning dawned, and common-place as is the expression, yet we must confess the day was lovely; one of those soft, delicious September days so well known to all who are acquainted with the climate of Devonshire. Gaily the sun looked down from his field of stainless azure, and peeped through the windows of the elegant little room which the taste of her young bridesmaids had decorated as Caroline's tiring-room for the day, and his bright rays played on the rich jewels scattered on the toilette, and decked them with renewed brilliance; and at times his light would fall full upon

the countenance of the young bride, sometimes pensive, at others, radiant in beaming smiles, as she replied to the kind words of Lady Gertrude, or in answer to the playful conversation of her younger bridesmaids, who, full of life, and hope, and innocence, hovered like fairy spirits round their queen. The tears which had fallen from the eyes of Emmeline on her sister's neck that morning were dried, yet still there were some lingering traces of sadness on her fair sweet face, which she struggled vainly to conceal, but which were regarded as the sorrow of an affectionate heart thus parting from the sister of its love.

And Lilla Grahame, too, was there, smiling with, real and heartfelt pleasure. She had observed the slight cloud on Emmeline's brow, and with every affectionate art endeavoured to remove it.

The toilette of the bride was completed, save her jewels, which Ellen had entreated might be her office to arrange, and, smilingly, Lady Florence resigned her place by Caroline's side.

"For Edward's sake and for mine, dearest Caroline, will you, decked as you are with jewels so far more precious, yet will you wear this, and regard it indeed as the offering of the sincerest affection for yourself, the warmest prayers for your welfare, from those who for so many years have felt for you as if you were indeed their sister? poor as is the gift, will you let Edward see it is not rejected?" and Ellen, as with a flushed cheek and quivering lip she spoke, placed on the arm of her cousin a bracelet, composed of her own and her brother's hair, and clasped with chaste yet massive gold. The braid was fine and delicate, while the striking contrast of the jet black and rich golden hair of which it was composed, combined with its valuable clasp, rendered it not an unfit offering on such a day.

"Is it to remind me of all my unkindness towards you, Ellen, in days past, of my hour of pride?" replied Caroline, in a low voice, as she threw her arm caressingly round her cousin, and fondly kissed her. "I will accept your gift, my dear Ellen, and sometimes look upon it thus."

"Nay, do not say so, dearest Caroline, or I shall feel inclined to take it even now from your arm, and never let you see it more; no, rather let it be a remembrance of those poor orphans, whose lives *you* have not done the least to render happy. Gratefully, affectionately, shall we ever think of you, dear Caroline, and, oh, may this little offering bid you sometimes think thus, and thus only of us."

The carriages were rather later than expected, and Lady Gertrude observing Caroline somewhat pale, though no other sign denoted agitation, endeavoured, by talking more sportively than usually was her wont, to while away the time till the important moment arrived.

It came at length, and Caroline, with a faltering step, entered the carriage, which conveyed her to the old and venerable church, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and Lady Gertrude, who had promised to remain near her. The fair girls that held the rank of bridesmaids followed, and three other carriages contained the invited guests to the wedding. Not a creature was visible to disturb by acclamations the bridal party on their route, and take from the calm and holy beauty of the early morning; but that the day was remembered was clearly visible, for there were garlands of the brightest, fairest flowers, which must, by their number and variety, have been culled from many gardens of many villages, festooning the hedges of the green lanes through which they passed, and many a gay pennon pendant from oak or stately elm fluttered in the breeze. All was so still and calm, that ere the carriage stopped at the church porch Caroline had conquered the inward trembling of her frame, and her heart thrilled not perhaps so anxiously as did both her parents', when, leaning on the arm of her proud and happy father, she walked steadily, even with dignity, up the church, where Mr. Howard, young Myrvin, Lord St. Eval, his parents, Lord Louis, Percy, Herbert, and Edward there stood, and a faint but expressive smile played round her lips, in answer to St. Eval's eager yet silent greeting. He could not speak, his feelings of happiness were too deep, too ecstatic for words, but she had but to look on his expressive face, and all, all was said.

There was a moment's solemn pause as they knelt beside the altar, and then the voice of Mr. Howard sounded, and its ever emphatic tones rung with even more than its usual solemnity on the ears of all the assembled relatives and friends, with thrilling power on the bride and bridegroom. Calmly and clearly Caroline responded; her cheek was pale, but her lip quivered not, and perhaps, in that

impressive service, the agitation of her mother was deeper than her own. She struggled to retain her composure, she lifted up her soul in earnest prayer, that the blessing of her God might indeed hallow the ceremony on which she gazed, and ere her child arose, and led forward by her young enraptured husband, approached for her parent's blessing and embrace, she was enabled to give both without any visible emotion, save that her daughter might have felt the quick pulsations of her fond heart, as she pressed her in her arms.

We will not linger on the joyous festivity which pervaded the lordly halls of Oakwood on this eventful day.

The hour had come when Caroline, the young Countess of St. Eval, bade farewell to her paternal home. The nearest relatives of the bride and bridegroom had assembled with them in a small apartment, at Caroline's request, for a few minutes, till the carriage was announced, for though resolved not to betray her feelings, she could not bear to part from those she loved in public. She had changed her dress for a simple yet elegant travelling costume, and was now listening with respectful deference but glistening eyes to the fond words of her mother, who, twining her arm around her, had drawn her a little apart from the others, as if her farewell could not be spoken aloud; their attention was so arrested by a remark of Lord Malvern, and his son's reply, that they turned towards them.

"Do not again let me hear you say our Gertrude never looks animated or interested," the former said, addressing the Marchioness, somewhat triumphantly. "She is as happy, perhaps, if possible, even happier than any of us to-day, and, like a good girl, she shows it. Gertrude, love, is it your brother's happiness reflected upon you?"

"Let me answer for her, sir," replied St. Eval, eagerly. "You know not why she has so much reason to look and, I trust, to feel happy. She sees her own good work, and, noble, virtuous as she is, rejoices in it; without her, this day would never have dawned for me, Caroline would never have been mine, and both would have lived in solitary wretchedness. Yes, dearest Gertrude," he continued, "I feel how much I owe you, though I say but little. Happy would it be for every man, could he receive from his sister the comfort, the blessing I have from mine, and for every woman, were her counsels, like yours, guided by truth alone."

"The Earl and Countess of St. Eval left Oakwood about two o'clock, for their estate in Cornwall, Castle Terryn, in an elegant chariot and four superb greys, leaving a large party of fashionable friends and relations to lament their early departure." So spoke the fashionable chronicle in a paragraph on this marriage in high life, which contained items and descriptions longer and more graphic than we have any inclination to transcribe.

A select party of the Marquis of Malvern's and Mr. Hamilton's friends remained to dinner, and, at the request of Percy and Lord Louis, dancing for the younger guests concluded the evening. The day had dawned in joy, and no clouds disturbed its close. Fatigued, and her thoughts still clinging to her child, Mrs. Hamilton was glad to seek the retirement of her own room. Her thoughts turned on her Caroline, and so fondly did they linger there, that Emmeline's strange diversity of wild spirits and sudden but overpowering gloom did not occupy her mind as powerfully as they would otherwise have done; she did not regard them, save as the effects of excitement natural to such an eventful day; she guessed not that of all her household the heart of her Emmeline was the heaviest, her spirits weighed down by a gloom so desponding, so overwhelming, that sleep for many hours fled from her eyes. She had powerfully exerted herself during the day, and now in solitude, darkness, and silence, the reflux of feeling was too violent for that young and, till lately, thoughtlessly joyous heart to bear. Her heavy eyes and pallid cheeks attracted notice indeed the following morning, but they were attributed to fatigue from the gay vigils of the preceding night, and gladly did the poor girl herself encourage the delusion, and obey her mother's playful command to lie down for a few hours, as a punishment for indulging an overplus of excitement.

Herbert's pleasure, too, the preceding day had been alloyed by anxiety; and perhaps his solicitude and his sister's sorrow proceeded from one and the same cause, which our readers will find at length, a few pages hence, when Arthur Myrvin becomes a prominent object in our history.

Pleasure, in a variety of festive shapes, but innocent in all, was for the next month the presiding genius of Oakwood and its vicinity. Lord Malvern's family remained as guests at Oakwood during that time, and some few college friends of Percy and Herbert, but Mr. Hamilton's other friends departed for their respective homes the week following the marriage.

The young Earl and Countess of St. Eval meanwhile resided at their beautiful retreat of Castle Terryn, which the taste of the young Earl had rendered in every respect a residence suited to the rank and feelings of those who claimed it as their own.

Nothing now prevented our young friend Ellen from joining in the amusements that offered themselves, and she enjoyed them even more than she had expected, for she was accompanied by her brother, who had deservedly become an universal favourite, and Mrs. Hamilton had the pleasure, at length, of seeing not only health but happiness beaming apparently unclouded on the countenance of her niece.

Mr. Grahame, for the sake of Lilla, who was becoming dearer each day to both her parents, for her true character for the first time stood clearly forth, struggled with his gloom, and accompanied her where-over her wishes led; and her cheerful spirits, her unpretending manners, and constant and active affection, manifesting itself in a thousand different ways, to amuse the couch of her now really ailing mother, did much to palliate the disappointment and misery the conduct of his elder daughter had occasioned.

Herbert's secret was still inviolably kept; no one suspected that he loved, much less that he was betrothed. Nearly two years had passed of that long period which must elapse ere Herbert could hope to make Mary his wife. They had glided quickly, very quickly by, and so too might the remainder; but there was a dark, foreboding feeling pressing heavily upon Herbert's heart as he looked forward, that robbed anticipation of its charm, and rendered him even more pensive than from his boyhood had been his wont. To strangers, even to his family, he was still the same; to his God alone he laid his spirit bare.

Six weeks after the marriage of Caroline, Oakwood and its neighbourhood was as quiet as it has been when we knew it in former years.

Lord Malvern's family stayed ten days at Castle Terryn, by the pressing invitation of the young couple, and then returned to their estate in Dorsetshire, leaving Lady Gertrude, however, for a few weeks' longer residence with her brother and his wife. The young men returned to college. Lilla Grahame remained at home till after the Christmas vacation, when she was once more to reside with Mrs. Douglas for six months or a year longer, according to the state of her mother's health, who no longer wished to quit Moorlands; and therefore her husband gladly consented to her remain there till Mrs. Hamilton paid her annual visit to London. About this time also, Ellen, accompanied by her brother, fulfilled her promise of visiting her old friend, Mr. Myrvin, and delighted him by making his pretty vicarage her residence till near the middle of November. Edward, with whom the kind old man was as much pleased as he had been with his sister, also remained at Llangwillan during that time, with the exception of three or four flying visits to Oakwood, and latterly to Castle Terryn, where Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, with Emmeline, were staying the few last weeks of his and his sister's visit at the vicarage. Their company was particularly soothing to Mr. Myrvin at this period; for the letters of his son were causing him extreme solicitude, revealing intentions, to understand which we must for a short period retrace our steps, and thus commence another chapter.

CHAPTER III

Young Myrvin had been, at the period of Caroline's marriage, rather more than a year as Mr. Howard's curate. At first, as we have seen, the example of Herbert had done much towards reconciling him to a profession, which was for many reasons opposed to his feelings. When in the company of his friend, he had imparted to him his struggles with the pride and ambition which still lurked within him, spite of all his endeavours and resolutions to conquer and banish them. While Herbert was near him all was well; his duty was regularly performed, in a manner that satisfied his rector, and sufficiently rewarded Mr. Hamilton for the interest he had taken in his and his father's welfare; but when Herbert left Oakwood, Arthur's distaste for his occupation returned with renewed strength, to which newly-dawning emotions added weight. Most painfully had Arthur, when first intimate with Mr. Hamilton, endeavoured to guard himself from the danger to his peace, which he felt existed in the society of beings so amiable and attractive as were his daughters; but his efforts were vain, as our readers may have already discovered. There was a nameless, an indescribable charm in the appearance and manner of Emmeline which he could not resist. It was some few months ere the whole extent of evil was discovered, not perhaps entirely till Emmeline returned to London, and Oakwood was desolate, painfully desolate to the young man, who, when lingering within its ancient walls, forgot everything around him, save the bright and beautiful being who was to him its charm. When, however, that fair form had departed from his sight, he was awakened to the delusive nature of his hopes, and with the knowledge, exquisite even in its despair, that he loved Emmeline Hamilton, his profession became more and more distasteful. Had he followed the paths of ambition, as his inclination prompted, had he but had the means of seeking some station whence he might at length have risen to eminence, he cared not what the obstacles, his union with her might not have been so difficult to overcome, or, at least, he might not have met her; and did he wish that such had been the case? no; misery in its most agonizing shape stood before him, and yet the cause of that misery was the one bright star that appeared to gild his lot.

A poor curate of a country parish, with no resources but his salary to increase his scanty means, no power of rendering himself of consequence in the eyes of the world; and, alas! the fruit of many years' hard labour from father to son—one-half of which might have rendered him sufficiently independent to have chosen his own profession—was gone. Poor as he was, could he ever look forward to possess the hand of Emmeline? he felt the utter impossibility, and bitterly he knew he loved but to despair. These contending feelings diverted his thoughts as may well be supposed, and caused him to be careless in the discharge of his clerical duties, abrupt and strange in his manner with Mr. Howard; and unfortunately there was one in the village who was ready to turn the simplest circumstance to the young curate's disadvantage.

It was not likely the sinful and licentious man who, by Mr. Hamilton's active exertions, had not only been dispossessed of the living of Llangwillan, but very nearly of his gown also, would permit these, what he termed injuries, to pass unavenged. Against the elder Myrvin he felt his efforts would be unavailing, nor did he feel inclined to try a second time, when he had once been foiled; but Arthur he believed a surer mark. A farm of some consequence was to be let on Mr. Hamilton's estate; it was very easy to settle in it a man lower in rank, but hard, unrelenting as himself, an unprincipled instrument of his will. The business was done, and the new neighbour, prepossessing in appearance and manners, speedily ingratiated himself with all, and even obtained, by a semblance of hard-working industry, and regular attendance at public worship, seconded by quiet and unobtrusive conduct, the notice and regard of his landlord, Mr. Hamilton.

This man had entered his farm about four or five months after Arthur had been installed as Mr. Howard's curate, and cautiously and yet successfully he executed the wily requirements of his employer. So guardedly did he work, that no one could trace to him, who ever spoke as the

friend of their curate, the prejudice which had slowly but surely penetrated the mind of every man against him, and interpreted his simplest action in the worst light. There were some rumours afloat of misdemeanours during his college life; it mattered not whether they were true or false, they were received and encouraged by the credulous. He was a Welshman too, full of evil qualities, and clothed with invulnerable pride, which last idea was unfortunately confirmed by Myrvin's distaste for his profession, which prevented his entering into the joys and sorrows of his parishioners, mingling familiarly and kindly with them as a minister of God should do.

How or when this prejudice began, or what was its origin, not one of the good folks of the village could have told, for they really did not know; but still it existed, and Arthur knew it. He felt himself disliked, and instead of endeavouring to conciliate good-will and remove prejudice, his mind was in such a fevered state of excitement, that he indulged in every bitter feeling toward those with whom he had to deal, and shrunk yet more from the performance of his duty. Instances of careless neglect were often found, and became magnified in the relation. The young curate was not always at hand when his presence was principally required; he never left directions where he might be found. Abuse crept into that parish, which in the time of his predecessor had been one of the most orderly in Mr. Hamilton's domains—abuses in the younger inhabitants, at which old men looked grave, and cited the neglect of their curate as the cause, though to what abuses young Myrvin had given countenance all would have found it difficult to tell. That he did not rebuke them it was true; he did not perhaps observe them, but it was said, and justly, he must have been strangely blind not to do so.

The villagers understood not that preoccupation of mind which does indeed render us blind to all things, save to the one intense subject of thought.

Complaints were made to and heard by the rector, who, faithful to his trust, visited the parish, made inquiries, heard tales concerning his curate that startled his charity, and finally spoke severely to Arthur on his careless and neglectful conduct. It would have been better for Arthur had pride remained banished during that interview; but, unfortunately, fired with indignation at anything resembling censure even from a superior, it returned with full force, and by his haughty silence with regard to some of the charges brought against him, his ill-disguised contempt of others, confirmed every evil report concerning him which Mr. Howard had heard. Mildly he requested that the future might atone for the past, and that Myrvin would remember the sacred post he held. The unhappy young man heard him without reply; but when the rector had departed, he strove to think soberly on the charges brought against him, and look within himself to know if he deserved them. Neglect and carelessness—yes, he had given cause for both. Other accusations of much graver import he dismissed at once, satisfied that the very thought of such vices had never even for one moment stained his mind, and as secure in his own integrity and right feeling, as he was aware of the prejudice against him, he determined—as, alas! how many in such cases do—not to alter his general conduct, lest it should be said he tacitly admitted the truth of every report against him. Had he only been accused of neglect in parochial duties, he might perhaps, if his troubled spirit had permitted him, have endeavoured to attend more closely to them; but his pride prevented him from striving to obtain the good-will of those who seemed only alive to every circumstance tending to his disadvantage. Would he endeavour to conciliate those whom he well knew disliked him? no; the very act of so doing would be brought against him, and sternly he resolved that haughtiness and pride should still characterise his deportment. What mattered it what people thought or said, if it was untrue? he cared not; the world was a wilderness to his excited and irritated fancy, in which there bloomed but one sweet flower, too pure, too beautiful for him to touch. It was his doom he thought to grovel on the earth, hers to shine like a star in the sphere above him.

Not long after Mr. Howard's interview with his curate, Mr. Hamilton's family and his guests arrived at Oakwood, and Herbert eagerly sought his friend. He was shocked at the change he perceived in his appearance, which, though marked, was yet quite indescribable; that Arthur was unhappy, that his profession was more than ever distasteful to him, he soon discovered; but the real cause of these feelings he tried in vain to probe. He saw, with the deepest regret, that all his former exhortations

on the subject, his earnest entreaties that Arthur would persevere till he brought a willing heart as an offering to his Maker, all had been without effect; but yet his kind heart could not cast away his friend, opposite as were their feelings on a subject which to Herbert was of vital importance. It was strange that a character such as Herbert Hamilton should have selected Arthur Myrvin for his chosen friend, yet so it was. It might have been pity, sympathy, which had first excited this friendship. The indignation he felt at the unjustifiable treatment Arthur had received while a servitor at college had excited an interest, which had at first completely blinded him to his many faults; and when they were discovered, the ardent desire and hope that he might be of service in removing them from the otherwise noble character of his friend still preserved and, indeed, heightened his regard. Though frequently disappointed during his absence, at the brevity and sometimes even confused style of Arthur's letters, he had buoyed himself up with the hope that his representations had had their effect, and he should find him, on his return, reconciled and happy in the exercise of his duties. Again he urged, with a kindness of manner that caused Arthur to wring his hand, and then pace the room in ill-concealed agony, the necessity, now that he had indeed taken orders, of endeavouring to do his Master's work on earth, of forcing his rebellious spirit to submission. Arthur listened to him attentively, sadly; but vainly Herbert strove to instil in him a portion of that heavenly love which was to him the main-spring of his life. Arthur loved with an intensity, which utterly prevented his looking up to heaven as the goal, to reach which all earthly toil was welcome; and still not even to Herbert did he breathe one syllable of the fire that was inwardly consuming him. Had he been any one but Herbert Hamilton, the unhappy young man would have sought and found relief in his confidence; but not to the brother of the being he loved, oh, not to him—he could not, dared not.

"Herbert," he would say, in a voice hoarse with contending feelings, "did I dare betray the secret of this tortured heart, the true cause of my misery, you would pity, even if you condemned me; but ask it not—ask it not, it shall never pass my lips; one thing only I beseech you, and I do so from the regard you have ever seemed to feel for me. However you may hear my character traduced, my very conduct may confirm every evil report, yet believe them not; I may be miserable, imprudent, mad, but never, never believe the name of Arthur Myrvin is stained with vice or guilt. Herbert, promise me this, and come what may, one friend, at least, is mine."

Herbert gazed on him with doubt, astonishment, and sorrow, yet an irresistible impulse urged him to promise all he asked, and Myrvin looked relieved; but painfully he felt, though he noticed it not to his friend, that the manner of Mr. Hamilton towards him was changed; cordiality and kindness had given place to coldness and reserve.

The whirl of a gay and happy London season had produced no change in the outward appearance and demeanour of Emmeline Hamilton. It had not been to her the ordeal it had been to her sister. She came forth from the gay world the same pure, innocent being as she had entered it. Admired she was by all with whom she was associated, but her smile was not sought for, her conversation not courted, as had been Caroline's, therefore her temptations had not been so great, but she was universally beloved.

Her mother sometimes wondered that Emmeline, keenly susceptible as she was to every other emotion, should still remain so insensible to anything resembling love. "She is indeed still the same innocent and darling child," she thought, and rested in pleased and satisfied security. She little knew, penetrating even as she was, that those young affections were already unconsciously engaged, that one manly figure, one melancholy yet expressive face utterly prevented the reception of any other. Emmeline knew not herself the extent of influence that secret image had obtained; she guessed not the whole truth until that night when her marriage had been jestingly alluded to, and then it burst upon her, stunning her young mind with a sense of scarcely-defined yet most painful consciousness. Arthur Myrvin had looked to Emmeline's return to Oakwood with many mingled feelings; she might be perhaps, even as her sister, a betrothed bride; he might have to witness, perhaps to officiate at her nuptials; he might see her courted, receiving attentions from and bestowing smiles on others, not

casting one look or one thought on him, who for her would have gladly died. The idea was agony, and it was the sufferings occasioned by the anticipation of ideal misery that had produced the change in face and form which Herbert had beheld and regretted.

They met, and as if fortune favoured their secret but mutual affection, alone, the first time since Emmeline had returned from London. Unaccustomed to control, and at that time quite unconscious she had anything to conceal, though wondering why every pulse should throb, and her cheek so flush and pale, her agitation of manner, her expressed and evidently felt sorrow for the traces of suffering she beheld, sunk as balm on the sorrowing heart of the young man, and his first three or four interviews with her were productive of a happiness so exquisite, that it almost succeeded in banishing his gloom; but short indeed was that period of relief. Speedily he saw her, as he had expected, surrounded by gay young men of wealth and station. He felt they looked down on him; they thought not of him, as a rival he was unworthy, as incapable of loving a being so exalted; but in the midst of these wretched thoughts there arose one, that for a brief space was so bright, so glad, so beautiful, that while it lasted every object partook its rays. He marked her, he looked, with eyes rendered clear from jealousy, for some sign, it mattered not how small, to say she preferred the society of others to his own; ready as he was to look on the darkest side of things, he felt the hesitating glance, the timid tone with which she had latterly addressed him, contrary as it was to the mischievous playfulness which had formerly marked her intercourse with him, was dearer, oh, how much dearer than the gaiety in which she had indulged with others. This change in her manner was unremarked by her family.

The eye of love, however, looked on those slight signs in a very different light. Did she, could she love one so unworthy? The very idea seemed to make him feel as a new and better man. He covered his eyes with his hands, lest any outward sign should break that blessed illusion, and then he started, and returning recollection brought with it momentary despair. Did she even love him—were even her parents to consent,—his own,—for his vivid and excited fancy for one minute imagined what in more sober moments he knew was impossible—yet even were such difficulties removed, would he, could he take that fair and fragile creature from a home of luxury and every comfort to poverty? What had he to support a wife? How could they live, and what hope had he of increasing in any way his fortune? Was he not exciting her affections to reduce them, like his own, to despair? And could she, beautiful and delicate as she was, could she bear the deprivation of his lot? She would never marry without the consent of her parents, and their approval would never be his, and even if it were, he had nothing, not the slightest hope of gaining anything wherewith to support her; and she, if indeed she loved him, he should see her droop and sink before his eyes, and that he could not bear; his own misery might be endured, but not hers. No! He paced the small apartment with reckless and disordered steps. His own doom was fixed, nothing could now prevent it—but hers, it might not be too late. He would withdraw from her sight, he would leave her presence, and for ever; break the spell that bound him near her. Ere that hasty walk in his narrow room was completed, his resolution was fixed; he would resign his curacy, and depart from the dangerous fascinations hovering round him.

Yet still he lingered. If he had been too presumptuous in thinking thus of Emmeline—if he were indeed nothing to her, why should he inflict this anguish on himself? Why need he tear himself from her? The night of Edward's return, while in one sense it caused him misery, by the random remark of Lord Louis, yet, by the agitation of Emmeline, the pang was softened, though he was strengthened in his resolve. Four days afterwards, the very evening of that day when Mr. Howard had alluded to his neglect of duties, before Herbert and his cousins, he tendered his resignation, coldly and proudly refusing any explanation, or assigning any reason for so doing, except that he wished to obtain a situation as tutor in any nobleman or gentleman's family about to travel. So greatly had the mind of Mr. Howard been prejudiced against the unhappy young man, by the false representations of his parishioners, that he rather rejoiced at Myrvin's determination, having more than once feared, if his conduct did not alter, he should be himself compelled to dismiss him from his curacy. But while pleased at being spared a task so adverse to his benevolent nature, he yet could not refrain from

regarding this strange and apparently sudden resolution as a tacit avowal of many of those errors with which he was charged.

Feeling thus, it will be no subject of surprise that Mr. Howard accepted his curate's resignation; but while he did so, he could not refrain from giving the young man some kind and good advice as to his future life, which Arthur, aware the rector regarded him through the medium of prejudice, received not in the same kind spirit as it was offered. He listened silently indeed, but with an air of pride which checked all Mr. Howard's really kind intentions in his favour.

The rector, aware that Mr. Hamilton would be annoyed and displeased at this circumstance, did not inform him of Myrvin's intentions till some few weeks after Caroline's marriage, not indeed till he felt compelled by the wish to obtain his approval of a young clergyman who had been his pupil, and was eager to secure any situation near Mr. Howard, and to whom therefore the curacy Arthur had resigned would be indeed a most welcome gift. Mr. Hamilton was even more disturbed, when all was told him, than Mr. Howard had expected. It seemed as if Arthur had forgotten every tie of gratitude which Mr. Hamilton's services to his father, even forgetting those to himself, certainly demanded. His determined resolution to assign no reason for his proceeding but the one above mentioned, told against him, and Mr. Hamilton, aware of the many evil reports flying about concerning the young man, immediately imagined that he resigned the curacy fearing discovery of misdemeanours which might end even more seriously.

Herbert, too, was deeply pained that his friend had left him to learn such important intelligence from the lips of another instead of imparting it himself. It explained all the apparent contradictions of Arthur's conduct the last month, but it surprised and grieved him, yet the mystery caused him both anxiety and sadness, for Myrvin was evidently determined in no way to solve it. That he was unhappy in no ordinary degree, was to the eye of friendship very evident, not only in the frequent wildness of his manner, but in the haggard cheek and bloodshot eye; and sympathy thus ever kept alive in one so keenly susceptible of the woes of others as was Herbert Hamilton, sympathy continually excited, prevented all decrease of interest and regard. Percy was irritated and annoyed; Myrvin had disappointed him. His conduct, in return for Mr. Hamilton's kindness, appeared as ungrateful as unaccountable, and this caused the more fiery temper of the young heir of Oakwood to ignite and burst forth in a flame in the presence of Arthur, whose meek forbearance and, he now began to fancy, silent suffering tamed him after a brief period, and caused him, with his usual frankness and quick transition of mood, to make him an apology for his violence. He was touched by the young man's manner, but they continued not on the same terms of friendly intimacy as formerly.

Mrs. Hamilton's charitable nature, heightened also by Herbert's unchanging regard, would not permit her to credit the tales that were abroad concerning him. She regretted his determination, for it appeared like wilfully casting away the friendship and interest of those who were likely to do him service. She guessed not the real motive of his resolve, if she had, she would have honoured even as she now regarded him with pity; but almost for the first time the penetration of Mrs. Hamilton was at fault. Emmeline's feelings, even as those of Arthur, were successfully concealed; from her brother Herbert she had first heard of Myrvin's intentions. She listened in silence, but her lip quivered and her cheek grew pale; and when she sought the solitude of her own room, tears relieved her, and enabled her to act up to her determination, cost what it might, to be the same playful, merry girl before her parents as was her wont, not that she meant in any way to deceive them, but she had learned that she loved Arthur Myrvin, and knew also that to become his wife, situated as they were, was a thing impossible.

Had Emmeline really been the romantic girl so generally believed, she would now have done all in her power to overcome every difficulty, by regarding poverty as the only criterion of true love; she would have fed her imagination with visions of herself and Arthur; combating manfully against evil, so they shared it together; she would have robed poverty with an imaginary halo, and welcomed it, rejoicing to become his wife, but such were not her feelings. The careful hand of maternal love had

done its work, and though enthusiasm and romance were generally the characteristics most clearly visible, yet there was a fund of good and sober sense within, that few suspected, and of which even her parents knew not the extent, and that plain sense effectually prevented her ever becoming the victim of imagination.

Emmeline loved Arthur Myrvin, loved him with an intensity, a fervour, which only those who possess a similar enthusiastic temperament can understand. She felt convinced she was not indifferent to him; but agony as it was to her young heart to part from him, in all probability for ever, yet she honoured his resolution; she knew, she felt its origin, and she rejoiced that he went of his own accord, ere their secret feelings were discovered.

Notwithstanding all her endeavours, her spirits flagged, and at the conclusion of the Oakwood festivities she appeared so pale and thin, that Mrs. Hamilton consulted Mr. Maitland. Emmeline had resisted, as much as she could without failure of duty, all appeal to medical advice, and it was with trembling she awaited his opinion; when, however, it was given, she rejoiced that he had been consulted, for had her parents entertained any suspicions of the real cause, it would have completely banished them. He said she was merely suffering from the effects of a lengthened period of excitement, that quiet and regularity of pursuits would in all probability restore both health and spirits. A smile, faint and apparently without meaning, played round her lips as her mother repeated what he had said, and playfully declared she should most strictly adhere to his advice.

Arthur had shrunk from the task of acquainting his father with his intentions, for he well knew they would give him pain, and cause him extreme solicitude, and he postponed doing so till his plans for the future were determined. He had even requested Ellen and Edward, who were still his friends, to say but little concerning him during their stay at Llangwillan; but if they revealed his intentions, he implored them to use all their influence with his father to reconcile him to this bitter disappointment of his cherished hopes. He had determined not to return to Llangwillan, he felt he could not bear to see his parent with the consciousness that he had acted contrary to his wishes; he would not therefore do so till he had succeeded in obtaining the situation he so earnestly desired. But as the period when he should resign his curacy now rapidly approached, he no longer refrained from writing to his father, and Ellen proved her regard for both father and son, by affectionately endeavouring to soothe Mr. Myrvin's disappointment and solicitude, which were, as his son expected, extreme. She succeeded, at length, in persuading him, that could he obtain the situation he so much desired, Arthur would be more likely to advance than in retaining his present occupation.

The period of Arthur's departure came a few days before Christmas. He went to bid Mr. Hamilton farewell the very morning on which that gentleman intended riding over to Exeter to meet Ellen and her brother, on their return from Llangwillan. To Arthur this interview was indeed a painful one. From the moment his resolution to depart had been fixed, that moment the blessed truth had strangely and suddenly burst upon him that he was beloved; a new spirit appeared to dawn within, and midst the deep agony it was to feel he was parting for ever from a being he so dearly loved, there was a glow of approving conscience that nerved him to its endurance. It was this which had enabled him to conquer his irritation at Percy's violence, and the grief it was to feel that Herbert too must doubt him. He esteemed, he loved, was deeply grateful to Mr. Hamilton, and his evident displeasure was hard to bear; yet even that he had borne, strengthened by secret yet honourable incentives. But that morning, his heart throbbing with ill-concealed anguish, for the following day he would be miles from Oakwood, never, never to behold Emmeline again, his frame weakened, his blood fevered from the long-continued mental struggle, the stern address of Mr. Hamilton stung him to the quick.

Mr. Hamilton was not one of those who could disguise his sentiments. If interested at all in the fortunes of another, he felt he must speak, however severe in some cases his words might seem. As the chosen friend of his son—the victim for a time of oppression and injury—young Myrvin had excited his interest too powerfully for him entirely to abandon it even now, and therefore he spoke plainly to him even as he thought.

"You are casting from you," he said, "a friend who was both able and willing to assist you, apparently without the slightest regret, even with indifference. As the chosen and dear companion of my valued son, your interests were mine, and gladly would I have done all in my power to forward your views, had your conduct been such as I expected and required, but such it appears has been far from the case. Your unaccountable resignation of a situation, which, though not one of great emolument, was yet of value, unhappily confirms every evil report I have heard. The same unsteady and wavering spirit which urges you to travel, instead of permitting you to remain contented in the quiet discharge of sacred duties, may lead you yet more into error, and I warn you as a friend, govern it in time. You may deem me intrusive in my remarks, I speak but for your own good, young man; and though your forgetfulness of the sacred nature of your profession could not fail to lessen my esteem and regard, yet for your father's sake I would implore you to remember that your calling involves duties of the most solemn nature, and renders you a much more responsible being both in the sight of God and man."

Arthur answered him not. His cheek burned and his heart throbbed, but it was the father of Emmeline, the benefactor of his father, who spoke, and he might have spoken more and more severely, but he would have been unanswered; even to defend his own stainless integrity and innocence he could not have spoken, the power of speech appeared to have entirely deserted him. Never could he have been said to hope, but the words he had heard proved to him that he had lost the esteem and regard of Mr. Hamilton, and darkened his despair. He fixed his large, dark grey eyes earnestly on Mr. Hamilton's face, so earnestly, that for some time afterwards that look was recalled with melancholy feelings; he bent his head silently yet respectfully, and quitted the room without uttering a single word.

Struck by his haggard features, and the deeply mournful tone of his voice, as he bade her farewell and thanked her for all her kindness, Mrs. Hamilton, whose kindly nature had never permitted her to share her husband's prejudice against him, invited him, if his time permitted, to accompany her on her walk to Moorlands, where she had promised Lady Helen and Lilla to spend the day during her husband's absence. There was such extreme kindness in her manner, pervading also her words, that Arthur felt soothed and comforted, though he found it difficult to converse with her on the indifferent subjects she started, nor could he answer her concerning his plans for the future, for with a burning cheek and faltering voice he owned they were not yet determined. He gazed on her expressive features, which responded to the interest she expressed, and he longed to confess the whole truth, and implore her pity, her forgiveness for having dared to love her child; but with a strong effort he restrained himself, and they parted, in kindness, indeed, but nothing more.

"Emmeline is gone down to the school," said Mrs. Hamilton, unasked, and thus betraying how entirely she was free from all suspicions of the truth, "and she goes from thence to see a poor woman in the outskirts of the village. You must not leave us without wishing her farewell, or she will think you have not forgiven all the mischievous jokes she has played off upon you so continually."

Arthur started, as he looked on her face. Again the wish arose to tell her all, but it was instantly checked, and bowing with the deepest reverence, as he pressed in his her offered hand, hastily withdrew.

Should he indeed see Emmeline, and alone? Her mother's voice had bid him seek her, but the same motives that bade him resign his curacy, caused him now to feel the better course would be to fly at once from the fascination of her presence, lest in a moment of excitement he should be tempted to betray the secret of his love; but while passion struggled with duty, the flutter of her dress, as Emmeline suddenly emerged from a green lane, and walked slowly and, he thought, sadly along, caught his eye, and decided the contest.

"I will be guarded; not a word of love shall pass my lips. I will only gaze on her sweet face, and listen to the kind tones of her dear voice again, before we part for ever," he thought, and darting forwards, was speedily walking by her side. He believed himself firm in his purpose, strong, unwavering in his resolution; but his heart had been wrung to its inmost core, his spirit bent beneath its deep, wild agony, and at that moment temptation was too powerful; he could not, oh, he could not

part from her, leave her to believe as others did. Could he bear that she, for whose smile he would have toiled day and night, to be regarded with esteem, to obtain but one glance of approbation, could he bear that she should think of him as the unworthy being he was represented? No! he felt he could not, and in one moment of unrestrained and passionate feeling, his love was told, the treasured secret of his breaking heart revealed.

Emmeline heard, and every limb of her slight frame trembled, almost convulsively, with her powerful struggle for composure, with the wish still to conceal from him the truth that he was to her even as she to him, dear even as life itself; but the struggle was vain. The anguish which the sight of his deep wretchedness inflicted on that young and gentle bosom, which from childhood had ever bled for others' woes, was too powerful, and led on by an irresistible impulse, she acknowledged his affections were returned; for she felt did she not speak it, the extreme agitation she could not hide would at once betray the truth, but at the same instant she avowed her unhappy love, she told him they must part and for ever. She conjured him for her sake to adhere to his resolution, and leave the neighbourhood of Oakwood; she thanked him with all the deep enthusiasm of her nature, for that regard for her peace which she felt confident had from the first dictated his resigning his curacy, and braving the cruel prejudices of all around him, even those of her own father, rather than betray his secret and her own; rather than linger near her, to play upon her feelings, and tempt her, in the intensity of her affection for him, to forget the duty, the gratitude, the love, she owed her parents.

"Wherefore should I hide from you that the affection, the esteem you profess and have proved for me are returned with equal force?" continued this noble-minded and right-feeling girl, as they neared Mrs. Langford's cottage, where she felt this interview must cease—she could sustain it no longer. "I would not, I could not thus wound the kind and generous heart of one, to whose care I feel I could intrust my earthly happiness; but as it is, situated as we both are, we must submit to the decrees of Him, who, in infinite wisdom and mercy, would, by this bitter trial, evince our love for Him, and try us in the ordeal of adversity and sorrow. He alone can know the extent of that love we bear each other; and He, if we implore Him, can alone give us sufficient strength to obtain the conquest of ourselves. We part, Arthur—and if not for ever, at least till many years have passed. Forget me, Arthur; you have by the honourable integrity of your conduct wrung from me a secret I had deemed would have died with me; for I knew and felt, and so too must you, its utter, utter hopelessness."

Her voice for the first time, faltered; audibly, but with a strong effort, she rallied, "I do not ask from you an explanation of the rumours to your discredit, which are flying about this neighbourhood, for not one of them do I believe; you have some secret enemy, whose evil machinations will, I trust, one day be clearly proved; perhaps you have been neglectful, heedless, and I may have been the cause. But let not this be, dear Arthur, let me not have the misery of feeling that an ill-fated love for one thus separated from you has rendered reckless that character which is naturally so good, so bright, and noble. Oh, for my sake, yield not to despair; shake off this lethargy, and prove to the whole world that they have wronged you, that the fame of Arthur Myrvin is as stainless as his name."

Arthur moved not his eyes from her as she thus spoke, every word she uttered increased the strong devotion he felt towards her; but as the purity, the nobleness of her character was displayed even clearer than ever before him, he felt himself unworthy to possess her, and yet that such a being loved him, avowed her love, acknowledged that to him she could intrust her earthly happiness without a single doubt, that knowledge exalted him above himself, soothed that morbid sensitiveness which had oppressed him, and, ere her sweet voice had ceased to urge him on to exertion, to trust in Him who had ordained their mutual trial, he had inwardly resolved to nerve himself to the task, and prove that she was not deceived in him, that he would deserve her favourable opinion. He gazed on her as if that look should imprint those fair and childlike features on the tablet of his memory.

"I will obey you," he said at length, in a voice hoarse with contending emotions. "We part, and when I return years hence, it may be to see you the happy wife of one in all respects more suited to you; but then, even then, although love for me may have passed away, remember it is you, whose gentle

voice has saved a fellow-creature from the sinful recklessness of despair; you who have pointed out the path which, I call heaven and earth to witness, I will leave no means untried till it is trodden. Had you refused to hear me, had you scorned my affections, left me in displeasure for my presumption, oh, Emmeline, I might indeed have become that which I am believed; but now you have inspired me with a new spirit. The recollection that you have not deemed me so utterly unworthy, will never, never leave me; it shall cling to me, and if evil assail me, that fond thought shall overcome temptation. The vain longings for a more stirring profession shall no more torment me, it is enough *you* have not despised me; and however irksome may be my future duties, they shall be performed with a steadiness and zeal which shall procure me esteem, if it do no more, and reconcile my conscience to my justly offended Maker. If, in future years, you chance to hear the name of Arthur Myrvin spoken in terms of respect and love, you will trace your own work; and oh, Emmeline, may that thought, that good deed, prove the blessing I would now call down upon your head."

He paused in strong and overpowering emotion, and Emmeline sought in vain for words to reply; they had reached the entrance to Mrs. Langford's little garden, and now the hour had come when they must part. "Farewell, dearest Arthur, may God bless you and give you peace! Leave me now," she added, after a moment's pause. But Arthur could only fix his eyes mournfully on her face, as though her last look should never leave him; then, suddenly, he raised her hand to his quivering lip. One moment, through blinding tears, he gazed on that dear being he loved so well; yet another moment, and he was gone.

Emmeline leaned heavily against the little gate, a sickness as of death for a moment crept over her and paralysed every limb; with a strong effort she roused herself and entered the cottage, feeling greatly relieved to find Mrs. Langford was absent. She sunk on a low seat, and burying her face in her hands, gave way for the first time to a violent burst of tears; yet she had done her duty, she had acted rightly, and that thought enabled her to conquer the natural weakness which, for a short time, completely overpowered her, and when Mrs. Langford returned, no signs of agitation were evident, except a more than ordinary paleness, which in her present delicate state of health, was easily attributable to fatigue.

Now it so happened that Widow Langford possessed a shrewdness and penetration of character, which we sometimes find in persons of her class, but which was in her case so combined, from long residence in Mr. Hamilton's family, with a delicacy and refinement, that she generally kept her remarks very much more secret than persons in her sphere of life usually do. It was fortunate for our poor Emmeline that it was so, for the widow had chanced to be an unseen witness of Arthur's impassioned farewell. She heard the concluding words of both, marked the despairing glance of Arthur, the deadly paleness of her dear Miss Emmeline, and connecting these facts with previous observations, she immediately imagined the truth; and with that kindness to which we have alluded, she retreated and lingered at a neighbour's till she thought her young lady had had sufficient time to recover her composure, instead of acting as most people would have done, hastened up to her, under the idea she was about to faint, and by intrusive solicitations, and yet more intrusive sympathy in such a matter, betrayed that her secret had been discovered.

Mrs. Langford shrunk from acting thus, although this was not the first time she had suspected the truth. She knew Emmeline's character well, and doted on her with all the affection a very warm heart could bestow. Having been head nurse in Mrs. Hamilton's family from Herbert's birth, she loved them all as her nurslings, but Emmeline's very delicate health when a baby, appeared to have rendered her the good woman's especial favourite.

At the time of Caroline's marriage, Miss Emmeline's future prospects were, of course, the theme of the servants' hall; some of whom thought it not at all improbable, that as Miss Hamilton had become a countess, Miss Emmeline might one day be a marchioness, perhaps even a duchess. Now Widow Langford thought differently, though she kept her own counsel and remained silent. Miss Emmeline, she fancied, would be very much happier in a more humble sphere, and settled down

quietly near Oakwood, than were she to marry some great lord, who would compel her to live amidst the wear and tear of a gay and fashionable life. Arthur Myrvin chanced to be a very great favourite of the widow's, and if he could but get a richer living, and become rather more steady in his character, and if Miss Emmeline really loved him, as somehow she fancied she did, why it would not only be a very pretty, but a very happy match, she was quite sure.

The good widow was, however, very careful not in the least to betray to her young lady that she had been a witness of their parting; for, after an expression of pleasure at seeing her there, an exclamation of surprise and regret at her pale cheeks, she at once branched off into a variety of indifferent subjects concerning the village, topics in which she knew Emmeline was interested, and concluded with—

"And so our young curate is, indeed, going to start for Exeter to-night, in the Totness mail. I am so very sorry, though I do not dare say so to any of my uncharitable neighbours. I did not think he would go so soon, poor dear Mr. Myrvin."

"It is not too soon, nurse, when every tongue has learned to speak against him," replied Emmeline, calmly, though a sudden flush rose to her cheek. "He must be glad to feel Mr. Howard no longer requires his services."

"But dear Miss Emmeline, you surely do not believe one word of all the scandalous reports about him?" said the widow, earnestly.

"I do not wish to do so, nor will I, without more convincing proofs," replied Emmeline, steadily. "My father, I fear, is deeply prejudiced, and that, in one of his charitable and kindly feelings, would tell against him."

"My master has been imposed on by false tales, my dear young lady; do not let them do so on you," said the good woman, with an eagerness which almost surprised her young companion. "I am quite convinced he has some secret enemy in the parish, I am pretty certain who it is; and I do not despair one day of exposing all his schemes, and proving Mr. Myrvin is as well disposed and excellent a young man as any in the parish. I know who the villain is in this case, and my master shall know it too, one day." Emmeline struggled to subdue the entreaty that was bursting from her lips, but entirely she could not, and seizing the widow's hand, she exclaimed, in a low agitated voice—

"Do so; oh, proclaim the falsehood, the cruelty of these reports, and I—I mean Arthur—Mr. Myrvin will bless you. It is so cruel, in such early youth, to have one's character defamed, and he has only that on which to rest; tell me, promise me you will not forget this determination."

"To the very best of my ability, Miss Emmeline, I promise you," replied Mrs. Langford, more and more confirmed in her suspicions. "But do not excite yourself so much, dear heart. Mr. Maitland said you were to be kept quite quiet, you know, and you have fatigued yourself so much, you are trembling like an aspen."

"My weakness must plead my excuse for my folly, dear nurse," answered Emmeline, striving by a smile to control two or three tears, which, spite of all resistance, would chase one another down her pale cheek. "Do not mind me, I shall get well very soon. And how long do you think it will be before you succeed in your wish?"

"Not for some time, my dear young lady, at present. I have only my suspicions; I must watch cautiously, ere they can be confirmed. I assure you, I am as anxious that poor young man's character should be cleared as you can be."

A faint smile for a moment played round Emmeline's lips, as she pressed the good woman's hand, and said she was satisfied. A little while longer she lingered, then rousing herself with a strong effort, she visited, as she had intended, two or three poor cottages, and forced herself to listen to and enter with apparent interest on those subjects most interesting to their inmates. In her solitary walk thence to Moorlands she strenuously combated with herself, lest her thoughts should adhere to their loved object, and lifting up her young enthusiastic soul in fervent faith and love to its Creator, she succeeded at length in obtaining the composure she desired, and in meeting her mother, at Moorlands,

with a smile and assumed playfulness, which did not fail, even at Mrs. Hamilton's gentle reproof for her lengthened absence and over fatigue, to which she attributed the paleness resting on her cheek, and which even the return of Edward and Ellen to Oakwood, and the many little pleasures incidental to a reunion, could not chase away.

Three weeks passed quietly on; Oakwood was once more the seat of domestic enjoyment. The Earl and Countess St. Eval spent the week of Christmas with them, which greatly heightened every pleasure, and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, instead of seeking in vain for one dear face in the happy group around them on the eve of Christmas and the New Year, beheld beside their peaceful hearth another son, beneath whose fond and gentle influence the character of Caroline, already chastened, was merging into beautiful maturity, and often as Mrs. Hamilton gazed on that child of care and sorrow, yet of deep unfailing love, she felt, indeed, in her a mother's recompense was already given.

Edward's leave of absence was extended to a longer period than usual. His ship had been dismantled, and now lay untenanted with the other floating castles of the deep. Her officers and men had been dispersed, and other stations had not yet been assigned to them. Nor did young Fortescue intend joining a ship again as midshipman; his buoyant hopes—the expectations of a busy fancy—told him that perhaps the epaulette of a lieutenant would glitter on his shoulder. On his first return home he had talked continually of his examination and his promotion, but as the time neared for him to accompany his uncle to London for the purpose, his volubility was checked.

Caroline and her husband returned to Castle Terryn, and scarcely four weeks after Myrvin's departure, Emmeline received from the hands of Mrs. Langford an unexpected and most agitating letter. It was from Arthur; intense mental suffering, in the eyes of her it addressed, breathed through every line; but that subject, that dear yet forbidden subject, their avowed and mutual love, was painfully avoided; it had evidently been a struggle to write thus calmly, impassionately, and Emmeline blessed him for his care: it merely implored her to use her influence with St. Eval to obtain his interference with his father on his (Arthur's) behalf. Lord Malvern he had heard was seeking for a gentleman to accompany his son Louis as tutor and companion to Germany; there, for the two following years, to improve his education, and enable him to obtain a thorough knowledge of the language and literature of the country. Arthur had applied for the situation, and recognised by the Marquis as the young clergyman he had so often seen at Oakwood, he received him with the utmost cordiality and kindness. On being questioned as to his reasons for resigning his curacy, he frankly owned that so quiet a life was irksome to him, and a desire to travel had occasioned the wish to become tutor to any nobleman or gentleman's son about to do so. He alluded himself to the reports to his prejudice, avowed with sorrow that neglect of parochial duties was indeed a just accusation, but from every other, he solemnly assured the Marquis, his conscience was free. Not one proof of vice or even irregularity of conduct had been or could be brought against him. He farther informed Emmeline, that not only the Marquis but the Marchioness and the whole family appeared much disposed in his favour, particularly Lord Louis, who declared that if he might not have him for a tutor, he would have no one else, and not go to Germany or to any school at all. The Marquis had promised to give him a decided answer as soon as he had consulted Lord St. Eval on the subject. He knew, Myrvin concluded, that her influence was great with the Earl, and it was for that reason and that alone he had ventured to address her.

Emmeline reflected long and deeply on this letter. Had she listened to the powerful pleadings of her deep affection, she would have shrunk from thus using her influence, however small, to send him from England,—yet could she hesitate? had she indeed forgotten herself to follow that only path of duty she had pointed out to him? Brief indeed were her moments of indecision. She wrote instantly to St. Eval in Arthur's favour, but so guardedly and calmly worded her letter, that no suspicion of any kinder or more interested feeling than that of her peculiarly generous and warm-hearted nature could have been suspected, either by St. Eval or her sister. She excused her boldness in writing thus unadvisedly and secretly, by admitting that she could not bear that an unjust and unfounded prejudice should so cruelly mar the prospects of so young and, she believed, injured a fellow-creature. She was

well aware that her father shared this prejudice, and therefore she entreated St. Eval not to mention her share in the transaction.

Lord St. Eval willingly complied with her wishes. She had been, as we know, ever his favourite. He loved her perfect artlessness and playfulness, her very enthusiasm rendered her an object of his regard; besides which, on this point, his opinion coincided with hers. He felt assured young Myrvin was unhappy—on what account he knew not—but he was convinced he did not deserve the aspersions cast upon him; and, directly after the receipt of Emmeline's earnest letter, he came unexpectedly to the parish, made inquiries, with the assistance of Mrs. Langford, and returned to Castle Terryn, perfectly satisfied that it would certainly be no disadvantage to his brother to be placed under the care and companionship of Arthur Myrvin. He lost no time in imparting this opinion to his father; and Emmeline very quickly learned that the whole affair was arranged. Lord Louis was wild with joy that Arthur Myrvin, whom he had liked at Oakwood, was to be his tutor, instead of some prim formidable, dominie, and to this news was superadded the intelligence that, the second week in February, the Rev. Arthur Myrvin and his noble pupil quitted England for Hanover, where they intended to make some stay.

Emmeline heard, and the words "will he not write me one line in farewell ere he leaves England?" were murmured internally, but were instantly suppressed, for she knew the very wish was a departure from that line of stern control she had laid down for herself and him; and that letter, that dear, that precious letter—precious, for it came from him, though not one word of love was breathed,—ought not that to be destroyed? Had she any right now to cherish it, when the aid she sought had been given, its object gained? Did her parents know she possessed that letter, that it was dear to her, what would be their verdict? And was she not deceiving them in thus retaining, thus cherishing a remembrance of him she had resolved to forget? Emmeline drew forth the precious letter; she gazed on it long, wistfully, as if in parting from it the pang of separation with the beloved writer was recalled. She pressed her lips upon it, and then with stern resolution dropped it into the fire that blazed upon the hearth; and, with cheek pallid and breath withheld, she marked the utter annihilation of the first and last memento she possessed of him she loved.

Mrs. Hamilton's anxiety on Emmeline's account did not decrease. She still remained pale and thin, and her spirits more uneven, and that energy which had formerly been such a marked feature in her character appeared at times entirely to desert her; and Mr. Maitland, discovering that the extreme quiet and regularity of life which he had formerly recommended was not quite so beneficial as he had hoped, changed in a degree his plan, and advised diversity of recreation, and amusements of rather more exertion than he had at first permitted. Poor Emmeline struggled to banish thought, that she might repay by cheerfulness the tenderness of her parents and cousins, but she was new to sorrow; her first was indeed a bitter trial, the more so because even from her mother it was as yet concealed. She succeeded for a time in her wishes, so far as to gratify her mother by an appearance of her usual enthusiastic pleasure in the anticipation of a grand ball, given by Admiral Lord N—, at Plymouth, which it was expected the Duke and Duchess of Clarence would honour with their presence. Ellen anxiously hoped her brother would return to Oakwood in time to accompany them. He had passed his examination with the best success, but on the advice of Sir Edward Manly, they both lingered in town, in the hope that being on the spot the young officer would not be forgotten in the list of promotions. He might, Edward gaily wrote, chance to return to Oakwood a grade higher than he left it.

CHAPTER IV

"Ellen, I give you joy!" exclaimed Emmeline, entering the room where her mother and cousin were sitting one afternoon, and speaking with some of her former cheerfulness. "There is a carriage coming down the avenue, and though I cannot quite distinguish it, I have second sight sufficient to fancy it is papa's. Edward declared he would not tell us when he was coming home, and therefore there is nothing at all improbable in the idea, that he will fire a broadside on us, as he calls it, unexpectedly."

"I would willingly stand fire, to see him safe anchored off this coast," replied Ellen, smiling. "Lord N—'s ball will lose half its charms if he be not there."

"What! with all your enthusiastic admiration of her Royal Highness, whom you will have the honour of seeing? For shame, Ellen."

"My enthusiastic admiration; rather yours, my dear Emmeline. Mine is so quiet that it does not deserve the name of enthusiasm," replied Ellen, laughing. "Nor could I have imagined you would have honoured me so far as to give me an attribute in your eyes so precious."

"I am getting old and learning wisdom," answered Emmeline, making an effort to continue her playfulness, "and therefore admire quietness more than formerly."

"And therefore you are sometimes so silent and sad, to atone for the past, my Emmeline," remarked her mother, somewhat sorrowfully.

"Sad, nay, dearest mother, do me not injustice; I cannot be sad, when so many, many blessings are around me," replied the affectionate girl. "Silent I may be sometimes, but that is only because I do not feel quite so strong perhaps as I once did, and it appears an exertion to rattle on as I used upon trifling subjects."

"I shall not be contented, then, my own Emmeline, till that strength returns, and I hear you delighted, even as of old, with little things again."

"And yet you have sometimes smiled at my romance, and bade me think of self-control, dearest mother. Must I be saucy enough to call you changeable?" answered Emmeline, smiling, as she looked in her mother's face.

Mrs. Hamilton was prevented replying by Ellen's delighted exclamation that it was her uncle's carriage, and Edward was waving a white handkerchief, as if impatient to reach them, an impatience which was speedily satisfied by his arrival, bounding into the room, but suddenly pausing at the door to permit his uncle and another gentleman's entrance, to which latter he respectfully raised his cap, and then sprung forward to clasp the extended hands of his cousin and sister.

"Allow me to congratulate you, madam," said Sir Edward Manly, after returning with easy politeness the courteous greeting of Mrs. Hamilton, "on the promotion of one of the bravest officers and most noble-minded youths of the British navy, and introduce all here present to Lieutenant Fortescue, of his Majesty's frigate the Royal Neptune, whose unconquered and acknowledged dominion over the seas I have not the very slightest doubt he will be one of the most eager to preserve."

"Nor can I doubt it, Sir Edward," replied Mrs. Hamilton, smiling, as she glanced on the flushing cheek of her gallant nephew, adding, as she held out her hand to him, "God bless you, my dear boy! I do indeed rejoice in your promotion, for I believe it well deserved."

"You are right, madam, it is well deserved," replied Sir Edward, with an accent so marked on the last sentence that the attention of all was arrested. "Hamilton, I have been silent to you on the subject, for I wished to speak it first before all those who are so deeply interested in this young man's fate. The lad," he added, striking his hand frankly on Edward's shoulder, "the lad whose conscience shrunk from receiving public testimonials of his worth as a sailor, while his private character was stained, while there was that upon it which, if known, he believed would effectually prevent his promotion; who, at the risk of disappointment to his dearest wishes, of disgrace, want of honour, possessed sufficient courage to confess to his captain that his log-book, the first years of his seamanship, told

a false tale—the lad, I say, who can so nobly command himself, is well worthy to govern others. He who has known so well the evil of disobedience will be firm in the discipline of his men, while he who is so stern to his own faults will, I doubt not, be charitable to those of others. The sword presented to him for his brave preservation of the crew of the Syren will never be stained by dishonour, while he looks upon it and remembers the past, and even as in those of my own son, shall I henceforward rejoice in using my best endeavours to promote the fortunes of Edward Fortescue."

The return of Edward, the honours he had received, the perfect happiness beaming on his bright face, all caused Ellen to look forward to the ball with greater pleasure than she had ever regarded gaiety of that sort before; and Mrs. Hamilton would sometimes playfully declare that she and Emmeline had for a time exchanged characters, although Edward's never-failing liveliness, his odd tales and joyous laugh, had appeared partly to rouse the latter's usual spirits, and dissipate slightly her mother's anxiety.

The festive night arrived, and anticipation itself was not disappointed in the pleasure it bestowed. All the nobility of the country, for miles round, had assembled in respect to the royal guests who had honoured the distinguished commander with their august presence; and Mrs. Hamilton's natural feelings of pride were indeed gratified that night, as she glanced on her Caroline, who now appeared in public for the first time since her marriage, attired in simple elegance, yet with a richness appropriate to her rank, attracting every eye, even that of their Royal Highnesses themselves, by the graceful dignity of her tall and commanding figure, by the quiet repose and polished ease which characterised her every movement. If Lord St. Eval looked proud of his young wife, there were few there who would have blamed him. The Lady Florence Lyle was with her brother, enjoying with unfeigned pleasure, as did Ellen, and to all appearance Emmeline, the scene before them.

The brilliant uniforms of the army, and the handsome but less striking ones of the navy, imparted additional gaiety and splendour to the rooms, forming picturesque groups, when contrasting with the chaste and elegant costumes of the fairer sex. But on the fascinating scene we may not linger, nor attempt to describe the happiness which the festivities occasioned the entire party, nor on the gratification of Lieutenant Fortescue, when Sir Edward Manly begged the honour of an introduction for his young friend to his Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence, who, with his amiable consort, the Princess Adelaide, had honoured Lord N—with their august presence. Upon one incident alone we must be permitted to dwell, as affording a great and unexpected pleasure to our friend Ellen.

Edward and Ellen were for some time perfectly unconscious that they were objects of the most earnest, penetrating scrutiny of a lady, leaning on the arm of a young and handsome man in regimentals, near them.

"It must be them; that likeness cannot be that of a stranger," were the words, uttered in an earnest, persuading tone, addressed by the young officer to the lady, who might be his mother, which were the first to attract the attention of the little group, though the speaker appeared quite unconscious he was overheard. "Let me speak to him, and at least ask the question."

"No, no, Walter," the lady replied, in a low tone. "Changed as are our situations now, I could not wish, even if it be them, to intrude upon their remembrance."

An exclamation of suppressed impatience escaped from the lips of the young man, but instantly checking it, he said, respectfully and tenderly—

"Dearest mother, do not say so, if" (the name was lost) "grew up as she was a child, she would be glad to welcome the friend of her father, the companion of her childhood."

"But it cannot be, Walter; that beautiful girl is not like my poor child, though her brother may strangely resemble those we have known."

"Have you not often told me, mother, we never change so much as from childhood into youth? Ellen was always ill, now she may be well, and that makes all the difference in the world. I am much mistaken if those large, mournful eyes can belong to any but"—

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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