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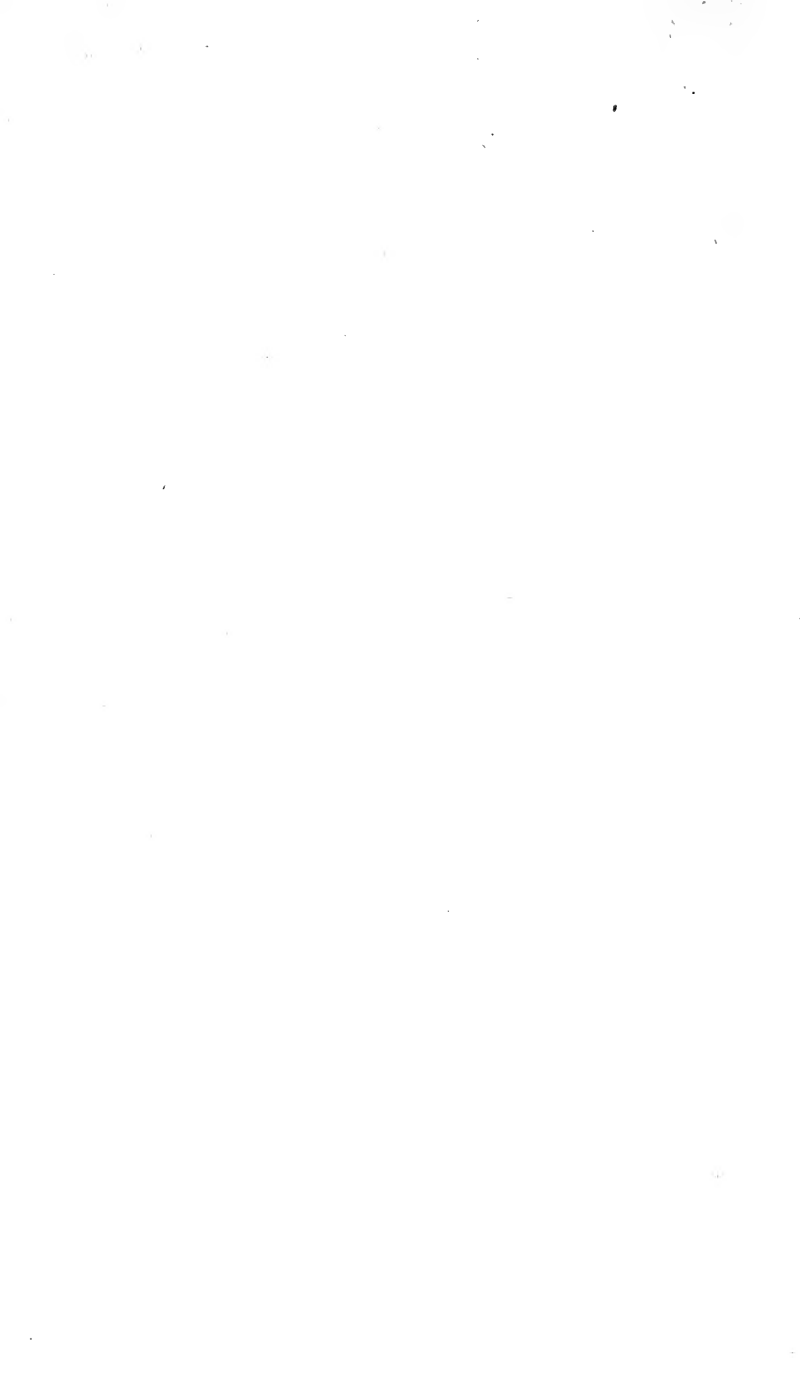
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Sept. 1851.

Miss Greenwood.

Brookwood



LADY SELINA CLIFFORD,

A NOVEL.

AND OTHER TALES.

EDITED BY

LADY DORMER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION.

10-11-1876
It may be necessary, in a few words, to introduce "Lady Selina Clifford" to the public.

It will be seen that the Tale is laid some five-and-twenty years since. So many fashionable stories of the day are constantly appearing, that all are familiar with high life as it exists at the present time.

It has been thought, however, that the more youthful reader may take an interest in a picture which represents the recreations of the wealthy and the great, at an earlier period of the nineteenth century—in scenes in which their parents, probably, took a part : while it is hoped that the latter, once con-

versant with such scenes, who may condescend to honour this story with a perusal, may not be ill-pleased at being reminded of them, and will assent to the fidelity with which they have been delineated.

LADY SELINA CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

IN the year 1830 the market-town of Thornley, situated in one of the most beautiful parts of the county of ——, was a most self-important little place. It had its monthly winter balls, its whist club, its evening parties, its hotel, and various other advantages, all of which tended to prove it kept a respectable pace with the improvements which, even in those days, had begun to put forth the buds which have since proceeded with such rapid growth, and

spread themselves to the remotest corner of our island. It was adorned with the usual number of grave and respectable houses. There was the lawyer's on the right-hand, as you passed up the High-street from the London road, with a facing of light pink bricks and heavy stone windows, which had a very imposing effect. A little further on was the house of the surgeon, which, to compensate for the more sober hue of its dark grey bricks, displayed in the window a range of glass jars, whose brilliant contents, when lighted up by the magical effects of gas, shed a rainbow of the brightest hues across the stone pavement.

But the glory of the place,—the pride of Thornley,—was centred in the hotel, which had lately been enlarged, and fronted with an undeniable casing of Parker's cement ; and over the doorway had been placed a splendid white hart, with a chain of gold around its neck. In the summer, mine hostess

would encircle it with a double row of bright scarlet flower-pots, so that it might be said to repose in a bed of geraniums and myrtles.

About a quarter of a mile beyond the town, on the left, was the Rectory, a tall, dull-looking house, shaded with old chestnut trees ; and the gloom of the iron-railed court-yard before it was rather relieved by a small flower-garden which opened into it on the left, and which was kept in the neatest order by Miss Hensley, the only daughter of the rector, a good-humoured, homely, bustling woman of forty-five, who was Lady Bountiful, gossip-purveyor, and adviser-general to the parish.

Doctor Hensley was a little, thin, restless old gentleman, whose character was only redeemed from the merest common-place by two peculiar qualifications,—he was a “ motive-finder,” and a “ horror-seeker ;”—that is, he could not hear of the slightest occurrence without directly setting his wits to work to

find out a cause for it. Not a neighbour could take a journey, give a dinner-party, or invite a friend to stay with him, but Doctor Hensley would be obliging enough to discover some surreptitious motive for his doing so. The other redeeming qualification was a most inveterate love of the horrible. His favourite book was the "Newgate Calendar," but that did by no means satisfy the keenness of his appetite; and not a fire could break out, a leg be broken, or a child be drowned, within twenty miles of him, without a gleam of satisfaction breaking out through the cloud of gravity he thought it necessary to assume on the occasion. It was not that he was a hard-hearted man; but the horrible was his natural element, — he could not help it.

But to proceed in my tour through Thornley and its environs.

Nearly opposite to the Rectory was a small hunting-lodge which had been tenant-

ed for the last three years, during the winter months, by a gentleman of the name of Aston, a man of good fortune and family, a member of the club at Melton Mowbray, a distinguished star at Almacks, and also of decided taste and consideration in the fashionable world. He was greatly looked up to in the neighbourhood of Thornley ; hardly an opinion was formed of anything that related to taste or fashion till it had first received his sanction. He was besides, from his good-humour and agreeable manner, very universally liked. There was one family, though, who did not entirely join in this general approbation—who rather feared than liked him—this was a family of the name of Harvey, who resided at Rolleston Park, a beautiful seat about two miles from Thornley. Mr. Harvey had been in some lucrative, though not distinguished business, but had retired for many years with a very large fortune. His great ambition was to be

thought a man *comme il faut* ; to have every part of his establishment in what is called good style : the slightest breach of what he considered etiquette in his domestic arrangements caused him real anguish. No man ever laboured harder in his vocation than Mr. Harvey, and with most of his neighbours he passed current, — but Mr. Aston pronounced him a counterfeit.

Mr. Aston, on his first arrival in the country, threw a new light on the character of Mr. Harvey, which made many ashamed of having been for so many years imposed upon. There had they been admiring, in blissful ignorance, his *soufflets au mareschino*, his *gigots à sept heures*, his finger-glasses filled with rose water, and his servants waiting in cambric gloves ; but they never had the wit to discover the lurking pig's face in the corner, which came

“ Like the dead leafless branch in the summer's bright ray,”

to spoil all, and seemed to hide its blushes

amongst the umbrageous sprigs of brocoli which surrounded it, as if it were ashamed — as well it might be — to be detected in a silver dish. Mr. Harvey's family consisted of a wife, two daughters, and a son, all of whom shall come to light in due time.

A few miles beyond Rolleston Park was Brooklands Abbey, the magnificent seat of the Earl of Litchfield, a Catholic nobleman of immense fortune. Very little had been seen of him in the neighbourhood, as domestic misfortunes had caused him to seclude himself for some time from society, and afterwards he had visited the continent for a period of eight years, from whence he had lately returned to England, and was again expected to reside at the seat of his ancestors.

Lord Litchfield had married very young and very unfortunately; his wife was beautiful and fascinating, but thoughtless and unprincipled, and had eloped from him, with an officer in the Guards, two years after her

marriage, leaving an infant daughter of a few months old. The wounded feelings of Lord Litchfield—for he had fondly loved and trusted his wife—had rendered him averse to any intercourse with the society in which he had been accustomed to mingle. Lady Litchfield—for she had not been divorced—was lately dead, and the Earl had returned to England. He had at this period attained his thirty-fifth year, and Miss Hensley assured the neighbourhood of Thornley that “he would never marry again ; he had had enough of matrimony—she dared to say he was only too happy to be free—and besides, she had heard he was so gloomy and ill-tempered that few young ladies would like to venture on him.” These assertions of Miss Hensley, however, did by no means prevent a great commotion among the fathers, mothers and daughters, for many miles around Brooklands Abbey, when it was ascertained the melancholy Earl was again to become its inmate.

Few of the neighbours of Lord Litchfield were more anxious for his arrival than Sir Robert Leslie, who had a seat a few miles from Brooklands Abbey. Sir Robert was a Baronet of a very ancient Catholic family; he had one son, who was yet in his childhood, and four grown-up daughters. The sole end of his existence appeared to be to establish those daughters in marriage—it was his “thought by day, his dream by night.” Poor man! it was feared if he did not soon succeed, his anxiety would bring him to an untimely grave. Bread appeared not to nourish him, nor sleep to give him rest: he was gradually wasting away; and yet his friends, and those who were of a sanguine disposition, still cherished the hope that, could a wedding but once take place, in his family he would begin to grow fat from that very hour.

His eldest daughter had arrived at the ruminating age of thirty-six—she was no beauty, and as her best friends could not

accuse her of being very amiable, she was of course very clever. The two next daughters were pretty, good-humoured, commonplace girls, of about two or three and twenty. The youngest, Matilda, was just eighteen ; she was of a very retired, gentle, and almost melancholy disposition, and was extremely desirous to take the veil ; her wish had however been strongly opposed hitherto by her father, whose favourite she was, and who had higher hopes of establishing her well in marriage than he had for her sisters.

There was another expected arrival in the neighbourhood of Thornley, which excited almost as great a sensation among the gentlemen as that of Lord Litchfield did among the ladies of the place—for it was the expected arrival of a young, beautiful and rich heiress—Lady Selina Clifford.

Lady Selina was the only child of the late Earl of ——— ; she had been an orphan from early infancy, and consigned to the guardian-

ship of an uncle and the Bishop of ———, who had been a friend of her father. She had been brought up almost entirely in Italy, as she resided with her uncle, who held a diplomatic mission in that country; he was lately dead, and Lady Selina, who was now of age, determined to fix her residence at Lumley Court, of which she had retained a fond recollection. Report spoke highly of her beauty and accomplishments, and the little world around Thornley was on the tip-toe of expectation for the arrival of the two great luminaries—the heiress and the earl—who were expected to shed a radiant light all around their vicinity.

It now only remains for me to introduce two more families of my country neighbours to my readers; and as they are not of much note they will speedily be dispatched, and I shall hasten personally to present the various personages, of whom I have attempted to give a slight sketch.

My persons of little note are merely two old

maids, who lived in the town of Thornley, the Miss Wilsons by name—quiet, harmless, staid damsels, chiefly remarkable for their sensitive modesty. The others are Mr. and Mrs. Dartford, the lawyer of Thornley, and his wife, whom I cannot now stop to describe, but who shall speak for themselves in the due course of things.

CHAPTER II.

SIR ROBERT LESLIE was not what is termed a dinner-giving man, for his estate was much encumbered, and he had been, for some years, prudently living within his income, and curtailing all unnecessary expenses ; but having now paid his first visit at Brooklands Abbey, on the arrival of its lord, he deemed it expedient to follow up the return of that visit by an invitation to dinner. The invitation was accepted, and Sir Robert and his three eldest daughters were assembled in the drawing-room at Elmwood, with laudable punctuality, as the clock struck six, to await the arrival of their guests, who had been invited at that hour.

The whole party were rather in an uncomfortable state of expectation and agitation : they had none of them met Lord Litchfield or Lady Selina Clifford, both of whom were now to be their guests ; they were all anxious to appear to advantage before such distinguished visitors ; and they were but little accustomed to play the hosts ; besides which, there were many little private distresses that threw a gloom over the family party now assembled. Sir Robert was out of humour because he had yielded to the earnest request of his favourite daughter, Matilda, that she might not appear at dinner ; he had, however, issued his peremptory command that she should pass the evening in the drawing-room. He now stood with his back to the fire, meditating upon his folly in suffering Matilda to follow her own whims and looking around his large gloomy-looking drawing-room, the furniture of which was rather more antique than he could have wished. He had been

seldom accustomed to see the heavy satin-wood sofas and chairs disrobed of their modest garments of brown chintz, and it now struck him that their long dark shining legs looked rather indecent, and had better have remained covered up.

Miss Leslie sat apart upon a sofa, with an immoveable countenance, though internally suffering much agitation. The domestic affairs fell under her superintendence, and she had just learned that the favourite jelly had *fallen in*; added to which misfortune was the greater one of the fish not having arrived, and her being totally unprepared for a *top dish*. Her meditations were, therefore, very bitter, and the more so as the non-arrival of fish was entirely owing to Sir Robert obstinately persisting, against her better judgment, in having his dinner party take place on Monday—the very worst day, as every one knows, for fish. Miss Leslie assured her sisters that she was entirely indifferent as to this calamity; it was

“Papa’s fault and was nothing to her;” notwithstanding which assertion it was evident to her sisters that she was anything but indifferent to her misfortunes; they therefore prudently retired as far from her vicinity as they possibly could, and ensconced themselves in a window to watch the arrival of the first carriage which should drive up the avenue, while in a low voice they detailed to each other their own petty grievances.

Charlotte was distressed that the evening was so damp—she was afraid her hair would never keep in curl; and Catherine, who was very brown, thought it a great pity they were obliged to be in mourning. The monotony of their complaints was every now and then very pleasingly broken by wondering “how Lady Selina would be dressed,” and “if Lord Litchfield would be handsome,” and in hoping the Harveys “would not wear their ugly blue gowns, of the very sight of which they were sick.”

“Where are Mr. Pennant and Hildebrand?” asked Sir Robert; and as he spoke the young gentleman and his tutor entered the room.

Hildebrand Leslie was a very fine boy of eleven years old; his appearance, however, on the present occasion, was somewhat injured by his sisters Charlotte and Catherine having chosen to employ themselves for an hour in the afternoon in curling his hair the wrong way—the artists themselves pronounced him much improved by the operation. He had submitted himself as the victim of their curling irons till his small stock of patience was totally exhausted, and no further efforts of theirs could attain the desirable end of “making Hildebrand keep his nails clean;”—that was a point beyond even the eloquence of Sir Robert or Mr. Pennant, therefore the young ladies were fain to content themselves with the hope that the curled head would attract all sinister observation from the dirty nails.

The tutor of young Hildebrand, Mr. Pen-
nant, was also the priest in the family of Sir
Robert Leslie, and a very gentleman-like and
clever man, about thirty; he was, also, very
good looking: notwithstanding which he was
no favourite with some of the young ladies of
the family, as his manner was very cold and
reserved, and he was extremely strict, as their
confessor, in enjoining a close observance of
the penances he judged it necessary to inflict
upon them at different times. Charlotte and
Catherine took every opportunity of escaping
from his lectures, which were much too long
and grave to suit their taste; but in Matilda,
who was very docile and of a very religious
turn of mind, he found at all times a willing
pupil.

The first carriage which drove up the avenue
was that of Mr. Harvey, and the appearance of
the whole party, as they entered the drawing-
room, was unexceptionable. Mrs. Harvey was
not unladylike, and never spoke but when

speaking was absolutely necessary ;—both her daughters were pretty girls, and strictly attired according to the last number of “Townshend’s Selection from the Parisian Costumes.” Mr. Harvey was an irreproachable-looking elderly man, and his son, Frederic, was good-looking and gentlemanlike.

Mr. Aston was the next arrival, to the relief of Sir Robert, who well knew the icy bands, which now fettered the circle, would thaw at once before his easy and agreeable manner. Mr. Aston, too, had been acquainted with Lady Selina Clifford, in Italy, and Sir Robert, who was rather a shy man, depended much upon him for rendering the evening agreeable to the young heiress.

Mr. Aston was almost immediately followed by Lord Litchfield. Sir Robert had not seen the Earl for many years, and now found him greatly altered : he had been eminently handsome, but was now very thin

and pale, and had a look of deep dejection, which, mingled with an air of reserve, by some interpreted *hauteur*, made rather a chilling impression on his host, who remembered him a fine, animated, ingenuous young man, with a flow of almost exuberant spirits.

The young ladies were, on the entrance of Lord Litchfield, rather disappointed in the expectations they had formed of him; he was too pale, and his head was beginning to become bald, and he looked very dismal, and not much like the kind of man whom ladies claim at once as a species of personal property. On a second glance, however, they mentally and unanimously came to the conclusion, that his lordship was "extremely interesting;" that his eyes were almost unequalled; and, that he was not bald, but that his fine dark hair merely grew very high upon his forehead. His features and his figure were strictly fine, and he possessed

that lofty air of perfect self-possession and grace, which although not always attendant on high birth and high breeding, is yet rarely or never seen without them.

The last of the party who arrived, was Lady Selina Clifford, accompanied by the lady who lived with her in the capacity of companion and *chaperone*, and who bore the unpoetical appellation of Mrs. Todd. Not all the reports which Mr. Aston had spread, of the beauty of Lady Selina, had come near to the loveliness which now struck every eye with admiration, as she entered the drawing-room at Elmwood. It was, indeed, impossible to conceive anything more strikingly beautiful; her figure, which was rather above the middle size in height, was slim, and yet rounded to the finest proportions; a complexion of a dazzling fairness, was relieved by the richest tints of the rose, and eyes of the deepest hazel; while fine dark-chestnut hair, shaded a brow of the most exquisite

beauty. Every feature appeared perfect, and yet the insipidity which has been sometimes adjudged the attendant on regularity of features, was nowhere to be discovered in the countenance of Lady Selina; its expression was particularly animated and interesting. Her dress and style were completely foreign, and the easy elegance of her manner partook in a slight degree of the same peculiarity.

The first moment Sir Robert Leslie beheld her, he trembled at the thought of so powerful a rival for his daughters: it was impossible for him not to own—proud as he was of the beauty of his three youngest girls—that there was scarcely a chance of their being looked at when Lady Selina was present. The Harveys were all lost in admiration, and poor Sir Robert was mentally calculating in how short a space of time Frederick Harvey could, in common

decency, follow the lead of Lord Litchfield and Mr. Aston, and lay his hand, heart, and fortune, at the feet of the beautiful heiress—for at her feet his rueful forebodings feared they would be. Alas! the three golden fishes, for whom his lines were to be baited with his three daughters, would all escape him! There was comfort, however, in the thought, that Lady Selina could not marry them all three if she would. Polygamy was not allowed in England: it might be that the two rejected swains would fall to the share of two of the Miss Leslies after all; and the careful, and far-seeing father, endeavoured to cheer himself up with the thought.

In the meantime his daughters could not get over their surprise at the dress of Lady Selina; it was not at all like any one of Townsend's *modes*, nor any that they had been taught to think fashionable. They

could not make out why she should allow her hair to fall in long ringlets, when it ought to have started up an end into long *crêpes*, like sausages; nor why she should wear it without any ornament, at the very time when flowers, feathers, gold ribbons, and Swiss pins, were all lawfully allowed to be worn at once. They, however, felt inclined to acquit her of the crime of a lack of ornament, when they actually counted seven of the most costly bracelets, the beauty of which they could not but consider, as rather diminished, by their being worn underneath the long sleeves of light gauze. To unsophisticated eyes, the fashion is certainly rather a perverse one; but no doubt it is intended as an emblem, that beauty veiled is the more attractive; or perhaps it may be meant to imitate the modest violet which loves to lurk beneath the shade; at all events, it whets the curiosity, and the Misses Leslies were exceedingly anxious for

a nearer inspection which they had not at present much chance of accomplishing, owing to the announcement of dinner, which recalled them at once from their lofty visions of cameos, chased golds, crape, and French curls.

CHAPTER III.

EVERYTHING appeared to go smoothly at dinner. Miss Leslie was agreeably surprised to find, as if by magic, that the dilatory fish had at last made their appearance, and were "doing their office," if not with all the intellect displayed by the fish in the Arabian tale, at least with a modest, quiet grace, more peculiarly adapted to the occasion.

Sir Robert felt an internal gleam of satisfaction, that the rank of Lady Selina and Lord Litchfield necessarily placed them at the farthest possible distance from each other that the table would allow; and he was very well pleased to observe, that his daughter Charlotte

occupied a seat next to the Earl ; while the uneasiness he could not but experience at seeing Mr. Aston seated next to Lady Selina, was much ameliorated by discerning Catherine on the other side of him. Miss Leslie, whose heart was warmed by the unexceptionable appearance of her various dishes as each cover was removed, magnanimously resolved to indulge Mr. Aston, who was slightly tinctured with epicurism, in his favourite employment of making and demolishing a devil, notwithstanding the unorthodoxy of its appearance, at a large party—a point which she had never been induced to concede to him before. The favourite parts of the turkey were accordingly consigned to him for the purpose, and with silent gravity he commenced the important operation, making no sort of reply to the incessant and contradictory pieces of advice which invariably wait upon the devil-maker. When his labours were finished, he confessed he made it a rule to put a seal on his lips and his ears while occupied

in the mysteries of his art, and after humbly deprecating the wrath of all to whose irrelevant observations he had not replied, he added as his excuse, "no man is ever so secure of the kind interference of his friends as while he is deviling a turkey. Have you ever known an instance where he was permitted to perform the act in peace? Every eye is sure to be fixed on him—every tongue is ready with some friendly hint as to the most approved proportion of ingredients, as to the orthodoxy of applying mustard, or not—a point which I have heard discussed as long and as earnestly as the slave-trade abolition. Let me earnestly advise every devil-maker to look neither on the right nor yet on the left, but to continue with imperturbable obduracy to turn a deaf ear to the advice of all his friends, and triumph over the devil, according to the suggestions of his own practical experience alone. But above all, let him never put a grain of any other pepper than cayenne, not if Doctor

Kitchener himself were to advise him to the contrary."

"I see," replied Lady Selina, smiling, "you atone for your reluctance to take advice by your readiness in bestowing it."

"Yes; I am naturally of a generous disposition, and give where I never receive—it has always been my failing."

The anxious eye of Sir Robert soon discovered that the conversation at the upper end of the table began to languish. The "cheek of parchment" and the "eye of stone," which I am compelled to admit were the striking peculiarities of Miss Leslie, did not appear to inspire her noble neighbour with the requisite flow of conversation; while the running fire of questions and common-place remarks of Miss Charlotte had all been expended during the first course; and the random shots occasionally ventured in reply, were so tardy and so discouraging, that her natural volubility subsided into a mental decision that Lord Litchfield was

certainly "rather a stupid man," and she could not but observe, with some pique, that his eyes very frequently wandered to the beautiful countenance of Lady Selina, who was carrying on an animated conversation with Mr. Aston, occasional sentences of which, as they reached the ear of Lord Litchfield, appeared to excite the attention and interest, which neither of his fair neighbours had been able to draw forth. Lady Selina was speaking of Italy, which she called "her country," and to which she was enthusiastically attached; she was now defending it against some aspersions which Mr. Aston, who was amused with her warmth, had ventured, in order to excite it. Lord Litchfield had resided many years in Italy, and the animated eulogium of it by Lady Selina, interested him, and he was already wishing his lot had been cast at the lower end of the table, where he might have received the amusement he felt little inclination to bestow, and as he certainly could extract it but scan-

tily in his present situation, he felt no regret when Miss Leslie gave her retiring signal.

The formality of the retreat to the drawing-room was, as is usual in such cases, attempted to be dispersed by a gentle stirring of the already ferocious fire, and the novel observation, that "a room always felt chilly on first coming out of the dining-room—but that the weather was unusually cold for the time of year."

After the regular time allowed for the scorching of their dresses was expended, each lady was armed with a long-handled pinched paper screen, and seated upon a sofa or chair, in two lines, for the more conveniently performing the operation of drinking their coffee.

Lady Selina, who had mixed but little in English society, felt the "icy worm" begin to creep over her, and ventured to disturb the gentle whispers of her companions, by an audible request for music. "If Lady Selina

had no objection, the Miss Leslie's would defer it till the gentlemen came in from the dining-room, because papa always made them sing till they were quite hoarse, and play till their fingers ached ; he was so excessively fond of music." Lady Selina could not wish them to incur either of these calamities for her sake, but, as she really wanted a little amusement, she made another attempt to procure it, by asking whether either of the Miss Leslie's drew, and whether they might be allowed to look at any of their drawings ?

The portfolio was readily and instantly produced, and the indiscreet curiosity of Lady Selina punished by the tax imposed upon her sincerity by her politeness during the examination of its contents. The genius of the Miss Leslie's appeared to be universal, and they apparently disdained to cramp it by the endeavour to attain perfection in any one particular style alone ; they boldly let their pencils run wild in all, and to the wonder-

ing eyes and startled taste of Lady Selina were displayed a St. John with a swelled cheek ; a bunch of yellow roses and geraniums, richly streaked with gum ; a pastoral landscape in black lead, which looked as if it had been drawn with the point of a very small pin ; a Hebe with a wall-eye and a wooden eagle ; a thin lilac hill, endeavouring to support a range of heavy fire-coloured clouds, while a gentle shepherd gazed upon them from a sap-green bank in a corner, as he watched with tender care with his remaining eye a fleecy herd, which had very much the appearance of the fat maggots which occasionally emerge from hazel-nuts ; a nymph peeping knowingly from a cottage casement, overhung with woodbine, with what was intended to be a most determined, unquestionable look of innocence, while her companion, a rosy damsel with a jocular expression of countenance, appeared to be in the humane act of crushing a dove to death ; a ship on

fire; the parting of Hector and Andromache; Conway Castle; several horrible specimens of Oriental tinting; and some butterflies sucking honey with all their might out of a large cabbage-rose completed the selection, which the young ladies had made of what they considered their *chefs-d'œuvre*.

When the portfolio was closed, Lady Selina was overpowered by the volubility which now returned to the Miss Leslies in full flow, as if they wished to indemnify themselves in the secluded corner to which they had retired with her, for the spell the icy circle had cast on their voluble faculties.

Lady Selina's natural politeness and great good humour led her to answer with some patience the string of questions with which she was assailed, some of which were what may be denominated *leading* questions, or, at least, rather comprehensive ones. Both the young ladies entreated her to tell them "something about Italy," but they did not

tax her ingenuity to discover what that something should be, for they both ran on, apparently delighted with the re-awakened music of their own voices. Their ideas of Italy were very sublime, though somewhat confused, and were floating through their heads in not very tangible shapes, still more mutilated by their ineffective attempts to prove to Lady Selina, that they “knew a *good deal* about Italy,” which good deal appeared to consist in “Neapolitan coral; the Pope’s toe; Venetian gondolas; Roman cameos; the Bay of Naples; and the Carbonari.” In all of these subjects Lady Selina was thoroughly versed, therefore they had not to her the charm of novelty,—a charm she highly prized and at length found, in listening to the animated detail of a *rat hunt*, with which Master Hildebrand thought fit to amuse her, and in which, as she is my heroine, I am ashamed to say, she found more amusement than in listening to the refined

conversation of his sisters, who soon left them, *tête-à-tête*, in order to talk over the approaching ball at Thornley, with the Miss Harveys.

The interest Lady Selina felt in listening to the "hair-breadth 'scapes" of Hildebrand's "capital good terrier," was entirely suspended on seeing the drawing-room door opened, and a young lady enter whose appearance greatly struck her. Her figure was very graceful, although extremely slight, and the excessive paleness of her countenance, shaded with a quantity of soft, fair hair, was strongly contrasted by the deep mourning dress she wore. She would have been greatly too pale, but that the deep vermillion of her lips and the excessive clearness of her complexion, which showed almost every vein, precluded all idea that it was caused by ill health. Her soft blue eyes and perfect features, with a gentle melancholy expression, powerfully interested Lady Selina, who, on learning from Hildebrand that it was his sister Matilda who had

just entered, arose to solicit the introduction Miss Leslie appeared rather tardy in effecting.

Every effort of Lady Selina to draw Matilda Leslie into conversation was unavailing. Her shyness and timidity, though wholly free from awkwardness, were excessive, and nothing could be obtained beyond answers in a low tone of voice, the musical sweetness of which, however, encouraged Lady Selina to continue her efforts. The answers were given with a sweet smile, and the clear blue eyes were sometimes raised for a moment to Lady Selina's, with an expression of gratitude for the attention she was showing her; and, throughout the evening, Lady Selina observed with pleasure that Matilda clung to her, listened with interest to every word which she uttered, and often fixed her eyes with an expression of admiration on her, though they were instantly withdrawn if apparently observed.

Lady Selina was mentally determining not

to think Matilda Leslie the least insipid, with a vehemence of resolution which plainly showed she had some fear she might prove so, when the gentlemen of the party made their entry from the dining-room, to the great relief of two of the Miss Leslies, who, as they had said every word they were now uttering, at least twenty times, to the Miss Harveys before, began to feel the want of fresh auditors.

They had wondered “whether the Thornley ball would be a good one; and whether any officers would be there; and whether papa would let them leave off their mourning; and whether Lord Litchfield would go; and whether Lady Selina would wear long sleeves”—till they had no more wonder left—it was all expended; and so were all the “hopes, and daresays, and very likelies,” of the poor Miss Harveys.

CHAPTER IV.

As Lord Litchfield entered the drawing-room, he turned to inquire of Mr. Aston the name of the young lady in mourning. The beauty of Matilda was in a very different style from that of Lady Selina, beside whom she was seated, and the contrast struck Lord Litchfield and Mr. Aston as they looked towards them.

“The prize of beauty must decidedly be Lady Selina’s,” said Mr. Aston; “but yet I rather think there are those who would prefer the pensive beauty of Matilda Leslie — a poet, for instance. He might compare her to the white rose, without stepping far into

the regions of fiction—she is the very flower itself.”

“She is, indeed, very lovely,” replied Lord Litchfield, “but I think I would agree with you in adjudging the prize of beauty to Lady Selina Clifford; the mind which speaks in her countenance is a powerful illuminator of it. I have not spoken to her, and am, generally speaking, no physiognomist; yet I would venture to assert, she has talent, cultivation, and feeling. I never saw a countenance in which they were more strongly depicted. The characteristics of Miss Matilda Leslie’s expression are gentleness and timidity.”

“Considering you are no physiognomist, my lord, you have guessed well. You have discerned qualities in the expression of Lady Selina which my acquaintance with her has allowed me to be very sure that she possesses; and all who know Matilda Leslie will grant her to be gentle and timid. But will

you farther prosecute your physiognomical studies, or will you take a surer method of ascertaining the qualifications of both young ladies, by allowing me to present you to them ?”

Lord Litchfield willingly followed Mr. Aston, and was received by Lady Selina with the easy grace of high-breeding, and with a smile which showed the introduction was agreeable to her. Matilda blushed, and slightly bowed without arising from her seat or lifting her eyes. Anything which tended to bring her into notice was evidently painful to her. Lord Litchfield, Lady Selina, and Mr. Aston immediately fell into conversation, and all endeavoured to draw Matilda into it; but her reserve and shyness were not to be overcome, and although she appeared to take an interest in their remarks, she could not be prevailed upon to join in them. The Miss Leslies were now inflicting the contents of their portfolio upon Mrs. Todd

and the Miss Harveys, and Lady Selina felt rejoiced that her task was over.

“If you are a judge of drawing, Lady Selina,” said Mr. Aston, “you must have been gratified with the Miss Leslie’s performances.”

He spoke seriously, but Lady Selina knew his taste to be correct,—she was aware, too, that his powers of ridicule had, frequently, great effect over her risible faculties, and therefore willing to change the subject as quickly as possible, she replied,

“I will not say that I am a judge of drawing, but I am particularly fond of it. Do the Miss Harveys draw?”

“Is there anything they do *not* do? They are all-accomplished young ladies. You are not much acquainted with them yet, but you will not have been so many days before you will have had specimens of the two-and-twenty accomplishments their mother boasts they possess.”

“I trust they will spare me the twenty,” said Lady Selina, laughing; “two of the number would amply content me. I hope to improve my acquaintance with them, as we are so near neighbours, and I am told I shall like them. They are both pretty girls, and apparently good-humoured and ladylike.”

“They are amiable girls; but as I know you to be exceedingly fastidious, I am not sure that you will not think their good qualities overbalanced by the unhappy errors they have the misfortune constantly to fall into.”

“Explain to me, if you please, in what way they have offended the fastidiousness you so obligingly make over to me out of the superabundance of your own.”

“Oh! do not be alarmed—you may still make them your friends; the errors I speak of are not those of the heart, though I am afraid they may wound your sensibility.

What do you think of their having been known to eat pork in private, and to drink ale at luncheon? Besides which, I know that they buy their shoes ready made, think waltzing immoral, and put their spoons in their tea-cup—this you may depend upon as fact. I have also heard them say, they think pink and blue a very French mixture of colours; and I have no doubt they would think the same of poor Malvolio's celebrated garters, as contrast seems their idea of harmony in colouring."

"I am afraid these are very conclusive facts," said Lord Litchfield, smiling; "I trust, however, the gentlemen of the family are not equally unfortunate in exciting your disapprobation."

"Oh! I have many bills to find against them, too, though perhaps of not quite so black a nature, for instance, Mr. Frederick Harvey does not, as his sisters do, titter as he walks through a statue gallery; call

prints *pictures*; wear a cloth pelisse, or curl his hair with brown papers; but he eats soy with his fish, and thinks it highly criminal to use any other implement to separate it with, than a small crust of bread and a fork, because that happened to be the only lawful way in the days of yore."

"I hope, at least, Mr. Harvey may escape your censure," said Lord Litchfield; "I sat next to him after dinner, and thought him a very pleasant and conversible man, but I acknowledge I may be mistaken; I must bend to your superior judgment—my eyes are not so microscopic as yours, in discriminating the minute errors you speak of; they merely discern general outlines, I believe."

"Call you them minute errors? By what shall we judge our acquaintance, if not by the characteristics I have been pointing out? Their principles and great leading moral qualities are not daily called into notice; we

cannot wait to form our judgments by them. We must draw conclusions as soon as we can, in order to encourage or check new acquaintance, to make room for others, or we should be sorely pressed for time during the short space man is allowed to mourn in this wicked world."

"But what are the unfortunate errors of Mr. Harvey?" asked Lady Selina.

"Oh! I allow he may at times be rather a pleasant companion in a small way, and he does his best to excite approval; yet, depend upon it, he is an impostor; it is pretence, not reality. At first, you would pronounce him gentlemanlike, but the feeling soon follows, that his manner is wholly acquired; it is not natural to him. Besides, he has that most suffocating of all failings, he is a common-place man. I could readily forgive him all his other errors, if he would forego that one. My patience is great, and my temper excellent, but I never can find

sufficient of either to answer, or endure undeniable truisms and worn-out remarks. He will tell you, when you ask him, if the church in Langham-place is not very beautiful, that the steeple is like an extinguisher. Why should it *not* be like an extinguisher? Are not the most beautiful things in nature and art like many of the most familiar, if we choose to make ridiculous comparisons? He also conceives it a point of duty, to say the last work of Sir Walter Scott is inferior to his preceding ones."

"*That* I allow would try my temper," said Lady Selina; "I could bear even the extinguisher better than that. There are few people I can hear, with patience, presume to discover faults in those inimitable novels; and still less, to listen to the faint praise which is sometimes bestowed by those who cannot appreciate or feel their extraordinary merits; but I am afraid, Mr. Aston, you will call this prejudice."

“No, indeed, far from it. I cordially agree with you in your reprobation of those mean cavilling spirits, who, after basking in the splendour reflected from the sun, and inhaling life, and light, and enjoyment, from his glorious beams, can presume to look for spots in his disk.”

“Or,” said Lord Litchfield, “if any failings are to be discovered in this author’s works, we may say of them, as Colman, I think it was, said of the failings of Shakspeare, ‘his genius, whenever it subsided, might be compared to the ebbing of the ocean, which left a mark upon its shores, to show to what a height it was sometimes carried.’”

“The remark might, indeed, be apposite,” said Lady Selina, “if the failings were to be discovered, which, however, I am determined not to allow. I have hardly ever in my life experienced more exquisite pleasure than I have done while reading those enchanting books. The effect of complete illu-

sion is more powerful over me in them than in any other author's works, unless it be in those of Shakspeare, and even there it has hardly been so powerful. When I close the book, I feel like the Eastern caliph, who drew his head from the magician's pail,— I hardly know how to believe that all I have felt is not indeed reality."

Lady Selina was interrupted by a request from Miss Leslie, that she would favour them with some music.

The pianoforte had already been opened, and a little cluster of listeners had gathered about it, in the hope of her compliance. If the truth must be told, Lady Selina was perfectly aware of the superiority of her musical talents, and arose immediately, not at all averse from displaying them.

None of the present party, with the exception of Mr. Aston, had ever heard her sing, and her vanity (for although a heroine, she had foibles, and an excusable portion of

vanity was among them), whispered her that she should make an impression on all who heard her.

General admiration she had always been accustomed to excite, and perhaps she regarded it rather more than it merited ; on the present occasion she felt sure that it would be hers, yet it was not foremost in her wishes ; she chiefly desired to receive it from Lord Litchfield. She had been much pleased with him during the conversation they had had together ; she was also, it must be confessed, much struck with his appearance and his manner ; and as her imagination was very active and *decisive*, she had already irrevocably determined that he was entirely devoted to music by nature, and that, from his long residence in Italy, he must necessarily have acquired in it a competency of judgment. In this she was, however, mistaken : Lord Litchfield had no taste for music, and knew little or nothing about it ; such simple airs as spoke

to his feelings he could at times take pleasure in, but farther than that, he could not go; all the complications, all the intricacies of melody were lost upon him; nay, he rarely listened to Italian music at all, so that Lady Selina was entirely in the dark at present, in her resolution to entice his heart through his ear.

It is hardly fair to lay before my readers, so very ingenuously, all the thoughts of Lady Selina—yet, as I have determined to paint her to them exactly as she is, her foibles and follies are to be shown to them as clearly and as honestly as her good qualities; besides, I am not professing to draw a perfect heroine, and the sweetness of disposition, generosity, ingenuousness, and freedom from every kind of selfishness, which marked the character of Lady Selina, threw all her little failings into shadow. She had been accustomed to adulation from her childhood—all that could have been done to spoil her had been done—yet she

remained a perfectly natural character, full of benevolence and openness ; she had preserved a warmth of feeling and a simplicity of taste, amid all the flattery and ideas of self-consequence which had been instilled into her by others. On the present occasion, Lady Selina selected one of the most beautiful of Rossini's enchanting compositions, and performed it with a delicacy of execution, a flexibility of voice, and an expression, which did entire justice to that inimitable composer. There was feeling—there was sentiment—there was the purest taste in every inflexion of her rich and melodious voice. She knew she had never performed better, and on rising from the instrument, she looked towards Lord Litchfield—alas ! he was listlessly turning over some music—no traces of admiration or of feeling upon his countenance, fine as it was. This was very provoking, and did not at all agree with her notions of his character.

Lady Selina was hasty in forming opinions,

and as she was frequently right, she did not at all like to own her mistakes, when they did occur, even to herself. To do Lord Litchfield and Lady Selina justice, he had at first listened attentively to her singing, and felt fully assured that she looked very beautiful, and sang in the best taste ; but her performance was rather long, and his thoughts began to wander, and before its close they had travelled as far off as they could well be from the scene and sounds before him—he was meditating whether he should give his little girl an Italian or an English master for singing. He was very fond of this child, and very anxious about her, and frequently his thoughts, amid the most brilliant society or amusements which courted him abroad, would wander back to his poor little motherless girl at home. He was not satisfied with the governess to whose care she was entrusted, and for this reason he was frequently uneasy or anxious about her. The chain of his thoughts was now broken by

the harsh voice of Mrs. Todd, who, thinking he had not done Lady Selina justice, began to inform him of the names of the celebrated professors under whom she had studied at Rome, and of the universal admiration which her singing and other accomplishments invariably excited. Lord Litchfield listened to her—for he was a very polite man—but it was in weariness of spirit. He had rather a prejudice against what are termed all-accomplished ladies, and admired a gentle and retiring character in a woman, before the most showy acquirements. At this moment his eye was caught by Matilda Leslie, who was solicited to sing. The paleness of her complexion was for a moment suffused with crimson at the very thought of performing before so many auditors ; she begged earnestly to be excused, but on her father urging her compliance, she arose, although in trembling, to obey him. During the first few bars her voice could scarcely be heard ; but, gaining courage as she proceeded,

it fell in liquid sounds upon the ear, as with a tone of deep feeling she sang the exquisitely pathetic ballad of "Gin living worth could win my heart." The style of singing was very simple and unornamented, yet her voice was so melodious, and her expression so perfect, that it went straight to the heart.

Lord Litchfield had listened with great interest ; he even arose, and standing behind her chair ; she sang, at his request, the whole of the verses of the ballad, and at its close he warmly expressed his admiration. This was really rather provoking to Lady Selina ; she had much wished to please him, and appeared to have failed, and yet she could not but be aware that her singing was beyond all comparison superior to that of Matilda Leslie ; nay, she knew that she could as far excel her in the simplest ballads as in the more elaborate compositions ; and yet it is no small proof of the sweetness of her temper, that she forbore, when again asked to perform, to choose the

simple style of singing which appeared to be admired by Lord Litchfield. She did Matilda Leslie and her singing full justice, and was greatly pleased with both : her good humour was quite unruffled, although she could not help wishing that her performance had made as much impression on him as that of Matilda had done.

The Miss Harveys performed very well, like the usual run of well-taught young ladies ; and the Miss Leslies scrambled through some difficult pages of Gelinek in a very provoking manner, and shortly afterwards the party separated.

CHAPTER V.

As the winter advanced, great progress in sociability had been made in the party which had assembled at Sir Robert Leslie's house at dinner. They had met very often, and the mutually favourable impression of Lady Selina and Matilda Leslie had ripened into intimacy, and even friendship. Matilda frequently spent several weeks together at Lumley Court ; her timidity had given way before the kindness of Lady Selina, and she repaid that kindness with the sincerest affection and the warmest admiration : she looked upon her as perfection, and relied upon her judgment and her opinions, in almost every respect, with the most implicit

confidence. Lady Selina felt a great interest for Matilda, and loved her very affectionately ; the only fault she could find in her was, that her feelings were not quite sensitive and warm enough to meet the enthusiastic nature of her own ; she thought that at times Matilda appeared a *little* cold—that she did not enter quite so earnestly as she ought to do into events or feelings which excited Lady Selina in a very great degree—she wished there had been a *little* more warmth about her ; yet she did not love her the less for the want of it.

Lady Selina had seen a great deal of Lord Litchfield, and the favourable impression he had at first made upon her, had gathered strength daily, notwithstanding his lamentable want of taste in music. She felt more and more admiration for his character as it became better known to her ; he had indeed excited in her a deep interest, although she owned not to herself that it was of the nature it really was. From the first evening of her acquaint-

ance with him she had thought that he admired Matilda Leslie ; she was now sure that he did—nay, was almost certain that he was really attached to her. Lady Selina had great strength of mind, and, thinking thus, she endeavoured to check the preference with which Lord Litchfield had inspired her : she fancied she had succeeded, and that her feelings towards him were those of esteem alone ; she wished his happiness most earnestly, and knowing how deeply it had suffered, she hoped—fervently hoped—it might be restored to him, even though it should be through Matilda Leslie. It must be owned she had watched Matilda, and had come to the decision that she never could be really in love with any one—not even with Lord Litchfield ; yet she thought that he was very agreeable to Matilda—that she showed for him more preference than for any other person—this was all ; but Lady Selina thought this was not the way in which such a man as Lord Litchfield should be loved :

a tear almost rose to her eye, and she pursued the train of thought no longer, and, with unbroken cheerfulness and sweetness of temper, she would busy herself directly in some favourite pursuit.

I hope I shall not lessen the interest which I wish my readers to take in Lord Litchfield if I endeavour to depict the feelings and determinations which actuated him on his first settling at Brooklands Abbey, on his return from the continent : I am afraid that by doing so I shall injure his cause among the younger part of my readers especially ; and the words “ cold and calculating ” may escape them. Yet will I maintain that he was very far from being cold ; and if he is to be called calculating, let it be remembered how much he had suffered—how cruelly he had been deceived in his first choice. It was very much his wish, notwithstanding what had been predicted of him on his arrival at Brooklands, to marry again—to secure to himself, if possible, that domestic

happiness which had been so cruelly despoiled by the conduct of his wife. Lord Litchfield had been ardently attached to her ; he had been anxious to promote her happiness by every indulgence in his power, and even by the lessening of his own ; he was a very domestic man, and preferred residing on his estate in the country ; yet he yielded his own inclination to hers, and spent much of his time in town : when there, Lady Litchfield plunged into dissipation, and almost entirely deprived her husband of her society. He tried the gentlest means to reclaim her ; but at length some rumours met his ear which induced him to remove her from London, and shortly afterwards she eloped from him.

Most deeply and bitterly had Lord Litchfield felt the cruel and criminal conduct of one whom he had loved devotedly ; his health and spirits had suffered severely, and he had become an altered character ; he forsook his country and all his favourite pursuits ; and,

suffering for several years under deep melancholy, he appeared to enjoy little or no pleasure, excepting that which he invariably took in his little girl. His feelings were naturally very acute and very ardent—they had been abused and chilled, but not extinguished ; and at the time of his arrival in England, and after the death of his guilty wife, he felt the want of domestic happiness very strongly. Brooklands Abbey appeared to him a blank, and he wished it might be his good fortune to meet with a woman who could love him, render his home cheerful, and be a mother to his child. He had, in short, almost determined on marrying again ; and if he was cool and calculating in these plans for his own happiness, he is to be excused. He was far from expecting to be again in love ; he wished for neither a brilliant nor a beautiful wife, but gentleness, sweetness of temper, and, above all, a domestic turn of mind he held to be indispensable. He had been exceedingly struck with Lady Selina Clif-

ford, had derived great pleasure from her society, and thought her exquisitely beautiful; nay, had even asked himself on their first acquaintance, whether it were possible that she could ever love him—he was not a vain man, and had decided that it was almost impossible that she should. She was in all the freshness of youth, lovely, accomplished, rich, of high rank, admired, and sought by all;—how could he offer her a heart half-broken, and which another had so shared and so despised? He felt, too, that he was an altered man: neither in person nor in spirits was he what he had been—and how could he expect one so beautiful, so admired, would yield her wishes to his retired habits, and that at her early age she would make a sacrifice of her time and attention to the education of his child? He felt this was impossible. He wished to do his child justice, to consider her happiness as well as his own in the mother to whom he would consign that of both.

Lady Selina avowed her love of gaiety ; she had taken a house in town for the ensuing spring, and talked with delight of the pleasure she hoped to enjoy there, and of the entertainments she would give. She was so brilliant, so admired, that Lord Litchfield feared it would not be for her husband alone that she would or ought to shine. His thoughts would then revert to Matilda Leslie : gentle, complying, and diffident, she disliked gaieties of every kind, and took pleasure alone in country pursuits and amusements. He admired her, too, very much, and on farther study of her character, thought her well fitted to render him happy, and finally determined upon endeavouring to win her affection. Her religion—as she was, as well as himself, a Catholic—was also favourable to his wishes, as he held the opinion of a difference in that respect being very inimical to the happiness of a married life. In fact this latter opinion was very powerful with him, and decided him to endeavour to render

himself agreeable to Matilda Leslie in preference to Lady Selina. It is true that he admired Lady Selina much more than he did Matilda ; he thought her far superior in point of intelligence and of cultivation ; he even took more pleasure in her society and in her conversation ; he admired her, in short, very warmly ; and yet the reasons which have been mentioned determined him to pay his addresses to Matilda Leslie. He was not in love with her it must be confessed ; but his good opinion of her increased as he became more acquainted with her charming disposition and domestic turn of character ;—he even flattered himself that he had made some impression upon her ; it was evident that she felt a preference for his society, and would converse more with him than with almost any other person : yet he was anxious not to deceive himself, and determined to postpone his proposals until he felt sure that he was really beloved : he recoiled from the bare idea of being

accepted on account of his rank and his fortune alone ; and knowing Sir Robert Leslie's anxiety to have his daughter married, he dreaded that Matilda should be influenced by him against the wishes of her own heart. Being then resolved against precipitancy, he entered into the society around him with greater interest than he could have hoped to have felt ; and as Sir Robert Leslie intended to take a house in town for the season, Lord Litchfield hoped to meet Matilda there, and to have still farther opportunities of judging whether she really could feel for him the attachment he required.

All this explanation which I have given my readers, of the different feelings of Lord Litchfield and Lady Selina, is rather surreptitious and anticipatory ; but I profess merely to give slight sketches, not finished portraits ; and I find it easier, if the truth must be told, to make my readers acquainted in this summary way (to which the privilege

of authorship entitles me) with the feelings of my principal personages, than I should find it to discover them in the natural, but slow, course of events.

This candid confession being made, and the state of the case in some degree explained, I must make a retrograde motion to nearly the time of the breaking up of Sir Robert Leslie's dinner-party. I, by no means, am an advocate for regularity, for, as an unpractised author, it does not suit the cast of my genius ; but I have yet a few "Country Sketches" to place before my readers, ere I transplant them to the gayer scenes of London.

About a week after Sir Robert Leslie's dinner-party (from being a rare event it is wished to make it a kind of epoch, and to treat it with due respect, therefore it shall be called *the* dinner-party, or, Sir Robert Leslie's dinner-party is, perhaps, the more imposing) ;—well, about a week after this

celebrated party took place, the Miss Leslies were put in great commotion by an invitation to dine at Brooklands Abbey. Lord Litchfield particularly requested to see all the four young ladies with Sir Robert; a separate invitation was sent to Mr. Penant.

Matilda was very desirous to be excused, and her sisters were very willing that she should be; but her father was of another opinion, and Matilda was positively to be of the party.

Miss Leslie then, in a state of dignified sulks, offered to resign her claim, although she was "sure Lord Litchfield would depend upon her for doing the honours of the evening, if Mrs. Harvey were not there. *Some* lady must do them, and of course Lady Selina would not."

Miss Leslie did not pique herself upon her youth, but merely upon her sense and judgment, therefore she thought her maturer

years would here give her advantage over Lady Selina.

Catherine and Charlotte heard the debate in silence; they were by no means either magnanimous or sulky — they wished very much to go, and, having expressed as much, they awaited their father's decision in trembling anxiety.

It was finally resolved that *all* should go, and a neatly-written and sensible and polite note of apology for the largeness of the party was forthwith dispatched in reply to the Earl's invitation.

Mr. Pennant sent his own answer, and was, of course, independent of the house of Leslie.

Catherine and Charlotte walked as steadily out of the room as they could, because their father always recommended a quiet demeanour; but the moment the door was closed they flew up two stairs at once to their own apartment, where Sally Gubbins was instantly

summoned to receive reiterated and earnest injunctions to sew as many bugles as possible upon their black dresses ; to iron all the flounces ; and to send Robin over directly upon Scrub to Thornley, to Mrs. Twist's, to get six yards of the broadest black satin ribbon she had in her shop, and to be *sure* it was without a pearl edge.

Sally Gubbins then hurried off, for Miss Leslie's bell was ringing furiously, and the poor persecuted damsel thanked her stars, as well as her breath would allow her in her hasty flight across the long oaken gallery, that Miss Matilda was gone out to walk in the park with Master Hildebrand, and was not so particular about her dress as the other young ladies.

CHAPTER VI.

THE party at Brooklands consisted of the Leslies, Mr. Pennant, Lady Selina Clifford and Mrs. Todd, Mr. Aston, the Harveys, and Doctor and Miss Hensley. Lady Selina arrived the last, and as she drove through the romantic park she bent forward to view its venerable oaks, magnificent sheet of water, and umbrageous woods, and to gaze in admiration on the splendid gothic turrets of the Abbey as it rose among them. Mrs. Todd was talking incessantly, but Lady Selina heard her not; she was enchanted with the beauty of Brooklands, and could not help thinking its mistress might be a very happy

woman. In this thought she was not singular; for I appeal to any young lady who may happen to be reading this book, whether she ever entered a beautiful or a comfortable domain or house belonging to a bachelor, without thinking something of the sort.

The interior of Brooklands Abbey was equally imposing with the exterior;—a hall, almost a miniature cathedral, and a splendid suite of apartments, were traversed ere she reached the saloon in which the party were assembled. After having greeted all her friends, and said a few words to Lord Litchfield, Lady Selina's eyes were wandering about the room. It was magnificently furnished, but it lacked lady-taste most lamentably; there were no flowers, no "elegant litter," no writing-trays and smelling-bottles; no Lord Byrons and "Lalla Rookhs" lying promiscuously upon the table, no pastilles, no cupids in the characters of paper-pressers,

no rosewood and buhl Devonports or vases filled with *pot pourri*, or cases of gems, or blue and gold illuminated albums, or amber caskets, or crystal fountains murmuring beneath the miniature clock. I must stop to take breath, and to allow my readers the same indulgence, but I could easily fill two pages more with the indispensable requisites for an elegant drawing-room, not one of which Lady Selina would have been without in her own upon any account: however, none were to be seen at Brooklands, nothing but a large French-polished, cold, dull table, with a huge ugly-looking ormolu ink-stand, exactly in the middle, and six chilly white pens, made out of the unsophisticated feathers of a goose. It was really melancholy; and everything about the room was placed at regular distances, and entirely out of the way of passengers; nothing out of its place, not the slightest appearance of that elegant confusion which adds so much to

domestic comfort—all was formality, the very portfolios of engravings, if there were any, were all closed ; the groom of the chambers could have no taste, that was certain.

Lady Selina's eyes were arrested, in her discoveries of the requisites wanting to render the apartment habitable, by resting on a little girl who was seated on a hassock ensconced behind an arm-chair, on which Lord Litchfield had been sitting, when he arose to greet Lady Selina. He now returned to lead his daughter to her.

Lady Augusta Wentworth was about eight years of age, and a remarkably pretty child, though of a sickly and delicate appearance. Her face immediately struck Lady Selina as being like one of Sir Joshua's picturesque-looking children. It was small, and tapering off almost to nothing at the chin ; with large, clear, dark-blue eyes ; a very small mouth, with full under-lip ; an open forehead with its clustering, light brown curls.

She was very shy, and appeared to be entirely without the spirits of childhood or the vivacity common to her age.

Lady Selina was much interested with her, and being extremely fond of children and a universal favourite with them, the little girl's timidity appeared to be somewhat overcome, and when Lord Litchfield would have removed her from her station on the lap of Lady Selina, she whispered—

“Papa, I would rather stay with this lady. She doesn't ask me so many questions as the rest, and I can talk to her better.”

Lady Selina was delighted to have made such an impression on the interesting child, and only resigned her when dinner was announced.

Nothing could exceed the grace and high breeding of Lord Litchfield's manner as a host, and not even Miss Charlotte Leslie could accuse him of being “rather a stupid man” at his own table. He was all atten-

tion to every one of his guests ; his usual melancholy and reserve appeared to be laid aside, and those in his immediate vicinity were charmed with the varied and easy flow of his conversation. Among these was Lady Selina, who sat next to him, and who found great pleasure in conversing with him.

During dinner she had not much of his exclusive attention, and she was obliged to attend more than she wished to Dr. Hensley, who was seated next to her on the other side, and who entertained her with an endless variety of shocking occurrences. He informed her how many people had been buried in one week at a town a few miles from Thornley, where a typhus fever was raging ; and a few miles beyond it, every soul was ill with the small-pox. He strongly advised Lady Selina to allow herself to be vaccinated every third year, and to carry camphor with her if she chanced to

pass through the infected villages. This was all the infectious intelligence he had been able to catch hold of ; therefore after in vain endeavouring to ascertain the cause of the maladies, he was obliged to set it down to the progress of malaria.

He then proceeded to describe to the life, the shocking appearance of a man who had been crushed beneath a waggon wheel, and of a child who had been burnt to death. Lady Selina's stock of patience was nearly exhausted, when, fortunately for her, Dr. Hensley's attention was called to the opposite side of the table, where he heard Mr. Aston telling Miss Harvey of a young lady in the neighbourhood who had been thrown from her horse that morning. This was to him a new story, and one quite congenial to his taste ; therefore, eagerly bending over the table to hear the particulars of it, he inquired if the young lady had been hurt.

“My dear sir,” replied Mr. Aston, “she was

as much hurt as you could possibly desire. She is not expected to recover."

For a moment Dr. Hensley was silenced, and as Lord Litchfield was discussing a political question with Mr. Pennant, Lady Selina amused herself with attending to Mr. Aston's conversation, which was almost always a source of entertainment to her. Mr. Harvey was pompously informing him he had just sent an order to Gillows for twelve of the newest sort of arm-chairs for his drawing-room.

"I have," he added, "no idea of the usual plan of a man having only two — one for himself and another for his wife. I like my friends to be comfortable as well as myself."

"What, then," asked Mr. Aston, "do you do when your *enemy* comes to call on you? I suppose you keep a high stool for him in a corner."

Miss Leslie, who sat next Mr. Aston, asked him if he had seen Lady F—— at the last

ball at Thornley, and whether he had observed the magnificence of her diamonds ?

This Lady F—— was a remarkably fat and vulgar-looking woman.

Mr. Aston replied, “I saw her, and I thought she looked like ‘the toad, ugly and venomous, but with a precious jewel in her head.’”

Miss Leslie still thought “her jewels were splendid and became her very well, and that she had heard Lady F—— possessed almost more diamonds than any person in England.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Aston, “I have no doubt she would wear a zone of diamonds too, if there would be a chance of its being seen in the valley of its repose. Yet were it there we might say, ‘all that that mountain’s sheltering bosom shields’ would be lost to the gaze of the vulgar.”

Miss Leslie did not exactly understand, therefore, in order to change the subject, she asked him, if he had met the Miss Linleys

in Town, who had been schoolfellows of hers, and whether he liked them ?

“ I cannot say I had any great affection for them. But if friends of yours, it is hardly fair to ask my opinion of them.”

“ Oh ! I assure you they are no favourites of mine ; so pray tell me why you did not like them, and how they got on in Town, and what you thought of them, and — ”

“ Hold — hold, Miss Leslie, if you please. I will answer your three questions first. I did not like them very much — that is to say, I felt no very warm friendship for them. I chanced to see them unexpectedly at breakfast one morning, with their hair *à-la-Maintenon* ; and, dining there the next day, I was asked to eat some cutlets in the same exploded style. Now, having seen them underneath the young ladies’ caps on the preceding morning, you know, I could not be expected to approve of them at dinner. Then, as to the way in which they got on in Town —

they are the kind of young ladies who go out and shut the door after them.”

Miss Leslie, who had not quite comprehended the impropriety of the *Maintenon-cutlets*, which she had always understood to be a dish *comme il faut*, was now willing to show that she was perfectly aware young ladies could not walk in London, unattended by a footman, therefore said,

“Dear me! that is very odd,—very improper certainly,—no ladies of character do *that*.”

“Oh! Miss Leslie, do not mistake me so much; I insinuate nothing against the Miss Linleys’ character in any other respect, than their sinning against the circumscribed limits to which young ladies of fashion are confined. I believe the Miss Linleys’ to be patterns of virtue; indeed, I am sure they are, for I once saw them on a frosty morning in January, sitting side by side upon two stools at a pianoforte, at a mile’s distance

from a fire, playing a symphony of Hadyn's. Now you must be aware, that none but very steady and virtuous ladies would do such a thing as that."

When the dessert made its appearance, Lady Selina had a long and uninterrupted conversation with Lord Litchfield, till the ladies retired to the drawing-room. He spoke much to her of his little girl, and of the uneasiness he felt in not having a governess who satisfied him; he thought Mrs. Norton, whom Lady Selina would see in the course of the evening, was too strict with her little pupil, and that she had not won her affection; yet she had been highly recommended to him by a lady whom he had thought a competent judge of the sort of person to whom a child's education might be entrusted. He was, he told Lady Selina, making inquiries among his friends for a governess, but was still very far from satisfying himself, having found

objections to all who had been recommended to him ; he feared it would be long ere he discovered a lady fitted for the entire charge of a child who was without a mother, and, until such an one could be found, he felt himself obliged to continue Mrs. Norton in her present situation. He explained to Lady Selina the qualifications which he held indispensable, and requested her very earnestly, that if it were in her power to give him assistance, she would exert it in his favour. Lady Selina assured him she would, and even hoped that, when in London, she might be successful.

They afterwards spoke much of Italy, and of different scenes, and works of art, which were familiar to both, and it was with great reluctance that Lady Selina arose, when the ladies retired from the dining-room.

She was more and more pleased with Lord Litchfield ; his ideas and his taste

(always excepting his want of a musical one) were just what they should be ; he was so cultivated, so polished, so intellectual, so highly bred, so every way delightful and interesting, that Lady Selina was certainly more pleased with him than it was quite prudent to be.

She was in good spirits, and talked and replied to every one with so much gaiety that she was becoming a general favourite, and yet every moment she was reverting, in imagination, to some part of Lord Litchfield's conversation or remarks, which had particularly struck her ; but still she was not detected, and all the ladies around her were charmed with her and with themselves. Mrs. Norton, with the little Lady Augusta, was waiting to receive them in the drawing-room, and after the child retired, Lady Selina conversed for some time with the governess, and cordially agreed with Lord Litchfield in his disapproval of her ; she

appeared exceedingly austere and self-satisfied, and, in her details of her plans with her pupil, Lady Selina could by no means agree with her as to their being preferable to every other.

The poor little girl's path appeared to be made as little alluring as possible ; Mrs. Norton, from her own expressions, seemed to have no idea of the finer tact which is necessary to form a child's mind, principles, and temper, which Lady Selina, young as she was, knew to be, beyond all comparison, of greater consequence than the erudition and accomplishments which seemed the sole aim of Mrs. Norton. She also made an unfavourable impression upon Lady Selina, by complaining to her, that Lord Litchfield was far too indulgent to his daughter, and kept her more with himself than was consistent with her duties in the schoolroom.

Miss Hensley, who had lately made acquaintance with Lady Selina, could no longer

allow Mrs. Norton to monopolize her, and placing herself beside her, she was encouraged by the good-humoured smile which greeted her, to pour upon her the inexhaustible volley of small-talk.

Miss Hensley was an exceedingly kind-hearted, though very vulgar woman, and had a constant flow of little ideas, which allowed neither herself nor her auditors a moment of tranquillity.

“Dear me, Lady Selina, Mrs. Harvey and I have been so admiring your ladyship’s lovely blue satin mantle, which we saw as we crossed the hall, and took the liberty to look at. I never saw such a satin in my life, and *such* velvet for the capes!—it *must* be Genoa. ‘Oh!’ said I to Mrs. Harvey, ‘how becoming the swansdown must be to Lady Selina’s beautiful complexion! yet, if I was as rich as she, I know what *I* would have; I would have the finest fur I could lay my hands upon, instead of swansdown; for, after

all, you know birds' feathers are not nearly so handsome as the skins of beasts.'”

Lady Selina could scarcely repress an audible smile, but agreeing with Miss Hensley, as to the superior intrinsic value of furs, she proceeded, still more encouraged,—

“To be sure it is taking a great liberty, and I'm almost ashamed to mention it, but your ladyship is so very kind and obliging, and to be sure there is some excuse, because of the beautiful haunch of venison which was sent to my father yesterday; so if you really could be so condescending as to overlook the shortness of the notice, and dine to-morrow at the rectory, we really should be so very — you cannot think how very—.”

Now Lady Selina had a favourite plan for to-morrow evening, yet seeing Miss Hensley's eager desire for her compliance, she accepted her invitation with the greatest good-humour, and received her delighted

thanks in return, and was also rewarded by Miss Hensley continuing,—

“I am so glad, and I hope you will not have so very dull an evening either, for Lord Litchfield has been so very kind as to promise my father to come, and so have the Leslies, and Mr. Aston, and we shall have the Miss Wilsons in the evening, and I hope a cozey game at commerce or loo; and I have got a nice little boy of a nephew to show your ladyship, as you seem so fond of children; he is a fine fellow, and I take a great deal of pains with his education, but he is a little wild sometimes, notwithstanding; but that, you know, children *will* be at times. Dear me! what a very fine gentleman Mr. Aston is! I am always afraid to speak to him, he is sure to take me up one way or another, or else to say something that nobody else besides himself understands. It was but this morning that I met him in the lane, and begged to see him to-morrow

at dinner ; he seemed to hum and haw about it, but I told him I had no doubt your ladyship and my Lord Litchfield would oblige us, and then he said all at once he'd come. I thought this very good-natured of him ; so, as I knew he was very nice in his eating, I told him, that besides the venison, I had got a nice fat goose for him, with potatoes under it ; and what do you think he said ? —he absolutely said,—

‘ Ma'am, I consider a goose as a bird no better than she should be, though if yours is slain I will not slander the departed.’ That was the speech he made. I could not help thinking it rather rude, and me so anxious to please him, knowing what a fuss he makes about his stomach ; and besides pampering it up, it's my belief he takes great care of it in other respects too, for when he dined with us this summer, I asked him to take some grapes,—they weren't quite ripe to be sure, but how could he know

that ?—and yet, if you'll believe me, after he said 'no thank you' to me, I heard him say to Miss Mary Harvey,

“ ‘Who would seek or prize delights that end in aching?’

“So I suppose he was afraid of being griped, or some such thing. Oh, he's very particular. And I shall be so glad to introduce my mother to your ladyship, and she'll be so very happy to see you ; only, poor soul ! she never knows any one now, for she's past eighty years old, and quite lost, as one may say ; yet she knows *me*, and sometimes she says, 'Deborah ! Deborah' she says,—it would do your heart good to hear her. Well ! and that's a very nice lady you've got to live with you for a governess or *chaperone*, or whatever it is ; only I didn't quite understand what she said to me just now. I was praising your ladyship to her, and said, you had no pride in you at all, that I could see, and then she said, 'No, she has no occasion—She's too

proud to be proud.' I didn't exactly know what she meant, but I thought she seemed very clever."

Lady Selina was greatly amused, and had no intention of interrupting Miss Hensley ; however, as the gentlemen were now in the room, she shuffled off to tell her father of the success of her mission in securing Lady Selina's consent to partake of the venison, and Mr. Aston's defamed goose.

Mr. Pennant coming up at this moment, Lady Selina, who wished to make his acquaintance, entered into conversation with him. Lord Litchfield was sitting by Matilda Leslie, therefore she could not hope for the immediate pleasure of his society, independent of which, she thought she had enjoyed more than her share of it already, and was willing in consequence to find entertainment in whomsoever chance should throw in her way ; nor was she sorry that it proved to be Mr. Pennant, as there was that in his appearance and manner, which

invariably created an interest in his favour. He was, in general, exceedingly reserved, and entered little into gaiety, or even sociability of any sort; yet, when drawn into conversation, there was something so mild, so gentlemanlike, and so polished in his manner, that he seldom failed to please. He certainly pleased Lady Selina, who conversed with him long, and with great pleasure; his mind was highly cultivated, and he appeared to have an extensive knowledge of literature, and of general subjects of taste and of art.

Lady Selina felt almost grieved, that such a mind should be obscured in the performance of such an office as that of a tutor to so young a boy as Hildebrand Leslie, or that his talents and usefulness should be confined within the narrow limits of that of a Catholic priest in a private family. It was generally lamented by the young ladies in the neighbourhood, that so very handsome a man as Mr. Pennant, should be a priest;

he had much better have been a layman, or, at all events, a Protestant clergyman ; he would then have received much admiration and attention, which were now lost to him, and which would be considered as entirely thrown away upon one who was now lost to all intents and purposes.

The evening at Brooklands closed with music, and, contrary to custom, was, without one dissentient voice, allowed to have passed very pleasantly.

CHAPTER VII.

I HOPE my readers will not be fatigued with three dinner parties, in close succession ; yet, as some parts of them must be allowed to be rather rich, considering they are drawn from life, I hope to be excused if I again trespass on their patience, in giving a sketch of the party which assembled at Thornley Rectory, according to Miss Hensley's elegant invitation and alluring inducements.

Lady Selina entered the drawing-room rather late, as she had been paying a visit in a distant part of the neighbourhood, therefore a few minutes after her entrance, dinner was announced, and as Lord Litchfield conducted

her into the dining-room, Lady Selina determined that she was going to spend a very pleasant evening ; yet I will not aver that she did not experience a slight spasm of mortification on hearing his lordship inquire of Miss Catherine Leslie, who sat on one side of him, why her sister Matilda was not of the party. He expressed his regret that she was not, and Lady Selina could not help thinking or fancying that he spoke as if he really were disappointed, and the thought passed her mind that had Matilda been there, Lord Litchfield might not now have been her neighbour at dinner. These little thoughts, which rather forced their own entrance than were admitted voluntarily, however, by no means prevented her from enjoying, to the full extent, the very agreeable conversation of Lord Litchfield, in which Mr. Aston, who was also seated next to Lady Selina, frequently joined.

The dinner was served up upon round dishes and square plates of old Japan china (that

Lady Selina absolutely coveted for her new Indian cabinet), and was according to the strictest rules of fashion, as prescribed by the scientific Mrs. Glasse, during the early part of the last century, or farther back still, for anything we know to the contrary. There was “bombarded veal” and “pig matelôt,” in compliment to the united service: the unlucky goose was nowhere to be seen, which proved its fair proprietor was by no means slow in taking a hint; but then in its stead there were “chickens surprised” and a “duck à-la-mode”—no wonder the chickens were surprised to see so slatternly a bird attired in fashionable costume;—then there were “pigeons in a hole,” peeping out of it at a lazy “curried rabbit,” sleeping on a “pillow of rice;” and, in the second course, a “Florendine hare,” leering at a “pheasant transmogrified;” a “partridge kabobed,” ogling in at the window of a “thatched-house pie;” there is no saying what he espied in it, for its contents were vastly

heterogeneous ; a "hedge-hog of cream," making the agreeable to a widowed "hen," with a large family of "chickens in jelly ;" and some philosophical "Dutch blanc mange," gazing at the "moon and stars in flummery."

These two superb courses, which would have made M. Ude and M. Beauvilliers faint entirely away, were followed up by "slip-coat cheese," and "brick-bat cheese," and "bullace cheese," and pickled onions, and captains' biscuits, and a lamb, made out of butter, and garnished with laurestinus and holly-berries, to show that he disdained to arrive with the primroses, like lambs of vulgar birth.

When all these various dishes were "reared," and "unbraced," and "unlaced," and "winged," and "allayed," and "dismembered," and "thighed," and "displayed," and "lifted," according to the scientific terms of our friend Mrs. Glasse, the dessert was placed upon the table, and with it came Miss Hensley's "nice

little boy of a nephew,"—and a sweet child he was—a babe of grace, with blubber lips, and nankeen trousers, red hair, and swelled crimson cheeks, and a pale blue jacket to suit withal. After being tenderly kissed by his aunt, he was forthwith dispatched to be admired by Lady Selina, and admonished "not to be shy," which injunction he appeared to be inclined to obey to the letter the moment his appetite was satiated, or rather the moment he had consumed all that Lady Selina would give him to satisfy the cravings thereof: as soon as this desired end was attained, so far as it might be, in thick but winning accents, he addressed the following speech to the charmed ear of Lady Selina.

"Did *you* see the flowers in the PLATTER at dinner? Aunt stuck them out, and cocked all the best round to this side of the table, because *you* were to sit here; she said she didn't so much care about what the other people thought—only as you were a lady by

title, she wanted you to see she could do things nice. Well! and wasn't that a good hedge-hog, made out of cream, that you had at dinner? Aunt made it, and I licked the dish."

Then, turning to Mr. Aston, he continued: "I hope you didn't *set* by the rissoles, because one of them bursted his inside out; and aunt said she hoped to goodness you wouldn't *set* by them, because that you was always on the spy-out for something wrong."

Lady Selina was nearly overcome, but her sense of propriety urged her to say, in a faint voice,—

"You should not tell us those kind of things—it is very naughty."

The boy frowned, and looked savage; but Mr. Aston exclaiming "that boy will be the death of me," he chose to take it for encouragement, and wheeling round upon Lady Selina, he continued,

"I warrant you think I'm letting the cat

out of the bag, but I don't care if I am ; it serves aunt right for not letting me eat up the two out-side bits of the cake when she cut it up for tea then. I told her if she didn't she'd live to repent it, for that when our Jem handed it round I'd gobble all I could lay hands on, and she'd be ashamed to scold me before all the company."

Lady Selina's centre of gravity was now nearly reversed, and, wishing to change the current of this domestic *exposé*, she asked the hopeful child whether he went out yesterday, to see the hounds throw off.

"No, I didn't. Jem was busy cleaning up the plate, and aunt wouldn't go with me, because she was afraid of her hair coming out against she dined at Lord Litchfield's in the evening, and she wouldn't let me go by myself. However, me and aunt had such fun : we sat by ourselves all the morning, in the store-room,

It's made with tincture of Benjamin, and put into a bag with a toe—I don't mean a toe off one's foot, but real tow."

"Perhaps," asked Mr. Aston, meekly, "you mean a soldier in one of his Majesty's regiments of foot?"

"No, I don't," roared the boy; "you know very well what I mean—I mean the tow that Jem cleans out grandpapa's gun with."

Both Lady Selina and Mr. Aston had a very keen perception of the ludicrous, and they certainly were amused beyond expression. Lord Litchfield had listened a few minutes, in silent amazement; but he was infinitely too much disgusted with the boy's vulgarity to feel amusement; he was even surprised that Lady Selina could find it in anything of the kind. Lady Selina, it must be confessed, was equally surprised at Lord Litchfield's immoveable gravity; for her own part, she found the boy perfectly irresistible.

At this moment Miss Hensley, unconscious how her nephew had been entertaining her friends with his domestic conversation, turned to Lord Litchfield and asked,—

“Is n’t Sam a fine boy of his age, my lord? I really think he would make a nice playfellow for little Lady Augusta—we must see and bring them together.”

Sam’s ears were as much on the *qui vive* as his tongue, and he called out,—

“No, that you needn’t; I won’t play with a girl—I’m not Molly enough for that though.”

“Notwithstanding you help your aunt to make virgin’s milk,” spitefully whispered Mr. Aston.

The reproach was lost upon Sam, who had just caught some preserved ginger, and had fortunately burned his mouth;—a loud roar ensued, and he and the ladies of the party were immediately hurried off to the drawing-room.

“Cupid nursed by the Graces!” were the last words of Mr. Aston, which fell upon the

ear of Lady Selina as the weeping Samuel was led out between his aunt and Mrs. Todd.

The drawing-room door was hardly closed upon Cupid and his attendant nymphs, when the two Miss Wilsons were announced : their punctuality was so laudable as to inspire Lady Selina with the idea that they must have been listening with their ear at the key-hole of the hall-door, in order to rush in the moment the dining-room door was heard to close. They were ladies about fifty years of age, with muslin gowns worked in coloured worsteds by themselves, sharp chins, garnet necklaces, long fingers, brown silk nets with brown satin bows and scraggy throats, both scrupulously alike, "twin-cherries upon one stalk." When they had informed the assembled party of the exact state of the weather at every hour of the departed day, and of the recent appearance of the clouds as they passed up the street of Thornley, and also of their private opinion as to what weather might be expected on the

two following days, they each extended a hand to Master Samuel, who was invited to come and ask them how they did ; but Samuel had no curiosity on that score, and was deeply immersed in the interesting adventures of “ Dame Wiggins of Lee, and her wonderful Cats,” and would by no means leave them for the Miss Wilsons : and here we must commend his taste, for a more entertaining and ingenious work never issued from the press ;—all those persons who have not read it, are herewith strongly recommended to do so without further loss of time.

An instantaneous effect was, however, produced upon Sam’s apparent attention to his studies, for at this moment “ our Jem ” entered the room with a large salver in his hand ; and Sam forthwith arose to look after his own interests, and the two celebrated “ outside bits of the cake,” upon which his affections had been placed so long ago as the morning. Besides Jem and his salver, there was at one end

of the room a large round table with tea, coffee, smoking crumpets, muffins, toasted bread, buns, biscuits, and cakes of every description for the benefit, it is supposed, of the Miss Wilsons, who usually dined at one o'clock, and who had not dipped so deeply into the substantial of Mrs. Glasse as the rest of the party.

The drawing-room was hung with a few good pictures, and Lady Selina was looking at them with one of the Miss Wilsons, when the gentlemen made their appearance. Mr. Aston and Mr. Pennant joined them while Lady Selina was admiring a "Virgin and Child," by Vandyck. Miss Wilson's sensitive modesty took the alarm, and as she could not prevail upon Lady Selina to quit it, on their approach, she determined they should know her opinion on the subject, and said she thought "it would have been much better had there been a handkerchief over the shoulders, and also more drapery on the child."

“A pair of knee-breeches, for instance,” said Mr. Aston; “it would be a sin to hide his legs.”

Miss Wilson walked away, to Lady Selina’s delight, and took her spurious modesty with her; and Lady Selina proceeded to view the remainder of the pictures.

“I was exceedingly annoyed,” said Mr. Aston, “last spring, in town, by a friend of mine, who was continually asking me to join him at picture sales and exhibitions of the old masters. He mistook his own case and fancied himself a judge, because he knew—as who does not? *obina*—a Canaletti or a ~~Hoffman~~, or a few masters which it is almost impossible to mistake. He has shot at a Rembrandt and a Rubens, and chanced to be right; therefore no powers on earth will now convince him that he is not a first-rate judge of pictures: nevertheless, he has no more taste than our friend Miss Wilson, who, if the picture she just now criticised belonged to herself, would, I have no doubt,

call in a travelling limner to daub over the living flesh of Vandyck.”

On the opposite side of the room from that where Lady Selina was standing, was a very beautiful portrait by Romney of Mrs. Hensley, taken at the age of eighteen : she happened at the moment to be sitting exactly beneath it—
infirm and imbecile ; the contrast could not but inspire melancholy feelings to all who observed it. Lady Selina pointed it out to Mr. Pennant.

“ Alas ! ” he said, “ I was even now meditating upon it. Who, indeed, can resist sad reflection when thus forced upon our minds ? I look on that portrait, all youth, loveliness, and smiles, and at the same moment on its original, over whose head sixty-three years have passed since that sweet portrait was painted. If she herself were to reflect for a moment, how wretched would she be in gazing on it !—she would know that all her earthly hopes, pleasures, and feelings, must be as withered as

her form! Alas! who would wish to live to extreme old age?—it is to outlive all our best and dearest feelings. Friendship I can conceive may endure in a cold, listless sort of way, but love!—love *can not*;—neither love itself, nor parental love, nor even fraternal love. It is a beautiful fiction to say,

“The sunflower turns on her god when he sets,
The same look which she turned when she rose.”

but it is *only* a fiction. How can *feelings* remain the same when that which excited them is so changed? It is idle to console ourselves by saying love softens down into friendship. If it be so, the feeling must be a wretched one—it is beginning at the wrong end; friendship may end in love, but never, never genuine love in *only* friendship. Even memory, which is one of the greatest sources of pleasure to the young, is, in extreme old age, almost a curse: we *then* feel that all we can recall to it as pleasant, can never return for us more. Then for parental love; how *can* a parent—when his children are

themselves old and parents—how *can* he have that tenderness for them which he felt in their infancy and youth? Oh! if we thus outlive all our dearest feelings and ties, can we wish to attain old age?”

He ceased for a moment—a feeling the most bitter was expressed in his countenance—the enthusiasm with which he had spoken was suddenly extinguished, and in a voice of trembling emotion he said,—

“ I have spoken from a momentary impulse—what must you think of me, Lady Selina? Alas! it is not for *me* to utter sentiments such as these of the things of this earth. I have spoken of feelings and of ties which must be ever unknown to me;” and then, forcing a smile as he quitted Lady Selina, he added, “ If I am denied the happiness of such ties, at least I escape the painful feelings I have described.”

Lady Selina was really affected; she had been surprised at the enthusiasm with which

he had spoken, and she felt deeply for him in the last words he had uttered.

“ He is indeed to be pitied,” said Mr. Aston ; “ I know him well—I am proud to call him my friend. One of the noblest and most feeling hearts that ever beat in the human bosom is in him, excluded from all the ties he has so affectingly described, and to which he would have done so much justice. I have seen enough in him to know that most bitterly and deeply he feels his deprivation—he *must* do it ; a heart such as his *cannot* discard the feelings of nature without deeply wounding it at the same time.”

“ Lady Selina could scarcely repress her tears, and she felt pleased with the warmth with which Mr. Aston commiserated the deprivations of Mr. Pennant.

“ How different,” she observed, “ is the situation of Mr. Pennant from that of a person who voluntarily remains single ! We do not pity the man who, from his own choice, secludes

himself from all society ; yet we feel strongly for him who is imprisoned for life, even although his being so may have been owing to a previous act of his own. . . .” Lady Selina was interrupted by a proposal from Miss Hensley that she would join the commercetable, at which the rest of the party were already seated. Commerce was a favourite game with her, and she readily assented.

The interest of the evening was greatly enhanced by the extraordinary event of Miss Charlotte Leslie being twice fortunate enough to hold aces while on the acts of grace :—who is the person phlegmatic enough to endure such an occurrence with composure ? It was certainly not Charlotte Leslie. An hysterical affection proclaimed it the first time to the suspicious ears of her contemporaries, and on the second a convulsive fit was nearly being the fatal result of so extraordinary a piece of good fortune.

It was still more remarkable that Miss

Wilson had kings, and Miss Marianna Wilson queens, during the same deal, therefore the aces were a complete death-blow to their elevated hopes, and never during the remainder of their lives did they sit down to a pool at commerce, or see any one take out the act of grace, without holding out to him or her, as an encouragement, the extraordinary good fortune of Miss Charlotte Leslie, who actually held aces twice on the act of grace, and afterwards won the pool. They never forgot it,—it was, and continued to be, one of the most remarkable events of their lives.

The evening closed with great *éclat*, and the good-humoured Miss Hensley was charmed with the success of her party, and observed to her father, as she economically extinguished her wax lights, the moment “the coast was clear,” that “everything had gone off exceedingly well; that Lady Selina and the Miss Leslies seemed quite delighted with their evening, and that even Mr. Aston appeared to

approve, and had actually said that the venison was perfectly well roasted :” this solemn fact she determined to retail to the cook on the following morning, for her future encouragement.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the night preceding the ball, which was to take place at the White Hart, at Thornley, Miss Charlotte and Miss Catherine Leslie were seated beside a good fire, in their dressing-room, at the celebrated "*curling-hour*"—an hour by young ladies generally made sacred to their loves, or their caps and bonnets. Sally Gubbins, who was an indifferent *friseur*, had been dismissed, and the following dialogue took place between the sisters :

“ Catherine ! I wonder what we shall do if Mrs. James doesn't send our dresses to-morrow ? ”

“ Oh ! she's sure to send them—you know

she never disappointed us ; but I think it's a pity we didn't order them sooner, because, perhaps, they may have to be let out in the waist, or something or other. I hope she'll send bands with them."

"I'm so glad we ordered rose colour—it's not so common as pink. I wonder what Lady Selina will wear!"

"Yes—I wonder. She has all her things from Madame Carson, you know ; but, for my part, I like Mrs. James quite as well, and one's more sure to get good silks and gauzes at Howel and James's than anywhere else."

"I dare say Lady Selina will wear diamonds—I long to see. What an old frump Mrs. Todd is! I guess she'll have a hat like a drum, and a red gown."

"I dare say she will. What luck that we are out of mourning at last! our black gowns had got so shabby—and the bugles made them all come in holes. I think we were very stupid not to order new wreaths for our hair."

“ Oh ! the rosebuds and barley do very well ; you know we only wore them once. I think our dresses will be better than Matilda’s. I wonder she chose white, because she’s so pale.”

“ Yes. What necklaces shall we wear ? ”

“ Our gold, of course ; you know we settled to wear our gold ear-rings.”

“ Do you guess Mr. Aston will ask either of us two ? ”

“ I should think he would to a certainty. What a bore Lord Litchfield doesn’t dance ! ”

“ A horrid bore !—If he did I dare say he’d ask us. One thing, however, Frederic Harvey’s sure to ask us ; he always does, and I would as soon dance with him as with any one in the room.”

“ Yes—he’s a capital good partner. Do you think Mr. Aston will dance with Mary Harvey ? I’m quite certain she’s in love with him.”

“ It’s no good if she is—she has not the

least chance. Charlotte! I hope *paille de ris* bonnets will be in fashion next spring. What a lovely one that is of Lady Selina's!"

"Yes. What a bore it is my hair comes off so! I've a good mind to send for some Macassar."

"I hope it will be a frost to-morrow night, or I shall have mine as straight as an arrow."

"I shall put eighteen curl-papers in to-night, instead of twelve, in hopes it will curl stiffer."

"I'm sure if you can put in eighteen papers, you can't want Macassar much. I'm so glad Mr. Aston has got such a lot of friends staying with him. I dare say he'll introduce two or three of them to us. I wonder who they are! Miss Hensley said one of them was Lord somebody, she couldn't recollect the name,—she's always so stupid about names. She said she thought it began with an F. If papa was gone to bed I'd run down for the Peerage, and look among the F's; but I haven't heard the bell

yet. I dare say he'll sit up a long time yet, talking to Mr. Pennant."

"It's a very good thing for us that Sarah's not going to the ball; she'd be sure to make papa go away early. I wonder whom we shall have for the supper quadrille?"

"I think we are sure to get plenty of partners, as Mr. Aston is the steward, and with our new dresses and all."

"I dare say Lord Litchfield will be steward of the next. I hope he'll make a good one."

"I wish the Miss Wilsons wouldn't go. I am sick of the sight of them and their horrid feather-tippets. And one knows so exactly what they will say, and how they will look. And they *will* persist in asking me after my cough, when they know, as well as I do, that it's been well for these two months."

"Come, we had much better go to bed; it's past twelve, and we shall be up very

late to-morrow, and look so hideous if we sit burning our faces here so long.”

The young ladies then retired, after wondering, only six times, how Mrs. James would trim their dresses. As, however, they had not the least chance of discovering this at present, they were obliged to wait, as patiently as they could, till the coach should arrive on the following day, and until Robin and Scrub and the interesting box were fairly landed at Elmwood, to elucidate the mystery.

The night on which the ball was to take place arrived as quickly as any other night, although to the Miss Leslies and many other young ladies it appeared to be unusually slow in its paces.

The party from Elmwood was one of the first which arrived at the White Hart, and the young ladies stood shivering, in a state of nervous agitation and expectation, around a black, smoky fire, at one end of a long,

narrow, ill-lighted ball-room. Every minute, of course, appeared to them an hour ; and occasional glances at their rose-colour gauze dresses, and now and then a grating scrape from a fiddler aloft, which would have given Mori a fit of the tooth-ache, were their only consolations, until the welcome sound of wheels, rumbling over the stones in the inn-yard, saluted their ears.

The first arrival was Miss Hensley, and the two Miss Wilsons, in their two "horrid feather tippets," — as had been anticipated — and, worse and worse, eight rows of pink ribbon round their heads, with a little pink cockade over each of their four eyes. Miss Hensley's turban, with fire flies' wings, was even better than this.

Before Miss Charlotte Leslie had replied to Miss Marianna Wilson's friendly inquiries after her cough, Mr. Aston, who was the steward, arrived, and, with him, no less than five gentlemen. It really was quite reviving!—

and, what was better still, he introduced Colonel S—— and Sir Charles L—— directly, as partners to Catherine and Matilda Leslie, and named his other three friends to them in confidence.

One was actually Lord Somebody, as Miss Hensley had foretold ; but his name did not begin with an F ;—he was Lord Bruce, a celebrated dandy. A little, short, dark, clever-looking man next to him, was Lord William Rawdon, of the Grenadier Guards ; and a thin, pale, silly-looking youth talking to him was Mr. Birmingham Aston, a cousin of Mr. Aston, and a man of very large fortune. All undeniable ! Five new importations ! What fine times for the young ladies ! There was no saying what might happen before the end of the winter, since it had begun so very magnificently.

Whole hosts of young ladies in pink, blue, and white gauzes now poured in ; *some* flounced exceedingly well, others whose

dresses were *clitchey* — (if this term be not understood, it is sufficient to say that it is the very worst one that can be applied to a lady's dress).

Some of these young ladies were as distinguished as artificial flowers and silver ribbons, and barley and blonde, and lockets and necklaces could make them. One or two there were who would be simple, and were accordingly attired in clear white muslin, with coral. Then there were others with full flowing dresses ; and some again, who looked as if they were sewed up in sacks, like Leila, ready to be thrown into the sea.

The mammas divided between them one or two hats — not more — with very good marabout plumes, and one tolerably clean ostrich one ; fifteen turbans—twelve of them red ones, and all very indifferently put on ; seventeen blonde caps, with English artificial flowers ; a few berrits ; and two or three ladies, who were young for their age, wore

bunches of ringlets tied to their own hair, and ornamented, or otherwise hidden, with combs and various kinds of light ware.

There were the usual proportion of bald heads, and grey heads, and speckled heads, and powdered heads, and wigged heads, among the gentlemen of a certain age ; and a tolerable sprinkling of officers from the county town, in red coats with green collars, and some of them with buckles in their shoes. As they belonged to a regiment of the line, they were denominated, by Mr. Aston, the "light fantastic toes."

The dancing gentlemen, with a few exceptions, were not very meritorious, although they had their admirers, as well as revilers, among the swarm of young ladies. They consisted of the usual quantity of the usual sort of men which decorate a country ball-room. A few fallen angels, such as have been described in Mr. Aston's party, were occasionally among them, but their visits

were, of course, "few and far between." And then, in opposition to these, there were, as at all country balls, a number of black men, nobody knows who, and who come from nobody knows where, but still they do very well for some of the young ladies of lesser consideration, to make up a third quadrille.

The idea has been started of sending a van up to Town, to import "fancy men" for provincial balls. Now *these* men always look as if, instead of a van, they had come in a hearse. It is very strange that black is always their prevailing colour, whether they are in the church, or in mourning, or not, it does not signify—black they are and black they remain.

As no one knows them, they have, of course, if they dance, very circumscribed limits of conversation; therefore it is a settled point, that they begin to talk of that most unsettled of all points—the weather.

They inform their partners, as minutely as the Miss Wilsons, of the exact state of the atmosphere ; hence, Mr. Aston at last discovered to the entire satisfaction of every one, that these black gentlemen *must* be the celebrated “ clerks of the weather-office,” so often mentioned in story.

Lady Selina Clifford came just in time to open the ball with Mr. Aston. The Miss Leslies were rather disappointed to find she wore no diamonds, and that Madame Carson had merely given her a very plain, but very beautifully-made white dress ; but then, to make amends, Mrs. Todd actually had the very hat like a drum, and the very red gown they had foretold she would have. This was balm to their wounded feelings.

It was at this ball that Sir Robert Leslie, with feelings of joy inexpressible, first conceived the idea that Lord Litchfield admired his daughter Matilda. She disliked dancing and sat still as often as her father would

allow her, and, as he observed that when she did so, Lord Litchfield invariably placed himself beside her, he very good-naturedly permitted her to indulge her own inclination, and decline as many quadrilles as she chose.

The very idea of seeing Matilda Countess of Litchfield, and established amid all the splendour of Brooklands Abbey, was beyond the utmost expectations of her father; his whole soul was engrossed by the vision, and he made random answers to all observations addressed to him on this memorable evening. A momentary glance, however, was, from time to time, bestowed on his other two daughters.

All was going on well with them too. They had shared the "fallen angels" between them, and had each danced with Frederick Harvey and with Mr. Aston. What could be better? And as keen a mouser as Sir Robert was for his daughters, even he was satisfied for the present. He had no occasion to set steel-

traps and spring-guns for unwary youths to-night. His daughters were sought, and he had nothing to do but to fold his arms and smile in spirit, and to be very glad that he had given them new dresses — they were expensive ones, to be sure, but he hoped they would pay in the end.

Lady Selina was disappointed in regard to Lord Litchfield ; she had very little conversation with him, and could not but observe the almost unceasing attention he was paying to Matilda Leslie. She had rather, much rather, have conversed with him than with any one in the room, and it caused her a feeling of pain as she reflected that he sought her not. Yet, endeavouring to banish this reflection as much as possible, she determined, very wisely, to find amusement in the scenes and persons around her. In this she succeeded, for in her own good humour and quickness of observation, she possessed that mental philosopher's stone which transmutes even the least promis-

ing things into sources of enjoyment. Lady Selina was, of course, the leading star of the evening, and followed and sought by almost all ; and herself, willing to be pleased as well as to please, her evening could not be a dull one. She was amused with the wit of Lord William Rawdon, and with the quaint dry manner for which he is celebrated ; and even the affectation and elaborate folly of Lord Bruce were very entertaining to her. Not one of her partners were dull ones. Mr. Aston she always liked, and to-night he was even more than usually pleasant ;—even Mr. Birmingham Aston, simple as he was, was not without some redeeming qualifications. He had once heard it said that the Astons were a very clever family ; he thought his cousin the greatest wit of the age, and determined the family reputation should not be lost through his fault ; he resolved to set up for a wit himself, and by following at a humble distance the steps of his cousin, he hoped to pick up the crumbs of

genius which he scattered in his superfluity. Lady Selina was much amused by hearing him on the present occasion, retail in a mutilated form much original matter of his cousin's, which now derobed of its freshness and time and place, told in a very sorry manner. He repeated Mr. Aston as much as possible, and copied him as closely as his own simplicity and shallowness of intellect would allow. Yet it would not do; no one would agree to call Mr. Birmingham Aston a wit—he was not by nature intended for one; and it is a character that art alone can never compass. No better idea can be given of Mr. Birmingham Aston's manner of repeating things than the fact of his having retailed the conundrum, "Why is mangel-wursel like a mouse? (because the cattle eat it),"—and given as the reply, "Because the cows eat it," wondering all the time at the stupidity of his auditors, who were not enlightened by his explanation.

This unlucky man, too, set up for a fine

dancer, and curvetted about with all his might in a variety of intricate patterns.

As Lady Selina was mentally contrasting this elaborate style with the easy gentleman-like, and scarcely perceptible movements of his cousin, the words of the wise man involuntarily occurred to her :—“ The fool putteth to more strength : the man of understanding considereth which way.”

Although Mr. Birmingham Aston considered himself a fine dancer, yet a natural timidity, which he had never been able entirely to overcome, always seized upon him when he most wished it away—in his *pas seul* in Pastourelle. At this awful period a modest blush would suffuse his countenance, and he would invariably stand like a statue until it had passed away. Lord William Rawdon observed to Lady Selina, that “ what Mr. Birmingham Aston lacked in assurance he made up in patience, being the only man who was ever known to wait out the whole eight bars com-

pletely to the end." Thus, there are many ways of attaining distinction if they are but carefully sought.

The supper was as wretched at the "White Hart," at Thornley, as it is at the common run of country ball-suppers, and is so in general without being any disparagement to the ball, as it is well known that only a few old ladies and gentlemen care anything about a ball-supper in the country. Let it be observed, that this is asserted only of a *country* ball; for French wines, ices, Roman punch, and M. Jarrin, are never despised by the youngest and fairest; therefore it is only in regions where these are unattainable that such things pass current as two thin slices of beef on a mountain of parsley; pickled pork in the character of ham; stale oysters, full of pieces of broken shell and dirt; white-faced puffs and tartlets; with currant jelly, which always tastes as if James's powders were mixed up with it; lean chickens as tough as lean; sour cream; jelly

made with vinegar instead of lemons ; stale cakes ; hot negus in earthenware jugs ; steel forks ; bottled porter, and odoriferous fumes, which—

“ Return the sweets by tobacco given,
In softest incense back to Heaven.”

These perils o'erpast in safety, the ladies leaped over their benches, and proceeded up a cold, dark, gusty staircase into the ball-room, to get through, as well as they might, that most chilling and dreary interval in human life which precedes the *entrée* of the gentlemen after a country ball-supper. How much better are London suppers managed !—no such interval there is ever heard of. A more melancholy scene cannot well be imagined : a few old ladies engross both the Lilliputian fire-places ; the middle-aged ones sit in couples, either sulking, yawning, or talking, as the spirit may move them, or their inclination prompt them ; the young ladies walk in duets, trios, quartettos, and chorusses ; some shivering in

crape handkerchiefs, others in shaded *ceintures*. Those whose cloaks are not too shabby have now the advantage in point of warmth. At this moment it is easy to ascertain those who are engaged for the next quadrille, and those who are not ; the former have a satisfied independent air, the latter appear more timid, and are ever and anon watching the door with looks of anxiety, in the hope of being no longer "left to their sorrows."

The gentlemen at last pour in ; Hart's *first* set bursts forth, and "dark shadows may pass away" as soon as they can. The disengaged young ladies are now engaged (if an Irishism may be allowed), and "the tide of their grief is gone."

During the melancholy interval above described, Lady Selina had been very well amused ; she had been walking up and down the room with Mary Harvey ; she had not before this evening been well acquainted with her, and now liked her exceedingly.

Mary Harvey was a very pretty intelligent-looking girl, with a clear brown complexion, and very dark eyes and hair, with a remarkably good figure ; she was also perfectly lady-like and agreeable, good humoured, and well informed, so that Lady Selina was much pleased with her, and felt strongly inclined to forgive her the “unhappy errors” which the fastidious Mr. Aston had discovered, or pretended to discover, in her. Lady Selina felt almost sorry he had been so observing in detecting them, for she began to suspect, from the warm praise and the evident admiration which he excited in Mary Harvey, that she thought of him with more interest than prudence warranted. As this thought passed through the mind of Lady Selina, Mr. Aston entered the room, and asked Mary Harvey to dance with him, for the first time that evening : a bright blush, a sparkling eye, and a slight degree of confusion, as she accepted his arm, confirmed to Lady Selina, her former suspi-

cions ;—she felt sorry, for she fancied, with the Miss Leslies, that “Mary Harvey had not the slightest chance.” Himself of an ancient and distinguished family, possessed of a large fortune, and moving in the first circles, it was not likely that Mr. Aston should marry a girl whose father, although a man of fortune, had been in trade, and a trade too not the most distinguished : yet it was evident to Lady Selina, as she observed Mary Harvey, that she felt a decided preference for Mr. Aston ; nor was she mistaken—Mary Harvey had long loved him, sincerely and disinterestedly, with a love, even proof against indifference on his side, for he had paid her no particular attention, any farther than that he had always appeared to prefer her society to her sister’s. He was by no means aware of the attachment he had excited, for Mary Harvey had a genuine delicacy, which guided her in her behaviour towards him, and taught her to hide from him, as much as possible, the preference she felt.

She was by no means a common-place kind of girl, and not at all given to fancy herself in love. This was her first attachment; her feelings were always both warm and steady, therefore were not likely to evaporate so speedily as those of the Miss Leslies, who thought no more of taking a new love, and casting off an old one, than of buying a new bonnet from Mrs. James, and giving the discarded one to Sally Gubbins.

Mary Harvey's feelings were very different, and her love for Mr. Aston was already deeply rooted—deeper far than was at all suspected even by those who had already discovered her partiality for him.

It is now time to put an end to the Thornley ball, as I by no means wish to inflict upon my readers more at a time than they may be able to endure; therefore I shall merely add, in the elegant and seldom-repeated language of the Morning Post, that after “listening with delight to the soul-inspiring and mirth-creating

strains of Weippert's band," (had it been there,) "and after having partaken of every delicacy of the season (porter and oysters included), the votaries of Terpsichore unwillingly retired from the festive scene, when the rising beams of Sol warned them to depart." I therefore hasten to follow their example, being unwilling to

“Feel like one who treads alone,
A smoky room deserted ;
Whose oil is dead, and fiddlers fled,
And all save me, departed.”

CHAPTER IX.

LADY SELINA CLIFFORD had taken a house in Stanhope-street, for the ensuing London season, and intended to remove thither about the end of the month of March. Sir Robert Leslie had also engaged one in Audley-square, and was to take possession of it early in April. The period in which this chapter commences was in the month of March, and Lord Litchfield had already removed to his house in Berkeley-square. Mr. Aston was also to take wing at the end of the month, so that the neighbourhood of Thornley was to be speedily despoiled of all its brightest beams. The Harveys were to remain at Rollestone-park, to the great

regret of some part of the family. This regret was, however, changed into delight to Mary Harvey ; for Lady Selina, always anxious to give pleasure to others, and feeling really interested in Mary Harvey, had invited her to accompany her to town. She had been prudent enough not to decide on this without mature deliberation, as she knew that Mary Harvey must, when there, constantly meet Mr. Aston, and she was now perfectly convinced of her preference for him ; and she also felt the responsibility she should herself incur, if, through her means, Mary was encouraged in an attachment that must be hopeless. She felt all this, but acted now from the change which she had observed during the last few weeks in the manner of Mr. Aston towards Mary Harvey. He had gradually appeared to take more interest in her society than he had been accustomed to do : he evidently admired her, and was pleased with her conversation ; he danced with her, and took a

chair by her side more frequently than formerly ; he entirely ceased to mention the “unhappy errors” he had once detected in her—nay, even went so far as to have said that “Mary Harvey was really exempt from the failings of her family, and was a particularly lady-like and well-informed girl.”

A short time after this change Lady Selina observed that he appeared to wish to avoid her—yet it was evidently a struggle to him to do so. She now began to think he must be really in earnest—he certainly must be attached to Mary Harvey ; he could now be no longer blind to the high estimation and the genuine feelings of tenderness which he had excited. The affection of such a girl as Mary Harvey might have been prized by any man, and Mr. Aston was one who was well able to appreciate its value : he had great feeling and a high sense of honour, and Lady Selina thought and hoped that when really convinced of the enduring nature of the attachment he

had inspired, he would yield to the feelings of his own heart, and throw aside the worldly ones which at present appeared to actuate him.

Mr. Aston was certainly a proud man,—he wished for birth and fashion in the woman he should marry : his family had always made unexceptionable connections, generally very distinguished ones ; and he felt reluctance, great reluctance, that through his means the name of Mr. Harvey—a retired manufacturer—should appear in the pedigree of Aston.

Lady Selina was well aware of his feelings ; yet, knowing how deeply those of Mary Harvey were interested in them, she determined to exert herself in her favour, thinking that should a separation now take place the newly awakened preference of Mr. Aston might die away ; while, on the contrary, if they should still frequently meet, she felt sure, from her opinion of Mary Harvey, that

it must acquire strength and overcome the obstacles which now surrounded it.

After all these observations and considerations then, the invitation was given, and accepted with a delight which only those in Mary Harvey's situation, and with the prospect of being separated from one they most love from March until the following hunting-season, can appreciate.

Mary Harvey was a girl of very quick observation, and with a natural taste for refinement. She had been much struck by the perfect high breeding of Lady Selina Clifford; and her wish to please Mr. Aston, of whose fastidious taste she was aware, had lately led her to pay minute attention to those *small observances*, the breach of which in good society at once affixes a bar to the attainment of a reputation for elegance and good taste.

Mary Harvey now no longer called engravings "pictures;" water-coloured drawings

“paintings;” or cutlets “chops;” or talked of “riding” in a carriage; or put her spoon in her tea-cup; or saw any sin in sitting in an arm-chair, or putting her feet on a stool when gentlemen enter from the dining-room (as divers young ladies are known to do); nor did she any longer consider it immoral to look out of a drawing-room window in London, now and then, when she had nothing better to do; she no longer thought it necessary and sensible to say that reading novels “was a waste of time;” or that Rossini “repeated himself” (as if he could do better!); or that Sir Walter Scott wrote too much (which could not be the case if he were to cover all the paper in Europe); nor was she afraid of being thought a dram-drinker if she tasted a liqueur when it was given to her, and when she very much wished to taste it; or thought it becoming to be afraid of entering a room filled with people, in the supposition that

all eyes must be attracted by her, whereas persons of proper humility hope to sneak in unobserved, if they really are ashamed to be seen ; she no longer retained in her album, such lines as

“ The rose had been washed, just washed by a shower,
Which Mary to Anna conveyed ;”

and,

“ An adieu should in utterance die ;”

and,

“ The dews of the evening most carefully shun,
Those tears of the sky for the loss of the sun.”

All of which conceits she had once thought “ sweet ideas,” and “ lovely copies of verses.” She now no longer thought the supernatural machinery in “ The Monastery ” “ not at all natural ;” or witty to call a clergyman a “ parson ;” or a medical man a “ pill-box ;” or her father “ the Governor ;” or put a dictionary at her elbow, and lines under her paper when she wrote a letter ; or would write a note over again, or else scrape for an hour with a pen-knife at a word that

was wrong, rather than employ the simple means of drawing her pen through it ; or was ashamed to tell her footman to desire the coachman to drive down Bond-street and St. James's-street, or any other favourite haunt, unless she really had an errand that way : she never now called anything or any person "genteel," or thought it fashionable to "quizz," or fear she would lose her character for virginity if she wore a cap in the morning, or a *berrét* in the evening, or a ring on the fourth finger of her left hand ; nor did she wind up her notes "yours in haste," or "*addio carissima* ;" nor, if she happened to be at a ball in the county town, did she think fits of ill-suppressed laughter with a few friends in a corner, and audible quizzing, was the most effectual manner of proving her own pretensions to fashion, and showing her superiority to "the natives" and tradespeople, who on some occasions are obliged to be admitted. In this latter respect Mary Harvey had ac-

quired an advantage over many young ladies of high birth and fashion, for she had discovered that, in the eyes of really well-bred people, conduct of this kind is only attendant on a vulgar or a little mind. She had good taste enough to admire Lady Selina Clifford, who was never heard voluntarily to wound the feelings of any person, but was always well-bred and kind to all with whom either choice or chance associated her. In this, Lady Selina had the more merit, as naturally she was gifted, as has been before observed, with a very keen perception of the ludicrous; yet she had so much benevolence, so much native propriety of mind and enlargement of ideas, that she never failed to make allowances for others. When she saw the objects of the ill-bred railery of their superiors in rank, she recollected that they had had no opportunities or advantages which might have rendered them superior to what they were;—they might be vulgar, they might be extremely ridiculous, and Lady

Selina, perhaps, could not help seeing that they were, yet she never pointed out their failings to others ; she could find sources sufficiently prolific in amusement without descending to one so narrow-minded and so ill-bred.

This conduct Mary Harvey had the good sense to profit by, and she very soon both loved and admired Lady Selina : the intimacy between them was really of incalculable advantage to her ; she was improving and refining daily ; and the change was certainly not lost upon Mr. Aston. He was now evidently becoming attached to her, and the very high opinion and deference which she felt for himself could not but have some weight with him, although he was not really a vain man. He saw that his opinion was everything with Mary Harvey—that she held him in the highest estimation. These were her real feelings towards him, and, without departing from the thoroughly natural character which she

was, she could not, and did not, disguise them.

Mr. Aston was not quite proof against a preference so flattering to himself from so very pretty a girl as Mary Harvey. He could not but think her a person of great discernment and judgment — how could he? — and he now found it more and more difficult to avoid her society. Nay, he even felt half-afraid of himself when he learnt that she was to accompany Lady Selina to Town. Yet he satisfied himself at length with thinking that in more extended society he should speedily forget her. It was only the contracted circle of a country neighbourhood, which had caused him to think so much about her. When once more in London he should see girls nearer to his own station in life, who would soon teach him to forget Mary Harvey.

In these reflections, he forgot that he had, for several years past, mixed in the society

he was now about to rejoin — had been in the constant habit of meeting girls of the first fashion, and of rank and beauty, and yet that he had never felt more than a slight preference for any one of them. At this time it is to be remembered that he was by no means aware of the deep attachment which he had excited in Mary Harvey. Had he been so, perhaps he might not have been quite so strenuous in his resolution to forget her entirely.

Lady Selina, who took much interest in the happiness of both, was, from her own observation, now very sanguine as to the happy result of their mutual attachment. She felt great pleasure in the thought, that perhaps through her means the happiness of both might be secured. Her disposition was so benevolent, that it was to her a great consolation that if she failed to be happy herself, she yet might have it in her power to render others so. With such a dispo-

tion as this, she might find for herself many sources of happiness ; and yet, admired and sought as she was, and surrounded with all that wealth could bestow, she was not without sorrow. In the midst of the splendour which surrounded her, she would, at times, feel almost alone in the world. She was without any near relation, and, from having lived so long abroad, possessed no opportunity of forming for herself friendships in England. She was not, or thought she was not, likely to marry — was even fearful of being sought for her fortune alone, and had not felt a preference for any of the numbers who had sought her hand.

Lord Litchfield was the only person she had ever known who had touched her heart, — the only one whom she could have loved — and yet she had no hope of ever being to him more than a friend. His attentions to Matilda Leslie had now been for some time very decided, and Lady Selina felt cer-

tain that when they met in town his proposals would not be long deferred.

Not all her efforts had yet succeeded in driving Lord Litchfield entirely from her mind ; she thought more highly of him than of any other person ; he pleased her in every way ; it was, therefore, not without much grief that she remarked his now unceasing attentions to Matilda Leslie. She loved Matilda, and was anxious for her happiness ; and there were times when she almost thought it would not be augmented by a union with Lord Litchfield. She was sure that he was not appreciated as he ought to be ; indeed since his interest in Matilda had been more marked, she had evidently appeared to wish to shun him. This, to Lady Selina, was almost unaccountable ; for, from the estimation in which she herself held him, it scarcely to her seemed possible that he should seek the affections of any woman, where they were disengaged, in vain ; and Lady Selina felt

certain, from the intimacy which subsisted between herself and Matilda, that she had no preference for any other person. From the commencement of their acquaintance, she had frequently heard Matilda express her earnest desire to take the veil. This wish still remained in all its force. Therefore, to Lady Selina, who was a Protestant, it appeared clear that neither Lord Litchfield nor any other person was beloved by Matilda.

During the last fortnight of Lady Selina's stay in the country, Matilda had been on a visit at Lumley Court. Her spirits were never high, and at this period they appeared to be more than usually depressed; and, on the morning of the day on which she was to depart, when walking with Lady Selina in the shrubbery, she suddenly seated herself on a bench and burst into tears. Lady Selina endeavoured to soothe her, with much kindness; but, from an instinctive feeling that Lord Litchfield's name should not be men-

tioned between them, she forbore to attempt to draw from her the cause of her grief. Matilda at length ceased to weep, and, taking the hand of Lady Selina, she said,—

“You are almost the only friend I have, —the only one who will feel for me—and yet I am afraid to speak to you, lest you, as well as my father, should blame me for what now causes me so much unhappiness. Yet you are so good, and have ever been so kind to me, that I should keep nothing from you that I can properly tell. Will you, then—”

She stopped, with much emotion. Lady Selina commiserated her evident unhappiness, and, struggling with her own feelings, she said—

“Speak to me, dear Matilda; tell me all that afflicts you; and if I can advise, or in any way aid you, be assured that I will. I see that you hesitate: perhaps I can guess tell me, is it not of Lord Litchfield you would speak?”

Matilda, in a faint voice, and with much confusion, owned that it was. Lady Selina paused a moment—her heart beat violently—for the world she would not betray her feelings to Matilda :—she struggled with herself, and resolved that should Matilda seek her advice, she would give it with perfect disinterestedness, whatever it might cost her. Matilda's eyes were bent on the ground, and she did not observe the emotion of her friend ; it passed away externally, and she was able to say, in a tolerably composed voice—

“ Do not fear to tell me anything, dear Matilda. If I could, in any way, alleviate your sorrow, how gladly would I do so ! ”

“ Dearest Selina ! You can do it by only listening to me—by feeling with or for me. I have never had a friend who could advise, or one who has loved me much, excepting my father—never during my life. All my feelings—all my enjoyments—all my sorrows, have been solitary. I have been as one who had no

sister—and yet I have three, and I could have loved them I do love them yet they never but it is not of this that I should speak. I know that I have the kindest of friends in you, and that my father loves me most affectionately. I should not then complain but” She paused, and Lady Selina continued.

“You have a friend in me, Matilda, and always shall have. You said it was of Lord Litchfield you were going to speak—be not afraid, then. I know that he loves you.”

Matilda gained courage, and proceeded.

“I fear that he does, and it is this which grieves me. I know that he regards me with a partiality—an unfortunate partiality, and one which is very far above my merits, for I am not so vain as for a moment to suppose I could ever merit the affection of such a man as Lord Litchfield; he is too far above me. I do not speak of his rank or his fortune—they are his least possessions, and perhaps I cannot hold

them in the estimation I ought, for they would have no weight with me in any way ; but I know how to appreciate his worth and his talents : I hold him in the highest estimation, and believe there are few like him ; yet I do not, nor ever can, love him. It has long been my earnest, my only wish, to take the veil :—no words that I can utter—no idea that you can form, could convey to you a sense of how fervently I desire this ;—it is seated deeply in my heart—it is almost my one thought ;—it has grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength, and nothing that could happen could ever eradicate it from my mind.—Oh ! Selina, if you knew the horror that I have for being forced to mingle with the world—the averseness that I feel to marry Lord Litchfield, or any one else, you would pity me ; for, I will not disguise from you, that, in a conversation which I had with my father, a few days ago, he told me that nothing would ever induce him to give his consent to my taking the veil—

he told me, too, that Lord Litchfield had asked his permission to address me, and that should I refuse his hand, he could no longer consider me as his child."

Matilda could not proceed, but laying her head on the shoulder of her friend, she wept bitterly. Lady Selina's part was a hard one : she had heard with an emotion, which words can but faintly express, that Lord Litchfield was really desirous to marry Matilda—had even spoken to her father. She felt deeply for her ; many thoughts passed rapidly through her mind ; her eyes filled with tears ; her utterance appeared choked, and she was unable to speak, until Matilda exclaimed,—

" Dearest Selina ! tell me what I can do ; and tell me that you pity me, or I shall think that, like my father, you think me unfeeling and ungrateful. Oh ! say that you do not ! "

" I do not, my poor Matilda. I am very certain that you never could be either. You wish for my advice : listen to me then, pa-

tiently ; and if it agree not with your own wishes, do not think that I do not feel for you most sincerely. I love you, and would have you act as is most consistent with your permanent happiness, not with your present wishes, for I am well assured that you will not be happy if you take the veil. From what I know of Sir Robert Leslie—from what he himself has said to me, I feel sure that his consent to your doing so will never be obtained : you would then disoblige him for ever, nay, act contrary to his direct wishes—his absolute command. Could you then be happy ? You could not. I think too well of you to believe that you could. You are blest with a father, who loves you most affectionately, who has your happiness at heart. You are his favourite child ; you cannot, you ought not, to disobey him. I have never known the blessing of a father's love, but I know how sacredly it should be esteemed by a child, and I hold that every sacrifice is due to it. I see how serious and

how earnest you are to take the veil ;—I am a Protestant, and naturally look upon it in a different light from what you do ; neither can I hope to shake a wish which you have entertained so long : yet I will say, that even were your father to give his consent to your doing so, I believe that you would not be happy. I have known many nuns during my residence in Italy, and I feel convinced that theirs is not a life for happiness ; at best it is only a cold dull calm—‘a sky without a cloud or sun.’ You would give up every tie—separate yourself from your family, to live for yourself alone. Think not that I wish to reproach you—I wish to convince you. You are yet very young, and will feel differently from what you do now.”

In a broken voice Matilda replied—

“ I know that I ought not to disobey my father, and that I never could know happiness if I did. I see that I must give up all thoughts of taking the veil. I would do so now, and

would promise to think of it no more, whatever that promise might cost me, if he would but beg of Lord Litchfield to give up all thoughts of my ever becoming his. I never can love him. I should then be most guilty if I were to deceive, and allow him to suppose that I did. You, who are so upright-minded yourself, Selina, you cannot advise me to do this.”

“ I do not advise you, dearest Matilda, to marry a man whom you could not love ; but I feel sure that the time will come when you will love Lord Litchfield. You think of him now as highly as he deserves, which is highly, indeed ; you cannot then long remain insensible to, or ungrateful for, the affection of such a man. When once you have given up all idea of taking the veil, you will feel the value of a heart like Lord Litchfield’s ; you will love him, and you will be most happy with him. Resolve then at once to follow the path which will lead to your own happiness, and to that of those who love you. I have pointed

this path out to you, and your own heart will tell you that it is the one which duty also commands you to tread. You are—you must be convinced of this; why then should you hesitate? When once assured of what is right for you to do, pursue it steadily and at once, and banish all vain regrets. And now, dearest Matilda, I shall leave you to reflect on what I have said, and I trust that you will tell your father your resolution to act as he wishes when you return home this afternoon; and that when we meet in town I shall see you fully sensible of your happiness in being beloved by such a man as Lord Litchfield.”

Sir Robert Leslie's carriage at this moment arrived to convey Matilda to Elmwood; she therefore affectionately embraced Lady Selina, thanked her fervently for her kindness, and promising to reflect on what she had been saying, and to do nothing contrary to the wish of her father, she bade her farewell, and quitted Lumley Court.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER the departure of Matilda, Lady Selina continued her walk in the shrubbery ; she was greatly agitated, and in vain endeavoured to repress her tears ; yet the consciousness of having, against the wishes of her own heart, advised Matilda to act in the manner which she judged the best, supported her under the bitter grief she experienced in the certainty that Lord Litchfield loved another than herself. Lady Selina struggled with these feelings ; reflection showed her how ill-judged, nay, how wrong it was to encourage them even for a moment : she now felt the absolute necessity of subduing them entirely—of learning to meet

and to think of Lord Litchfield only as the husband of Matilda ; and she determined that no effort should be wanting on her part towards doing so : all weakness should be subdued, and Lord Litchfield should no more be to her what he had been : she had recommended resolution and firmness to another, and she would now prove that she could regulate her own actions by them. Thus resolving, Lady Selina continued her walk, and endeavoured to turn her thoughts to other subjects than the one which had so much engrossed them. Her endeavours however proved to be for the present fruitless : half measures would not do ; and, angry with herself, Lady Selina magnanimously resolved to remain no longer alone in uninterrupted thought : she therefore quitted the shrubberies, determined on doing what was at the moment particularly disagreeable to her, nay, an absolute punishment, she went in search of Mrs. Todd, to ask her to accompany her to Thornley, to pay one or two visits. She was to leave the

country in a few days, and had already bidden farewell to almost all her neighbours, excepting those in the town of Thornley : these visits she therefore now determined to pay. Mrs. Todd was accordingly found in her usual chair by the fireside, and the pony phaeton ordered to be at the door as soon as possible, and Lady Selina was shortly on her road to Thornley, talking and listening to Mrs. Todd's uninteresting conversation, with the most praiseworthy patience and perseverance.

Lady Selina's first visit was to Mrs. Dartford, the wife of the lawyer at Thornley, and a lady who wished to pass as a person of taste and refinement, and who endeavoured to prove, on all occasions, that she had been exceedingly condescending when she accepted the hand of Mr. Dartford. Her father had made a large fortune in business, and lived at Putney, in an overgrown, red brick house : his daughters had received an elegant education, at "Elysium House Establishment," and were consequently

extremely accomplished young ladies. Lady Selina had ample leisure to take a survey of the drawing-room before her hostess had completed her toilet sufficiently to make her *entrée* into it, and could not avoid admiring the ingenuity of the arrangements, nor smiling at the air of pretension which marked them. The room had originally been a respectable, large, dark, comfortable-looking, oak-wainscoted one, but had now come out an exceedingly *débonnaire* concern, under the auspices of its fair owner. The walls were painted a cold blue, and the hand of taste had pasted thereon arches of paper trellis work, with flowers and butterflies twining among them, very much in the style of a confectioner's shop. The curtains were bright green, lined with pink calico, and were twisted into all sorts of dust-catching plaits and loops ; on the chimney-piece were a set of Derbyshire-spar vases, a bright blue basket made out of alum, white pasteboard screens with flowers upon them, and a variety

of gold paper ornaments, and lumettes of coloured paper, and chimney-sweeps and cats in black velvet. The room was covered with a showy vulgar carpet, and the windows were filled with flower-pots, hiding their naturally rustic appearance behind painted pasteboard, which had very much the effect of “roses o’er a sepulchre.”

A French novel lay open upon the sofa, with a worked pocket handkerchief, and a bottle of salts, as its antidotes. In one corner of the room was a little cabinet pianoforte, with a fluted pale blue silk front, and a very black and difficult looking page of music open on its desk. In another part of the room were some wretched artificial flowers, in a china vase, under a glass shade, and dogs and geese of spun glass, screens and foot-stools of that most unbearable of all materials, painted velvet ; a clock of gorgeous crystalised tin ; an open Tunbridge-ware work-box, with a view of the Pavilion at Brighton on the lid ; a large scent-bag, of dyed pink silk ;

and various new publications were scattered carelessly upon the table; there was also a basket, lined with fluted calico, which contained a quantity of visiting-cards, among which Lady Selina observed those of the "Earl of Litchfield" and of "Lady Selina Clifford," very conspicuously placed.

At length the fair hostess descended into her "Temple of Fancy," in an "elegant undress," which consisted of a cap of pink and white gauze, evidently from the bazaar in Soho Square; a thin lilac silk dress to match; a rose-colour girdle; cream coloured shoes; yellow gloves tied with green; and another worked pocket handkerchief in her hand, besides the one filled with tears on the sofa; very likely there were one or two more in the bead-bag which she carried on her arm, for it was evidently filled up to the clasp with goods and samples.

Fortunately for Lady Selina, Mrs. Dartford was a very talkative lady, and as she sailed

into the room, she immediately opened a volley of small shot.

“Oh! Lady Selina! my dear Mrs. Todd! this is really so very kind of you to honour my poor little abode. I am so shocked at keeping you waiting, but the dressmaker was with me, and is such a tiresome creature, as they all are. And so we are going to lose your ladyship! and you are actually going to that dear, delightful metropolis? It is really selfish in me to regret your departure, for I know London, as the emporium of fashion, must be the natural element of your ladyship. I often say to Dartford, Lady Selina must be quite lost here, in this dull stupid neighbourhood; really, after being used to the Continent, it must appear to her nothing of a place. I am sure I frequently think it is very condescending of your ladyship to put up at all with this wretched English climate so good humouredly as you do.”

“It is no condescension, indeed, Mrs. Dartford, for I assure you the climate pleases me very well, and I am quite delighted with this neighbourhood, which I have not found in the least dull.”

“Now, it is so very kind in your ladyship to say so!—but, I am afraid you flatter us. I wish I could learn to think as you do; but I candidly tell you, that after Putney, I find Thornley uncommon flat. Putney, you know, is such an easy distance! and my sister and I constantly took the carriage to drive to the metropolis, and as my father is rather particular about his horses, we made the coachman put them up at some livery, and then we used to walk and get all our shopping done in the Western Exchange and Burlington Arcade, and sometimes we went to get our hair cut at the ‘Temple of Fancy for Ornamental Hair,’ in Oxford-street, you know—then took a few turns up and down Bond-street, and whisked down St. James’s-street,

and along Pall-mall, to take a hot oyster pattie or two, and a glass of capillaire at Farrance's, at the corner of Spring-gardens, which is one of the most fashionable shops in the metropolis, as I dare say your ladyship knows—and fashion is certainly everything.”

“ You have described a very amusing morning,—I cannot be surprised that you find Thornley rather dull.”

“ Why, certainly, after Putney and London, you know but your ladyship appears partial to the country — yet, certainly you *must* prefer the metropolis or the Continent? Now tell me, candidly.”

Her ladyship was not candid enough to answer this folly as it merited, therefore she preferred making no answer at all, especially as Mrs. Todd, with unruffled gravity and incontrovertible truth observed, that “ comparisons were odious, and that she dared to say Lady Selina liked the country best, when she wanted a country life — London, when

she wished to be gay—and the Continent when inclined to travel—and that a person could not be always in one mind, so that variety was well in its way.”

This was unanswerable. Mrs. Dartford had no more to say on the subject, but she quickly found another, and taking up the novel which was lying open upon the sofa, she asked Lady Selina, whether she had read Madame Genlis’s work, “*Les vœux téméraires*,” and if she were not “entirely enchanted with it?”

“Not *entirely*, certainly. I was exceedingly pleased with some parts, and there were others which I thought very ridiculous.”

“Oh! but Lady Selina, the language is so beautiful! and then, what a sweet piece of gallantry that is in the Marquis, when he takes the heroine to visit that uncultivated part of his estate, over which, three weeks before, she had mourned as an unpopulated desert without a shrub; and now, on this

second visit, and in the short space of three weeks, it had become a scene of sweet rural felicity—a village all complete—a *large tree*, with a cow tied to it, before each cottage door, and every house inhabited by a youthful bride and bridegroom, who came forth habited in white, with garlands of flowers in their hands; and it so chanced that they were all remarkably handsome—so very fortunate, you know, and quite like a ballet at the Opera-house, or a scene in ‘Clari.’ Pray, which of the novels of Madame de Genlis is your ladyship most partial to?”

Lady Selina said she thought she liked “Alphonsine” the best of those she had read.

“Ah! yes, I remember; the unfortunate mother, who was shut up in a cavern for so many years. There are some beautiful ideas in that novel. I recollect the heroine used to go into a little grotto every day, ‘*pour prier Dieu et jouer de la guitare*,’—such a very sweet and innocent idea! And then her smelling her

lover always before she saw him, because he wore pink scented powder in his hair!—so very natural! And if he was a fair man, how well pink powder must have become his complexion!”

Lady Selina could not help being amused, that Mrs. Dartford had selected for admiration the very parts which had always struck her as so exceedingly ludicrous, when there is so much really worthy to be admired in that affecting and deeply interesting story. The crystalized tin clock now gave warning that the visit might lawfully be put an end to, therefore Lady Selina only waited to allow Mrs. Dartford time to finish an eulogium she was giving to Mrs. Todd, on the classical education of “Elysium House Establishment,” which she assured her was a vastly genteel and fashionable seminary, and where Poonah-work, and Oriental-tinting, and painting on velvet, and making trimmings out of magnesia, and drawings out of pomatum, and all other elegant and ingenious arts, were

taught in the utmost perfection. This eulogium finished, Lady Selina and Mrs. Todd departed, both instructed and entertained, and Mrs. Dartford retired, to take off her lilac silk dress and cream-coloured shoes, and to put on more ordinary apparel, since the afternoon was rainy, and no more visitors were likely to visit her "little abode."

Lady Selina was always proof against rain, therefore she continued her drive as far as the Rectory. Miss Hensley was sitting by a blazing fire, cutting out flannel petticoats, with the infant Samuel, horn-book in hand, at her knee, having his young idea taught how to shoot. Samuel would rather that it had been with his pop-gun, for he was no admirer of literature, the classical works of Dame Wiggins, of Lee, excepted. He now took the opportunity of Lady Selina's entrance to throw his "Reading made Easy" under the sofa, in hopes he might forget he had put it there next time it was wanted, and, cramming his hands into

his pockets, he luckily found half an apple there, and retired to munch it in peace at the window, and to look at the ponies and the postilions, and count the spokes in the wheels of the phaeton. Miss Hensley was overjoyed to see Lady Selina—heaped pile upon pile on the already blazing furnace—sent cloaks and bonnets to be dried, and begged hard that her visitors would take a glass of “a very particular kind of cordial,” to prevent their catching cold.

Lady Selina was afraid of “virgin’s milk,” or “tincture of Benjamin,” and declined the cordial, but gratified Miss Hensley exceedingly by accepting her repeated and earnestly-pressed offer of “something hot.” Two large cups of chocolate and a mountain of seed-cake and gingerbread speedily made their appearance ; all which viands Samuel, like a gastronome, eyed askance from his window, casting most insinuating looks upon Lady Selina, till she had filled his hand with cake, when his affec-

tions forthwith reverted from herself to her ponies. Miss Hensley overwhelmed Lady Selina with thanks for coming to bid her good-bye before she left the country.

“ So very kind of you—and I’m sure I hope you ’ll have a pleasant time of it up in London, and plenty of dancing, and nice young men for partners : only don’t lose your heart to one of them, my dear, for we can’t spare you just yet ; —to be sure, if you marry a poor man, without a house to his head, as I hope you will, you ’ll live at Lumley Court all the same, which will be very pleasant to us all ; and, with your great fortune, you don’t need to look to house and land, or anything of that sort, but only to love and affection, my dear ; and no doubt you’ll have plenty of both, such a nice, pretty, good-humoured, clever little girl, as you are, and with no more pride than an old shoe, as my father sometimes says, in his homely way, poor soul. And so people really do say that poor little Matilda Leslie is to become Lady

Countess of Litchfield! Well, to be sure, some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, and others with a wooden ladle! And there's Mary Harvey going to London, with your ladyship, and no doubt she'll make a fine match too up there, for it is the only place for husbands after all; because you know there's plenty of choice of them there, to what there is in a place like this; and I'm sure I hope she'll get a good one, for she's a nice good-natured girl; and I hope Frederic Harvey will think about taking Catherine or Charlotte Leslie one of these days, if it's not very disagreeable to him. I dare say they'd be glad enough, poor things, for he's a fine handsome young man, and keeps a French *valet-de-chambre*, that looks like a gentleman, with a turquoise ring upon his finger."

Here Samuel called out, "Aunt, that sounds like the paper about the horse that was lost, that ended 'God save the king, and a pack-saddle upon his back.'"

“And so it does, Sammy, my dear; but there—I can’t be always talking out of a dictionary, you know.”

“No more can’t I, aunt: so where’s the good of making me learn such a lot of hard words as you set me to this morning?”

“Hush, hush, Sammy, my dear: little boys are seen, and not heard, you know.”

Samuel had discretion at times as well as wit, and he muttered, in a low voice, not meant to reach his aunt’s ear, “That’s more than can be said for little girls or big ones either; for any one may hear *your* tongue, whether they see you or no—clap, clap, all over the house.”

Lady Selina fortunately had a quick ear, therefore Samuel’s wit was preserved for posterity, and was not all “lost in air,” as he intended it should be.

The rain now abating, Miss Hensley at length, although unwillingly, allowed her guests to depart, with many injunctions to Lady Selina

not to forget her country friends, and not to lose her heart in town, and to be sure to amuse herself as much as lay in her power ; or, as she elegantly expressed it, “to take all the pleasure she could,” and to go to see Miss Linwood’s Exhibitions and the Panoramas, but above all, to come back again as soon as possible. To all these injunctions, Lady Selina promised a ready compliance, and, shaking hands with Miss Hensley, she bade her farewell, and departed, with the solemn and sagacious Mrs. Todd.

CHAPTER XI.

It is needless to attempt to depict the delight of Catherine and Charlotte Leslie, when a few days after the departure of Lady Selina Clifford, for town, they found themselves fairly arrived in Audley-square. The feelings of the family were rather different upon this occasion. Miss Leslie who was always exceedingly phlegmatic, cared little whether Elmwood or Audley-square contained her; she could scold the servants and net her purses, and write her bills of fare equally well in either place. Matilda deeply lamented the quiet shades of Elmwood, and was only reconciled to London, by the vicinity of Stan-

hope-street to Audley-square, which allowed her to pass the greater part of every morning with her friend, Lady Selina. Hildebrand wished himself back in the country most devoutly at the end of the first week ; he had been twice to the play ; seen the panoramas, cosmoramas, dioramas and pœciloramas, with divers other exhibitions and museums, and he now began to sigh for his pony, his dogs and John Hobbs, the head game-keeper. Sir Robert was completely out of his element in London. When he had read every letter in the "Morning Herald," after breakfast he had nothing to do but walk backwards and forwards in two very dull drawing-rooms ; he even found very little resource in gazing out of the windows, as the prospect from Audley-square is never very inviting ; therefore, he usually yawned away his time till Hildebrand's studies were over, and he could take him out to walk with him. To Catherine and Charlotte all was unalloyed

delight ; they had their heads and their hands full of business. The very first evening of their arrival they had to dispatch twopenny post-notes to Mrs. James and Vandavelde and Isidore. This business settled, and the drawing-rooms put into as much elegant confusion as Miss Leslie's sense of propriety would allow them to exercise, and Sally Gubbins's arrangements in their dressing-rooms having received their superintending examination, they stationed themselves at a window in the drawing-room to watch the wicker baskets lined with oil-skin which were flitting about the street, in the anxious hope that Mrs. James would let them have their bonnets in time to go out after luncheon, as, till they arrived, the Miss Leslies were absolute prisoners to the house, and they had so much shopping to do, so many things to choose and to order, that all their hopes were centred in the anxiously expected bonnets, as the only engines by which their over-

whelming business might hope to be accomplished.

Lady Selina was also exceedingly full of business ; she had a vast variety of directions to give and notes to write ; and long tiresome interviews with her steward and with her solicitor to get through ; and to arrange about an Opera-box ; and to wait till Mr. André had sent her servants' hats home, before she could use the carriage ; and to assist with her directions in the arrangements of the drawing-rooms ; altogether, she did not eat the bread of idleness, and fortunately, if Mrs. Todd was very apathetic, Mary Harvey was both able and delighted to assist her, and everything appeared speedily in train for a full enjoyment of a London season ; cards were sent and returned, visits paid and received, and a subscription for Almack's obtained in a very short space of time, and Lady Selina made entirely *au fait* in all the usages of fashionable life by the

Duchess of L——, who was a relation of her mother, and under whose auspices Lady Selina was to be introduced to the gay circle, where reports of her beauty and fortune had already excited a great sensation. Lady Selina possessed a very valuable friend in the Bishop of ——, who had been one of her guardians during her minority. In consequence of her residence in Italy, she had not seen him until her return to England, but he had visited her more than once at Lumley Court, during the winter, and was now one of the first to greet her arrival in London. In him, Lady Selina found an able adviser and an affectionate friend; a long friendship with her father had interested him greatly for his young ward, and, now that her amiable character was well known to him, the bishop felt for her the affection of a parent. Lady Selina, in return, loved him as if she had, indeed, been his child; implicitly followed his advice in every respect, and delighted to

consider herself as still under his guardianship.

The bishop had regularly corresponded with her during the time of her absence from England, and his exemplary character, and high talents, were held in the greatest veneration by her. To this friend Lady Selina applied in all the little difficulties which her large fortune and establishment necessarily entailed upon her, and by his advice all were speedily subdued, and a bright and smooth path appeared to all who knew her, as the only one the rich and admired heiress had to tread. She was, indeed, of so happy a temper, that petty evils never appeared to vex her; her natural disposition was to look on the bright side of everything, and her perception of enjoyment was so acute that she could discern pleasure, even happiness, in things, in scenes, and in sensations which many others would entirely overlook. It almost appeared as if she possessed an additional faculty for enjoy-

ment from many people of a colder disposition. Those who knew her then, judged Lady Selina to be the happiest of the happy. She by no means despised the pomps and vanities of the world, and they were all within her reach ; she had ample means of indulging her benevolent disposition ; and her refined taste for all the enjoyments of a cultivated mind, and perception of the beauties of nature and art—all that is thought to give a zest to life appeared to be hers, rank, beauty, admiration, popularity, a happy temper, uninterrupted health, a taste for literature, and an approving conscience, without which all the rest would have been rendered vain.

Lady Selina always,—almost always,—acted strictly up to her sense of right. The pleasures of the world had never yet led her to forget her duties—she seldom missed an opportunity of benefiting others, and never had voluntarily wounded the feelings of a single person ; she therefore ought to have been, and deserved to

be happy—and yet, that “all is vanity,” was strongly exemplified in her case, for happy she was not.

Mary Harvey was one evening enumerating to her the endless sources of happiness she appeared to possess, and laughingly added,—“If you are not the happiest of mortals, Selina, I shall think you like the princess in the fairy tale, who sighed for the roc’s egg.”

Lady Selina smiled, but she sighed at the same time — although certainly not for a roc’s egg. She was quitting the room when Mary spoke to her, and, as she closed the door, her eyes filled with tears. She brushed them away, and endeavoured to banish the feeling of bitterness that arose to tell her she could never possess the love of Lord Litchfield—and too sadly she felt that, without it, *all* was indeed *vanity*. She gazed on the splendour around her—the gilded walls—the magnificent ornaments—the priceless gems and splendid attire, which her attendant had arranged pre-

paratory to her evening toilet, and she felt, with irresistible truth, that in that very moment she would have resigned them all to be assured of the love of Lord Litchfield. She would even, had it been possible, have resigned his rank and fortune, as well as her own. She felt that she could conform to a retired life and a limited fortune, and have found her whole happiness in making his — but it was not to be.

Her reverie was momentary—for Lady Selina was not one voluntarily to cherish unavailing regrets ; she, therefore, roused herself, and, ringing for her maid, prepared to make her first appearance at Almacks. The Duchess of L——’s carriage was to call for her, and was at the same time, to set Mary Harvey down in Audley-square to pass the evening with the Leslies.

No *début* was ever accomplished with more success than that of Lady Selina Clifford. She was the great attraction of the evening,

and received unqualified approbation from all. She could not have appeared under better auspices than those of the Duchess of L——, who was the present leading star in the fashionable world. The introduction, then, of Lady Selina was undeniable, and her sweet and polished manner, brilliant beauty, and correctness of style, placed her at once in one of the most conspicuous niches in the temple of fashion. Her first partners were Lord Bruce, Mr. Aston, and Lord William Rawdon.

Many of the most distinguished young men of fashion were presented to her, and Lady Selina felt almost inclined to wish for a quiet corner and an interval of rest. No such quiet corner was, however, to be found. The circle around her increased, and she began rather to feel as a task the being obliged to reply to the elaborate and highly-ornamented nothings with which Lord Bruce was incessantly assailing her. He expatiated upon waltzing, as if the whole happiness of life depended upon it,

—talked long and learnedly upon the different modes of practising it, and was indignant beyond measure at those who were so unhappy as not to assimilate with his ideas of doing so in the proper manner ;—while upon all who were *au fait* at this scientific dance, he lavished as much praise, or more than he would had they possessed all the cardinal virtues and every other virtue under the sun.

The seat of the soul of Mr. —— has been said to be in his neckcloth ; that of Lord Bruce was still more lofty in its place of rest—it was decidedly in the *valse*. In this selection his lordship certainly knew his element—he was fit for little or nothing else. A long list of balls and different parties was then enumerated by him, and as he found Lady Selina was to be at most of them, and had no objection to *valse* with him, a gleam of satisfaction passed slowly over his vacant countenance,—

“ Like moonlight on a marble statue.”

He repeatedly assured her, she was “the first *valseuse* of the age,” and seemed surprised at the indifference with which his praise was received. Still he thought it worth his while to endeavour to excite the approbation of Lady Selina. She was an heiress, — the Bruces were all poor, — and he was already meditating a decided attack upon her heart, as the shortest road to her coffers ; otherwise he would not have deemed it worth a siege. But there was something about Lady Selina which told him it must be won ere her fortune would follow it.

Lord Bruce had the very highest opinion of himself, and hoped, in the course of a few evenings, to carry off this heart triumphantly. He was a well-looking man, and, with the assistance of Stultz and a competent valet, passed for a handsome one. His taste, too, was undoubted. He claimed the merit of being the first to introduce cut velvet waist-coats and platina guard-chains. Therefore,

all the world must allow him some merit, although it might not be exactly of the sort most calculated to win the heart of Lady Selina, who was certainly already wearying of his conversation, and felt relieved when Lord William Rawdon, approaching her, said to Lord Bruce,—

“Bruce, my dear fellow, you owe me a good turn ever since the day I caught your horse for you. So now do go and talk to Mrs. M—— for me. She has been talking politics to me till I had a great mind to tell her to put her hat on. She got at last to the National Debt, which I began to think too personal, so I told her I did not at all understand those kind of things, but I would call Lord Bruce, who was the only man I knew who talked politics well, out of the house. Pray go to her, my dear fellow, or she will seize on me again.”

Lord Bruce was delighted. He knew that Lord William was clever, and he had no idea

but that he was now entirely in earnest. Therefore he arose, and hastily recalling to his memory the leading article in the "Morning Post," said,—

"Well, Rawdon, I'll do my best for you. You certainly lost a good run by catching that horse."

As Lord Bruce sauntered away, Lord William said,—

"You see, Lady Selina, that I always make my friends pay me in kind ; you are now in my debt for a very good-natured turn ; I saw how much Lord Bruce annoyed you, and like a gallant knight I came to your rescue."

"You think, then, I gain by the exchange?" said Lady Selina, laughing.

"That is a very unkind cut ; but as I brought it on myself, it is allowable. Yes, I think you gain a great deal : you were growing very weary, Lord Bruce was not aware of it, and continued to 'vex with mirth' your 'drowsy ear.' Besides that, he was doing his

little possible to make you in love with him, which is always a dull up-hill kind of work. Now, I come determined to fall in with your humour, whatever it may be : if you are pen- sive, I can recite several sonnets to the moon ; if you are gay, I know no less than two ma- drigals ; and, as I am an engaged man, I shall not attempt the hopeless task of endeavouring to make you fall in love with me.”

“ You really act very humanely by me, and have already nearly expelled my drowsy fit.”

“ Yes, I am very humane, and the moment I think my seat can be better filled, I will accept the Chiltern Hundreds. I have a vast deal of tact, and shall discover in a moment when you would have it resigned. Let me see—here is Aston coming ; he is a very enter- taining person ; but no, you saw enough of him in the country—you would prefer me, I think. Birmingham Aston is not far off, but I think you would wish him still further ; yes, he shall be returned for Coventry. I suspect

too, that Colonel S—— is meditating a sortie this way, but it will be a forlorn hope ; he has no poetry about him—he is too rough—his manner wants rasping ; I am infinitely preferable to *him*. I am rather ugly, and very short, but still I am very entertaining at times, and have published three books, and speak very well in the House ; therefore I am an acquisition to you, and rather creditable for a *tête-à-tête*. Besides which, you must own my qualifications as a Cerberus are excellent ; I have scared away all I have looked at ; and you have not much trouble in talking to me ; I take the whole conversation into my own hands.”

“ Now, I am afraid I must repeat you, though, I dare say, you will think I cannot do better. In your own words, I must say ‘ that is an unkind cut, but I brought it on myself, therefore it is allowable.’ ”

“ No ; I do not think you brought it on yourself ; I will do you justice. I saw you

several times trying to edge in a sentence, but I never allowed you time. Oh! I see Lord Litchfield is looking this way; I think I must divide the see; it shall not be Litchfield and Coventry any longer. Yet, I do not know; on reflection, I think you would prefer me too: he is vastly grave and solemn; he draws near forty years of age; he never dances, and he has no soul for music. Stay—I am too hasty; my tact was nearly escaping me; I see now that you infinitely prefer him to me; he shall be called to the chair. After all I do not think he is so very grave, when once he is animated; and he is by no means near forty—Debrett assures me he is only thirty-five. I do not know but that he may dance in private, and I heard that he once stopped some Savoyard minstrels in the street, and listened to them with a good deal of attention.”

Lady Selina was compelled to laugh, and replied,—

“ You have got out of a scrape so very cle-

verly, that I will own, I think you amuse me more than Lord Litchfield would ; therefore you may keep the chair.”

“ Thank you. I will call and tell him so. Litchfield !”

“ Oh ! no : that will be too candid.”

“ Well, as you take it so quietly, I will not. If I had seen the least symptom of alarm about you, I would have told him directly. But, behold ! he approaches. Question ! question !—quick, quick—cannot you help me ? He is not a man to be called without a reason, with impunity : I am at my wit’s end. Oh ! Litchfield—Lady Selina bade me call you, to ask your advice relative to what dress she should wear at the Caledonian Ball. She thinks you are a man of taste.”

“ Rawdon, you must not expect me to believe that Lady Selina desired you to ask my advice, where it would be so very incompetent : the question bears too strongly your own impress for me to doubt where it originated.”

“ My dear lord, you do not do yourself justice : taste you have, although it may lie dormant. Now pray call it forth to the aid of Lady Selina on this knotty point. I have been recommending her to go as the *chapeau de paille*, to show how well she can look in an ugly dress.”

“ I am sorry that I cannot co-operate with you now, Lord William. I do not recollect your having advised me to do anything so very conceited ; or even to have heard you mention the Caledonian Ball to me. If you had, I would have told you that I have arranged with your sisters and the Lady Bouveries to make a quadrille, and to wear dresses alike, and that Lady Mary Rawdon and I called at our dress-maker’s, to order them, this very morning.”

“ Now, Lady Selina, I call this remarkably spiteful, and exposing me to Lord Litchfield in a very unhandsome manner. There is a conspiracy against me, I see, and I shall call my sisters to account, for not having asked my

advice about their dresses. *You* must have led them into this act of rebellion, for they never in their lives before bought so much as a piece of gauze or a yard of tape without asking my opinion first. But pray satisfy my curiosity on the spot. What are the dresses to be? Nothing common-place, I trust, if they are to be fancy ones. No *paysannes* or flower-girls, if you have any friendship for me. We shall have plenty of them, but they are not admissible in *our* set : we must leave them to the *haut-ton bas*."

" Oh ! Lord William, I must warn you I am not an exclusive, therefore your play upon words is, in this instance, wasted on me. However, I hope you will think I have decided well in regard to the fancy dresses, and that you will give your consent to your sisters appearing in them : they certainly are not common-place ones ; we are to be priestesses of the moon, as described in 'The Epicurean.' "

This choice of Lady Selina received the

unqualified approbation of Lord William and Lord Litchfield. The dress was pronounced to be beautiful, elegant, uncommon, classical, and lady-like, at the same time : nothing could be better.

Lord William Rawdon was now called away, and Lady Selina had a long conversation with Lord Litchfield. She was more than ever pleased with him : his conversation delighted her : he never himself descended to trifles, but he bore with those who did ; and when his reserve was thrown off, as it frequently was to Lady Selina, there was an interest and a superiority about him which could not fail to make an impression upon her. Lady Selina's admiration of him was indeed rapidly increasing, and she was mentally giving him the palm of superiority over all in the room, when he reminded her it was prudent to think as little about him as possible, by saying he had been to Audley-square, and had drunk coffee there before he came to Almack's. Mary Harvey and

Matilda had been singing to him, and he had half determined to give up Almack's entirely, and to pass the whole evening with the Leslies.

These words awakened Lady Selina to the "cold reality" of the case, and yet she joined sincerely in the praise and admiration he was bestowing on Matilda. She would even willingly have thought no more of Lord Litchfield, had that been possible; for her love was not of the kind which could say, "I would rather die for thee than live without thee;" it had not *yet* gone so far; for Lady Selina would certainly have banished all thoughts of Lord Litchfield, had it been in her power. She even longed, or fancied she longed, to hear that his marriage with Matilda was certainly to take place: this event she felt sure would at once teach her to forget him: when he was irrevocably another's, a mind so pure as hers looked upon love for him as beyond the bounds of possibility.

Lady Selina began to wish the conversation

changed, from Matilda Leslie to more indifferent subjects, and tried to divert her own mind from dwelling on that which she knew she had better banish, by taking interest in the scene around her ; she therefore was not sorry that Mr. Aston took a seat beside her, saying,—

“I think that the last ball I met you at, Lady Selina, was at Thornley. This is well enough in its way ; but we want Miss Hensley, the Miss Wilsons and Mrs. Dartford to give it a zest—do not you think so ?”

“Why, I am not sure that I do ; perhaps they would not shine so brightly if removed from their own proper sphere.”

“You think they are buds of the wilderness, mountain blossoms which would droop or fade if removed to this hot-house of sophistication ?”

“You are very poetical to-night, Mr. Aston.”

“More *horticultural* I should say, but you

began by being astronomical yourself. I think you compared them to stars in the first instance ; but I hope you agree with me, Lady Selina, in thinking we lack the sources of amusement which we found so prolific at Thornley. A keen observer *may* discover some even here, but it requires more attention."

"Aston, you reverse," said Lord Litchfield, "the lines of that poet who said—

" ' Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow ;
Those who would search for pearls must dive below.' "

"Pearls are here floating upon the top, and you are wishing to dive for straws."

"That is very well said, my lord, but Mrs. Dartford and Miss Hensley are not straws to me ; they are pearls of purest hue. All those lovely, elegant-looking girls, who at this moment happen to be dancing in the same quadrille, are straws to me in my present humour—I want to find a fault in them and I cannot."

“They would forgive you for your simile, if they were to hear your reason for it,” said Lord Litchfield.

“I do not know it was very like one that would be found at the bottom of a hackney-coach. You cannot feel for me, Litchfield ; you seem perfectly contented with Almack’s. I do not think you are casting one longing, lingering recollection towards Thornley.”

“I confess I am not ; the scene here is widely different, but it contents me.”

“And yet at Thornley,” said Mr. Aston, “we had a few fallen angels, I recollect ; here, they are all in their own sphere, and therefore, to me, less valuable. I never was an exclusive, as Rawdon is, and yet I have been meditating on what he was this moment pointing out to me—the vast superiority of style that is unaccompanied by pretensions. Look at that group before us, the lovely daughters of Lord ——, for instance ; how

truly patrician they look, and what correctness and simplicity in their dress!—their soft light hair has not a single ornament in it; they are gentle and unassuming, unspoiled by adulation. One like a tall and graceful lily, and the others, a white and a red rose growing side by side, as fresh, as lovely, and as pure. Can a more lovely group be imagined? But Lady Selina will say I am still too horticultural. You see I cannot escape from the garden, to-night.”

The Duchess of L——, now asked Lady Selina if she were ready to depart, as her carriage had been called.

As she arose to follow the duchess, Mr. Aston whispered—

“Oh! for a Mrs. Todd! who would have awaited your pleasure until Doomsday.”

CHAPTER XII.

ON the following morning, as Lady Selina was breakfasting with Mary Harvey and Mrs. Todd, at a very reasonable hour, the Miss Leslies were announced, and Catherine and Charlotte made their appearance. They came to beg Lady Selina's opinion and advice concerning their dresses for the Caledonian ball, and, after a long disquisition, finding it did not agree with their taste, they ended by following their own, and determined to go as "peasants of some nation," they were not quite sure which, but they would wear large chip hats and flowers, and aprons, and jackets or bodices of some kind. Lady Selina's taste

was decidedly against this plan, therefore, she held her peace, and they ran on.

“Well! now all this is settled, Lady Selina, do pray tell us a little about Almack’s. How delightful it must have been for you to see Colonel A——, and Colonel R——, and Mr. L——, and Lord M. C——, and Lord F. G——, without their hats on! We have never seen them, excepting in the park, so you know we have not an idea what their hair is like. Oh! do you think they will be at the Caledonian? Only think how divine it would be if they would all dance in a quadrille together!—a beauty quadrille, you know; I don’t see any reason why they should not.—And so you are going to be a priestess of the moon? Not Diana, is it?—and Mary Harvey too! How funny the little looking-glasses will look hanging to your sides! If your hair gets wrong they will be quite handy. I wonder what the priestesses had them for; I thought nuns and priestesses, and those kind of people,

never had any hair at all. I suppose the Duchess of L——, takes you. Oh! of course we shall see Lord Bruce and Lord William Rawdon, and all those that Mr. Aston introduced to us at the Thornley ball, only, very likely they will play fine and forget one up in London. I hope they wont though ; it would be such a bore not to know any one to dance with. Oh! do you know we had such work to get here, because Sarah wanted the footman to go to Clarke and Debenham's with her, and papa couldn't come with us, because he has got a cold, and was sitting over the fire, reading Don Harold, or one of Lord Byron's poems ; however, at last, Sarah let us have the footman, so now we must go to Wigmore-street, and get her commissions done."

And away they went, their hearts as light as their heads, which is saying a good deal for them. Soon after the removal of the breakfast equipage, Lady Selina received an early

visit from Lady Mary Rawdon, a volatile, good-humoured girl, who, from having been over-indulged at home, had acquired the dangerous habit of speaking and doing every ridiculous fancy that came into her head. Fortunately, she was very well-disposed and very good-tempered, which, added to her high rank, made people readily excuse her faults, and she was popular with many of her acquaintances, although she frequently gave offence to others. She had called thus early on Lady Selina, in order to settle the last important arrangements about their dresses for the Caledonian ball, and when that was happily over, she suddenly exclaimed—

“ Oh ! my dear Lady Selina, do you happen to like parodies ?”

Lady Selina happened not to like them at all, and candidly told her so, but Lady Mary continued—

“ Ah ! well, never mind ; I must have you

like one now, then, for the first time," and taking some papers from her sac, she went on : "You know Lady L——, has almost broken her heart, because she cannot get her two ugly daughters to Almack's. I thought she would have expired, when mamma refused her vouchers. I was excessively amused about it, and was describing her agonies to my brother William. I should tell you, first, that the youngest Miss L—— is always singing 'Charles Edward's Lament,'—you know the L's are all Scotch and Jacobites. Well, William wrote this parody upon it, and here they both are—

CHARLES EDWARD'S LAMENT.

The small birds rejoice in the green leaves returning,
The murmuring streamlet winds clear through the vale,
The hawthorn trees blow in the dews of the morning,
And wild-scattered cowslips bedeck the sweet dale.

But what can give pleasure, or what can seem fair,
While the lingering moments are numbered by care ?
No flowers gaily springing, or birds sweetly singing,
Can soothe the sad bosom of joyless despair.

The deed that I dared—could it merit their malice,
 A king and a father to place on his throne ?
His rights are these hills, and *his* rights are these valleys
 Where the wild beasts find shelter but *I* can find none !

But 'tis not *my* sufferings, thus wretched, forlorn,—
 My brave gallant friends 'tis *your* ruin I mourn ;
 Your deeds proved so loyal in hot bloody trial—
 Alas ! can I make you no sweeter return !

PARODY.

THE REJECTED COUNTRY LADY'S LAMENT.

The small birds rejoice in the season's returning,
 The Stultified dandies once more grace the ride ;
 The young ladies lounge thro' their afternoon-morning,
 And smile on the dandies who chirp by their side.

But what can give pleasure, or what can seem fair,
 While the unobtained vouchers still load me with care ?
 Not Albert's high springing, nor Pasta's fine singing,
 Can compensate for Almack's or relieve my despair !

The deed that I dared—could it merit rejection ?
 I was rich,—I was fair,—and attired by Duchon.
 Nardin dress'd my hair,—then say what objection ?
 The *élite* can find shelter, but *I* can find none.

But 'tis not *my* sufferings, thus wretched, forlorn,—
 My poor despised girls ! 'tis *your* ruin I mourn.
 The pains that you took these vouchers to book !
 To the country, alas ! we had better return.

Lady Selina bestowed as much praise on the parody as she could conveniently spare, and more than it deserved. Lady Mary was delighted, and exclaimed,—

“Oh! then, if you really think it is good, I have a great mind to send it to her; she would be in such a rage, it would be quite diverting.”

“Oh! no, Lady Mary; that would break her heart at once.”

“Oh! never mind her heart, my dear; besides, William says she is a granivorous animal; she has a large gizzard, and so can digest every thing; and that reminds me I ought to have told you William always calls regular ball-men, and those kind of things, *spring-gentry* and *small-birds*, so he let that stand at the beginning of the poem without parodying it. Well! now we have settled about the dresses and the songs, I want to ask you if you will let me spend the whole morning with you, and drive with you if you are going out. Mamma and my sisters are gone to Richmond, to pay a visit to

a cross old aunt who is my particular abomination, so I thought you would let me go out with you, if I asked you ; and, if you are going to pay any visits, I can sit in the carriage, like Patience on a monument, provided they are not in Portland-place, or any very dull streets : and if you are going to any shops or exhibitions, I should like it of all things.”

Lady Selina was delighted to have her, and promised not to go near Portland-place, or any dull streets. Lady Mary then begged for some employment that would not prevent conversation, and Lady Selina gave her a set of vases to copy, while she and Mary Harvey seated themselves at their drawing, and Mrs. Todd made worsted china-asters for rugs, which usually ended in the butler's pantry.

Lady Selina was not in a very talkative humour, therefore Lady Mary carried on the principal part of the conversation herself. She complimented Lady Selina upon the admiration she had excited at Almack's, and continued :—

“ Oh ! my dear Lady Selina, I had almost forgotten to tell you that if I had not been the most good-natured person in the world, I should never have been able to bear the sight of you any more. Lord Bruce fell quite desperately in love with you—at least as desperately as he can, poor man ; and you know he used to be in love with me once, so that I considered him quite personal property, and began to think he might do very well for me, as I do not at all mind a man’s being a fool—for one’s husband, I mean ; and, though he is not rich, yet I have thirty thousand pounds, and he has an old governor of an uncle in Currie, somewhere in India, who may leave him a fortune one of these days : so mamma thought it might do for me ; however, he has quite gone over to you now, which is all the more pity, as I see you cannot bear him : still he might do pretty well for you to marry notwithstanding, for he has birth and rank, and is tolerably good-looking, and you have a very large fortune ; therefore, if you

really have a mind to marry him, do not stand upon ceremony with me about it, because I do not care a rush for him—in point of being in love with him, I mean ; and I have for some time been thinking of trying for Colonel A—— ; he is so excessively handsome—only I am afraid he is not a marrying kind of man ; but then, besides that, I have a *corps de reserve*, of middling kind of men—Pet calves, as Miss Edgeworth, or somebody, calls them ; they are always useful, you know, in case one doesn't marry off in a season or two.”

Lady Selina laughingly assured her she resigned all claim to Lord Bruce, and Lady Mary continued,—

“Perhaps you are quite disengaged. William is half in love with you, he says ; but then, you know, he is engaged to be married to Miss Murray—which is rather against it—and if he had not, I told him he would have no chance, because he is so excessively ugly. . . . Let me see . . . you cannot mean to have

Mr. Aston? He is delightful, to be sure, and very interesting-looking, but then he is a commoner. . . . Oh! I really think Miss Harvey means to have him herself: only look how she is blushing; and how alarmed she looks now. Indeed, Miss Harvey, you need not be so frightened. I am uncommonly quick at finding out these things—there is no escaping me; so you had better own it at once, and then I will not betray you, if I can recollect to hold my tongue about it.”

Fortunately for poor Mary Harvey, the current of the “Talking Lady’s” ideas was here checked, by the entrance of little Lady Augusta Wentworth, who came to spend the morning with Lady Selina.

The awful governess had been discharged, and Lady Selina had been so fortunate as to have it in her power to recommend to Lord Litchfield a lady, the widow of a clergyman, who had been chaplain to the Bishop of —, a most accomplished and

estimable person, and one of whom the Bishop thought and spoke very highly. Luckily for the little girl, she was also extremely mild, and possessed the difficult art of managing children to perfection. Lady Augusta had already become extremely attached to her, and had nearly regained the spirits which her former governess had almost extinguished by her severity. Lord Litchfield was very grateful to Lady Selina, and as she took great interest in the child, he frequently sent her to visit her. Lady Mary Rawdon was delighted with the little girl, and asked her fifty questions, until she escaped to Lady Selina, of whom she was very fond, and who possessed the power of dispersing her shyness.

Lady Mary then reverted to her attack upon Mary Harvey, who was writing a note, and begged her to tell her at once if she was in love with Mr. Aston, adding,

“Not that you need, my dear, for I can

see it very plainly;—bless me! how your hand shakes! we must get you the ‘*Consolation to the tremulous writer.*’”

Mary Harvey and Lady Selina both laughed and thought it was ridiculous to be annoyed by her folly; therefore, as soon as Mary’s cheek ceased to blush, and her hand to shake, Lady Mary could find no more amusement in tormenting her, and turned off in quest of some other diversions: this she found, in building card-houses for little Augusta, till the entrance of a succession of visitors afforded her a new source, which occupied her till the carriage came to the door.

After the business of shopping, and after sundry visits had been happily got over, Lady Selina proceeded to the British Gallery, where she had appointed to meet the Bishop of ——. The collection happened to be a very rich one, and, as the bishop was a good judge of pictures, Lady Selina had the pleasure of having with her one who could participate

in the enjoyment they gave her. Lady Mary Rawdon neither understood nor cared anything about the Fine Arts, therefore, after one or two glances at her catalogue, and a few exclamations, such as, “what a black-looking landscape! and what heavy clouds! but I suppose it’s very fine, as it’s Ruysdael’s!”—“Dear me, what a hideous old man, to have his portrait painted: I wonder Rembrandt would take the trouble to do such an old creature!”—then, having no one to talk to, she had nothing to do but to wait with impatient patience till Lady Selina was ready to depart, and then, to her great relief, the carriage was ordered to Hyde-park. The Drive was more than usually full; there was a vast concourse of persons, and of nobodies; that is, according to Lady Mary’s vocabulary, “many of the *haut ton*, more of the *haut ton bas*, besides innumerable unobservables.” Lady Mary’s abuse was all lavished on the “*haut ton bas*,” the second set kind of people with showy equi-

pages, and still more showy bonnets, who affect "style," or what is very vulgarly called "dash," and court notoriety, as if it were the sole aim and end of their existence—the one thing worth living for: they have nothing naturally to entitle them to distinction, either in mind or in talent, and therefore they endeavour to make it for themselves. Lady Mary's acquaintance lay among none or very few of these, and those few in vain endeavoured to catch her eye: she was determined to give them no encouragement.

The "unobservables," as she called them, received more encouragement from her; they were "quiet, good sort of people, contented with their station, without making ridiculous struggles to be admitted to a higher; in dark coaches, and plain blue or drab liveries, and Leghorn bonnets, of no particular shape; quiet country people, who had come up for two months' or six weeks' amusement, to the wrong

side of Oxford-street, where they rested very contentedly.”

Lady Mary had no objection to them, and smiled and bowed to all she knew. As long as people kept on their own ground, they were safe from her ; but let them step beyond it, and she had no mercy on them. As the most *recherché* people of the day bowed on passing Lady Selina’s carriage, she amused Lady Mary exceedingly, by telling her what a fine opportunity this would have been for the Miss Leslies to have seen “Colonel A—— and Colonel R——, without their hats on.”

It was yet too early in the season for the Gardens, but as the day was very fine, they agreed to walk by the boat-house, where they were to meet Mary Harvey and Mrs. Todd, who were walking with little Augusta. They were joined by Mr. Aston, Lord William Rawdon, and Lord Litchfield, who were riding together, and on seeing them alight from the carriage,

begged to attend them. The bright sunshine, gay and beautiful scene, and agreeable conversation, rendered it a delightful walk, and all were sorry when the lateness of the hour obliged them to return to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XIII.

As the season advanced, Lady Selina participated in all its amusements; they had charms for her, and she hesitated not to avail herself of them: she had not yet learned to weary of the world, and as long as she felt not exclusively engrossed by it, to the neglect of duties, she continued in the whirl. She even found her advantage in this, for it prevented her from dwelling too much on recollections and feelings which were painful to her; and she was not afraid that habits would bind her to this kind of life; it was not necessary to her, and when removed from it, no one possessed a more active mind in striking out

resources for itself ; she could be perfectly contented in the greatest retirement, the most monotonous life—or, what some would call monotonous—her own accomplishments and cultivated mind rendered her a stranger to *ennui*. Of how few may this be said ! How few can indulge in the dissipation of fashionable life, in London, without the mind becoming enervated—without acquiring those tastes and wants which unfit them for an intellectual and really happy life !

How many become listless and enervated at the end of a London season, and leave Town to drag through eight months of torpid existence, until spring returns, to plunge them still more deeply into their folly and insensibility ! Such persons have been said to be three months raving mad, and nine months melancholy mad. Their malady is, indeed, of the worst species ; it unfits them for every pure enjoyment. They behold the spring only as the bringer of balls, operas, flirtations and new dresses. They see

not, they feel not the beauties of Nature bursting into a new life, with all her train of sweet lovely flowers, budding trees, glittering hawthorns, sunny blossoms and “warbling woodlands,” all, all are lost to them.

“Primrose, blossom, fragrant may,
And sheeted bloom of orchard gay,
May flourish fair and pass away ;
And summer’s riper glow succeeding,
May reign, and be in turn receding ;
And from the chaplet on her brow,
The last pale rose be fading now ;”

and yet they mark it not; or, mark the sweets of Nature only as bringing them nearer to the sophisticated ones of art! Alas, that it should be so!—that beings endowed with reason and capabilities of feeling should renounce what their Creator has poured out before them, in the plenitude of His mercy, for their enjoyment!

“Oh! how can they renounce, and hope to be forgiven!”

It is but doing Lady Selina justice, to say, that she was not of them; her taste for Nature was in all its freshness; and although she

followed the multitude, in passing some of the sweetest months in the year in London, yet this taste peeped forth whenever opportunity allowed. It was cramped and trammelled, it is true, and she would even herself laugh at her rural fancies showing themselves in such petty and almost ridiculous shapes, and yet being capable of producing her so much enjoyment. Her rooms were filled with flowers; she took great pleasure even in the circumscribed limits of nursery gardens; would drive in an open carriage about the rich and lovely country around London—for shady lanes and scented orchards are to be found by those who seek them—with a keen sense of enjoyment; and with unbounded delight she would make, and join in, select parties to row on the majestic Thames, and to traverse the exquisite scenery on its banks. Nay, when these resources failed, she could find pleasure in the scented limes and shaded glades of Kensington Gardens; and, unheeding the raillery of Lady

Mary and Lord William Rawdon against cockney feelings, she attempted not to repress the exhilarating pleasure which ever visited her in her drives and walks in the Regent's Park during the fine days of early summer. Its long lines of beautiful and classical buildings, broad terraces, lovely gardens, silver waters, broomy banks, blossoming shrubs, verdant greens, and blue distances glowing in sunshine, or reposing in shade, render it a scene of animated beauty, which must please at any time, and which when contrasted with hot and dusty streets must be doubly welcome. It is indeed a place for an English heart to feel pride in, as well as enjoyment; for with the magnificent street which opens into it, and the beautiful buildings and improvements which are multiplying every hour, it will speedily stamp London as one of the most splendid cities in Europe. Narrow streets, dingy bricks, and wretched buildings are all dancing off, to the popular air of the "March of Intellect;" and

let them go. I am a strenuous advocate for holding old faiths and old feelings, nay, even old customs fast, but not old brick houses and tumble-down shops, to the detriment of health, convenience, and beauty; and I cannot but feel the highest respect for the enlarged mind, taste, and enterprise, which are rapidly raising a fair and beautiful city from a heap of dust and ashes.

Lady Selina's "cockney feelings" will be applauded by some, and laughed at by a great many more, who will, very likely also agree with Lady Mary Rawdon in calling her a "ridiculous little kind of visionary," and "a small sentimentalist" in hearing of some of the expeditions or *pilgrimages* which she made to different places in and near London, associated with interesting feelings to her, from some book or historical fact which had impressed her imagination.

Majestic, — awe-inspiring as "Westminster's old Abbey" was to her, its charms were even

added to by the inimitable paper in the "Sketch Book ;" and it was with every feeling awakened by those enchanting pages, that she traversed its sublime cloisters, and wandered amid its storied walls and sacred tombs. Her imagination went busily to work, and while several of the party who were with her found it very cold and very dismal, Lady Selina was peopling it with the splendid pageants, stately ceremonies, and varied scenes its venerable walls had witnessed. Her old friend, the Bishop of ——, possessed the same pilgrim turn, and accompanied her in all expeditions of the kind. They mourned over the unfortunate Stuarts in Whitehall,—mused upon Glenvarlock and Duke Hildebrod in the precincts of the Temple,—sympathized with Jeanie Deanes and the good and noble Argyle in Richmond-park, — meditated on Elizabeth and Raleigh at Greenwich, — walked with Fenella and Peveril in St. James's-park, — with fifty other expeditions too numerous to

mention. Even Little Britain and Eastcheap were to them classical spots ; and the Tower ! Oh ! who shall speak the feelings, — the flights of fancy which it called forth ? All there is indeed hallowed ground, and carries the imagination back century after century ; and then to be indeed in the very room which is invested with so deep an interest by the names of Jane Grey, — Dudley, — Courtney, and a long list of the noble and unfortunate, — to say nothing of its being the apartment in which Nigel and the little impudent “ Peg-a-Ramsey ” endured their temporary imprisonment.

All these places were explored again and again with unabated delight. And, to the entire satisfaction of Lady Selina, a tour was even projected for the following summer, in which the bishop half promised to accompany her. They were to make pilgrimages to Kenilworth, to Cumnor, to Woodstock, and to places without end, and were to extend their tour into Scotland, as Lady Selina could

not much longer exist without visiting Holyrood, Lochleven, Perth, the Highlands, and all other hallowed spots in that "renowned, romantic land." She wished to see every spot commemorated by that master-hand which can "people solitudes, and give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name," with such force that imagination becomes powerful as truth, and is subject to his will in a manner as delightful as it is irresistible.

In all these various pursuits weeks flew rapidly onwards. The evening engagements, too, of Lady Selina were almost incessant, and now and then she began to suspect that her time was not so profitably employed as it might be, and half determined her next season in town should not be so dissipated. And yet, as she rarely went out to evening parties till very late, and always arose at her usual hour, she felt a sort of balm to her conscience in reflecting that her evening hours of amusement were only abstracted from sleep. Her

customary course of reading still went on, and her cultivation of music and of drawing ; therefore she hoped she was not giving way to the stream of dissipation very unwarrantably.

A great part of her morning amusements could not be called quite unprofitable. She was fond of seeing pictures and other works of art, and visited the painting-rooms of almost every artist of note in London. Nor did she hurry through these rooms or exhibitions, as so many of their visitors do, without a single feeling of taste or pleasure being excited, and who quit them without one impression remaining on the mind. Lady Selina visited these places of resort, not merely to pass away a few idle hours, or to meet her acquaintance and talk over the parties of the preceding evening. They were to her both a refined source of enjoyment and of improvement.

In the midst of all these pursuits and amusements, duties were not neglected. The charities of Lady Selina were extensive and

well bestowed. To the very best of her ability, all who depended on her for comfort or happiness were strictly attended to. Every wrong that she could redress was redressed; every evil that she could prevent was prevented. So far her conscience could not reproach her. She continued also to pass the Sunday in the manner in which from her childhood she had been accustomed to pass it, by the direction of her guardian, the amiable and excellent Bishop of ——.

The notions of Lady Selina in this respect may be thought over strict, yet as she acted according to her sense of right, she cannot be blamed. She always withstood the many importunities and even temptations to use her carriage on Sunday, either for visiting or for the Park or Gardens. The raillery of her acquaintance in this was unheeded by her, and she continued constantly to go twice to church on that day, and to employ the remainder of it in reading in her own apart-

ment ; nor would she ever be induced to accept an engagement on Sunday.

The weeks that had passed had brought some pain but much pleasure. Matilda Leslie had accepted the proposals of Lord Litchfield, and preparations for the speedy celebration of their marriage were already making. The extinction of all hope of Lord Litchfield ever becoming attached to herself, received some amelioration in the breast of Lady Selina, by the reflection that she had acted uprightly in advising Matilda as she had done before she left the country. She had nothing to reproach herself with. And it was this advice which had induced Matilda to give up her resolution to take the veil, and which had finally determined her to yield to the wishes of her father in accepting Lord Litchfield.

Matilda did not now visit in Stanhope-street so frequently as formerly ; she went out but little, and passed her mornings

much alone, therefore Lady Selina was not fully acquainted with the state of her present feelings. She supposed it scarcely possible but that Matilda must become attached to Lord Litchfield, and learn to appreciate her happy lot as it deserved to be appreciated. A great source of pleasure, too, to Lady Selina opened in the evidently increasing attentions of Mr. Aston to Mary Harvey. She felt certain now that he was really greatly attached to her, and that his proposals would speedily be made. This, Lady Selina looked upon as her own doing; she had brought them together, and she now rejoiced in the probable success of her good-natured endeavours.

Several proposals of marriage had been already made to Lady Selina, but all had been rejected. She felt a preference for none, and she began to suspect,—although she had too much good sense to be “entirely certain,” like many young ladies who are disappointed

in their first love, — that she was destined for a single life. Her affections were certainly not quite so variable as those of the Miss Leslies, who had learnt now from experience, they said, when in their rural and romantic fits they carved the initials of favoured swains on trees in the park at Elmwood, “to cut the bark very slightly, because it was such work to deface it the next year, when they wanted to carve some other initials.” Let it not be supposed, though, that they had ever remained constant an entire year ; long before that time they had run through half the letters in the alphabet, and stripped the bark of a dozen trees at least.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE evening for the Caledonian ball, to the Miss Leslie's a very important one, at length arrived. Matilda requested to remain at home, and being now "provided for," her provident father permitted her to follow her inclination. To Catherine and Charlotte, the scene was wholly new, and it was with the utmost difficulty they could repress the exuberance of their admiration, as on entering the large room at Almack's, the splendid *coup-d'œil* first burst upon them. The first quadrilles were just forming. Twelve young ladies, the greater number of rank, and very conspicuous for their beauty, were attired as the Months,

with filigree baskets on their heads, filled with the flowers of each month, their light dresses trimmed to correspond, while each of their partners wore a bouquet of the same flowers. One quadrille was entitled "The Flower and the Leaf"—the dresses remarkably pretty. Another wore the splendid costume of the reign of Elizabeth; among the number, the noble Sydney, with Leicester and Essex, were in personal appearance, at least, fully entitled to be allowed just representatives of the illustrious originals. Each quadrille received the unqualified approbation of the Leslies as they passed it to make their way to that which the taste of Lady Selina had formed, and which was, indeed, surrounded with admirers, and acknowledged to be the most striking of the evening. The dresses were precisely as described in "The Epicurean," and the beauty and rank of the wearers added not a little to the applause they excited. Among them, the loveliness of Lady Selina

shone pre-eminent. Lord Litchfield, who accompanied the Leslies, was extremely struck with the classic correctness of the costume; and as he looked on Lady Selina, he thought he had never beheld any beauty to compare to hers; the splendour of the jewels could not add to its brilliance. She was dancing with the Prince Carlo Dalbarno, the most distinguished among the constellation of noble foreigners then in London, and the Adonis of the day.

“How beautiful she is!” Lord Litchfield exclaimed to Mr. Aston, who stood beside him.

“She is truly lovely, indeed! and what sweetness there is in that beaming countenance, so full of mind and expression!”

“I have often been surprised,” resumed Lord Litchfield, “that, intelligent and refined as she is, she yet appears not merely to endure, but even to find amusement in the insipid conversation, the follies, and the homely

vulgarisms with which I have heard her assailed. The excessive silliness of Lord Bruce, the vulgarity of Miss Hensley, never appear to annoy her. I cannot understand it. Her patience never gives way."

"It does not surprise me so much," replied Mr. Aston, "as I have frequently remarked that persons of the best understanding, when thrown into the society of those beneath them in intellect, can extract from even the dullest, food for the mind or the fancy ; not merely to occupy the present, but, perhaps to advantage the future. Flints, when struck with the steel, will emit sparks, which may, by proper management, be kindled into a flame, although the flints themselves remain flints. The richness of some minds can, at all times, draw upon their own resources, when the barrenness of others with whom chance associates them, may oblige them to do so."

The approach of a royal party obliged them to fall aside. In its train was the beautiful

Lady ——, smiling and talking in high spirits to the numbers who sought her notice.

“How brilliant Lady —— appears! exclaimed Mr. Aston; “and how melancholy it is to know, that every smile is worn but as a mask to the unhappiness within. I cannot but pity, though I blame her. She sold herself, and must bear her chains. That coronet was dearly bought!”

“Yes,” replied Lord Litchfield, “and she finds her mistake too late. Hers is a proud spirit, and she still seeks to hide its bitterness from others. When I see the affectation of a happiness to which she has so little claim, she reminds me of those affecting lines of Metastasio,—‘*Se a ciascuno l’interno affanno si leggesse in fronte scritto * * **’ but you will recollect them. Yes! she is one of those whose only happiness is ‘*al parer a noi felice.*’”

“Stay, stay, my Lord; do you know we are moralizing?—a thing entirely out of rule. Take

care lest we be overheard, and lose our characters for ever. I am in an excessively cynical humour, I confess, and you are aiding and abetting me."

They now joined Lady Selina and Lady Mary Rawdon, who had just found seats, determined to remain spectators of the amusing scene before them, during the next set of quadrilles.

"What an abominable little creature!" exclaimed Lady Mary Rawdon, who was never at the trouble of restraining her expressions, as a young lady approached them in a skirt about half a yard shorter than necessity required, and its small dimensions much encumbered by *bouquets* of every kind of flower; a laced bodice and fantastic chip hat; a straw basket in her hand filled with flowers; a profusion of small oiled ringlets; her head held on one side with an air of innocence and *naïveté*, according to her conception of those obsolete acquirements; while bodice, hat, basket, ring-

lets, and *bouquets* were all ornamented by sundry rice-paper butterflies perched thereon.

She was escorted, for the sake of consistency, by a remarkably stupid bandit chief, of six feet two, with pistols in his belt.

“What sweet flowers and butterflies!” said Lady Mary, as they passed.

The damsel held her basket up to offer her some.

“No, no; you have a robber too much already. I cannot take them.”

“What! will you not encourage innocence and industry?” asked the stupid bandit. “Her own fair hands culled them.”

“Oh! not I, indeed;” replied Lady Mary. —“I never could endure innocence and industry and rural felicity, much less their counterfeits,” added she, after the interesting pair were beyond her hearing. Then running on with her accustomed volubility, careless whether she were listened to or not:—“Oh! there are both the Miss Leslies dancing: one

with Lord Bruce, and the other with Sir Charles F. ; how glad Sir Robert will be ! Oh, me ! here comes the Duke of Wellington,—charming man ! I wonder he has n't a halo round his head. I never meet him without wishing I was a man, that I might take my hat off to him ; or, that it was allowable for ladies to doff their bonnets. I wish he would reform the poor laws ;—how handsome he looks, though, in the mean time ! There's old Lord W—— ; I've a great mind to ask him the meaning of the hole in his hat, with a patch over it ; there it always is, whether his hat be new or old. I have asked fifty people about it, but no one can discover the reason. Oh ! Mr. Aston, look at that quadrille. What strange creatures !—where can they come from ? The Zoological gardens, I dare say. I am sure that man is the identical baboon that bit a child there yesterday. I wonder they let him out for nothing. I vow and protest here come the whole of Ivanhoe ! Well, those really are good

dresses!—and what a pretty Lady Rowena!—and what a charming opportunity to show one's hair, if one has any! That's Miss Murray, to whom William is going to be married. She is immensely rich. I wonder she will have him; he is so ugly. Here comes Mrs. S——, who always goes into her shower-bath with an umbrella; I wish she were in one now: and she gives such bad dinners too, that William vows he will never dine with her again, unless she will promise to keep Inkes's stomach-pump upon a side-table, to resort to, *pro re natá*. Do you know, it is an absolute fact, that when Dr. Maton prescribed a hot foot-bath for Mr. ——, he put his boots on before he would use it. I wish to goodness the Swiss Peasants and the Hamlets might all be lawfully turned out. Selina! here is Carlo Dalbarno coming to you again. He is desperately in love with you, that is certain, and every one says he will propose very soon. Do, pray invite me to your castello, in Italy; but don't use me as

Madame Montoni did Emily de * * *—oh! dear, what's her name?—in the 'Mysteries of Udolpho.'"

At this moment, Prince Carlo Dalbarno stopped the current of the quicksilver of the voluble young lady's ideas, by a request to valse with her; which quicksilver, in consequence, flew with her to the mazy round, where Mr. Aston may be held excused for thinking that a slight loss of breath would be a gain to her *ci-devant* auditors, in case of a renewed attack. On returning from the valse, and a subsequent quadrille, Lady Mary complained bitterly that she was quite sure Prince Carlo Dalbarno merely asked to dance with her for the pleasure of talking of Lady Selina.

"He never once mentioned another subject; I am sure he is desperately in love with her, which is the more provoking, as I am excessively inclined to fall in love with him myself:

however, I'll ask her to let me be bride's-maid instead."

"What, you make quite sure," said Lord Litchfield, smiling, "that Lady Selina will accept him?"

"Oh! to be sure she will—who would not? Bless me! I never thought of it till this moment. . . . I've a great mind to ask Matilda Leslie to let me be her bride's-maid—will your lordship speak a good word for me? Oh! I beg your pardon: I forgot you are all Catholics, and I dare say would not let a poor innocent heretic in among you upon any account. Well, you will have a quiet, tidy little wife, my lord, but then. . . . Bless me! I am in a complete blundering humour to-night, and have offended forty people in the last five minutes, so I will not talk any more to you at present, my lord, if it is only that I may have one friend left."

She accordingly flew off, and Lord Litchfield turned to Lady Selina—but Prince Carlo Dalbarno was again by her side: he was evidently

extremely struck with her. They were now engaged in an animated conversation. Lady Selina spoke the Italian language perfectly, and Lord Litchfield felt great pleasure in listening to her as well as to the Prince, who was particularly well informed and eloquent in his conversation.

“Lord Litchfield,” said Lady Selina, addressing him at length, “the Duchess of L—— has commissioned me to ask you to join a party to Richmond the day after to-morrow. Mrs. St. John gives a *déjeûner*, at her villa, on the Thames, and the Duchess invites whom she pleases: she has already asked a large party, and is very anxious for so agreeable an addition as your lordship. I am going to write a note to Matilda to-morrow, to invite her to share the *chaponage* of the Duchess with Mary Harvey and myself.”

Lord Litchfield was of course delighted to join so agreeable a party, and Lady Selina continued,

“We are to rendezvous at Whitehall-stairs,

and embark there for Richmond, and may expect a very pleasant day."

The Duchess of L—— was a decided exclusive, but to oblige Lady Selina she had consented that Mary Harvey should accompany her. The other members of the party were all persons *comme il faut*: among them were the Rawdons, Prince Carlo Dalbarno, Mr. Aston, Lord Bruce, with several other persons of distinction in the fashionable world. Lady Susan Rawdon, a sister of Lady Mary, who was also of Lady Selina's quadrille, now came up to her. She was a complete contrast to her sister, being a decided *ennuyée*, and extremely affected, and withal excessively silly. Begging Lady Selina to make room for her, she added,

"You have no idea how annoyed I have been; indeed quite frightened."

"What has been the cause of your alarm?" asked Lady Selina.

"Oh! do you know there is a very pretty little Annot Lyle here, with her lute and a

silver chain, just as Sir Walter Scott describes her ; and she came up to me just now. . . .”

“ I trust,” said Mr. Aston, “ you are not so timid as to be frightened at Annot Lyle.”

“ Oh ! la ! Mr. Aston ; do pray let me finish my story. I was going to tell you there is an Allan M'Auley with her, who is ranting and raving so, I really believe he is mad in good earnest. He pretends the dark hour, as he calls it, is on him ; and he is prophesying, and telling people's fortunes. You have no idea how he attacked me ; and no one can find out who he is, for he wears his mantle over his face. Mary says she thinks it is ——, the actor.”

The whole party became desirous to see this Highland prophet, in consequence of Lady Susan's intelligence, and Lord Litchfield gave notice he observed him approaching. Various rumours preceded him—he was Sir Walter Scott himself,—Horace Twiss,—Lord G——l,—Lord J. R.——,—and, stranger still, Lady ——, (if the latter she must have been on

stilts.) Divers other *beaux esprits* were named ; however, nobody had an opportunity of identifying Allan M'Auley beyond a doubt. Lady Selina had at first been eager to speak to him ; but on his approach her courage failed. He stopped opposite the party, and surveyed them attentively. No one attempted to speak until Mr. Aston said,

“ If the hour be upon you, speak, and fear not.”

“ Oh ! la ! exclaimed Lady Susan, do pray tell all their fortunes.”

He paused a few moments, and then, in a lower voice than his assumed character warranted, said, rapidly :—

“ Let him who wavers, waver no longer : the path he fears to tread is bright—all others will be dark to him. There is one among you who is sought by all, save the only one by whom she would be sought : the mist of the mountain is around them now, but the bright summer sun shall dispel it : let one noble

heart turn from the idol he is worshipping—it is the sole one who can hear him in vain ; fair eyes weep for him ; a true heart beats for him ; let him turn to them. . . .” He abruptly broke off, and walked rapidly away.

“ Now then I am certain,” said Lady Mary Rawdon, who had joined the circle, “ that Allan M’Auley is no other than Lady ——, because every one knows she is in love with Prince Carlo Dalbarno ;—that last speech was intended for him, depend upon it.”

“ La ! Mary,” exclaimed Lady Susan, “ how could you find that out ?—they were all like riddles to me.”

“ Riddle my riddle my ree—I ’ll read them all to you in a minute, if you will,” said Lady Mary : “ I can tell, word for word, what he meant to insinuate. Now, in the first place, there was Mr. Aston. . . .”

It so happened that none of her ladyship’s auditors were particularly desirous of the public solution of the riddles, and, accepting

the arm of Lord Litchfield, Lady Selina broke up the little party, to seek for Mary Harvey, who had been dancing with Lord William Rawdon. The seer had touched a painful chord in the bosom of Lady Selina, and feeling fatigued and a little out of spirits, she joyfully assented to the proposal of her *chaperone* to return home.

To Mary Harvey the evening had not proved so pleasant as she had anticipated it would have been. Mr. Aston had neither conversed with her, nor had he asked her to dance ; but then it was some satisfaction to her that he had not danced with any one else, and had appeared out of spirits the whole evening ; a circumstance very unusual with him. Lady Selina had observed this also, and augured well from it for her friend Mary.

The Leslie's found the evening a most agreeable one ; Catherine and Charlotte had found no lack of partners, and Sir Robert had derived vast satisfaction, present and future, from

observing that Mr. Birmingham Aston had danced no less than three quadrilles with Catherine. These were very prosperous proceedings, and Sir Robert resolved to call on and invite Mr. Birmingham Aston to dinner on the following day. He was a young man of large fortune and little intellect ; much might be done with him ; it would be a brilliant establishment for his daughter.

Mr. Birmingham Aston was not a Catholic, it was true, but Catholic suitors were not so plentiful as Catholic daughters in the present hard times ; and Sir Robert was sufficiently wise and provident to take what he could get, and feel thankful. The expected marriage of Matilda was so far beyond the most sanguine hopes he had ever formed, that he had scarcely yet brought his mind to believe in the actual reality of it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning, having slept off the fatigues of the Caledonian ball, Lady Selina ordered her carriage an hour earlier than usual, and set out accordingly at three o'clock, accompanied by Mary Harvey and Mrs. Todd. In the hope of finding the Leslies at home, as Lady Selina wished to give her invitation to Matilda, to join the party to Richmond, they drove first to Audley-square. All the ladies were out shopping, and Lady Selina was writing her message on her visiting card, when Hildebrand Leslie, who had seen the carriage from the window, came running down to ask if there were room for him in the carriage,

“I should like so much if you will take me ; my sisters would not, all I could do ; they said I should plague them while they shopped ; and papa and Mr. Pennant are both gone out for the whole day, and I have got nothing to do but to play at nine-pins, in the hall, Lady Selina.”

“Run for your hat, then, and make haste,” said Lady Selina, with whom he was a great favourite ; “and put your gloves on to hide your dirty hands,” continued she, as they drove from the door, “and promise me to behave very well, while I am at Madame Carson’s, and not to touch any of the bonnets, and then, before we go home, you shall go to the bazaar or to some exhibition as a reward.”

“Oh ! thank you, thank you,” said the delighted boy, “and when you go to Carson’s, I’ll stay in the hall, if you like, and play with Dragon. I have been there ever such a number of times with Matilda, and the dog knows me quite well ; so suppose I do ?”

Lady Selina could not suppose any such thing ; as her personal acquaintance with Monsieur Dragon, was not sufficient for her to leave Hildebrand with one of his formidable appearance ; therefore, the whole party ascended the staircase. On entering the rooms, they descried all the four Miss Leslies ; the three elder ones in solemn and earnest deliberation on various articles intended for the *trousseau* of Matilda, who was sitting rather apart from the committee, without appearing to take the slightest interest in the important transactions going on around her, if she might be judged by the listless answers she made to the questions of—

“Matilda, do you like this trimming,—shall we decide on it ?—and will you have French or Italian flowers in your pink bonnet ?”

“Just as you please, Charlotte ; I like any of them. Oh ! dear, yes. I ’m sure I cannot tell, you know best,” and this was all the satisfaction that could be extracted from her.

It was really provoking, and Mademoiselle Flore had just observed, "Il me semble que cette demoiselle n'a point de choix," when Lady Selina was eagerly hailed, and requested to aid the committee of ways and means. Flowers and trimmings were now promptly decided on; even Madame ~~Marcedon~~ Carson herself, acknowledged the correct taste of "miladi," and in half-an-hour, the business which had cost the Miss Leslies three hours of wear and tear of intellect, without any progress having been made in it, was completely settled, and with the important addition of the bridal dress being decided on, and the decision hailed with unbounded applause by all, but Matilda, who would neither look on it nor hear what it was to be, to the great astonishment of her two sisters. It must be confessed, though, that small matter served to astonish them at all times, insomuch, that Mr. Aston had once observed, that their whole lives were spent "in guessing and wondering,

yes! they never thought—guessing and wondering, and wondering and guessing, occupied the whole sal volatile of their intellect.” The wondering part of it was now called into play by the unexpected sight of Hildebrand.

“Good gracious, Lady Selina!—how could you be plagued with him? and how did you manage to get him away from the horrid great dog in the hall? He never will mind a single word we say to him—and only look! he has got his old green coat on! For shame, Hildebrand! — and what disgustingly dirty gloves! I’m sure, if I were Lady Selina, I would not have taken such a dirty, shabby-looking thing out with me.”

“No, that I am sure you would not; but Lady Selina is more good-natured, and does what I ask her, and so I do everything that she tells me to do; and she’s going to take me to an exhibition, and very likely to Kensington Gardens, or any where else I like to go, for she said she would; and she never

called my coat shabby—if she had, I would have told Parkins to bring down my blue one in a minute; and you are three ill-natured things, all of you, except Matilda, and you bully her as much as you do me; but she'll soon have the whip-hand of you, when she is the Countess of Litchfield, and how will you look then?"

Lady Selina protested she was perfectly satisfied with her young beau's appearance, and moreover invited him to dine with her, instead of returning to Audley-square, an invitation which he accepted with numerous thanks, a high jump of ecstasy, and a triumphant glance at his sisters. It was determined to drive next to the bazaar in Soho-square, which Hildebrand preferred to the promised exhibition, and the Miss Leslies promised to meet Lady Selina, at six o'clock, in Kensington Gardens, to walk together before they returned home. Among the crowd of carriages waiting in Soho-square, Lady Selina discerned the

phaeton of Lord Litchfield ; he had driven his little girl, and they found him at one of the stands, in all the perplexity of choosing, or endeavouring to choose, a work-box for her.

“ Oh, papa ! here is Lady Selina,” exclaimed the little girl, as she ran to meet her, and she shall choose for me, and then I know it will be a nice one.”

Lord Litchfield was glad to be relieved from the awful responsibility for which he felt his own incompetency, and a box resplendent in rose-wood, buhl, blue velvet, frosted silver and mother-of-pearl was selected, to the satisfaction of all parties, and the unbounded delight of the little Augusta. Lord Litchfield then accompanied Lady Selina and Mary Harvey in their tour through the different rooms, which was made for the edification of Hildebrand, who felt like Aladdin, among the magician's treasures, and lingered and admired, and admired and lingered, and, finally became the happy possessor of sundry books, dissected

maps, writing boxes, and various other articles which Lady Selina could scarcely prevail upon him to allow to be sent to the carriage, so eager was he to carry them himself, and not to lose sight of them. Lady Selina told Lord Litchfield, she was going to meet the Leslies in the Gardens, and he requested to be allowed to join her party.

“I have been unable,” said Lady Selina, “to prevail upon Matilda to join our Richmond expedition. I saw her just now, at Carson’s, but she told me she should prefer staying at home. Your lordship must try your influence upon her to induce her to accompany us.”

“I am afraid I shall have no better success,” said Lord Litchfield, gravely ; “she appears so averse from society, that I have never yet prevailed upon her to join any party, where I was myself engaged.”

Lady Selina did not reply, and calling the children, they all quitted the bazaar, and both carriages took the road to Kensington

Gardens. They found the Leslies on a seat, near the Bayswater entrance, awaiting their arrival. Lord Litchfield gave an arm to Matilda and to Lady Selina, and the party were speedily joined by Mr. Birmingham Aston, Prince Carlo Dalbarno, and several other gentlemen.

It was in vain that poor Mary Harvey hoped they might encounter Mr. Aston in their promenade; he was not in the gardens. They bowed to him, indeed, as he passed the bridge, with a large cavalcade of equestrians, but he did not attempt to join them; — no, not although there were swarms of Chelsea pensioners in waiting, ready to take his horse if he had been so inclined.

The walk, then, possessed few charms for Mary, who continued to “chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancy” as silently as she was allowed. The bitter was the present, — the sweet was that she was sure to see him on the next day at the *déjeûner* at Richmond.

He was to be of the Duchess of ——'s party — he might be in the same boat with her — at all events, to make a mis-quotation,—

“ Hope will win her way, where Reason would despair ;”

and Mary Harvey found little inclination to deny herself the small portion that Pandora had left her — visionary though it might be.

The band had long ceased playing, and the Gardens were thinning fast. Multitudes of reluctant parties were pouring out of both gates, bound homewards to avoid the dreadful consequences of making husbands and papas wait for dinner, and envying the happy strollers, whose independent state or later hour of dining rendered them amenable to no such laws, and permitted them to take a few more turns. The Leslies were among these happy few, as Sir Robert dined out, and they had providentially ordered dinner at eight o'clock, instead of their usual hour of seven.

The few parties yet remaining were ex-

tremely *recherchés*. All the pink palmyrenes, overdone bonnets, and bonnet caps trimmed with flowers and ribbons, had disappeared, and with them the race of men so well known about town, who appear to be all turned out of the same mould ; — in white hats, put on very much on one side ; blue frock coats, and white trowsers and gloves, and a rose in their button-hole. They may be farther known by walking very much from side to side ; usually swinging a glove in one hand, in the intention of appearing very striking from a distance.

Those now left were chiefly men of decided fashion, — their costume, to all appearance at least, unstudied ; — nothing striking about them, excepting an air of perfect ease, and a demeanour which at once stamped them as of a very different order from the departed set. The few ladies yet remaining were also of the same class,—very few *couleurs prononcées* were seen. The dresses were chiefly of silks of neutral shades, or of plain muslins ;

most of them wore cachemires, and all the bonnets were unimpeachable, — not one outrageous one of pink and green, or buff and red was to be discerned. Little groups of children were flitting around them. Mr. and Mrs. H—— with their beautiful boys, Lord —— with his lovely children, and a few more parents of the same class in society with their little nurseries in their train, still graced the Gardens.

Lady Selina's party consisted of three detachments. One, over which Mrs. Todd and Miss Leslie presided, was only remarkable for its solemnity. That of Catherine and Charlotte Leslie, who were attended by Mr. Birmingham Aston, was somewhat more vivacious, of course; but the main body obtained and retained the advantage over both. The conversation was kept up by Lady Selina, Prince Carlo Dalbarno, and Lord Litchfield, as Matilda was even more silent than was her wont. She had promised, at Lord Litchfield's earnest

request, that she would join the Richmond party; but she had not yielded with a good grace, and did not disguise that her doing so would be very disagreeable to her, and Lord Litchfield found it so impossible to draw her into conversation, that he at length gave up the attempt in despair. He was out of spirits himself, and could not avoid contrasting the vapid indifference of his *fiancée* with the sweetness and good humour of her friend. He found himself involuntarily drawn to feel interest and to join in the conversation between her and Prince Carlo Dalbarno.

This excellent and charming young nobleman he could not but acknowledge, was fully worthy of Lady Selina. It was evident that he was seriously in love with her. He could seek few hearts in vain; and yet there was something more to be felt than expressed in her manner towards him, which led Lord Litchfield to think his love would not be returned.

“How charming — how intellectual — how refined she is!” thought Lord Litchfield, as he listened to her: “what feeling — what a heart she has; and how blessed — how thrice blessed will he be who can win it!” He sighed, and the thought past across his mind, that a few years ago, before time and sorrow had so changed him, it might not have been impossible that —” He checked the idea before it had assumed a definite shape: but yet — “had she been a Catholic — had she *not* been an heiress — she might — . Oh! no, it was impossible she ever should — so exquisitely beautiful, so admired, so sought, so beloved!”

Half-formed and abruptly broken, these ideas flitted and returned again. He felt Matilda did not love him — he began to think she never would; to fear that she was cold and heartless, and that he had erred in judgment in selecting her as the companion of his future life. He had ardently longed for do-

mestic happiness, and now began to dread that he might be disappointed. His feelings were very unenviable, and he was glad when a remark addressed to him by his companions, or the appeals of his little girl, occasionally made to him as she walked before them with Hildebrand Leslie, obliged him to shake them off.

“How charming the gardens are !” exclaimed Catherine Leslie ; “I cannot think what we shall do when we are obliged to go back to Elmwood.”

“Return to plain work, and to purling brooks,” said Mr. Birmingham Aston, with a vapid smile, and imagining he had said something exceedingly new and witty.

“Oh ! we never work, excepting a little netting now and then of an evening.”

“Oh ! Charlotte, I vote saving up all the old concert-bills, and advertisements of the Caledonian ball, and everything we can get to put us in mind of London, and then paste

them up on a wall at Elmwood — a kind of Londoniana, you know.”

“Pray do,” said Mr. Birmingham Aston, “and you may chalk up ‘Warren’s blacking,’ and ‘Use Turner’s,’ and ‘Try Landers,’ and a few elegant little things of that sort, to make it still more like London.”

Both his auditors laughed, and Mr. Birmingham Aston felt quite certain he had said something extremely good; the more so, as he had an idea of having once heard his cousin, Mr. Aston, say something of the kind before. A man cannot always be witty, and it was in vain that Mr. Birmingham Aston racked the measured portion of brain with which Nature had endowed him, in the endeavour to bring forth a few more brilliant essays, for the edification of his fair auditors. It would not do; nothing was forthcoming, and he was obliged to resort to a string of questions, which he kept cut and dried, as a regular *pis aller* for small ball-room converse when other resources failed.

He now asked the Miss Leslies, whether they rode in the Park ; whether they were going to Epsom or Ascot ; with a few other little, light, elegant questions adapted for all capacities and occasions, and most likely selected from the "Intellectual Bazaar," written by the clever and accomplished Lady M——y.

The Miss Leslies were "certainly going to Epsom, and should like, above all things, to go to Ascot, but were afraid papa would not ; and if Matilda were married before the time for the races taking place, they would certainly have left town : however they hoped the lawyers would move in double slow time."

Something about *bar* and *minims*, on this hint, struggled in the brain of the would-be wit, but it would not come forth—it died in the birth. He felt quite sure it might, with proper management, have become a pun, and he resolved to apply to his cousin at some future time to help him out. Its present failure he ascribed in part to the young

ladies, who did not cease talking for a moment, and would allow him no time for reflection; and, it must be confessed, his was a spirit which much required it. He was certainly troubled with the disorder entitled "the slows;" he was ever panting and puffing to keep up with the sense of the company he was in; but it would not do. He generally, indeed, contrived to be in at the death; but then, he would require an explanation of the whole chase. He *would* hear the rights of it; and if he could prevail upon any unwary, good-natured person to take pity on him, he was generally at the end rewarded for his pains with—"Is that all? I thought it had been something very witty."

The Miss Leslies continued to detail with all volubility that they were "going to ride in the Park every day; they were only waiting for Buckley to send home their habits. Lady Selina's habit was a black one, and made by Stultz, but they preferred Buckley; and

Lady Selina wore a black handkerchief and no collars ; but they intended to have blue handkerchiefs, and large folding-over collars—*that* they were quite determined upon ; and Lady Selina had been taking lessons at Allen's ever since she came to Town, because she had not been used to ride in Italy ; but they had been accustomed to it all their lives, and used to ride Scrub, the black pony, since they were five years old."

Mr. Birmingham Aston was much interested in this account, and hoped to be allowed the honour of riding with them ; an offer they joyfully accepted, and the whole party were in high good humour with each other.

The Miss Leslies had no more sense than was sufficient for Mr. Birmingham Aston's purpose : he wished to impose himself upon them as a wit, and he succeeded : he was secure, that if he felt himself a fool amongst wits, he was positively a wit amongst fools ; this was balm to his feelings ; he felt sorry

when Lady Selina gave the signal for retiring from the Gardens, and handed the young ladies into their carriage in the firm conviction that they were very discerning and very agreeable girls ; particularly Catherine.

So far, so good ; it was a pity that Sir Robert Leslie was not there to draw successful omens from this walk. His chief hope of success in his grand undertaking was, launching his daughters as riders in the Park ; he had heard it confidently affirmed on undoubted authority that, since ladies had taken to this line more marriages had taken place than had ever been known before in London ; it was certain, that it afforded undeniable opportunities to carry on flirtations, and he calculated that twenty guineas laid out at Buckley's would be well spent money, and bring in a great return of interest.

The remainder of the evening was passed by the Miss Leslies in various ways ; by the elder one in casting up her weekly bills ; by

Matilda in reading the "Improvisatrice," in solitary silence upon a sofa, and occasionally shedding a few tears, drawn from a deeper source of sorrow than that contained in the poem. Catherine and Charlotte felt as free men, being completely left to themselves: but then they lost their precious time in the vain endeavour to invent some *frolic*, because "Papa was out, and it was a pity not to enjoy themselves:" and, lo and behold! Papa actually returned from his dinner-party before they had decided on anything better than that of having "a basin of water-gruel for supper, with nutmeg and sherry in it," and for which Sally Gubbins was secretly dispatched to the housekeeper.

An equally quiet evening was spent in Stanhope-street. Mrs. Todd worked at worsted china-asters with all her heart and soul, and spoke no word; but then she determined in her own mind that she would try to invent some cooler work for the summer.

Mary Harvey disturbed her not : she was trying to prevent mournful thoughts by having recourse to one of Miss Austin's inimitable novels. It is impossible to read these charming works without discovering innumerable beauties in every page ; not a sentence, nor a line, that is not true to nature : nothing over-coloured or exaggerated. It is the high finishing of Mieris combined with the truth, force, and expression of Vandyck. How deeply this charming writer interests us in all her scenes ! and yet there is little or no story in most of her books. It is the triumph of Nature. She requires no ornament, no high-colouring — her end is attained without them. In what novel, of this or any day, can a character be found so exquisitely delineated as that of Mrs. Norris, in "Mansfield Park : " it is almost impossible not to imagine her a real person ; one of one's own proper and annoying acquaintance. No person can ever forget Miss Austin's books, let his memory be ever so bad.

She stands alone in her path, and will never be equalled. Mary Harvey became deeply immersed in the pages of "Emma," her favourite among the whole collection which ornamented Lady Selina's drawing-room book-cases.

Lady Selina was herself engaged in playing at chess with her young guest, Hildebrand Leslie, whom she found no despicable antagonist, and who had a hard matter to conceal his triumph when the final conquering game was his own ; he did endeavour to conceal it, however, for he had a great deal of native good-breeding, though no polish ; and he was exceedingly fond of Lady Selina, and very grateful for her kindness to him.

In the mean time Lord Litchfield had spent a solitary evening in Berkeley Square ; he had been engaged to a party, but had given it up. His reflections were rather of a melancholy cast, and he almost wished he had not encouraged them by staying at home alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE party to Richmond commenced under very favourable auspices, and a very unusual punctuality. The carriages all arrived at Whitehall within three minutes of each other : it was well known that the Duchess of L—— was an absolute commander, and would wait for no one a moment longer than she pleased ; and every one acted accordingly. Nothing could be more propitious than the day ; it was warm, bright, and smiling, without being too hot. To prevent loss of time, the Duchess had marshalled her forces beforehand, and named the crew of each boat. Lady Selina and Matilda were to go with herself, and

among their attendant cavaliers were Lord Litchfield and Prince Carlo Dalbarno.

Nothing could be more charming than the row up to Richmond. The broad silver Thames, covered with gay vessels—the rich banks on either side bright with the tender green of early summer, and trees laden with snowy blossoms. All was bright in sunshine : most of the party in the boat of the Duchess were in high spirits, Matilda and Lord Litchfield excepted ; they appeared not to share the enjoyment of the others, and were each rapt in melancholy reflection.

Lady Selina derived great pleasure from the beautiful scenery around her, but felt desirous to be allowed to enjoy it in silence. This, however, was not at present attainable ; Prince Carlo Dalbarno was by her side ; he wished to draw her into conversation ; and with the tact of genuine good breeding and refinement, he succeeded in dispelling her pensive humour, by such insensible degrees, that she found herself

speaking with her usual energy, and listening to him with interest she knew not how. Few persons could indeed resist his powers of conversation ; he could frequently excite an interest under the most inauspicious circumstances ; his mind was stored with literature and with general information—full of poetry—of enthusiasm, and of feeling. He understood the English language perfectly, and spoke it fluently, although with Lady Selina he always conversed in Italian, which she considered almost as much her native language. Their acquaintance had commenced during the latter part of Lady Selina's residence in Italy, and was now resumed on her side, with much pleasure, although without those feelings of tenderness which he already entertained towards her, and which he ardently longed to inspire. Their approach to Richmond led them now to speak of scenes and facts connected with it.

Lord Litchfield, who was often appealed to

by Lady Selina and by the Prince, had been led to join in their conversation, spoke of the grave of Thomson.

“ You must forgive me,” said the Prince, “ for not admiring your Thomson. It was in vain that I searched for beauties in his pages, at least I failed in discovering any which I deemed sufficiently such to retain a permanent place in my recollection. Cowper, and many other poets, whom you rank highly, I thought of in the same way. They never elevated my mind—they never touched my heart.”

“ I think,” said Lord Litchfield, “ they are more our *domestic* poets : they will seldom be admired or loved out of England : they are too *local* to please generally.”

“ Then they are not true poets, you must grant me. It is your Milton—your Byron, who are the poets of all nations, of all ages, who speak home to every heart. Milton, of course, stands alone, and ought to be spoken of alone. And Byron—oh ! I must envy England the honour

of being his birth-place. I would give any one of the poets of Italy, unless it were Dante, in exchange for him—for the author of the third and fourth cantos of Childe Harold. How lofty, how sublime, are his expressions! what a world of poetry—what a host of vivid thoughts—of affecting reminiscences, will he at times conjure up by a few words alone! Had he written twenty volumes on the subject, what could have impressed the mind so indelibly as that apostrophe to Rome—

“Niobe of nations!—lone mother of dead empires!”

Her past glory—her present fallen state, rush upon the mind with a force that overwhelms it. And then what could better describe Clarens, than terming it ‘the birth-place of deep love?’ Yes! he will receive homage from all ages—all nations.”

“I have always,” said Lady Selina, “been peculiarly struck with the exquisite *propriety*, if I may use such an expression,—the extraordinary fitness of his epithets, and of his

exclamations even — his wonderful power of concentration.”

“The Spencerian stanza, too, is particularly adapted,” said Lord Litchfield, “for this concentration, which you admire; it is more remarkable, you will observe, in Childe Harold than in any other of Lord Byron’s works.”

“And may we not admire the same power, although exerted differently, in that charming poem, ‘the Minstrel?’ You must admire, or learn to admire, our Beattie, my lord,” said Lady Selina, turning to Prince Carlo Dalbarno. “I do more—I loved him even before I admired him. It was in early youth that I first read the ‘Minstrel;’ the impression it made upon me is still vivid as ever.”

The party now reached the grounds of Mrs. St. John’s villa, and when all had disembarked, they proceeded *en masse*, but in detachments, up the beautiful lawn, which sloped to the river, and which was covered with marquees and bowers, and thronged with groups of visi-

tors: the whole scene enlivened by the gay strains of music which met their ears before they reached the lawn. The party of the Duchess was observed on its approach, by Mrs. St. John, the hostess, with joy inexpressible: she was yet young in the world of fashion, a candidate for fame, and to be patronized by the Duchess of L——, was the greatest step she could attain in her progress. The chief of her own acquaintance were decided “humdrums,” and had been omitted on the present occasion. She had begun to fear her party might not be sufficiently numerous—but here was a constellation of fashion and of rank that would give it *éclat* at once! Prince Carlo Dalbarno too, without whom no party could be complete—how amiable of the Duchess to bring him; and Lady Selina Clifford!—better and better still.

Mrs. St. John nearly fainted with joy, as the Duchess rapidly and carelessly named to her the individuals of her party; her delight

and gratitude knew no bounds. It was by no means certain that her Grace of L—— would have given herself trouble about her grateful friend, had her entertainment been any other than a morning one. Evening parties were too plentiful to be sought or cared for, but *déjeûners* were not so common, and made an agreeable diversity from the usual method of getting rid of the morning in London. The Duchess of L——, therefore, condescended to patronize Mrs. St. John's *fête*, and to ask those persons she thought it would be most agreeable to herself to meet. Hearing that the Tyrolese were stationed in a distant part of the grounds, Lady Selina begged the Duchess would move that way, and the party accordingly followed the numerous groups who were following the same direction. The wild and exquisite melodies of Nature's own minstrels soon burst upon the ear.

“I have heard them many times,” said Lady Selina to Prince Carlo Dalbarno, “but never

before in the open air. How much finer the effect is now!"

"Ah!" said the Prince, "could we but discard the numerous audience, and the present scene, and hear them in their own native mountains!"

"I do not know how I should bear it," replied Lady Selina; "it would be almost overwhelming. The first time I ever heard them sing, the effect upon me was quite indescribable; and, although I knew nothing of the words which they sang, and had no associations connected with their wild notes, yet I was so powerfully affected, that I wished to be their sole auditor, in order that I might give way to my emotion, without fear of ridicule from those around me."

At the close of the first set of melodies, Lady Selina advanced to greet the Rainers, who were personally known to her, and whose simple manners and warm hearts had much interested her. Many of their friends now

pressed around them, for their good-humoured *naïveté*, had made them many in England. Lady Mary Rawdon shook hands cordially with the whole family, and inquired at what time they would be at home on the following morning, as she intended to call in Foley-place, then turning to Lady Selina, she said,—

“Now let us go and hear the band of the 2nd Life Guards, which is playing on the lawn ; I am sure it is their band, I can tell their trumpets among a thousand. It will be a pleasing variety after the Tyrolese. I am all for contrasts ; there is no knowing for certain, how one likes anything till one has both sides of a question.

They procured seats within hearing of the band, and in a delightful shady spot. The overture to the *Freischutz* was just beginning as they seated themselves. Lady Selina and Prince Carlo Dalbarno listened with all the silent wonder and veneration that splendid and unequalled composition never fails to inspire

in those who are true enthusiasts in music ; to such, its sublime and thrilling notes are never heard without admiration, even though they reach the ear for the hundredth time.

“That overture stands as awe-inspiring and as alone in music, as “Macbeth” and “Manfred” do in poetry,” said Prince Carlo; “it is the music of spirits, not one note of earth to be heard.”

“I only wish,” exclaimed Lady Mary Rawdon, “that you could hear *me* bungle through it, you would think the notes earthly enough. Cramer said, yesterday, it put him in a fever to hear me, poor man !”

“Surely you do not attempt to play it as a solo ?” asked the Prince, in horror.

“Oh ! Lord bless me, yes, I do. I see no sin in it, particularly as Weber has arranged it as a solo, himself, and I expect to get through it very cleverly in time, with Cramer’s hints. There is such a diversity of parts to get in, that I often envy Miss M——, who has hands like a shoulder of mutton, and could compass

them all with ease. I am obliged to resort to all kinds of gymnastics and sleight of hand, and if ever I play it at all, it will be by stratagem, and regular base subterfuge. I make the pedals every now and then take the part of one finger, if I cannot manage to hold a note down, while its four brethren have to work like Turks a mile off. It is a regular imposition from beginning to end; but then, fifty to one if people ever find it out."

"Now that you have awakened me to your errors," said the Prince, smiling, "I cannot fail to detect them; they might otherwise have escaped me. Such candour is not prudent; a proverb of my country says, *non distare 'l can che dorme.*"

"Now, really," said Lady Mary, "I feel obliged to any one for quoting a proverb; I have a particular fancy for them. Mamma says I am as bad as Sancho Panza, and never will let me quote one. I wish they were fashion-

able, for I am sure they save a world of trouble, and a vast many long-breathed sentences. One single proverb seasons a conversation in a minute, whereas you may beat about the bush for an hour or two before you can find enough to say to give it a zest in a common way. So, now you have set the example, my lord, I feel at liberty to quote one that would make half the ladies in the garden faint, if I spoke it in English. It came into my head this minute, but I did not dare speak it without a precedent, ‘*Chi dorme coi cani si leva colle pulce,*’ and that will be the case of the Duchess of L——, for I see her talking to that horrible fat Mrs. Twaddle,—what else can she expect from such society ?”

“And who upon earth is Mrs. Twaddle ?” asked Lady Selina.

“Oh ! I can tell you all about her, because my father banks there, and so does the Duke of L—— ; and depend upon it the Duchess has some weighty reason for speaking to her, or a

two hundred horse power steam-engine would not move her to be civil to such a woman. Her husband is a very rich banker—no end to his money—and the most vulgar wretch you can conceive, with manners just as if he had learned them out of the end of Mavor's spelling-book, that tells you to 'bow often to the company, put your hand in your bosom, sit in an easy attitude, with one leg on the advance, and wipe your mouth often that it be not greasy,' and so on; and then he talks regularly out of a vocabulary: I expect every moment to hear him say, 'Sir, or Madam, I remain your debtor,'—'your most obedient servant,'—and 'be pleased to take a seat.' And then Mrs. Twaddle is a worthy good woman, with a great deal of worldly good sense, and vastly particular to be always in the right. She will stand for twenty minutes at a time, to be sure whether something, about which no one cares twopence, happened on a Monday or a Tuesday. 'Let me see, my dear, it was

Monday, I think ; no, I am telling a story, it must have been Tuesday : ah ! no, it was Monday, too, because on Tuesday I went to Kew ; but then on Monday I stayed at home the whole day. Well ! after all, I do believe it was Wednesday—yes ! I am sure now it really was Wednesday.’ And then, as if this was not sufficient, she proceeds to tell you how many cards she has left at your door, because ‘servants are so careless, and make so many mistakes ;’ and twaddles on for an hour about cards, and whether they had ‘morning’ or ‘evening’ upon them, till you are nearly dead with *ennui*. She has got about fifty daughters, and has married off three very cleverly—fairly launched them off the maternal shore, in complete repair, and victualled for a voyage for life, with ‘Fordyce’s Sermons to Young Women,’ ‘The Lady’s Cookery Book,’ a ‘Companion to the Altar,’ and ‘Dr. Clarke on the Diseases of Children.’ If they do not turn out women of virtue, good housewives, and good mothers,

therefore, it is not Mrs. Twaddle's fault. One poor thing of a girl, who is the best among all her daughters, fell in love with a young barrister, who was always at the house, and when Mrs. Twaddle found it out, she lectured her by the hour; told her he had not a farthing in the world, and could not conceive how she could think of falling in love, when she knew he could offer her no establishment, no carriage, no horses;—and how was she to educate and maintain a family? It made me quite sick to hear her tell mamma all the nonsense she bothered the poor girl with; as how could she think of all those contingencies *before* she had actually fallen in love; and she was not likely to think of them afterwards, poor soul. It put me in mind of seeing a blackbird's nest once in a wattle-hedge in the country, which some men were taking down; and William saying 'What an improvident bird, to build her nest and lay her eggs before she had ascertained whether the hedge were to be a per-

manent one or not !' I cannot bear playing at consequences."

The Duchess of L——, who had at last shaken off Mrs. Twaddle, now called Prince Carlo Dalbarno to her. The moment he had left them, Lady Mary turned to Lady Selina, and said, abruptly, "Do you mean to accept him?"

"That is rather a premature question," replied Lady Selina, laughing; "but why do you ask?"

Oh! for no particular reason; for I see it is of no use being in love with him myself, for he never speaks a word to me when you are by; but I am the most good-natured person in the world. You took Lord Bruce away from me, too, and yet I bear no malice (not that *he* was worth a rush,) and I'm the best friend you have. I know you did not 'go to do it,' as the children say, so I am not the least angry about it. But, seriously, you ought to think twice before you accept Carlo Dalbarno; he is

a vast deal too handsome for a husband, depend upon it ; he is only fit for a lover. Why, if you marry him, you will be in love with him, as sure as fate ;—and what a distressing situation that would put you in ! I actually once knew a lady who was in love with her own husband ; and you have no idea of the ridiculous figure she cut. She used to watch him come in and go out of the room, and sometimes blushed when he spoke to her, though they had been married three years. I can conceive nothing more annoying. They could never feel at ease in each other's society ; and she must be always acting a part just as one does before marriage, to the absolute destruction of all domestic confidence ; she must live in the perpetual fear of showing the cloven foot. Depend upon it, it is a wretched thing to be in love long together with any one ; but with a person one is to pass one's life with, it is downright intolerable, and heaven preserve me from it ! However, I do not think that will

be Matilda Leslie's case. I don't think she cares a rush about Lord Litchfield ; but then I cannot wonder at it—he is so excessively dignified ; quite a belted Earl ; as grave as a judge, and as solemn as an owl. I *could* not be in love with *him*—could you ?”

This was a home question, and Lady Selina was not sorry when Prince Carlo with Lord William Rawdon again joined them before it could be answered.

“What in the world,” asked Lady Mary, “is Mr. Aston saying to the Duchess of L—— ? I never saw her laugh so much in my life. I suppose he is particularly witty, as Mr. Birmingham Aston is standing by with his mouth open wider than usual, trying to increase his capital for the retail trade. I have a great mind to go and see what is going on, for you are all uncommonly dull here ;” and away she went.

“Aston is certainly very entertaining this morning,” said Lord William ; “and he could

not have a better foil than that sublimely dull cousin of his who follows him everywhere to try what he can pick up for his own use on future occasions. They always remind me of what my old friend Jeremy Taylor says of the man who ‘stood twisting hay-bands, and still he twisted on, suffering an ass to eat up all he finished,’ or words to that effect.”

“It is a very apt and a very forcible, if not a very poetical, simile,” said Lady Selina; “and I well recollect its striking application in Jeremy Taylor’s ‘Holy Living.’”

“May I ask how it is applied?” said Prince Carlo.

“I think,” replied Lady Selina, “the simile concludes, ‘so miserable is he who thrusts his passions forwards towards futurity, and suffers all that he ought to enjoy to be lost and devoured by folly or inconsideration; thinking nothing fit to be enjoyed but that which is not to be had.’ That is the substance of it; I am not sure that I quote the words correctly.”

“Excellent!” cried Prince Carlo. “That sentence contains philosophy enough to fill a volume; and the ass and the hay-bands illustrate it to admiration.”

“Talking of philosophy,” said Lord William Rawdon; “I had need of what little I possess just now, in order to preserve my gravity while Mrs. Twaddle was speaking to the Duchess of L——. She holds herself up for a model of domestic worth and correctness; and yet the ultimate object of her whole life appears to be to obtain an *entrée* into good society — a paradox I am not at liberty to explain, since I cannot at all make these two ends in her character meet.”

“I am afraid there is but small chance of her succeeding in obtaining the desired *entrée*,” said Lady Selina.

“Do not be too sure of that. The highest niches in the temple of Fashion may, as well as the highest offices in church and state, be compared to a pyramid, whose top, I think it

is D'Alembert, who says, is accessible to only two sorts of animals, eagles and reptiles. Mrs. Twaddle may crawl up yet, and look down upon all of us as so many sparrows and tomtits. I have a great mind to make up to her and bespeak her patronage."

Mary Harvey, who had been walking with Matilda Leslie and Lord Litchfield now approached, and Lady Selina, observing that she looked fatigued, resigned her seat to her, and assented to the request of Matilda, that she would take a turn with them on the banks of the river. She was not sorry to leave her retreat, although she had been very well amused there ;—she began to fear that what she at first considered the mere badinage of the volatile Lady Mary Rawdon might indeed be well founded, that Prince Carlo Dalbarno was really becoming attached to her. The thought was very distressing ; for Lady Selina was not one to seek conquest merely as incense to vanity. She liked and esteemed the Prince,

but she did not, and was sure she could not, love him. She felt real grief at the idea of giving him pain, and resolved to deny herself the pleasure she took in his conversation, in order that he might discern what her sentiments were. His attentions on this morning had been very decided : there had been a tenderness in his manner which she had not remarked before, and these reflections made Lady Selina both thoughtful and uneasy. Neither Lord Litchfield nor Matilda were talkative ; and the little party proceeded to the river nearly in silence. They wound through a walk of fragrant lime trees, and emerged upon a small lawn, covered with cypress trees and flowering shrubs, and shut out from the other parts of the grounds by a thick hedge of evergreens.

“What a charming, quiet little spot !” exclaimed Matilda. “Let us sit for a short time in that pavilion close to the river.”

They went there, and she continued,—

“How glad I am to escape from the crowd on the lawn ; and how far, far pleasanter it is here !”

“I am afraid, Matilda,” said Lord Litchfield, half in jest and half in earnest, “that your enjoyment proceeds less from the scene and the society in which you now are, than from your great averseness from those you have just quitted. Would not you resign this pretty lawn and Lady Selina and myself to be walking in solitude in the Park at Elmwood ?”

Matilda blushed excessively, but she did not reply.

“That is scarcely a fair question, my Lord,” said Lady Selina : “Matilda is so sincere, that if she were to answer at all, she would say more than her sense of good-breeding would warrant. She would say, perhaps, as far as regards Selina—‘Yes.’ As far as regards Lord Litchfield—‘No.’”

“Oh, no ! no indeed, Selina,” cried Matilda, in great confusion.

Lord Litchfield smiled.

“Why this alarm, Matilda? are you denying you would say this, or are you denying yourself to be the sincere person your friend thinks you? Which are we to understand?”

“Perhaps both,” said Matilda, colouring extremely.

“Nay,” replied Lord Litchfield, in a voice of kindness, “we will not assent to this. Not for a moment could I bear to think you insincere. Sincerity is to me the most beautiful of all virtues; the want of it may lead”—he stopped, and then added earnestly, “do not shake my belief in your sincerity, Matilda.”

The eyes of Lord Litchfield were fixed on her as he spoke, and those of Matilda filled with tears, and sank beneath his gaze. She was extremely agitated, and after a moment's pause, said, in a tone of deep feeling,—

“Oh! Heaven is my witness, that I have, that I do still love, sincerity; that I have always endeavoured—alas! what shall I say?

But how is it possible to live in the world and yet to be sincere?—to be a woman and yet retain sincerity? Pride, delicacy; oh! how many things forbid it!”

“Not so, Matilda,” said Lord Litchfield, gravely; “Lady Selina lives in the world, and is she not sincere—sincerity itself?”

“She is—she is,” replied Matilda, “but who is like her?—she is so good, so upright; she has nothing to conceal; would to God I were like her! Alas! I am not. I am insincere, much as I love sincerity; nor can I help it. Oh! I know, Lord Litchfield, that I am not worthy of you it is not because I do not appreciate your worth Oh! no, you are too good—too much above me—you ought not to have loved me.”

She ceased, and leaning her head on the shoulder of Selina, burst into tears.

Lady Selina was greatly affected, and yet surprised at her conduct. For the first time, a suspicion darted through her mind, which

had never before crossed it—Was it possible that Matilda loved another?—yet how could it be? why, then, accept Lord Litchfield?—for Matilda was not one to be influenced by his rank and fortune; and she was so young—had lived so secluded, that her forming any other attachment was unlikely;—and how could Selina bring herself to believe that Lord Litchfield could be unbeloved?—that Matilda could repent her engagement with him? She looked towards him; his agitation was excessive; for many minutes he was silent; at length, with much emotion, he said,

“Matilda, if you cannot love me, do not deceive me, as well as yourself. You are aware of the years of misery I have known; do not blast the happier prospects which have been opening before me. Probe your feelings while yet there is time. Nothing you can say, nothing you could do, would give me so much wretchedness as to find, *after we were united*, that I had not your confidence—your love—

that, perhaps, even," added he, fixing a searching look upon her, "that another was preferred before me."

A profound silence ensued ; Matilda's countenance assumed for a moment, the appearance of death, so pale it became. Selina felt unable to utter a syllable, and Lord Litchfield continued,

"But, no, that cannot be ; so young, so apparently artless ; you cannot have acted thus basely ; you cannot have led me to suppose you loved me, if you had really given your heart to another."

Matilda started, she clasped her hands, and exclaimed, with a look of horror, and in a voice of strong emotion,—

"Oh ! no—no, indeed, I do not love another !"

These words instantly checked the suspicion which had arisen in the mind of Lady Selina ; she was truth itself, and could not bear to suspect falsehood in another ; she felt she had done Matilda injustice, for

a moment, to imagine her capable of acting with such shocking duplicity. Yet, whence then, the cause of her excessive agitation, her evident self-reproach and suffering? Why should she shock Lord Litchfield's feelings as she had done, by giving him cause, for a moment, to suppose such a thing possible? Selina knew not what to think, but deeply pitying the weeping girl, who clung to her, however, unintelligible was the origin of her sorrow, she ventured to say to Lord Litchfield,

“ You must have misunderstood Matilda ; her opinion of you is so high, “ that it is her own unworthiness she fears She could not proceed ; conflicting feelings overpowered her. The eyes of Lord Litchfield were fixed for a moment upon her countenance, as if he would read her inmost thoughts ; for a few moments he was silent ; at length, turning to Matilda, he said, in a voice of coldness and constraint, a voice such as Selina thought, were she in

Matilda's place, it would have killed her to have listened to.

“Matilda, I am bound to believe your positive assertion. You have denied that you have another attachment, and I am called upon to beg you to pardon my suspicion, that you could have acted so cruelly, so basely by me; yet, I acquit myself of having, without cause, entertained it. Your conduct is extraordinary, and to me wholly inexplicable. You are pale, you are trembling; you cannot fear me?—have I ever given you reason to do so? Yet you give me cause to think you are afraid of me . . . there is a want of confidence, that, should it continue, will make both of us wretched in after life. If you have any explanation to give, anything to communicate,—and allow me to say, you are called upon to act explicitly by me,—you will, perhaps, give to your friend, Lady Selina, the confidence you deny me. She is all kindness, all sweetness. You cannot have a better friend, nor one more capable of advising you.”

Neither of his auditors spoke, although his words had deeply penetrated each. Taking the hand of Selina, he expressed his regret that she should have suffered a moment's uneasiness from her feeling and sympathy with her friends, and quitting the Pavilion, they saw him no more. Selina, seeing the exhausted state of Matilda, did not attempt to resume a conversation so painful to both, and shortly afterwards, their party rejoined them, and hearing of the indisposition of Matilda, Lady Selina, with several among the number, who were tired of the gay scene, returned to town.

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY Selina naturally anticipated from the affection which Matilda bore her, and from the wish expressed by Lord Litchfield, that Matilda would give to her the explanation that her conduct at Richmond appeared to call for.

She felt a repugnance to seek it ; yet, thought it right to assure Matilda of her unchanged affection, and of her wish to render her any service, and to relieve the distress she appeared to be suffering. An embrace, and a few broken words of gratitude, were all she received in return. Lord Litchfield had mentioned the conduct of Matilda to her father, who had spoken to her on the subject. Sir Robert assured Lord Litchfield that the whole arose from the excessive shyness of Matilda ; from

her little knowledge of the world ; the humility with which she thought of herself ; the weakness of her spirits, and her high opinion of, and respect for, Lord Litchfield. This was his own belief, and he earnestly endeavoured to impress it upon his future son-in-law. Lord Litchfield urged her self-accusation of want of sincerity. Sir Robert, in reply, spoke of the excessive sensitiveness of her conscience—of her uncommon turn of mind. Lord Litchfield was aware of the peculiarity of her disposition, and endeavoured to feel satisfied, although he was not able entirely to forget the feelings which had been awakened in his mind. Matilda now appeared more touched by his attentions than formerly ; she evidently was desirous to heal the wound her conduct had inflicted upon him. There was nothing ostensible of which Lord Litchfield could complain, after the conversation at Richmond, yet he was uneasy—apparently unhappy, and his health suffered from the agitation of his mind. He had inquired of Lady Selina, if the subject of their late conversation had been renewed between herself and Matilda. Selina stated

what had passed, and he endeavoured to persuade himself that had there been ought to confess, Matilda would have given her confidence to a friend, to whom she was so much attached. Things, therefore, went on as usual ; still the lawyers held their customary snail's pace ; still the three elder Miss Leslies proceeded in their more rapid one, towards the accomplishment of a complete *trousseau* ; and still Lady Selina endeavoured to think of Lord Litchfield only, as the husband of her friend.

Sir Robert Leslie had long been desirous to form a white-bait party, and having obtained the consent of Lord Litchfield, Lady Selina, and Mary Harvey, to join it, he extended his invitations to the two Mr. Astons, and the whole party embarked at Whitehall-stairs, to proceed to the Ship Inn, at Greenwich.

As Mr. Pennant was of the party, Hildebrand, to his great delight, was permitted to join it also, and was not the least happy among the number.

“ I am quite coming out, I think,” he exclaimed, in the joy of his heart, “ and Lord Litch-

field and papa say I am to go to Epsom with all of you ; and that will be in a day or two : and I'm going to the Opera next Saturday."

"Bravo, my boy !" said Mr. Aston ; "and where do you go to-night, and to-morrow night?"

"I shall only go to bed to-night, because, I dare say we shall not get home till ten o'clock ; and there's nowhere to go to-morrow, unless Lady Selina will let me come to her music party with my sisters."

"Good gracious ! Hildebrand," cried his sister Charlotte, "you are the most impudent boy I ever saw in my life. You may be sure if Lady Selina had wanted you, she would have told you so."

Lady Selina could not help smiling.

"Indeed, Hildebrand," said she, "you shall come by all means, if you wish it, and I should have sent you an invitation to come with your sisters, had I imagined you wished for one. I feared you might find the party rather dull ; for there will be only music, no dancing."

"Oh ! but I want to hear Puzzi blow the

horn so much ; and I am very much obliged to you, Lady Selina. I thought you would let me come if I asked you, and so I begged papa to let me order a cut velvet waistcoat of Stultz, and Catherine shall curl my hair for me, if she will."

" I protest, Hildebrand, you are coming out as an exquisite," said Mr. Aston : " John Hobbs will hardly know you when you go back to Elmwood."

" Oh ! don't think I'm going to wear my cut velvet waistcoat out shooting ; I've got my old fustian jacket for that."

As the ladies of the party were not very ambitious to perform the feat of shooting the bridge they disembarked, and walked through the romantic regions of Billingsgate, while the watermen proceeded with the boat, to take them up beyond London Bridge. The novelty of the scene quite compensated for its want of refinement ; and as they had a large escort of gentlemen, the ladies, with the exception of Mrs. Todd, and Miss Leslie, were by no means sorry for the variety afforded by their short walk. It was extremely

consoling too, that Lady Selina was enabled to discover the identical house in which Lord Glenvarlock resided with his host, John Christie and his pretty and vain wife, who treated honest John so scurvily. There could be no doubt of its being the same abode; the description tallied exactly with that of Sir Walter Scott, and Lord Litchfield, Mary Harvey, and Mr. Aston, all agreed as to its being the veritable temporary abode of Nigel Olifaunt; they almost expected to see Richie Monoplies in his threadbare cloak at the door. The whole party enjoyed the row on the river so much, that they almost regretted when they reached Greenwich.

Sir Robert and Miss Leslie proceeded straight to the inn, to see that all their orders had been properly attended to. The rest of the party having nearly two hours to dispose of till their appointed hour of dinner should arrive, agreed to walk round the hospital, see the chapel and hall, and then take a few turns in the Park, before they should return to the inn. The walk in the Park was enjoyed by every individual of the party, but

by none more than Mary Harvey, by whose side Mr. Aston continued during the whole time.

The pleasure of being sought by one so highly prized, spread itself through the whole mind and countenance of Mary, and it is certain that Mr. Aston had never thought her more charming, or been more interested in her conversation than during this morning. They had outstripped their companions, and were mutually so much pleased, that the walk appeared to them a very short one, although Miss Charlotte Leslie, who was not so pleasantly attended as either her sister Catherine or Mary Harvey, and who happened to be remarkably hungry, thought it an unusually long one. Sir Robert and Miss Leslie had followed their friends to the Park, and now, with Mrs. Todd, formed a sensible and orderly group, which proceeded in measured pace, looking neither to the right nor yet to the left, and discussing with appropriate gravity the merits of white-bait, and the mystery that enveloped the mode in which the people of Greenwich prepare them for the table. Miss Leslie had tried fifty experiments, but had

never been able to compass a batter of such celestial qualities. Mrs. Todd sighed deeply, and wished the invaluable secret could be penetrated, and then no doubt smelts and sprats and "such small fry," might appear in the same costume, and with equal applause ; while Sir Robert, advancing to the precincts of a joke, uttered something about their being an excellent bait for the traps at Greenwich, to entice the idle and unwary from London, to spend their money and spoil their digestion.

This intelligent trio was preceded by Lady Selina, Matilda, Lord Litchfield, and Mr. Pen-
nant, who walked together. Lady Selina had felt out of spirits all the morning ; this was an unusual circumstance with her, that is to say, she seldom gave way beneath an inclination to depression of spirits as she had allowed herself to do this morning ; for during almost the whole of the row to Greenwich she had sat in silence and lost in reflection, without making any effort to join in the conversation of her companions.

The subject which so much occupied her was the sincere and evidently-increasing attach-

ment of Prince Carlo Dalbarno for herself. She had now no doubt that his declaration only awaited the first favourable opportunity ; and it distressed her extremely to reflect on the pain she must necessarily cause him in her rejection. She was also, it must be confessed, a good deal dissatisfied with herself. Why had she felt such interest in Lord Litchfield ? Alas ! it needed not that question. She might rather have asked herself how could she fail to do so ? He combined all the qualities she most admired, combined with a charm of manner which, to her at least, no other person possessed. She felt angry with herself that this interest had not subsided after his engagements to another : she still found herself listening to him ; thinking of him with increased admiration. Yet she asked herself how could it be otherwise ? He must be admired ; not to think of him with some interest would only argue insensibility to the qualities most calculated to excite approbation.

“ I fear though,” she thought, with all the ingenuousness of mind which distinguished her, “ that I have dwelt on him too much. I

have recalled his image and his words oftener to my mind than I should have done. Well! his marriage will now certainly take place in a very few weeks, and then I am quite sure of thinking of him only as a friend and as the husband of Matilda. Alas! why have I ever allowed myself to do otherwise?—from the first evening of their acquaintance he admired her—nor has he ever sought me save as a friend: and now what sorrow will it be to me to consign Prince Carlo Dalbarno to the misery of a hopeless attachment! How perverse—how wayward are the affections! Who can be more worthy of being beloved than he is? and yet he is indifferent to me. Has he not all the acquirements and refinements I so much prize in Lord Litchfield? What fault can I find in him? Yes! he is one that may be loved for himself alone. I almost wish it were in my power to return his affection. I might have loved—I might have been happy with him had I never known Lord Litchfield: as it is, I should be culpable indeed were I to accept him when I could only return the sincerity of affection I am convinced he entertains for me,

with the cold esteem which alone I can now feel for him. Where shall I ever find one more worthy to be loved? Nowhere! Yes! I feel sure that I never can love—and never, never will I follow the cold, the heartless, the wretched examples I see around me—of making a marriage where the heart is the last to be consulted.”

In reflections such as these Lady Selina proceeded for some time beside her companions in silence.

“It is not often,” said Lord Litchfield at length, “that we can accuse Lady Selina of being out of spirits—yet she is certainly in a reverie at least. We must punish by making her detail the subjects of it. Come, confess, Lady Selina, that your imagination was peopling this Park with the illustrious forms that were wont to grace it in days of yore. Are not you in a kind of waking dream, in which Sir Philip Sydney, Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh, Lord Burleigh, and many more, have a great share?”

“I am afraid I was not even thinking of them; but you have at least awakened a very

pleasing train of thought, and I am very willing to follow your lead, and to increase the enjoyments of the present by peopling it with the beings of the past."

"I am glad to see," said Matilda, "that Selina is always as much given to day-dreams as I am. I do not even feel sure that Lord Litchfield is not slightly inclined the same way himself."

"I do not deny it, Matilda. I have frequently cast off sad realities, and lived in fiction; but the delusion can never hold me long, and it is at best but an unprofitable turn: when we awaken from these day-dreams *all our gold is slates.*"

"Yet," exclaimed Matilda, eagerly, "they are not wholly unprofitable, if they enable us to get over the present with less unhappiness than we otherwise might."

"But," said Mr. Pennant, "have you only to do with the present by thinking how you may rid yourself of it? Do not both the future and what will become the past entirely depend upon it? consequently, both your hopes and your recollections must take their colour

from it ; and no very bright one will it be if your day-dreams alone are to occupy it—”

“ ‘ The past is nothing—and at last
The future can but be the past, ’ ”

said Lady Selina, smiling, “ and if we could allow the past to be nothing, Lord Byron would have afforded us great consolation in two short lines.”

“ But that we cannot allow,” replied Mr. Pennant. “ Past, present, and future, are so linked together, so colour each other, that it is beyond our power to break the link.”

“ Nor would we wish to break it,” said Lord Litchfield. “ When dwelling on scenes of past splendour and glory, who would destroy the halo shed over them by the power of associations drawn from the past ? It is that which makes the enthusiasm of our admiration in Italy ; without it the Colosseum would be only a heap of stones to us. Yes ! in Italy it is impossible not to dream—not to live almost entirely in retrospection.”

“ I never can enjoy any of these day-dreams in London,” said Matilda. “ It is only in

scenes of solitude that I can *shake off the clay*—that I can forget any sorrows I may have. Amid ‘the crowd, the hum, the shock of men,’ we are conscious of their full weight ; we cannot deceive ourselves into forgetfulness of them.”

“It is in town,” said Lady Selina, “that Sir Walter Raleigh says :—

‘Mirth’s but mummery,
And only sorrows real be.’

In the country, and in solitude,

‘Murmur ne’er comes nigh us,
Saving of fountains that glide by us.’”

“Very beautiful and very poetical,” said Lord Litchfield, “yet I cannot assent to the truth of the lines. No ! *the mind is its own place* ; and, to reply to your quotation with another, I must say,

‘’Tis not the place disgust or pleasure brings,
From our own mind our satisfaction springs.’”

“Those lines,” said Mr. Pennant, “ought to be engraved in letters of gold ; they might serve to banish the foul fiend, *Discontent*, which preys upon the happiness of so many, who yet, surrounded by innumerable blessings, are con-

stantly pining for others that, in their own blindness, they conceive to be such—yet, were they obtained, they might prove more like a curse to them.”

“ You use very strong language,” said Matilda. “ Is discontent so very criminal as you infer ? ”

“ Is not it ingratitude to heaven—a rebellion of spirit against its decrees ? Weak and blinded as we are, can we judge what is good for us ? I knew a lady who was a slave to discontent — always complaining, always wishing for something unattainable. She possessed almost every means for rational happiness, and had the disposal of a very large fortune. I have frequently heard this lady complain of the ingratitude she had met with from the poor !—of their forgetfulness of her bounties ! Good God ! is not this blindness and impiety ?—the swinish gluttony, that

‘ Ne’er looks to heaven amidst its gorgeous banquet,—
But with besotted, base ingratitude,
Crams and blasphemes its feeder.’ ”

“ It is,” said Lady Selina, and she feared she had been nourishing the fiend Discontent

in her late reflections. "Ah!" thought she, "we ought to dwell upon the blessings we possess, and not on those which cannot be ours. And have I been doing this? I have not; but I must—I will."

With this resolution she felt enabled to throw off the gloom which had settled on her, and following the train of thought which Lord Litchfield had at first aroused, she turned the discourse on the illustrious names he had mentioned, and the recollection of which was almost irresistibly inspired by the scene around them.

The conversation was carried on with spirit by all—for even Matilda joined in it with apparent interest; and the whole group felt sorry when Sir Robert called to them to assure them it wanted but a quarter of an hour to dinner, and there was no time to be lost.

The cloth was laid in a pleasant bay-windowed room, looking over and close to the river, whose cool breezes were admitted by all the sashes being thrown open. The sun was very powerful, but its rays were tempered by the green blinds being partly drawn down.

Large bouquets of roses were placed about the table, shedding their delicious perfume through the room, which was thus rendered a very agreeable retreat to all the party, after their walk in the heat of the day.

Sir Robert had given liberal orders, and the iced champagne and hock, with the not-to-be-despised cyder-cup, were found very agreeable accompaniments to the repast, which, as is generally the case on these occasions, consisted of fourteen or fifteen dishes of fresh-water fish, dressed in different manners, with about as many plates of brown bread and butter; two more of the usual courses, and a course of the celebrated white-bait, with the accompanying zests. Numerous dishes of fruit succeeded. A band of music was stationed in a boat below the window.

The scene on the river was animated and interesting, from the numbers of vessels which were passing, with now and then a huge, black, smoky steamer, wizzing its way and disturbing all in its vicinity, and looking, as Hildebrand observed, "like a great vulgar beast of burthen."

Many were the exclamations of sorrow, when the fast-fading daylight gave the signal to Sir Robert to desire coffee might be brought in as quickly as possible, and orders given to the boatmen to prepare for returning to London.

The row home was pronounced to be even more charming than that they had so much enjoyed in the morning. An awning protected the party from the damps of evening, and the boat with the musicians preceded them, playing the most beautiful airs of Rossini and Meyerbeer. Nothing could be more charming! Even the numerous gas-lights, and the noisy mirth of the ill-bred Thames watermen as they passed, did not prevent the ladies of the party from finding a kind of romance in the scene, which they were willing to take upon trust for want of better.

Sir Robert was in a remarkably complacent mood. He had himself enjoyed the excursion extremely. It had been an expensive one, no doubt; but then he had gathered infinite satisfaction from remarking, that the good understanding between his daughter Catherine

and Mr. Birmingham Aston, appeared on this day to have received a considerable augmentation.

To Mary Harvey the day had been decidedly one of the most charming she had ever known. Mr. Aston had scarcely ever quitted her side during the whole of it; he had sat by her at dinner, and now, in the boat, was still beside her; his conversation almost exclusively addressed to her. Yes! she really thought she was not quite indifferent to him! Could the party be otherwise than delightful to her?

Catherine and Mr. Birmingham Aston kept up a running fire of *petits riens* until they reached the place of disembarkation at Westminster-bridge. The greater part of the party were inclined to silence; some were busied with reflection; and Mrs. Todd and Hildebrand were fast asleep, and could scarcely be sufficiently aroused to be safely unladen from the boat, and stowed into the carriages which were in waiting by the bridge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE evening following the excursion to Greenwich was that on which Lady Selina had determined her little music-party should take place. A few friends were also to dine with her. She had not been in the habit of giving dinner-parties, but on this occasion, as the Duchess of L—— and her friend the Bishop of —— had promised her their support, she ventured to indulge the wish she felt to play the part of a hostess. She possessed a superb service of plate, and could not but accede to the sentiments of the Miss Leslies and of Mary Harvey, who averred it to be “a sad pity it should be for ever buried in the chests, for nobody’s edification but the butler’s.” A dinner was, therefore, resolved on, and several of the first vocal and instru-

mental performers were engaged to enliven the evening.

To the Leslies this party was a great event. They were by no means in the first set, nor had they at all a large acquaintance among their own ; but at Lady Selina Clifford's they were sure of meeting the most *recherché* of the first circle in London. All the planets they had worshipped at a distance would, for this evening, revolve in the same sphere with themselves.

They had provided new dresses for the occasion. Mr. Birmingham Aston was rather an amateur in ladies' dresses, and particularly admired the colour of "*vapeur*." Vapeur-crape was accordingly the order of the day with Catherine ; and Charlotte determined to follow her lead. Nardin was to have the sole charge of their heads, and, it must be confessed, played his part with the exterior much better than Nature had done with the interior. To render their whole costume complete, a drive to Colville's was effected in the morning, in order to procure bouquets of hot-house flowers to wear in the evening.

It is not an unusual custom, among sentimental young ladies, to dry and preserve these bouquets, should the evening on which one has been worn have proved particularly propitious or remarkably pleasant. Therefore, if Mr. Birmingham Aston should be as agreeable on this evening as he had proved at Greenwich, Catherine certainly intended to preserve her bouquet, in order to recall pleasing reminiscences in after days.

Charlotte had one or two small flirtations on her hands ; but, alas ! her favoured swains were not of Lady Selina's acquaintance. She was, however, somewhat solaced under this misfortune, by hearing that Frederick Harvey, who was lately arrived in town, had received an invitation.

Charlotte had frequently thought how charming a thing it would be to become mistress of Rolleston Park. Its heir, then, was by no means uninteresting to her. Charlotte, therefore, as well as her sister, might anticipate a pleasant evening in Stanhope-street, and many agreeable recollections when she should be returned to her "long home" at Elmwood,

while gazing on the faded flowers which had been worn under happier auspices.

Lady Selina and Mary Harvey had been greatly amused when the Miss Leslies detailed to them these their botanical propensities, on the morning in which they chanced to meet at Colville's. Mary proposed to establish a *hortus siccus*, with a short account annexed of the different parties at which each bouquet had figured. Catherine and Charlotte gravely assented to the utility and wisdom of the plan. They were very far below Mary Harvey in intellect, and yet, it must be confessed, that at the very moment she was laughing at them, she was conscious of having a small scent bag in her work-box filled with the leaves of roses, heliotropes, and verbinums which Mr. Aston had given her; but then, no doubt, they were retained for their perfume alone, and, most likely, she had happened to be particularly in want of a scent-bag at the time!

"Catherine and Charlotte Leslie are decided sentimentalists," said Lady Selina to Mary Harvey, as they drove along the King's-road on their return from Colville's. "I recollect

Mr. Aston once laughing at the devices on their seals, which are always altars, and hearts, and arrows, and Cupids. He called them their *amour-ial* bearings.”

Mary laughed, and said, “I never find that their ‘little mental afflictions,’ as they call them, lower their spirits in the least. Their hearts are like targets, pierced all over with small holes, but no arrow ever reaches the bull’s eye.”

“I doubt,” said Lady Selina, “whether they have a bull’s eye at all. I am rather inclined to agree with Lady Mary Rawdon, that they are of the class of granivorous animals; at least I firmly believe that those people who are always fancying themselves in love never feel ‘*la grande passion*’ at all; although, I have no doubt they would assert, with the ingenious Frenchman, that every fresh affair of this kind was their ‘*premier amour*,’ the last was but ‘*la dernière amourette*.’”

“Or, perhaps,” said Mary, “were you to reproach them with inconstancy, they would exclaim, with the still more ingenious French woman, — ‘*Moi inconstante! moi! — je suis fidèle à tout le monde*.’”

The *vapeur* crape and the "token flowers" of the Miss Leslies, who, not of Lady Selina's dinner-party, were the first arrivals in the drawing-rooms in the evening were speedily followed by the Lady Rawdons and their brother, and Mr. Aston and Lord Bruce, and many "bright particular stars," known from a distance, or not known at all by the Miss Leslies, whose visiting book, as has been observed, was of small dimensions, and might have been formed out of a single sheet of note paper without danger of curtailment of any kind.

Hildebrand Leslie, in his celebrated cut velvet waistcoat, was with his sisters until he managed to escape to a distance, in order to enjoy the pleasures of independence; being much too great a personage in his own opinion to submit to the ceaseless pieces of advice and prudent instructions of his two sisters, relative to his line of conduct during the whole evening.

A young Italian *improvisatore* on the piano-forte was delighting the whole room with his extraordinary performance. It was the first time he had been heard in England, therefore novelty added a fresh charm to the real grace

and feeling and the surprising execution of his inspirations. At their close, Mary Rawdon, who, with her sister, was standing near Lord Bruce, and who had been a very attentive listener, expressed to him in very enthusiastic terms her admiration of the performance.

“Is not his execution magnificent?” asked she; “and what feeling and wonderful powers of invention! Did you ever hear any one equal him?”

“I am sorry to differ from you,” replied Lord Bruce; “but he does not strike me as being very extraordinary. A vast deal of running up and down the keys, a great many breaks and pauses, pretty much like any other playing.”

“Good heavens, Lord Bruce! I never can get you to care about anything! no getting satisfaction from you at all. What can you mean by, being pretty much like any other playing? Have you no more taste or sense of hearing than to talk such folly as that?”

Lord Bruce smiled. He had never been in a passion himself, but it rather amused him to see any other person in that predicament.

“Do not let me annoy you. I only meant to say that the playing of this boy is pretty much like Cramer’s, or Scappa’s, or any one else’s that we have been used to hear all our lives.”

“Well, but if it were, do not you know that it is still extraordinary from its being entirely extempore?”

“Your ladyship is credulous. He may attempt to impose it on the public as extemporaneous; but how are we to feel sure that he has not been practising his performance of this evening from all eternity?”

“Well, if you are not exasperating beyond all belief! It is wasting both time and temper to talk to one who affects neither to care for nor to believe any one thing on the face of the earth. Indeed I wonder I attempted it, for I recollect you could not make up your mind to admire the Tyrolese, because you could by no means feel sure whether they really were all of one family, as they gave themselves out to be, as if it could signify one rush whether they were or not, so long as their voices blended together!”

Lady Mary turned away, and was followed by Lord Litchfield, who had heard and been amused at the indignation she had expressed, and which indeed she was seldom at the trouble to restrain, when once excited.

“Now was not that provoking?” asked she; “and did not I behave very well in not being downright rude to him?”

Lord Litchfield smiled.

“I own,” said he, “you had provocation to exclaim, *quel grand homme! rien ne peut lui plaire!*”

“Yes! I am sure that is the only pretension Lord Bruce has, to be the great man he conceives himself. Then no Jew was ever more unbelieving! He either disbelieves or doubts every thing he sees or hears that is in the least out of the common way; as if he expected us to say, ‘What a wise man! he believes nothing!’”

“If folly is to attempt to pass current for wisdom,” said Lord Litchfield, “we must allow it to take its own ways and means, as they are but limited, and are at least amusing. Lord Bruce is so much alarmed at the idea of being

classed among the '*credulous vulgar*,' that he passes into the other extreme and assumes a *vulgar incredulity*. Sir Walter Scott, in one of his novels, which I was reading this morning, applying these terms to the class of doubters in religion, and historical facts, as well as in other matters, says, 'They find it easier to doubt than to examine, and endeavour to assume the credit of an *esprit fort*, by denying whatever happens to be a little beyond the very limited comprehension of the sceptic.'"

"Excellent! now I will really remember to quote this to Lord Bruce the very next time he dares to doubt anything that I choose to tell him. I cannot endure those pitiful would-be-wise, who will neither admire, nor believe, nor be surprised at any one thing. I would twenty times rather see Katterfelto, with his hair on end, wondering at his own wonders, than one of these solemn phlegmatic fools, who if they are really what they would have us believe, only prove that they are lost to all sense of feeling, nature, and taste! To be sure, philosophers tell us, Truth lies buried

deep, and we all know poor Lord Bruce can therefore have no chance of coming at it :—but if that is the case, why cannot he let it rest in peace ? why must he be for ever fidgetting about and scratching up the earth that covers it, when he knows there is no hope of ever clearing it away ?”

“ Good heavens ! Mary, it makes me breathless to listen to you,” said her sister ; and not, it must be confessed, without ample reason. “ I am sure you will one day die of a fever, from over excitation.”

“ And that, my dear Susan, will never be your case — so console yourself with that reflection. *Ennui* will be *your* death-blow, depend upon it. You will die of the ‘ gapes,’ like the chickens last summer. I am sure they caught the disease from you, and so I told the poultry woman ; and I wonder she ever let you come into the chicken-yard at all. Oh ! Lord Litchfield, you must not forget you have promised to visit Rawdon Park this year. Do not put us off, and say, you have married a wife, and cannot come, for Matilda has promised me her company too,—at least

she did not say me nay, when I asked her ; though, I must confess, she looked greatly horrified at the idea. You shall not die of the ‘gapes,’ I promise you, for there will be Selina Clifford, and a large party to meet you, and you can keep out of Susan’s way, you know.”

“I would rather advise Lord Litchfield to keep out of yours, Mary. You are very amusing for a little while,—but to hear you running on in this way all day long is, really, destruction to the strongest nerves, as bad as being in a room where there was a perpetual drawing of ginger-beer,—cork flying out after cork.”

“Now Susan, thank you a thousand times ! Those are the truest, and certainly the wittiest, words you have ever spoken in the whole course of your life. I begin to have hopes of you.”

“Have you ever been engaged in private theatricals, my Lord ?” asked Lady Susan. “We are going to get some up at Rawdon Park. One wants something of that sort to keep one awake in the country.”

“I never have,” replied Lord Litchfield, “but I have no doubt, I shall be able to play the part of an auditor, very well.”

“I like theatricals, exceedingly,” said Lady Mary; “not that I want them merely to keep me awake, as Susan does; but they serve for amusement to those sophisticated creatures who have no turn for rural felicity, like myself. I never could care for curds and cream, and hay-fields and geraniums, and all that kind of thing. I cannot see the pleasure of milking one’s own cows and laying one’s own eggs. I tried to get up a school once, but I soon tired of that.”

“I am afraid,” said Lord Litchfield, smiling, “that your likings and dislikings are wonderfully evanescent. ‘A change comes o’er the spirit of your dream,’ somewhat too frequently. I begin to believe you are the genuine principle of perpetual motion.”

“Do not call me names, my lord, or I shall retort upon you, and call you the centre of gravity; at least, I must say you are certainly not over lively to-night. A little carbonate of soda would improve you vastly; but, alas!

poor Matilda Leslie will be more like opium to you, I am afraid ; quite a soporific ; and a soporific is very well, *pro renata*, as the doctors say ; but not for every hour of the day, take my word for it. You had better have married me or Lady Selina Clifford. So now, I shall go and listen to the music, and leave you to think of what I have said. I dare say poor Matilda will let you off, if you ask her."

Dull as she was, Lady Susan felt shocked at the inconsiderate folly of her volatile sister. Lady Mary was not really ill-natured, yet she seldom stopped to consider the feelings of others, if her doing so would put the least check upon any thing that it came into her head, at the moment to utter. There was, undoubtedly, somewhat in her last speech which had jarred with the feelings of Lord Litchfield ; he sighed, involuntarily, and not finding much relief from sad thoughts, in the vicinity of Lady Susan Rawdon, he moved onwards towards the group of musicians assembled near the harp of Lady Selina, who was playing a solo, and with so much taste and feeling, as well as delicacy of execution,

that Lord Litchfield, although, far from an enthusiast in music, remained chained to the spot. She introduced the exquisite air, *Di tanti regi*. It was a favourite with Lord Litchfield ; it now reminded him of days long gone by, before sorrow had reached him. A host of sad recollections rushed over him, his early prospects which had opened so brightly oh ! how had they faded !—and now Alas ! what had he now to look to ? He endeavoured to arouse his mind from the melancholy thoughts which nearly overpowered it ; it would not do—

“ The thought that fain would banish it,
Still was pursuing—
And the hard struggle to forget,
Was the renewing.”

Matilda was seated near him. She was more than usually pale, appeared more than usually unhappy ; if any one addressed her, it was evidently a struggle to her to reply ; tears appeared ready to break from her eyes, and Lord Litchfield, at length, gave up the attempts he had vainly made to lead her into conversation. He was hurt at her extreme coldness to himself—

offended as well as hurt. It appeared vain to expect ever to discover its cause. He recalled his last conversation with her father. Sir Robert had then ascribed her conduct as proceeding alone from the peculiarity of her disposition. Was it, indeed, so? Allowing it to be the case, such a disposition was not likely to bring him the domestic happiness he sought. Reserved himself, and inclined from early sorrow to melancholy, he began to think he had chosen without judgment, and too hastily. Yet how rectify his error? Matilda had assured him she had no other attachment, and what reason could she have for deceiving him? Yes! it was himself he had chiefly to blame. Matilda was weak-spirited, timid, cold, reserved. Few things or persons appeared to interest her. Such was her character. Was she then to blame, because she felt not that warmth of attachment for her future husband, with which he had hoped to inspire her? Alas! his present unhappiness appeared to be of his own seeking!

“Keen was the pang, but keener far to feel
He nursed the pinion which impelled the steel!”

When the music ceased, Lord Litchfield joined an *écarté* party, but finding himself unable to take amusement in what was passing around him, he retired at an early hour to his solitary home. In the mean time, he left many happy hearts behind him, and that of Catherine Leslie, not the least happy among the number. Mr. Birmingham Aston advanced now as rapidly as she could wish, and already splendid visions of silks and laces, and pearls and pink topazes danced before her eyes. More than once had she made a random reply to those who had addressed her, because her fancy was wandering in all the uncertainty of not being able to decide whether she should prefer a green britska or a yellow double phaeton, nor whether it would be the more eligible to have a French maid or an English one. Charlotte had also passed an agreeable evening on the whole, although Frederic Harvey had scarcely spoken to her. She had, nevertheless, found several very pleasant ball-room acquaintance of a late date, and had also derived much satisfaction in observing the favourable progress of Catherine's flirtation

with Mr. Birmingham Aston. Her *chateaux en Espagne* were, of course, not quite so exalted as her sister's, yet she too had her dreams of becoming bride's-maid's attire, a white bonnet, with blonde ; a long visit to the new-married pair ; and, a consequent escape from Elmwood and from Sarah, to say nothing of the consolatory fact of weddings being generally allowed to be epidemic ; therefore, there was no saying how speedily she might herself follow so laudable an example.

Mary Harvey and Mr. Aston were on the best possible terms with each other, and consequently had each found the evening a very agreeable one. Lady Selina rejoiced to observe the happiness of her friend Mary. She had exerted herself to render her little party agreeable to every one, and had found pleasure in her own exertions and success. She had observed the more than usual depression of Matilda and of Lord Litchfield ; yet, strange to say, benevolent as she was, this did not make her so uneasy, as, from her friendship to each, she deemed it ought. The concert, too, of which, with the assistance of Sir George

Smart, she had herself made the programme, had given her unalloyed delight. Her rooms looked most brilliant, everything went off well, and she began to think it very agreeable to play the part of hostess. In short, during the quarter of an hour she remained, to converse with Mary Harvey, after her drawing-rooms were deserted, it was decided that the party had been a particularly charming one. Mrs. Todd agreed with them. She had had a very comfortable game at picquet with Sir Robert Leslie, and a long half-doze in a Woburn, and could not be otherwise than pleased.

Lady Selina had promised to make a party with the Leslies, to go to the races at Epsom ; she had never been at a race, and certainly did not find much amusement when the day arrived ; at least the fatigue, dust, and length of the drive to and from London, far overbalanced the little she found on the course. Not so the Miss Leslies ; they were delighted with the races, and flattered themselves their pink bonnets, full of chrysanthemums, and pea-green silk dresses, were much more befitting the occasion, than the plain *capote* and large white cachemire of Lady Selina.

Matilda had obtained permission from her father to absent herself from the party, as Lord Litchfield, who had left town for a few days, was not to be present. Days, like all other spring-days in London, flew rapidly on, and the season approached its close. Mr. Aston had proposed for Mary Harvey; her father had consequently arrived in town, and all arrangements, preparatory to their marriage, had been put into the proper train.

Catherine Leslie was now speedily to become Mrs. Birmingham Aston. Her head and hands, as well as those of her sisters, were accordingly full of business. Much had to be effected within a short space of time, as Sir R. Leslie had given out his decree—immutable as those of the Medes and Persians—that, on a certain day, they must return to Elmwood—*trousseau* or no *trousseau*.

The preparations for the marriage of Matilda were nearly completed, and it was to be celebrated at Elmwood, on the same day with that of her sister.

Lady Selina had already fixed her day for leaving town: she longed for the quiet of the

country, and promised herself a few months of tranquil enjoyment at home, before her visit to the Rawdons, later in the summer.

Mr. Aston and his bride were to visit the Continent for a short time, and had promised to join the party at Rawdon Park, where Lady Selina looked forward, with great delight, to meeting them.

END OF VOL. I.

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