Clara Howard: In a Series of Letters

Charles Brockden Brown

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TO _____ _____ –

What could excite in you any curiosity as to my affairs? You once knew me a simple lad, plying the file and tweezers at the bench of a watchmaker, with no prospect before me but of labouring, for a few years, at least, as a petty and obscure journeyman, at the same bench where I worked five years as an apprentice. I was sprung from obscurity, destitute of property, of parents, of paternal friends; was full of that rustic diffidence, that inveterate humility, which are alone sufficient to divert from us the stream of fortune's favours.

Such was I three years ago! Now am I rich, happy, crowned with every terrestrial felicity, in possession of that most exquisite of all blessings, a wife, endowed with youth, grace, dignity, discretion.

I do not, on second thoughts, wonder at your curiosity. It was impossible for me to have foreseen, absurd to have hoped for such a destiny. All that has happened, was equally beyond my expectations and deservings.

You ask me how all these surprising things came about? The inclosed letters, which I have put into a regular series, contain all the information you wish. The pacquet is a precious one; you will find in it, a more lively and exact picture of my life, than it is possible, by any other means, to communicate. Preserve it, therefore, with care, and return it safely and entire, as soon as you have read it.

LETTER I.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − New−York, − *March 7.*

Why do I write? For whose use do I pass my time thus? There is no one living who cares a jot for me. There was a time, when a throbbing heart, a trembling hand, and eager eyes were always prepared to read, and ruminate on the scantiest and poorest scribble that dropped from my pen, but she has disappeared. The veil between us is like death.

Yet why should I so utterly despair of finding her? What all my toils may not accomplish, may be effected at a moment the least expected, and in a manner the least probable. I may travel a thousand miles, north and south, and not find her. I may lingeringly and reluctantly give up the fruitless search, and return home. A few hours after, I may stroll, in melancholy, hopeless mood, into the next street....and meet her. By such invisible threads is the unwitting man led through this maze of life.

But how will she be met? Perhaps....horrid thought!...she may have become vile, polluted; and how shall I endure to meet her in that condition. One so delicate, carrying dignity to the verge....beyond the verge of pride; preferring to starve rather than incur contempt. But that degradation is impossible.

Yet, if she dreaded not my censure, if she despaired not of my acquiescence in her schemes, why conceal from me her flight? Why not leave behind her a cold farewel. Could she be insensible to the torments and inquietudes which her silence would entail upon me. Could she question the continuance and fervency of my zeal for her welfare? What have I done to estrange her heart, to awaken her resentment?

She does not live with Sedley. That question Mr. Phillips's report has decided. Atleast she does not live with him as *his wife*. Impossible that Mary Wilmot should be allied to any man by a different tie. It is sacrilege so much as to whisper to one's heart the surmise. Yet have I not written it? Have I not several times pondered on it? What has so often suggested these frightful images?

This mysterious, this impenetrable silence it is, that astounds and perplexes me. This evident desire, which her conduct betrayed, to be not sought after by me, and this departure in company with Sedley; the man whom so long a devotion, so many services had not induced her to suffer his visits. To sever herself thus abruptly and forever from *me*, to whom she had given all her tenderness, with whom she had divided all her cares, during years; to whom the marriage promise had been solemnly pledged, and trust herself, on some long and incomprehensible journey with one, whom she had thought it her duty to shun; to exclude, on all occasions, from her company; is beyond my comprehension.

But I am tired of the pen already; of myself; of the world.

Ah, Clara! can so groundless a punctilio govern thee? The settled gloom of thy aspect; thy agitation, when too tenderly urged by me; thy tears, that, in spite of heroic resolutions, will sometimes find way, prove thy heart to be still mine.

But I will urge thee, I will distress thee no more. Thy last words have put an end to my importunity. Can I ever forget them, or the looks and gestures with which they were spoken?

"I never will be yours! Have I not heard all your pleas; all your reasonings? And am I not now furnished with all the means of a right judgment. I have listened to you twenty times upon this topic, and always patiently. Now listen to me.

"I never will be yours, while Mary's condition is unknown. I never will be yours while she is single; unmarried to another and unhappy. I will have no intercourse with you. I will not grant you even my esteem, unless you search for her; find her; and oblige her to accept your vows.

"There is now no obstacle on account of fortune. *I* have enough for several, and will give you half. All that my parents have, and you know they are rich, they will either divide between you and me, or will give entirely to me. In either case, competence, and even abundance shall be hers and yours."

'Tis nine months since I first entered this house: not on the footing of a stranger or a guest; but of a child. Yet my claims upon my revered friend are not filial. He loves me, because all the virtues I possess are of his own planting and rearing. He that was once the pupil has now become the son.

How painful and how sweet is the review of the past year. How benign were the auspices under which I

entered this house. Commended to the confidence and love of their daughter, treated with complacency, at first; then with confidence by that daughter; and, finally, honoured with her love. And yet, a single conversation; the mention of one unhappy name, has reversed totally my condition. I am still beloved by Clara; but that passion produces nothing but her misery and mine.

I must go, she tells me; and duty tells me that I must go in search of the fugitive. I will not rest till I have ascertained her destiny. Yet I can forbode nothing but evil. The truth, whatever it be, will avail me nothing.

I set out to−morrow; meanwhile Clara shall have this scribble: perhaps, she will not spurn it. Wilt thou, Clara? Thou once lovedst me: perhaps, dost love me still: Yet of that I must entertain some doubts. I part with thee tomorrow, perhaps, forever. This I will put into thy hands at parting.

LETTER II.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Hatfield, − *March 20.*

You knew my intention to stop, a few days, at this place, to see my sisters and my old friend. I promised to write to you, and inform you of my welfare. I gave the promise with coldness and reluctance, because I predicted that no benefit would flow to either from our correspondence. Will you believe that I was a little sullen at our parting; that your seeming cheerfulness was construed by my perverse heart, into something very odious? The words *inhuman* and *insensible* girl rose to my lips, and had like to have been uttered aloud.

I did not reflect, that, since you have resolved to pursue a certain path, my regard for you, if unmixed with selfishness, should prompt me to wish, that you may encounter as few asperities as possible, and to rejoice at the easiness of a sacrifice, which, whether difficult or easy, *must* be made.

I had not left you a day, before my inconstant disposition restored me to my virtuous feelings. I repented of the coldness with which I had consented to your scheme of correspondence, and tormented myself with imagining those pangs which my injustice must have given you. I determined to repair my fault as quickly as possible; to write to you often, and in the strain worthy of one who can enter into your feelings, and estimate, at its true value, the motive which governs your actions.

I have, indeed, new and more urgent motives for writing. I arrived, at this hospitable mansion, late in the evening. I have retired, for the first time, to my chamber, and have instantly taken up my pen. The nature of the tidings I send, will justify my haste. I will relate what has happened, without further preface.

I approached my friend's door, and lifted the latch without giving any signal of my approach. I found the old gentleman, seated with his pipe, near the fire, and looking placidly on the two girls, who were busy at draughts, for which they had made squares on the pine table, with chalk, and employed yellow and red grains of corn in place of *pawns*.

They started at my entrance, and, seeing who it was, threw themselves into my arms, in a transport of surprise and delight. After the first raptures of our meeting had passed, Mr. Hickman said to me; Well, my boy, thou hast come just in time. Godfry Cartwright has just carried away letters for thee. He goes to town to−morrow, and I gave him a pacquet that has lain here for some time, to put into the office for thee.

A pacquet? For me? From whom?

When thou knowest the truth, thou wilt be apt to blame us a little, for our negligence; but I will tell thee the whole affair, and thou shalt judge how far we are culpable. A week ago, I was searching the drawers in my cherry−tree desk, for the copy of a bond which old Duckworth had placed in my hands for safe−keeping, when I lighted on a bulky pacquet, sealed up, and inscribed with thy name. I thought it strange, that a paper of that kind should be found in my possession, and looked at it again and again before I could comprehend the mystery. At last I noticed, in the corner, the words "By Mr. Cartwright." Cartwright, thou knowest is the man we employ to take and bring letters to and from the city. Hence, I supposed it to be a pacquet brought by him on some occasion, and left here for thee; but by whom it was received, when it was brought, and how it should chance to repose in this drawer, I could not guess. I mentioned the affair to my sister, but she had no knowledge of the matter. At length, after examining the pacquet and comparing circumstances, she gradually recollected its history.

Alack−a−day! cried she, I do remember something of it now. Cartwright brought it here, just the same evening of the very day that poor Edward left here and went to town. I remember I put it into that drawer, supposing that to be as good a place as any to keep it safe in, till we should hear from the lad, and so have some inkling whereabouts to send it to him; but, as I am a living soul, I forgot all about it from that day to this.

Such is the history of your pacquet, which, you see, was mislaid through accident and my sister's bad memory.

This pacquet instantly connected itself, in my fancy, with the destiny of poor Mary. It came hither nearly at the time of her flight from Abingdon. It, no doubt, came from her, and contained information of unspeakable moment to our mutual happiness. When I reflected on the consequences of this negligence, I could scarcely restrain my impatience. I eagerly inquired for the pacquet.

Not an half−hour ago, said Hickman, I delivered it to Cartwright, with directions to put it into the post−office for New−York. He sets out early in the morning, so that thou wilt receive it on thy return to New−York.

Cartwright lives five miles from this house. The least delay was intolerable; and, my horse not being yet unsaddled, I mounted him immediately, and set out, in spite of expostulation and intreaty. The night was remarkably gloomy and tempestuous, and I was already thoroughly fatigued; but these considerations were forgotten.

I arrived at Cartwright's hovel, in less than an hour, and having gotten the pacquet, I returned with equal dispatch. Immediately after, I retired to my chamber and opened the pacquet, on which I instantly recognised the well−known hand of Miss Wilmot. I will wave all comments, and send you the letter.

Letter

TO EDWARD HARTLEY. − Abingdon, − *Nov. 11.*

I need not tell you, my friend, what I have felt, in consequence of your silence. The short note which I received, a fortnight after you had left me, roused my curiosity and my fears, instead of allaying them. You promised me a longer account of some mysterious changes that had taken place in your condition. This I was to receive in a few days. At the end of a week I was impatient. The promised letter did not arrive. Four weeks passed away, and nothing came from you.

Your pacquet has at last put an end to suspense: But why did you not send it sooner? Why not send me your story piece−meal; or, at least, tell me, in half a line, how you were employed, and what occasioned your delay? Why did you not come yourself? Edward, I am *displeased;* I was going to say, *angry* with you. You have sported with my feelings. I ought to lay down my pen while I am in this humour. The pangs your negligence has given me, have not yet been soothed to rest, and when I find that so much unhappiness has been given through mere heedlessness, I can scarcely keep my patience.

I was sitting on a bench in the garden, when a country lad entered the enclosure. As soon as I caught a glimpse of him, and observed that his attention was fixed upon me, and his right hand already in his pocket, my heart whispered that this was the bearer of tidings from you. I attempted to rise and meet him, but my knees trembled so much, that I was obliged to give up my design. He drew forth his pacquet and threw it into my lap, answering, at the same time, my inquiries, respecting you, by telling me that you were well, and that you had been busy, for a long time, night and day, in writing that *there* letter to me. He had stopt a moment to give it, and could not stay, but merely to receive three lines from me, informing you of my health.

You do not deserve the favour. Besides, my fingers partake the flutterings of my heart. A tumult of joy and vexation, overpowers me. But, though you do not merit it, you shall have a few lines. This paper was spread upon my lap, and I had taken the pen to write to my aunt Bowles, but I will devote it to you, though my tremors, you see, will scarcely permit me to write legibly.

Your messenger chides my lingering; and I will let him go with nothing but a verbal message, for on second thoughts, I will defer writing till I have read your long letter.

Nov. 15.

Yes; the narrative of Morton is true. The simple recital which you give, leaves me no doubt. The money is his, and shall be restored the moment he demands it. For what I have spent, I must a little while be his debtor. This he must consent to lose, for I never can repay it. Indeed, it is not much. Since my change of fortune, I have not been extravagant. An hundred dollars is the most that I have laid out, and some of this has been in furniture which I shall resign to him.

Be under no concern, my friend, on my account. Think not how I shall endure the evils of my former condition, for I never shall return to it. Thy Mary is hastening to the grave, with a very quick pace. That is her only refuge from humiliation and calamity, and to that she looks forward with more confidence than ever.

I was not fashioned of stubborn materials. Poverty, contempt, and labour, are a burden too great for me. I know, that for these only, am I reserved, and this interval of better prospects was no comfort to me. I always told you my brother had no just claim to this money, and that the rightful claimant would sooner or later appear. You were more sanguine, and were willing to incur, even on grounds so imperfect, the irrevocable obligations of marriage. See into what a gulf your rashness would have hurried you, and rejoice that my obstinacy insisted on a delay of half a year.

You know my motives for accepting, and on what conditions I accepted your proffered vows. I have never concealed from you my love. What my penetration easily perceived, your candour never strove to conceal. Your indifference, your freedom from every thing like passion, was not only to be seen in your conduct, but was avowed by your lips. I was not so base as to accept your hand, without your heart. You talked of gratitude, and duty, and perfect esteem. I obtained, you told me, your entire reverence, and there was no female in the world whom you loved *so much*. It was true that you did not love *me*, but you *preferred* me to all other women. Union with me was your supreme desire. Your reason discerned and adored my merits, and the concurrence of the heart

could not but follow.

Fondly devoted to you as I was, and urged as these arguments were, with pathetic eloquence, I could not be deceived for more than a moment. My heart was filled with contradictory emotions. I secretly upbraided you for obduracy in withholding your love, while I, at the same time, admired and loved you the more for your generosity. Your conduct rendered the sacrifice of my happiness to yours the more difficult, while it increased the necessity, and inforced the justice of that sacrifice. I could not discover the probability, that marriage would give birth to that love which previous tenderness and kindness had been unable to produce. I doubted not your fidelity, and that the consciousness of conferring happiness would secure your contentment; but I felt that this was insufficient for my pride, if not for my love.

I sought your happiness. To be the author of it was the object of inexpressible longings. To be happy without you was impossible, but the misery of loneliness, however great, was less than that of being the spectator of your misery, or even that of defrauding you of the felicity, attending marriage with a woman whom you could truly love. Meanwhile, our mutual poverty was itself an insurmountable bar to marriage.

My brother's death put me in seeming possession of competence. Circumstances were now somewhat changed. If no claimant appeared, I should be able, by giving myself to you, to bestow upon the object of my love that good, the want of which nothing can compensate. There were no other means of rescuing your sisters and yourself from indigence and dependence. What I was willing to share with you, you would not share with me on any terms but those of wedlock.

Too well did I see on what weak foundations was built this scheme of happiness. This property was never gained by my brother's own industry, and how could I apply to my own use what I could not doubt belonged to another, though that other should never appear to claim it at my hands.

My reluctance was partly subdued by your urgency. I consented, waveringly, and with a thousand misgivings, to be yours at the end of six months, if no one should appear, meantime, to make out a good title to this money. I listened to your arguments and suppositions, by which you would fain account for my brother's acquisition of so large a sum consistently with honesty, and for his silence as to his possession of it. I was willing to be convinced, and consented to sacrifice my peace by marrying the man I loved, because this marriage would secure to him the competence, which I could not enjoy alone.

This end cannot now be effected. New reasons have sprung up for foregoing your affection, even had Morton perished at sea. A friend has returned to you, who is far more able to relieve your poverty than I should be. It is easy to see on what conditions this relief is intended to be given. He has a daughter, whom he deems worthy of his adopted son. He knows your merit, and cannot fail of perceiving that it places you on a level with the most lovely and accomplished of human beings.

I see how it is. This Clara will be yours. That intelligence, that mien, that gracefulness, which rustic obscurity cannot hide, which the garb of a clown could never disguise, accompanied with the ardent commendations of her father, will fascinate her in a moment. I cannot hesitate what to wish, or how to act. That passion which a form, homely and uncouth like mine, tarnished and withered by drudgery and sorrow, and by comparative old age, for I am nine years older than you; which a mind, void of education, and the refinements of learned and polished intercourse was incapable of wakening, cannot fail to be excited by the youth and beauty, the varied accomplishments and ineffable graces of this stranger. She will offer you happiness, and wealth, and honour, and you will accept them at her hands.

As for me, I cannot be yours, because I am not my own. My resolution to be severed from you is unalterable; but this is not necessary to insure our separation. It cannot take place, even if all my wishes were in favour of it. Long before the expiration of the half year, I shall be removed beyond your reach. This is not the illusion of despair. I feel in my deepest vitals, the progress of death. Nature languishes within me, and every hour accelerates my decay.

My friend, thou must not parley with me; thou must not afflict me with arguments or intreaties, by letters or visits. I must see thee, and hear from thee no more: but I know thy character too well to expect this from thee. As soon as thou receivest this letter, thou wilt hasten hither, and endeavour to shake my purpose.

I am not doubtful of my own constancy, but I would save myself and thee from a trial that will answer no end. I shall leave this place early to−morrow. Whither I am going must never be told to thee. Thy pursuit and thy inquiries will be incessant and anxious, but the measures I have taken for eluding thy search, will defeat all thy

efforts. I know that these assurances will not dissuade thee from making them, and I sorrow to reflect on the labours and anxieties to which thou wilt subject thyself for my sake; but I shall derive consolation from the belief, that my retreat will *never be discovered*.

I enclose an order on the bank for the money that remains in it, drawn in favour of Morton, and an assignment to him of the few tables and chairs that furnish my lodgings here. These thou wilt faithfully deliver into his hands. I likewise return you your papers and letters.

And now....Edward....best and most beloved of men!....and is it come to this? Must I bid thee farewel forever?

Do not, I beseech thee, think hardly of me for what I have done. Nothing but a sense of duty, nothing but a supreme regard to thy happiness, could suggest my design. I cannot faulter in the execution, since I could not waver in the sense of my duty. I am ashamed of my weakness, that hinders me from pronouncing my last farewel.

Make haste to forget the unhappy Mary; make haste to the feet of your new friend, and to secure that felicity which an untoward fate denied me the power of bestowing.
My friend, my benefactor, farewel.

Mary

LETTER III.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *March 24.*

I write to you in a mood not very well suited to the business. I am weary and impatient. The company which surrounds me is alien to my temper and my habits. I want to shut out the tokens of their existence; to forget where I am, and restore myself to those rapturous scenes and that blissful period which preceded my last inauspicious meeting with Morton.

I write to you, and yet I have nothing to say that will please you. My heart overflows with bitterness. I would pour it out upon *you* , and yet my equity will only add new keenness to my compunction, when I come to review what I have written. I am disposed to complain. I want an object to whom to impute my disasters, and to gratify my malice by upbraiding. There is a kind of satisfaction in revenge that I want to taste. I want to shift my anxieties from my own shoulders to those of another, who deserves the burden more than I.

Your decision has made me unhappy. I believe your decision absurd, yet I know your motives are disinterested and heroic. I know the misery which adherence to your scheme costs you. It is only less than my own. Why then should I aggravate that misery? It is the system of nature that deserves my hatred and my curses: that system which makes our very virtues instrumental to our misery.

But chiefly my own folly have I to deplore: that folly which made me intrust to you the story of Miss Wilmot, before the bonds had been formed which no after−repentance could break. I ought to have forgotten her existence. I ought to have claimed your love and your hand. You would have bestowed them upon me, and my happiness would have been placed beyond the reach of caprice.

What has wrought this change in my thoughts? I set out from Hatfield with an heart glowing with zeal for the poor Mary. I burnt with impatience to throw myself at her feet, and tender her my vows. This zeal time has extinguished. I call to mind the perfections of another. I compare them with those of the fugitive. My soul droops at the comparison, and my tongue would find it impossible to utter the vows, which my untoward fate may exact from me.

Yet there is no alternative. I must finish the course that I have begun. I must conjure up impetuosity and zeal in this new cause. I must act and speak with the earnestness of sincerity and the pathos of hope. Otherwise I shall betray my cause and violate my duty. Alas! it is vain to deny it, my powers are not equal to this task.

I have inquired at the house where Mrs. Vallentine formerly lived. A new family are there, and no intelligence of the former tenant can be gained from them. This lady has friends, no doubt, in the city; but I know them not. It is chance alone that can give me their company.

My efforts are languid and my prospects dim. I shall stay here for as short a time as possible, and then proceed to Virginia. I will not rest till I have restored to Mary her own. This money shall be faithfully delivered. To add my heart to the gift is impossible. With less than my affections she will never be satisfied, and they are no longer mine to bestow.

Having performed this duty, what will remain for me. My future destiny it will be your province to prescribe. I shall cease, however, to reason with you, or to persuade. Decide agreeably to your own conceptions of right, and secure to yourself happiness, even by allotting misery, banishment, or death, to

E. H.

LETTER IV.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *March 26.*

If I thought the temper which dictated your last letter would continue beyond the hour or the night, I should indeed be unhappy. My life has known much sorrow, but the sharpest pangs will be those arising from the sense of your unworthiness.

In my eyes marriage is no sensual or selfish bargain. I will never *vow to honour* the man who deserves only my contempt; and my esteem can be secured only by a just and disinterested conduct. Perhaps esteem is not the only requisite to marriage. Of that I am not certain; but I know that it is an indispensible requisite to love. I cannot love any thing in you but excellence. Infatuation will render you hateful or pitiable in my eyes. I shall hasten to forget you, and for that end shall estrange myself from your society, and drop your correspondence.

You know what it is that reason prescribes to you with regard to Miss Wilmot. If you cannot ardently and sincerely seek her presence, and find in the happiness which she will derive from union with you, sufficient motives to make you zealously solicit that union, you are unworthy not merely of my love, but of my esteem. Henceforth I will know you not.

Let me not have reason to charge you with hypocrisy, or to consider your love for me as the mere child of sensuality and selfishness. You have often told me that you desire my happiness above all things. That you love me for my own sake. Your sincerity and rectitude are now put to the test. Do not belie your professions, by a blind and unjust decision. Allow me to judge in what it is that my happiness consists, and prove your attachment to me by promoting my happiness.

Misguided friend! What is it you want? To gain your end by exciting my pity? Suppose the end should be thus accomplished; suppose I should become your wife merely to save your life, to prevent hazards and temptations to which my rejection might expose you. Mournful, indeed, full of anguish and of tears, would be the day which should make me your bride. My act would be a mere submission to humiliating and painful necessity. I should look to reap from such an alliance, nothing but repinings and sorrow. By soliciting my hand, by consenting to ratify a contract made on such principles, you would irretrievably forfeit my esteem. My condition would be the most disastrous that can betide a human being. I should be bound, beyond the power of loosening my bonds, to one whom I *despised*.

I am, indeed, in no danger of acting upon these principles. I shall never so little consult my own dignity and yours, as to accept your hand *through compassion*. I am not unacquainted with the schemes which your foolish despondency has suggested to you. I know very well what alternatives you have sometimes resolved to offer me; of compliance with your wishes, or of banishing you to the desert, and dissolving that connection between my father and you, which is so advantageous to yourself and your sisters. Fie upon you I Even to have entertained such thoughts fixes a stain upon your character not easily effaced. Nothing but the hope that the illusion is transitory, and that sober reflection will, in a short time, relieve you from the yoke of such cowardly and ignoble designs, prevents this from being the last token of friendship you will ever receive from

C. H.

LETTER V.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *March 28.*

Clara, thou hast conquered me. I see the folly of my last letter, and deplore it. It, indeed, merited the indignation and the scorn which it has received. Never shall you again be grieved and provoked by the like folly. I am now master of my actions and my thoughts, and will steadily direct them to a single purpose, the pursuit of the poor Mary, and the promotion of her happiness.

How inconsistent and capricious is man. To−day, his resolution and motives are as adverse to those of yesterday, as those of one man, can be, at any time and in any situation, to those of another. Yesterday! Heaven preserve me from a repetition of the same thoughts! I shudder on looking back upon the gulf on the brink of which I was tottering. How could I so utterly forget my own interest; the regard due to the woman who truly loves me; to my sisters and my noble friend?

But the humiliation is now past. I think it is: I am sure it is. I am serene, resolute, and happy. The remorse my errors have produced is now at an end. Better thoughts, resolutions worthy of your pupil and your *friend* have succeeded. Not that my past feelings have been, perhaps, quite as culpable as you describe them. My repinings were drawn from fallacious sources, but they were not wholly selfish. I imagined you loved me; that my alliance with another, however sanctioned by your judgment, would produce some regret. Believing your judgment misinformed; believing these regrets to be needless, I was not willing to create them. I need not say that this was *all* my reluctance. That would be false; but, as they partly originated hence, my feelings were not wholly selfish, and if I may judge of my own emotions, surely you wrong me in calling my passion by the odious name of sensual.

But these things are past. You have not done me justice; and in return, I have imputed to you, feelings of which you knew nothing. Henceforth, my conduct shall convince you that I cannot stoop to solicit that boon from your pity, which is refused by your love. Conjugal claims and enjoyments are mutual. The happiness received is always proportioned to that conferred. A wretch, worthy of eternal abhorrence, must *he* be, and endowed with tyger−like ferocity, who seeks and is contented with the *person*, while the heart is averse or indifferent. Such an one, believe me, Clara, am not I.

On Tuesday, I expect to dispatch all my concerns in this city, and to proceed southward.

Adieu.

E. H.

LETTER VI.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *April 1*.

There is an obscurity in your letter, my friend, that I cannot dispel. The first part afforded me much pleasure, but the sequel disappointed me. You seem to have strangely misconstrued my meaning. Whether this misconstruction be real or pretended, it does not become me to enter into any explanation. If it be real, it affords a proof of a narrow and ungenerous heart, an heart incapable of perceiving the possibility of sacrificing my own personal gratification to that of another, and of deriving, from that very sacrifice, a purer and more lasting felicity. It shews you unable to comprehend that the welfare of another may demandself−denial from us, and that in bestowing benefits on others, there is a purer delight than in gratifications merely selfish and exclusive.

You question my love, because I exhort you to do your duty, and to make another happy that is worthier than I. Why am I anxious for that other and for you? Why should I rejoice in your integrity, and mourn for your degradation? Why should I harbour such glowing images of the bliss which your Mary should derive from union with you? Would not my indifference and negligence on these heads, would not my ardour to appropriate your affections to myself, prove me to be...there is no name sufficiently abhorrent and contemptuous for such an heart.

And yet, such is the deportment you expect from me! Any thing but this will prove me to be indifferent, or averse to you! Desist, I beseech you, in time. If you proceed thus, quickly will you lose what remains of that esteem which I once felt for you. Instead of earnestly promoting your alliance with Miss Wilmot, I shall anxiously obstruct it, on account of your unworthiness.

If this misconstruction be *pretended* only, if you mean to assail, by this new expedient, my imaginary weakness; if you imagine, that in order to remove an unjust imputation from my character, I will do what will make me really culpable; if you imagine that I shall degrade myself in my own estimation, merely for the purpose of raising myself in yours, you have grossly deceived yourself.

Formerly you talked, with much self−complacency, of the trials to which I had subjected my fortitude, and *consoled* yourself with thinking that adhering to my new scheme, was productive of misery. I say, that you *consoled* yourself with this reflection. In your eyes, my character was estimable in proportion to the reluctance with which I performed what was just. Your devotion to me was fervent in proportion as the performance of my duty was attended with *anguish* and *suffering!*

Edward! are you, indeed, so sordid as to reason in this manner? Are you so blind as to account this the surest road to my esteem? Are you not ashamed of your infatuation and absurdity?

I need not disguise or deny my unhappiness from any pity to you, or through the value which I set on your esteem. You exult in proportion to my misery. You revere me in proportion as my sentiments are mean and selfish! I am to be upbraided and despised, in proportion to the fulness of that enjoyment, which, the approbation of my conscience, the sense of doing right myself, and of conferring good on others, has given me!

Let me constantly hear from you, respecting your movements. I am in hopes that time and reflection will instil into you better principles. Till then, I shall not be displeased, if your letters be confined to a mere narrative of your journey.

Adieu.

C. H.

LETTER VII.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *April 5.*

You were to leave Philadelphia on Tuesday, you told me. I imagined the interval would be engrossed with business, and, therefore, expected not to hear from you, till after that day; but that day, and the whole week is past, and no tidings.

This silence does not proceed from sullenness. I hope, I persuade myself, it does not. Whatever anger you have conceived against me, let not that, I intreat you, make you ungrateful to my father, cruel to your sisters, unjust to yourself.

Letters have been hourly expected from you, relative to concerns which you had in charge. Have you neglected them? Have you betrayed your trust? Have you suffered an unmanly dejection to unfit you for this charge? Have you committed any rashness?

Heaven forbid! Yet, what but some fatal event has occasioned this delay? Perhaps, while I thus write to you, you are....

Let me not think of it. I shiver with a deadly cold at the thought. Thou art fiery and impetuous, my friend. Thy spirit is not curbed by reason. There is no outrage on discretion; no crime against thyself, into which thy headlong spirit may not hurry thee.

Perhaps, my last letter was harsh, unjust. My censures were too bitter. I made not suitable allowances for your youth; the force of that attachment which you own for me. Knew I so little of my own nature, and the illusions of passion, as to expect you to act and speak with perfect wisdom.

Would to heaven, I had not written that letter, or that I had sufficiently considered its contents before I sent it. It was scribbled hastily, in a moment of resentment. Of that, which I so acrimoniously censured in you, I was guilty myself. I ought to have staid till cool reflection had succeeded.

But, perhaps, we torment ourselves needlessly. It is said, that the late storms have overflowed the rivers, swept away the bridges, and flooded the roads. Perhaps, your letters are delayed from this cause. Perhaps, the ways have been impassable.

Mr. Talbot has been abroad during the morning. We expect him to return presently. He may bring us letters.

No intelligence yet received! I am excessively uneasy. Your friend is displeased. He is almost ready to repent the confidence he has placed in you. Nothing can justify your silence. Your sickness should not hinder you from informing him of certain transactions. Their importance required you to give him early notice of any disaster that might befal you, and common prudence would enjoin you to take measures for conveying this intelligence by the hands of others, in case of your incapacity....

The coming of the post has been interrupted only for one day. The reason why we have not heard from you, can only be your not having written. My thoughts are too much disturbed to permit me to write any more. I will lay down the pen, and dispatch this: perhaps, it may find you, and produce some effect.

C. H.

LETTER VIII.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Schuylkill, − *April 10.*

I write to you by the hand of another. Be not greatly surprised or alarmed. Perhaps, my strength is equal to the performance of this duty for myself, but my good friend and affectionate nurse, Mrs. Aston, insists upon guiding the pen for me. She sits by my side, and promises to write whatever I dictate.

My theme is of an interesting and affecting nature. Perhaps, it might appear to you improper to employ any hand but my own. Circumstances must apologize for me. I cannot hold the pen; the friend, whose hand I employ, deserves my affection and gratitude. On her discretion I can rely. Besides, I am now approaching a bourne, where our scruples and reserves usually disappear. The suggestions of self−interest, and the calculations of the future, are sure to vanish at the approach of death.

When I wrote you last, I told you my intention to leave the city on Tuesday. I afterwards received your letter. Your censure was far more severe than my conscience told me I deserved. But my own heart did not secure me from regret. I was highly culpable to allow my peace to be molested by the tenor of your letter. In different circumstances, I should certainly conceal from you, its effect upon my feelings. I intended to have concealed them from you. I perceived that, with respect to you, I was thenceforth to regard myself as a stranger and an out−cast; and resolved that you should see me and hear from me no more.

In embracing this scheme, I found no tranquillity. Clara, I loved you, and that love led me to place my supreme happiness in the possession of your heart. For this you call me sensual and selfish. This, at least, convinced me of one thing; that the happiness which I formed to myself, is beyond my reach! It behoved me, doubtless, to dismiss all fruitless repinings, as well as to forbear all unprofitable efforts. My courage was equal to the last, but not to the first. Though the confession will degrade me still lower in your opinion. It is now no time to prevaricate or counterfeit; and I will not hide from you my anguish, and dejection. These did not unfit me for performing my duty to your father, but they banished health and repose from my pillow.

I set out, on Tuesday morning, for Baltimore. The usual floods of this season having carried away the bridge on Schuylkill, we prepared to pass it in a boat. The horses which drew the stage, being unaccustomed to this mode of conveyance, and being startled by the whirlpools and eddies, took fright, when the boat had gained the middle of the river, and suddenly rushed out, at the further end, into the stream.

All the passengers, except two females, had dismounted from the carriage before it entered the boat. The air was extremely cold, and a drizzling shower was falling. These circumstances induced the father of the two girls, who was one of our company, to dissuade them from alighting, as he imagined no danger would arise, during the passage. Happily the passengers and boatmen were behind the carriage, so that, in rushing forward, the horses drew after them nothing but the coach and those in it.

The coach and horses instantly sunk. The curtains, on all sides, had been lowered and fastened; but the rushing waters burst the fastenings, and by a miraculous chance, the two females, who sat on one seat behind, were extricated in a moment from the poles and curtains. The coach sunk to the bottom, but the girls presently rose to the surface.

I threw off my upper and under coat in a moment, and watching the place of their reappearance, plunged into the water, and by the assistance of others, lifted one breathless corpse into the boat. Meanwhile, the father, more terrified, and less prudent, threw himself, cloaked and encumbered as he was, into the water, to save his children. Instead of effecting this, he was unable to save himself. No one followed my example in plunging into the river, and the father and one of his children perished together.

The immediate consequence of this exposure, in a feverish state of my frame, was a violent ague, which gave place to an high fever and dilerium. I stopt at the inn on the opposite bank, to change my wet clothes for dry; but, having done this, was unable to proceed, and betook myself to my bed. I suspected nothing more than an intermittent, which, however violent, during its prevalence, would pass away in less than an hour. In this I was mistaken.

My understanding was greatly disturbed. I had no remembrance of the past, or foresight of the future. All was painful confusion, which has but lately disappeared. Clear conceptions have returned to me, but my strength is

gone, and I feel the cold of death gradually gaining on my hearth. My force of mind is not lessened. I can talk and reason as coherently as ever; and my conclusions are far more wise than while in perfect health.

The family of Mr. Aston, residing in this neighbourhood, hearing of my condition, have afforded me every succour and comfort I needed. It was not till this moment that I have been able to employ the suitable means of conveying to you tidings of these events. Your letter has just been brought me from the post−office, and my good friend, who now holds the pen, and who has watched by my pillow during my sickness, was good enough to read it to me.

What shall I say? To one regarding me as selfish and unjust; as even capable of villainy and foul ingratitude; who, among so many conjectures, as to the cause of my silence, was ready to suspect me of breach of faith, the low guilt of embezzlement! What shall I say?

Nothing: I can say nothing. The prayers of a dying man for thy felicity, Clara, will, at least, be accepted as sincere. There is no personal motive to vitiate this prayer. Thy happiness must, henceforth, be independent of mine. I can neither be the author nor partaker of it. Be thou, lovely and excellent woman! *be happy!*

I break off here, to write to your father. I have much to say to him, which another day, perhaps, another hour, may forever prevent me from saying.

E. H.

LETTER IX.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *April 26.*

My father carries you this. The merciful God grant that he may find you alive! Edward, is it possible for you to forgive me....But I deserve it not. I have lost you forever! My wickedness and folly merited no less.

My father smiles and says there is hope. He vows to find you out; to restore you to health, to bring you back to us alive and happy.

Good God! what horrible infatuation was it that made me write as I did! If thou diest, just....just will be my punishment. Never more will I open my eyes to the light.

My father, my mother, will not suffer me to go to thee. To see thee once more; to receive thy last sigh; to clasp thy cold remains; to find my everlasting peace in the same grave. They will not hearken to me; they will not suffer me to go!

In my frantic thoughts, I ran to the water's edge. I was stepping into the boat to cross the river, determined to see thee ere a new day returned, but I was pursued. I am detained by force; by intreaties more powerful than bonds and fetters.

I need not go. Thou art gone forever. My prayer for forgiveness thou canst not hear. Heaven has denied me the power to repair the wrongs that I have done thee. To expiate my folly, to call thee back to my bosom; and to give my stubborn heart to thy possession, cannot be.

C. H.

LETTER X.

TO MRS. HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *April 14.*

I HAVE been here thirty hours, and have not written to you. I know your impatience, and that of your girl; but, till this hour I was unable to give you information that would relieve your fears. Edgar was, indeed, ill. I found him in a state wholly desperate. He had not strength to lift his eye−lids at my approach, or to articulate a welcome.

I found in his chamber his nurse and his physician. The former is a young lady, newly married, who resides in this neighbourhood, and a sister of the person whom our pupil saved from drowning. She has paid him the kindest and most anxious attention.

Let me hasten to tell you that the crisis has passed, and terminated favourably. A profound sleep of ten hours, has left him free from pain and fever, though in a state of weakness which could not be carried beyond its present degree, without death.

Set your hearts at rest. The lad is safe. I promised to bring him back alive and well, and will certainly fulfil my promise; but some weeks must elapse before he will be fit for the journey. You must wait with patience till then. Farewel.

E. Howard.

LETTER XI.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *April 15.*

To describe the agony which my father's silence produced, both to my mother and myself, would be useless. Thanks to my God, you are out of danger. I can now breathe with freedom.

Tell me, beloved Edward, by your own hand, or, if your weakness will not suffer it, by that of your friend, that you forgive me. O! that I were not at this unfriendly distance from you! That I could pour out the tears of my remorse, of my gratitude, of my love, upon your hand. I am jealous of your lovely nurse. She is performing those functions which belong to me.

You are grateful for her services, are you not? Not more so than I am. Give her my fervent thanks....but stay, I will give them myself. I will write to her immediately, tell her of the obligations she has laid upon me, and solicit her friendship. She is an angel, I am sure.

Prithee, my friend, make haste and be well; and fly to us. The arms of thy Clara are open to receive thee. She is ready to kneel to thee for pardon; to expiate her former obduracy by years of gratitude and tenderness. Lay on my past offences what penalty thou wilt. The heavier it be the more cheerfully shall I sustain it; the more adequate it will be to my fault.

Mary....My heart droops when I think of her. How imperfect are schemes of human felicity. May Heaven assist me in driving from my mind the secret conviction, that her claim to your affection is still valid.

Alas! how fleeting is our confidence. Come to me my friend. Exert all thy persuasive eloquence. Convince me that I have erred in resigning thy heart and hand to another; in imagining the claim of Mary better than mine.

I call upon thy efforts to rescue me from self−condemnation; but I call on thee without hope. My reason cannot be deceived. The sense of the injustice I have done her, will poison every enjoyment which union with thee can afford me.

Yet come. I repent not of my invitation. I retract not my promise. Make me irrevocably thine. I shall at least be happy while I forget her, and I will labour to forget her.

Adieu.

C. H.

LETTER XII.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *April 23.*

When you know my reason for not accompanying your father, you will approve of my conduct. I am once more in health, but could not, at this season, perform the journey without hazard. Meanwhile, some affairs remain to be transacted in this city, to which my strength is fully equal; and the assurance of your love, has lulled all my cares to repose.

In less than a week I will be with you. Rely upon my power to convince you that your present decision is just. If I had doubts of its rectitude, your offer, transporting as it is, would never be accepted.

How little did you comprehend my character, in believing me capable of urging you to the commission of what I deemed wrong! And think you that even now I will accept your hand, unattended with the fullest concurrence of your reason? No: but I doubt not to obtain that concurrence. I will fly to you on the wings of transport, and armed with reasons which shall fully remove your scruples.

These reasons, as well as a thousand affecting incidents which have lately befallen me, I will reserve for our meeting. Meanwhile, place the inclosed portrait in your bosom. It is that of my *nurse*, Mrs. Aston. She sends it to you, and desires me to tell you that she has received your letter, and will answer it very shortly. Adieu.

E. H.

P.S. I stay at No....., north Eighth−street.

LETTER XIII.

TO FRANCIS HARRIS. − Philadelphia, − *April 23.*

Do you wish for some account of my present situation? I will readily comply with your request. I am, indeed, in a mood, just now, extremely favourable to the telling of a long story. I have no companions in this city, and various circumstances, while they give me a few days solitude and leisure, strongly incline me likewise to ruminate and moralize on past adventures.

When I last wrote to you, I told you my destiny had undergone surprising changes since we parted. I had then no leisure to enter into minute particulars. Alas! my friend, changes still more surprising have since occurred, but changes very different from those to which I then alluded. Then they were all benign and joyous: since, they have been only gloomy and disastrous.

But how far must I go back to render my narrative intelligible? You went your voyage, if I mistake not, just after I was settled with my uncle and sisters, in the neighbourhood of Hatfield. I believe you were acquainted with the beginnings, at least, of my intercourse with Mr. Howard. I described to you, I believe, the dignified, grave and secluded deportment of that man; the little relish he appeared to have for the society around him, and the flattering regards he bestowed on me.

I was a mere country lad, with little education but what was gained by myself; diffident and bashful as the rawest inexperience could make me. He was a man of elevated and sedate demeanour; living, if not with splendour, yet with elegance; withdrawing in a great degree from the society of his neighbours; immersed in books and papers, and wholly given to study and contemplation.

I shall never forget the occasion on which he first honoured me with his notice; the unspeakable delight which his increasing familiarity and confidence; my admission to his house, and my partaking of his conversation and instructions afforded me. I recollect the gradual disappearance, in his intercourse with me, of that reserve and austerity which he still maintained to the rest of mankind, with emotions of gratitude and pleasure unutterable.

He had reason to regard me, indeed, somewhat like his own son. I had no father; I had no property: there was no one among my own relations, who had any particular claim upon my reverence or affection. A thousand tokens in my demeanour, must have manifested a veneration for him next to idolatry. My temper was artless and impetuous, and several little incidents occurred, during the many years that I frequented his house, that brought forth striking proofs of my attachment to him. I greedily swallowed his lessons, and remember how often his eyes sparkled, his countenance brightened into smiles, and his tongue lavished applause on my wonderful docility and rapid progress. He shewed his affection for me, by giving his instructions, inquiring into my situation, and directing me in every case of difficulty that occurred; but he never offered to become my real father; to be at the expense of my subsistence, or my education to any liberal profession. Indeed, he was anxious to persuade me that the farmer's life was the life of true dignity, and that, however desirable to me property might be, I ought to entertain no wish to change my mode of life. That was a lesson which he was extremely assiduous to teach.

He never gave me money, nor ever suffered the slightest hint to escape him that he designed to carry his munificence any farther than to lend me his company, his conversation and his books. Indeed, in my attachment to him, there was nothing sordid or mercenary. It never occurred to me to reflect on this frugality; this limitation of his bounty. What he gave was, in my own eyes, infinitely beyond my merits, and instead of panting after more, I was only astonished that he gave me so much. Indeed, had I had wisdom enough to judge of appearances, I should have naturally supposed that there existed many others who had stronger claims upon his fortune than I had, and might actually enjoy his bounty.

His family and situation were, indeed, wholly unknown to me and his neighbours. He was a native of Britain; had not been long in America; lived alone and in affluence; was a man past the middle of life; enjoyed a calm, studious and contemplative existence. This was the sum of all the knowledge I ever obtained of him. Indeed, my curiosity never carried me into stratagems or guesses, in order to discover what he did not voluntarily disclose, or what he was desirous to conceal.

The mournful day of his departure from Hatfield, and from America, at last arrived. I never was taught to believe that he designed to pass his life in America. I naturally regarded him as merely a sojourner, but never

inquired how long he meant to stay among us. When he told me, therefore, that he should embark in a week, I felt no surprise, though it was impossible to conceal my impatience and regret. I never felt a keener pang than his last embrace gave me.

He parted with me with every mark of paternal tenderness. Yet he left nothing behind him, as a memorial of his affection. Even the books that I had often read under his roof, some of which were my chief favourites, and would have been prized, for the donor's sake, beyond their weight in rubies, he carried away with him. Neither did he explain the causes of his voyage, or give me any expectation of seeing him again.

My obligations to Mr. Howard cannot be measured. To him am I indebted for whatever distinguishes me from the stone which I turned up with my plough, or the stock which I dissevered with my axe. My understanding was awakened, disciplined, informed; my affections were cherished, exercised, and regulated by him. My heart was penetrated with a sentiment, in regard to him.... perhaps, it would be impious to call it devotion. The divinity only can claim that; yet this man was a sort of divinity to me: the substitute and representative of heaven, in my eyes, and for my good.

I besought him to let me accompany him. I anxiously inquired whether I might cherish the hope of ever seeing him again. The first request he made me ashamed of having urged, by shewing me that I had sisters who needed my protection, and for whose sake I ought to labour to attain independence. His own destiny would be regulated by future events, but be deemed it most probable that we should never see each other more.

The melancholy inspired by this separation from one who was not only my best, but my sole friend, was not dissipated, like the other afflictions of youth, by the lapse of a few months. Being accompanied with absolute uncertainty as to his condition and place of residence, it produced the same effect that his death would have done. This melancholy, though no variety of scene could have effaced it, was, no doubt, aggravated by the cheerless solitude in which I was placed. The rustic life was wholly unsuitable to my temper and taste. My active mind panted for a nobler and wider sphere of action; and after enduring the inconveniences of my sequestered situation, for some time, I, at length, bound myself apprentice to a watch−marker in the city. My genius was always turned towards mechanics, and I could imagine no art more respectable or profitable than this.

Shortly after my removal to the city, I became acquainted with a young man by the name of Wilmot. There were many points of resemblance between us. We were equally fond of study and reflection, and the same literary pursuits happened to engage our passions. Hence a cordial and incessant intercourse took place between us.

I suppose you know nothing of Wilmot. Yet possibly you have heard something of the family. They were of no small note in Delaware. Not natives of the country. The father was an emigrant, who brought a daughter and this son with him, when children, from Europe. He purchased a delightful place on *Brandywine*, built an house, laid out gardens, and passed a merry life among horses, dogs, and boon companions. He died, at length, by a fall from his horse, when his daughter Mary was sixteen years of age, and the son four or five years younger.

These children had been trained up in the most luxurious manner. The girl had been her own mistress, and the mistress of her father's purse from a very early age. All the prejudices and expectations of an heiress were early and deeply imbibed by her; and her father's character had hindered her from forming any affectionate or useful friends of her own sex, while those who called themselves *his* friends were either merely jovial companions or cunning creditors. It very soon appeared that Wilmot's fortune had lasted just as long as his life. House, and land, and stock were sold by auction, to discharge his numerous debts, and nothing but a surplus on the sale of the furniture, remained to the heirs.

Mary, after a recluse and affluent education, was thus left, at the inexperienced age of sixteen, friendless and forlorn, to find the means of subsistence for herself and her brother, in her own ingenuity and industry. It cannot be supposed that she escaped all the obvious and enervating effects of such an education. Her pride was sorely wounded by this reverse, but nature had furnished her with a vigorous mind, which made it impossible for her to sink, either into meanness or despair. She was not wise enough to endure poverty and straitened accommodations, and a toilsome calling, with serenity; but she was strenuous enough to adopt the best means for repairing the ills that oppressed her.

She retired, with the wreck of her father's property, from the scene in which she had been accustomed to appear with a splendour no longer hers. Her sensibility found consolation in living obscure and unknown. For this end, she removed to the city, took cheap lodgings in the suburbs, and reduced all her expences to the most frugal standard. With the money she brought with her, she placed her brother at a reputable grammar school, and her

acquaintance, by very slow degress, extending beyond her own roof among the good and considerate part of the community, she acquired, by the exercise of the needle, a slender provision for herself and her brother.

The boy was a noble and generous spirit, and endowed with ardent thirst of knowledge. He made a rapid progress in his learning, and at the age of sixteen, became usher in the school in which he had been trained. He was smitten with the charms of literature; and greatly to his sisters disappointment and vexation, refused to engage in any of those professions which lead to riches and honour. He adopted certain antiquated and unfashionable notions about the "grandeur of retreat," "honourable poverty," a studious life, and the dignity of imparting knowledge to others. The desk, bar, and pulpit, had no attractions for him. This, no doubt, partly arose from youthful timidity and self−diffidence, and age might have insensibly changed his views.

My intercourse with Wilmot, introduced me, of course, to the knowledge of his sister. I usually met him at her lodgings. Sundays and all our evenings were spent together, and as Mary had few or no visitants, on her own account, she was nearly on the same footing of domestic familiarity with me, as with her brother.

She was much older than I. Humiliation and anxiety had deeply preyed on her constitution, which had never been florid or robust, and made still less that small portion of external grace or beauty, which nature had conferred upon her. Dignity, however, was conspicuous in her deportment, and intelligence glowed in her delicate and pliant features. Her manners were extremely mild, her voice soft and musical, and her conversation full of originality and wisdom. The high place to which she admitted me in her esteem, and the pleasure she took in my company, demanded my esteem and gratitude in return. In a short time, she took place of her brother in my confidence and veneration.

I never loved Mary Wilmot. Disparity of age, the dignity and sedateness of her carriage, and perhaps the want of personal attractions, inspired me with a sentiment, very different from love. Yet there was no sacrifice of inclination which I would not cheerfully have made, in the cause of her happiness. Though union with her could not give me the raptures, that fortunate love is said to produce, it was impossible to find them with another while she was miserable.

I had no experience of the passions. I knew, and conversed with no woman but Mary, and imagined that no human being possessed equal excellences. I had no counter−longing to contend with; and, to say truth, did not suspect that my regard, for any woman, could possibly be carried further than what I felt for her.

Mary's knowledge of the heart, the persuasion of her own defects, or her refined conception of the passions, made her less sanguine and impetuous. Her love was to be indisputably requited by a love as fervent, before she would permit herself to indulge in hopes of felicity, or allow me to esteem, in her, my future wife: Our mutual situation, by no means justified marriage. Secure and regular means of subsistence were wanting, as I had, somewhat indiscreetly, bound myself to serve a parsimonious master, for a much longer period than was requisite to make me a proficient in my art. Meanwhile, there subsisted between us, the most affectionate and cordial intercourse, such as was worthy of her love, and my boundless esteem.

As long as the possibility of marriage was distant, this discord of feelings was of less moment. A very great misfortune, however, seemed to have brought it, for a time, very near. Wilmot embarked on the river, in an evil hour, and the boat being upset by a gust of wind, was drowned. The brother and sister tenderly loved each other, and this calamity was long and deeply deplored by the survivor. One unexpected good, however, grew out of this event. Wilmot was found to be credited in the bank of P. for so large a sum as five thousand dollars.

You will judge of the surprise produced by such a discovery, when I tell you that this credit appeared to have been given, above two years before Wilmot's death: that we, his constant and intimate associates, had never heard the slightest intimation of his possessing any thing beyond the scanty income of his school: that his expences, continued, till the day of his death, perfectly conformable to the known amount of this wretched income, and that no documents could be found among his papers, throwing any light on the mystery.

I shall not recount the ten thousand fruitless conjectures, that were formed to account for this circumstance. None was more probable, than that Wilmot held this money for another. Mary was particularly confident of the truth of this conclusion, though, to me, it was not unembarrassed with difficulties, for why was no written evidence; no memorandum or letter to be found respecting the trust; and why did he maintain so obstinate a silence on the subject, to us, to whom he was accustomed to communicate every action and every thought?

We endeavoured to recollect Wilmot's conversation and deportment, at the time this money was deposited, by him, in his own name, in bank. This clue seemed to lead to some discovery. I well remembered a thoughtfulness,

at that period, not usual in my friend, and a certain conversation, that took place, between us, on the propriety of living on the bounty of others, when able to maintain ourselves by our own industry. In short, I was extremely willing to conclude that this money had been a present to Wilmot, from some paternal friend of his family, or, perhaps, some kinsman from a distance. At all events, as this sum had lain undisturbed in bank for two years, I saw no reason why it should not be applied to the purpose of subsistence, by his sister, to whom it now fully belonged.

It was difficult to overcome her scruples. At length she determined to use as small a part as her necessities could dispense with, and to leave the rest untouched for half a year longer, when, if no claimant appeared, she might use it with less scruple. This half year of precaution expired, and nobody appeared to dispute her right.

She now became extremely anxious to divide this sum, gratuitously, with me. To me, the only obstacle to marriage was, the want of property. This obstacle, if Mary Wilmot consented to bestow her hand, where her heart had long reposed, would be removed. It was difficult, however, to persuade her to accept a man on whom she doated; but who, though urgent in his proffers, was not as deeply in love as herself. At length, she consented to be mine, provided, at the end of another half year, I should continue equally desirous of the gift.

At this time, I was become my own master, and having placed Mary in a safe and rural asylum at Abingdon, I paid a visit of a few weeks to my uncle near Hatfield. I had been here scarcely a fortnight, when, one evening, a stranger whom I had formerly known in my boyish days, as the son of a neighbouring farmer, paid me a visit. This person had been abroad, for several years, on mercantile adventures, in Europe and the West−Indies. He had just returned, and after various ineffectual inquiries after Wilmot, with whom he had been formerly in habits of confidence, he had come to me, in the prosecution of the same search.

After various preliminaries, he made me acquainted with the purpose of his search. The substance of his story was this: After toiling for wealth, during several years, in different ports of the Mediterranean, he at length acquired what he deemed sufficient for frugal subsistence in America. His property he partly invested in a ship and her cargo, and partly in a bill of exchange for *five thousand dollars*. This bill he transmitted to his friend Wilmot, with directions to reserve the proceeds till his arrival. He embarked, meanwhile, in his own vessel, sending, at the same time, directions to his wife, who was then at Glasgow, to meet him in America.

Unfortunately the ship was wrecked on the coast of Africa; the cargo was plundered or destroyed by the savage natives, and he, and a few survivors, were subjected to innumerable hardships, and the danger of perpetual servitude. From this he was delivered by the agents of the United States, in consequence of a treaty being ratified between *us* and the government of Algiers. Morton was among the miserable wretches whose chains were broken on that occasion, and he had just touched the shore of his native country.

His attention was naturally directed, in the first place, to the fate of the property transmitted to Wilmot. Wilmot, he heard, died suddenly. Wilmot's sister, his only known relation, was gone nobody could tell whither. The merchant, on whom his bills had been drawn, was partner in an Hamburg house, to which he had lately returned. The ships in which he sent his letters, had safely arrived. His bills had never been protested at any of the notaries, but all the written evidences of this transaction, that had remained in his own hands, had been buried, with his other property, in the waves.

After some suspense, and much inquiry, he was directed to me, as the dearest friend of Wilmot, and the intended husband of his sister.

You will see, my friend, that the mystery which perplexed us so long, was now at an end. The coincidence between the sum remitted, and that in our possession, and between the time of the probable receipt of the bills, and that of the deposit made by Wilmot at the bank, left me in no doubt as to the true owner of the money.

I explained to Morton, with the utmost clearness and simplicity, every particular relative to this affair. I acknowledged the plausibility of his claim; assured him of miss Wilmot's readiness, and even eagerness, to do him justice, and promised to furnish him, on his return to Philadelphia, with a letter, introducing him to my friend. We parted.

This was a most heavy and unlooked−for disappointment of all our schemes of happiness. My heart bled with compassion for the forlorn and destitute Mary. To be thus rescued from obscurity and penury, merely, to have these evils augmented by the bitterness of disappointment, was an hard lot.

I was just emancipated from my servitude. I was perfectly skilled in my art, but mere skill might supply myself with scanty bread, without enabling me to support a family. For that end, credit to procure an house, and the

means of purchasing tools and materials, were necessary; but I knew not which way to look for them.

My nearest relation was my uncle Walter, who had taken me and my sisters, in our infancy, into his protection, and had maintained the girls, ever since. His whole property, however, was a small farm, whose profits were barely sufficient to defray the current expences of his family. At his death, this asylum would be lost to us, as his son, who would then become the occupant, had always avowed the most malignant envy and rancorous aversion to us. As my uncle was old, and of a feeble constitution, and as the girls were still young, and helpless, I had abundant theme on my own account, for uneasy meditation. To these reflections were added the miseries, which this reverse of fortune, would bring down upon the woman whom I prized beyond all the world.

One day, while deeply immersed in such contemplations as these, and musefully and mournfully pacing up and down the piazza of the inn at Hatfield, a chaise came briskly up to the door and stopped. I lifted my eyes, and beheld, alighting from it, a venerable figure, in whom I instantly recognized my friend and benefactor, Mr. Howard. The recognition was not more sudden on my side than on his, though a few years, at my age, were sufficient to produce great changes in personal appearance. Surprise and joy nearly deprived me of my senses, when he took me in his arms and saluted me in the most paternal manner. We entered the house, and as soon as I regained my breath, I gave utterance to my transports, in the most extravagant terms.

After the first emotion had subsided, he informed me that the sole object of his present journey to Hatfield, was a meeting with me. He had just arrived, with a wife and daughter, in America, where he designed to pass the rest of his days. It was his anxious hope to find me well and in my former situation, as he was now able to take the care of providing for me into his own hands. He inquired minutely into my history since we parted. I could not immediately conquer my reserve, on that subject, that was nearest my heart; but in other respects, I was perfectly explicit.

My narrative seemed not to displease him, and he condescended in his turn, to give me some insight into his own condition. I now discovered that he was sprung from the younger branch of a family, at once, ancient and noble. He received an education, more befitting his birth than his fortune; and had, by a thoughtless and dissipated life, wasted his small patrimony. This misfortune had contributed to tame his spirit, to open his eyes on the folly of his past conduct, and to direct him in the choice of more rational pursuits.

He was early distinguished by the favourable regards of a lady of great beauty and accomplishments. This blessing he did not prize as he ought. Though his devotion to Clara Lisle was fervent, he suffered the giddiness of youth, and the fascinations of pleasure, to draw him aside from the path of his true interest. Her regard for him made her overlook many of his foibles, and induced her to try various means to restore him to virtue and discretion. These effosts met with various success, till, at length, some flagrant and unexpected deviation, contrary to promises, and in defiance of her warnings, caused a breach between them that was irreparable.

The head of the nobler branch of Mr. Howard's family, was a cousin, a man of an excellent, though not of shining character. He had long been my friend's competitor for the favour of miss Lisle. The lady's friends were his strenuous advocates, and used every expedient of argument or authority, to subdue her prepossessions for another. None of these had any influence, while my friend afforded her any hopes of his reformation. His rashness and folly, having, at length, extinguished these hopes, she complied, after much reluctance and delay, with the wishes of her family.

This event, communicated by the lady herself in a letter to my friend, in which her motives were candidly stated, and the most pathetic admonitions were employed to point out the errors of his conduct, effected an immediate reformation. The blessing which he neglected or slighted, when within his reach, now acquired inestimable value. His regrets and remorses were very keen, and terminated in a resolution to convert the wreck of his fortune into an annuity, and retire for the rest of his life, to America. This income, though small, was sufficient, economically managed, to maintain him decently, at such a village as Hatfield.

His residence here, at a distance from ancient companions, and from all the usual incitements to extravagance, completed, in a few years, a thorough change in his character. He became, as I have formerly described him, temperate, studious, gentle, and sedate. The irksomeness of solitude, was somewhat relieved, by his acquaintance with me, and by the efforts, which his growing kindness for poor Ned, induced him to make for improving and befriending the lad. These efforts, he imagined to be crowned with remarkable success, and gradually concentred all his social feelings in affection for me. He resolved to be a father to me while living, and to leave his few movables, all he had to leave, to me, at his death.

These prospects were somewhat disturbed, by intelligence from home, that his cousin was dead.

Eighteen years absence from his native country, and from miss Lisle, had greatly strengthened his attachment to his present abode, but had not effaced all the impressions of his youth. The recollection of that lady's charms, her fidelity to him in spite of the opposition of her family, and of his own demerits, her generous efforts to extricate him from his difficulties, which even proceeded so far, as to pay, indirectly, and through the agency of others, a debt for which he had been arrested, always filled his heart with tenderness and veneration. These thoughts produced habitual seriousness, gratitude to this benefactor, an ardent zeal to fulfil her hopes by the dignity of his future deportment; but was not attended with any anger or reget at her compliance with the prudent wishes of her family, and her choice of one infinitely more worthy than himself. At this he sincerely rejoiced, and felt a pang, at the news of that interruption to her felicity, occasioned by her husband's death.

This event, however, came gradually to be viewed with somewhat different emotions. He began to reflect, that a tenderness so fervent as was once cherished for him, was not likely to be totally extinguished, by any thing but death. His cousin, though a man of worth, had been accepted from the impulse of generosity and pity, and not from that of love. She had been contented, and perhaps, happy in her union with him; but, if her first passion was extinct, he imagined there would be found no very great difficulty in reviving it. Both were still in the prime of life, being under thirty−eight years of age.

The correspondence, so long suspended, was now renewed between them; and Mr. Howard, with altered views, and renovated hopes, now embarked for that country which he had believed himself to have forever abjured. This new state of his affairs, by no means lessened his attachment to the fortunate youth, who had been, for eight years, the sole companion of his retirement. While his own destiny was unaccomplished, he thought it proper to forbear exciting any hopes in me. Should his darling purpose be defeated, he meant immediately to return. Should he meet with success, and his present views, as to the preference due to America, as a place of abode, continued, he meant to exert his influence with the elder and younger Clara, for his cousin had left behind him one child, a daughter, now in the bloom of youth, to induce them to emigrate. In every case, however, he was resolved that the farmer−boy should not be forgotten.

His projects were crowned, though not immediately, with all the success to be desired. The pair, whom so many years, and so wide an interval had severed, were now united, and the picture, which Mr. Howard drew, of the American climate and society, obtained his wife's consent to cross the ocean.

"My dear Ned," said Mr. Howard to me, after relating these particulars, "I have a pleasure in this meeting with you, that I cannot describe. You are the son, not of my instincts, but of my affections and my reason. Formerly I gave you my advice, my instructions, and company only, because I had nothing more to give. Now I am rich, and will take care that you shall never be again exposed to the chances of poverty. Though opulent, I do not mean to be idle. He that knows the true use of riches, never can be rich enough; but my occupation will leave me leisure enough for enjoyment; and you, who will share my labour, shall partake liberally of the profit. For this end, I mean to admit you as an inseparable member of my family, and to place you, in every respect, on the footing of my son.

"My family consists of my wife and her daughter. The latter is now twenty−three, and you will be able to form a just conception of her person and mind when I tell you, that in both respects, she is exactly what her mother was at her age. There is one particular, indeed, in which the resemblance is most striking. She estimates the characters of others, not by the specious but delusive considerations of fortune or birth, but by the intrinsic qualities of heart and head. In her marriage choice, which yet remains to be made, she will forget ancestry and patrimony, and think only of the morals and understanding of the object. Hitherto, her affections have been wholly free, but"...here Mr. Howard fixed his eyes with much intentness and significance, on my countenance..."her parents will neither be grieved nor surprised, if, after a residence of some time under the same roof with her *brother* Edward, she should no longer be able to boast of her freedom in that respect. If ever circumstances should arise to put my sincerity to the test, you shall never find me backward to convince you that I practise no equivocations and reserves, and prescribe no limitations or conditions, when I grant you the privilege of calling me father.

My stay with you at present must be short. I am now going, on business of importance, to Virginia. I shall call here on my return, which I expect will be soon, and take you with me to New−York, where I purpose to reside for some time. The interval may be useful to you, in settling and arranging your little matters, and equipping yourself for your journey."

Such, my friend, was the result of this meeting with Mr. Howard. Every thing connected with this event, was so abrupt and unexpected, that my mind was a scene of hurry and confusion, till his departure, next morning, left me at liberty to think on what had past. He left me with marks of the most tender affection, with particular advice in what manner to adjust my affairs, and with a promise of acquainting me by letter with all his motions.

I waited with some impatience for Mr. Howard's return. Many things had dropped from him, in our short interview, on which I had now leisure to reflect. His views, with regard to me, could not fail to delight my youthful fancy. I was dazzled and enchanted by the prospect which he set before me, of entering on a new and more dignified existence, of partaking the society of beings like Mrs. Howard and her daughter, and of aiding him in the promotion of great and useful purposes.

One intimation, however, had escaped him, which filled me with anxious meditations. The young Clara was the companion of his voyage hither. She had landed on this shore. To her presence and domestic intercourse, I was about to be introduced, and I was allowed to solicit her love. He was willing to bestow her upon me, and had, without doubt, gained the concurrence of her mother in this scheme. It was thus that he meant to insure the felicity, and establish the fortune, of his pupil.

There is somewhat in the advantages of birth and rank, in the habit of viewing objects through the medium of books, that gives a sacred obscurity, a mysterious elevation, to human beings. I had been familiar with the names of nobility and royalty, but the things themselves had ever been shrouded in an awecreating darkness. Their distance had likewise produced an interval, which I imagined impossible for me to overpass. They were objects to be viewed, like the divinity, from afar. The only sentiments which they could excite, were reverence and wonder. That I should ever pass the mound which separated my residence, and my condition, from theirs, was utterly incredible.

The ideas annexed to the term *peasant*, are wholly inapplicable to the tillers of ground in America; but our notions are the offspring, more of the books we read, than of any other of our external circumstances. Our books are almost wholly the productions of Europe, and the prejudices which infect us, are derived chiefly from this source. These prejudices may be somewhat rectified by age, and by converse with the world, but they flourish in full vigour in youthful minds, reared in seclusion and privacy, and undisciplined by intercourse with various classes of mankind. In me, they possessed an unusual degree of strength. My words were selected and defined according to foreign usages, and my notions of dignity were modelled on a scale, which the *revolution* has completely taken away. I could never forget that my condition was that of a *peasant*, and in spite of reflection, I was the slave of those sentiments of self−contempt and humiliation, which pertain to that condition elsewhere, though chimerical and visionary on the western side of the Atlantic.

My ambition of dignity and fortune grew out of this supposed inferiority of rank. Experience had taught me, how slender are the genuine wants of an human being, and made me estimate, at their true value, the blessings of competence, and fixed property. Our fears are always proportioned to our hopes, and what is ardently desired, appears, when placed within our reach, to be an illusion designed to torment us. We are inclined to question the reality of that which our foresight had never suggested as near, though our wishes had perpetually hovered around it.

When the death of Wilmot put his sister in possession of a sum of money, which, when converted into land, would procure her and the man whom her affection had distinguished, a domain of four or five hundred fertile acres, my emotions I cannot describe. Many would be less affected in passing from a fisherman's hovel, to the throne of an opulent nation. It so much surpassed the ordinary bounds of my foresight, and even of my wishes, that, for a time, I was fain to think myself in one of my usual wakeful dreams. My doubts were dispelled only by the repetition of the same impressions, and by the lapse of time. I gradually became familiarized to the change, and by frequently revolving its benefits and consequences, raised the tenor of my ordinary sensations to the level, as it were, of my new condition.

From this unwonted height, Morton's reappearance had thrown us down to our original obscurity. But now my old preceptor had started up before me, and, like my good genius, had brought with him gifts immeasurable, and surpassing belief. They existed till now in another hemisphere; they occupied an elevation in the social scale, to which I could scarcely raise my eyes; yet they were now within a short journey of my dwelling. I was going to be ushered into their presence; but my privilege was not to be circumscribed by any sober limits. This heiress of opulence and splendour, this child of fortune, and appropriator of elegance and grace, and beauty, was proffered

to me as a wife!

I reflected on the education which I had received from Mr. Howard; his affection for me, which had been unlimited; his relation to his wife's daughter, and the authority and respect....which that relation, as well as his personal qualities, produced. I reflected on the futility of titular distinction; on the capriciousness of wealth, and its independance of all real merit, in the possessor, but still I could not retain but for a moment, the confidence and self−respect which flowed from these thoughts. I was still nothing more than an obscure clown, whose life had been spent in the barn−yard and corn−field, and to whose level, it was impossible for a being qualified and educated like Clara, ever to descend.

You must not imagine, however, that this descent was desired by me. I was bound, by every tie of honour, though not of affection, to Mary Wilmot. Incited by compassion and by gratitude, I had plighted my vows to her, and had formed no wish or expectation of revoking them. These vows were to be completed, in a few months, by marriage; but this event, by the unfortunate, though seasonable and equitable claim of Morton, was placed at an uncertain distance. Marriage, while both of us were poor, would be an act of the utmost indiscretion.

What, however, was taken away by Morton, might, I fondly conceived, be restored to us by the generosity of Mr. Howard. It was not, indeed, perfectly agreeable to the dictates of my pride, to receive fortune as the boon of any one; but I had always been accustomed to regard Mr. Howard more as my father than teacher, and it seemed as if I had a natural right to every gift which was needful to my happiness, and which was in his power to bestow.

Mary and her claims on me, were indeed, unknown to my friend. He had no reason to be particularly interested in her fate; and her claims interfered with those schemes which he had apparently formed, with relation to Clara and myself. How, I asked, might he regard her claims? In what light would he consider that engagement of the understanding, rather than of the heart, into which I had entered? How far would he esteem it proper to adhere to it; and what efforts might he make to dissolve it?

Various incidents had hindered me from thoroughly explaining to him my situation, during his short stay at Hatfield; but I resolved to seize the opportunity of our next meeting, and by a frank disclosure, to put an end to all my doubts. Meanwhile, I employed the interval of his absence, in giving an account of all these events to Mary, and impatiently waited the arrival of a letter. The period of my friend's absence was nearly expired, and the hourly expectation of his return prevented me from visiting Mary in person. Instead of his coming, however, I at length received a letter from him in these terms:

Richmond, − *Nov. 11*.

I shall not call on you at Hatfield. I am weary of traversing hills and dales; and my detention in Virginia being longer than I expected, shall go on board a vessel in this port, bound for New−York. Contract, in my name, with your old friend, for the present accommodation of the girls, and repair to New−York as soon as possible. Search out No....., Broadway. If I am not there to embrace you, inquire for my wife or niece, and mention your name. Make haste; the women long to see a youth in whose education I had so large a share; and be sure, by your deportment, not to discredit your instructor, and belie my good report.

Howard.

Being, by this letter, relieved from the necessity of staying longer at Hatfield, I prepared to visit my friend at Abingdon. Some six or seven days had elapsed since my messenger had left with her my last letter, and I had not since heard from her. I had been enjoined to repair to New−York with expedition, but I could not omit the present occasion of an interview with Mary. Morton's claim would produce an essential change in her condition, and I was desirous of discussing with her the validity of this claim, and the consequences of admitting it.

I had not seen Morton since his first visit. I now, in my way to Abingdon, called at his father's house.

The old man appeared at the door. His son had visited and stayed with him a few days, but had afterwards returned to the city. He had gone thither to settle some affairs, and had promised to come back in a few weeks. He knew not in what affairs he was engaged; could not tell how far he had succeeded, or whereabout in the city he resided.

I proceeded to Abingdon, not without some expectation of Morton's having already accomplished his wishes, and persuaded my friend to refund the money; and yet, in a case of such importance, I could not easily believe

that my concurrence, or at least, advice, would be dispensed with.

I went to her lodgings as soon as I arrived. I had procured her a pleasant abode, at the house of a lady who was nearly allied to my uncle, and where the benefits of decent and affectionate society could be enjoyed without leaving her apartments. Mrs. Bordley was apprized of the connection which subsisted between her inmate and me, and had contracted and expressed much affection for her guest. On inquiring for miss Wilmot, of her hostess, she betrayed some surprise.

Mary Wilmot? she answered, that is a strange question from you: surely you know she is not here.

Not here? cryed I, somewhat startled; what has become of her?

You do not know then that she has left us for good and all?

No, indeed; not a syllable of any such design has reached me; but whither has she gone?

That is more than I can say. If you are uninformed on that head, it cannot be expected that I should be in the secret. I only know, that three days ago she told me of her intention to change her lodgings, and she did so accordingly, yesterday morning, at sun rise.

But what was her motive? What cause of dislike did she express to this house? I expected she would remain here, till she changed it for an house of her own.

Why indeed that may be actually the case now, for she went away with a very spruce young gentleman, in his chaise; but that cannot be. Poor creature! She was in no state for so joyous a thing as matrimony. She was very feeble; nay, she was quite ill: she had scarcely left her bed during five days before, and with difficulty got out of it, and dressed herself, when the chaise called for her. She would eat nothing, notwithstanding all my persuasion, and the pains I took to prepare some light nice thing, such as a weak stomach could bear. When she told me she meant to leave my house, I was as much surprised as you, and inquired what had offended or displeased her in my behaviour. She assured me that she had been entirely satisfied, and that her motives for leaving me had no connection with my deportment. There was a necessity for going, though she could not explain to me what it was. I ventured to ask where she designed to go, but she avoided answering me for some time; and when I repeated the question, she said, she could not describe her new lodgings. She knew not in what spot she was destined to take up her rest, and confessed, that there were the most cogent reasons for her silence on that head. I mentioned the coldness of the weather, and her own ill−health, but she answered, that no option had been left her, and that she must go, if it were even necessary to carry her from her bed to the carriage. All this, as you may well suppose, was strange, and I renewed my questions and intreaties, but she gave me no satisfaction, and persisted in her resolutions. Accordingly, on Thursday morning, a chaise stopped at the door, took her in, with a small trunk, and hastened away.

I was confounded and perplexed at this tale. No event was less expected than this. No intimation had even been dropped by Mary, that created the least suspicion of this design. She had left, as Mrs. Bordley proceeded to inform me, all her furniture, without direction to whom, or in what manner to dispose of it, and yet had said, that she never designed to return. The gentleman with whom she departed, was unknown to Mrs. Bordley, and had stopt so short a time as not to suffer her to obtain, by remarks or interrogatories, any gratification of her curiosity.

Having ineffectually put a score of questions to Mrs. Bordley, I entered the deserted apartments. The keys of closets and drawers no where appeared, though the furniture was arranged as usual. Inquiring of my companion for these, Ay, said she, I had almost forgotten. The last thing she said before the chair left the door, holding out a bunch of keys to me, was, Give these to....there her voice faultered, and I observed the tears flow. I received the keys, and though she went away without ending her sentence, I took for granted it was you she meant.

I eagerly seized the keys, and hoped, by their assistance, to find a clue to this labyrinth. I opened the closets and drawers and turned over their contents, but found no paper which would give me the intelligence I wanted. No script of any kind appeared; nothing but a few napkins and sheets, and the like cumbrous furniture. A writing−desk stood near the wall, but blank paper, wafers, and quills, were all that it contained. I desisted, at length, from my unprofitable labour, and once more renewed my inquiries of Mrs. Bordley.

She described the dress and form of the young man who attended the fugitive. I could not at first recognize in her description any one whom I knew. His appearance bespoke him to be a citizen, and he seemed to have arrived from the city, as well as to return thither. She dwelt with particular emphasis on the graces of the youth, and frequently insinuated that a new gallant had supplanted the old.

For some time, I was deaf to these surmises; but, at length, they insensibly revived in my fancy, and acquired

strength. I began to account for appearances so as to justify my suspicion. She had not informed me of her motions; but that might arise from compunction and shame. There might even be something illicit in this new connection, to which necessity might have impelled her. The claims of Morton were made known to her by me, but possibly they had been previously imparted by himself. To shun that poverty to which this discovery would again reduce her, she listened to the offers of one, whose opulence was able to relieve her wants.

The notion that her conduct was culpable, vanished in a moment, and I abhorred myself for harbouring it. I remembered all the proofs of a pure and exalted mind, impatient of contempt and poverty, but shrinking with infinitely more reluctance from vice and turpitude, which she had given. I called to mind her treatment of a man, by name, Sedley, who had formerly solicited her love, and this remembrance gave birth to a new conjecture which subsequent reflection only tended to confirm.

Sedley had contracted a passion for Mary six or eight years ago. He was a man of excellent morals, and heir to a great fortune. He had patrimony in his own possession, and had much to hope for from his parents. These parents hated and reviled the object of their son's affections merely because she was poor, and their happiness seemed to depend on his renouncing her. To this he would never consent, and Mary might long ago have removed all the evils of her situation, had she been willing to accept Sedley's offers; but though she had the highest esteem for his virtues, and gratitude for his preference, her heart was anothers. Besides, her notions of duty, were unusually scrupulous. Her poverty had only made her more watchful against any encroachments on her dignity, and she disdained to enter a family who thought themselves degraded by her alliance.

Sedley was a vehement spirit. Opposition whetted, rather than blunted his zeal; and Mary's conduct, while it heightened his admiration and respect, gave new edge to his desires. The youth whom she loved did not admit a mutual affection, and his poverty would have set marriage at an hopeless distance, even if it had been conceived. Sedley, therefore, believed himself the only one capable of truly promoting her happiness, and persisted in courting her favour longer and with more constancy than might have been expected from his ardent feelings and versatile age.

I need not repeat that Mary's affections were mine. To Sedley, therefore, I was the object of aversion and fear, and there never took place between us intercourse sufficient to subdue his prejudices. After her brother's death, marriage was resolved upon between us, and Sedley at length slackened the ardour of his pursuit. Still, however, he would not abjure her society.

Some secret revolution, perhaps, had been wrought in the mind of my friend. Her consent to marriage, had been extorted by me, for she was almost equally averse to marriage with one by whom she was not loved with that warmth which she thought her due, as with one who possessed every title to preference but her love. These scruples had been laid aside in consideration of the benefit which her brother's death, by giving her property, enabled her to confer upon me who was destitute. This benefit it was no longer in her power to confer. She would consider herself as severed from me forever, and in this state a renewal of Sedley's importunities, might subdue her reluctance. On comparing Mrs. Bordley's description of the voice, features, garb, and carriage of Mary's attendant, with those of Sedley, I fancied I discovered a strong resemblance between them. Some other coincidences, which came to light in the course of the day, made me certain as to the person of her companion. It was Sedley himself.

I was willing to gain all the knowledge of this affair which was within reach. Sedley's usual place of abode was his father's house in Virginia, but he chiefly passed his time in Philadelphia, where he resided with his sister, who was a lady of great merit, and left, by her husband's death, in opulent circumstances. This lady had made frequent overtures of friendship to Mary, but these had, for the most part, been declined. This reserve was not wholly free from pride. A mistaken sensibility made her shun those occasions for contempt or insult which might occur in her intercourse with the rich. The relation in which she stood to Sedley was another impediment. A just regard for his happiness compelled her to exclude herself as much as possible from his company. The kindness of Mrs. Valentine had not been diverted by these scruples and reserves, and some intercourse had taken place between them before Mary's retirement to Abingdon.

This change of views in my friend had given me much disquiet, but some reflection convinced me that it was a cause of rejoicing rather than regret. Wedlock had been desired by me, more from zeal for the happiness of another, than for my own. I had lamented that destiny which made the affections of three persons merely the instruments of their misery, and had exerted my influence to give a new direction to my friend's passions. This

undertaking was no less delicate than arduous, and no wonder, that in hands so unskilful as mine, the attempt should fail. I could not be much displeased that this end was effected, though I was somewhat mortified on finding that she did not deem me worthy of being apprized of her schemes. I reflected, however, that this information might only be delayed; and imagined a thousand plausible reasons which might induce her to postpone intelligence so unexpected, if not disagreeable to me.

Next morning I repaired to the city, and to Mrs. Valentine's house. I inquired of a female servant for Miss Wilmot, but was told that she had been there, a few hours, on the preceding Thursday, and had then gone, in company with her mistress and Mr. Sedley, to New−York. No time had been fixed for their return, but Mrs. Valentine had said that her absence might last for six or eight months. The steward, who might afford me more information, was out of town.

Thus my conjectures were confirmed; and having no reason for further delay, I immediately set out in the same road. My thoughts, disembarrassed from all engagements with Mary, persuaded of her union with Sedley, and convinced that this union would more promote her happiness than any other event, I returned without reluctance to Clara Howard. I was impatient to compare those vague and glittering conceptions which hovered in my fancy, with the truth; therefore adopted the swiftest conveyance, and arrived, in the evening of the same day, at Powle's Hook ferry.

My excursions had hitherto been short and rare, and the stage on which I was now entering, abounded with novelty and grandeur. The second city in our country was familiar to my fancy by description, but my ideas were disjointed and crude, and my attention was busy in searching, in the objects which presented themselves, for similitudes which were seldom to be met with. A sort of tremulous, but pleasing astonishment, overwhelmed me, while I gazed through the twilight, on the river and the city on the further shore. My sensations of solemn and glowing expectation chiefly flowed from the foresight of the circumstances in which I was preparing to place myself.

Men exist more for the future than the present. Our being is never so intense and vivid, if I may so speak, as when we are on the eve of some anticipated revolution, momentous to our happiness. Our attention is attracted by every incident that brings us nearer to the change, and we are busy in marking the agreement between objects as they rise before us, and our previous imaginations. Thus it was with me. My palpitations increased as I drew near the house to which I had been directed, and I could scarcely govern my emotions sufficiently to inquire of the servant who appeared to my summons, for Mrs. Howard.

I was ushered into a lighted parlour, and presently a lady entered. She bore no marks of having passed the middle age, and her countenance exhibited the union of fortitude and sweetness. Her air was full of dignity and condescension. Methought I wanted no other assurance but that which the sight of her conveyed, that this was the wife of my friend.

I was thrown, by her entrance, into some confusion, and was at a loss in what manner to announce myself. The moment she caught a distinct glance of my figure, her features expanded into a smile, and offering her hand, she exclaimed....Ahah! This, without doubt, is the young friend whom we have so anxiously looked for. Your name is Edward Hartley, and as such I welcome you, with the tenderness of a mother, to this home. Turning to a servant who followed her, she continued, call Clara hither. Tell her that a friend has arrived.

Before I had time to comment on this abrupt reception, the door was again opened. A nymph, robed with the most graceful simplicity, entered, and advancing towards me, offered me her hand....Here, said the elder lady, is the son and brother whom Mr. Howard promised to procure for us. Welcome him, my girl, as such.

Lifting her eyes from the floor, and casting on me bashful but affectionate looks, the young lady said, in an half−whisper, he is truly welcome... and again offered the hand which, confounded and embarrassed as I at first was, I had declined to accept. Now, however, I was less backward.

An unaffected and sprightly conversation followed, that tended to banish those timidities which were too apparent in my deportment. Mrs. Howard entered into a gay and almost humorous description of my person, such as she had received before my arrival, and remarked the differences between the picture and the original, intermingling questions, which, compelling me to open my lips in answer to them, helped me to get rid of my aukwardness. Presently supper was prepared, and dispatched with the utmost cheerfulness.

My astonishment and rapture were unspeakable. Such condescension and familiarity, surpassing all my fondest imaginations, from beings invested with such dazzling superiority, almost intoxicated my senses. My answers

were disadvantageous to myself, for they were made in such a tumult and delirium of emotions, that they could not fail of being incoherent or silly.

Gradually these raptures subsided, and I acted and spoke with more sobriety and confidence. I had leisure also to survey the features of my friends. Seated at opposite sides of the table, with lights above and around us, every lineament and gesture were distinctly seen. It was difficult to say which person was the most lovely. The bloom and glossiness of youth had, indeed, disappeared in the elder, but the ruddy tints and the smoothness of health, joined to the most pathetic and intelligent expression, set the mother on a level, even in personal attractions, with the daughter. No music was ever more thrilling than the tones of Clara. They sunk, deeply, into my heart, while her eyes, casually turned on me, and beaming with complacency, contributed still more to enchant me.

In a few days, the effects of novelty gradually disappearing, I began to find myself at home. Mr. Howard's arrival, and the cordiality of his behaviour, contributed still more to place me at ease. Those employments he designed for me, now occurred. They generally engrossed the half of each day. They were light, dispatched without toil, or anxiety, and conduced, in innumerable ways, to my pleasure and improvement. They introduced me to men of different professions and characters, called forth my ingenuity and knowledge, and supplied powerful incitements to new studies and inquiries.

At noon, the day's business was usually dismissed, and the afternoon and evening were devoted to intellectual and social occupations. These were generally partaken by the ladies, and visits were received and paid so rarely, as to form no interruption to domestic pleasures. Collected round the fire, and busied in music or books, or discourse, the hours flew away with unheeded rapidity. The contrast which this scene bore to my past life, perpetually recurred to my reflections, and added new and inexpressible charms to that security and elegance by which I was at present surrounded.

Clara was the companion of my serious and my sportive hours. I found, in her character, simplicity and tenderness, united to powerful intellects. The name of children was often conferred upon us by my friend and his wife; all advances to familiarity and confidence between us were encouraged; our little plans of walking or studying together were sanctioned by smiles of approbation, and their happiness was evidently imperfect while ours was suspended or postponed.

In this intercourse, there was nothing to hinder the growth of that sentiment, which is so congenial with virtuous and youthful bosoms. My chief delight was in sharing the society and performing offices of kindness for Clara, and this delight the frankness of her nature readily shewed to be mutual. Love was not avowed or solicited, and did not frequently recur, in an undisguised shape, to my thoughts. My desires seemed to be limited to her presence, and to participating her occupations and amusements. Satisfied in like manner with this, no marks of impatience or anxiety were ever betrayed by her, but in my absence.

The fulness of content which I now experienced, did not totally exclude the remembrance of Mary. I had heard and seen nothing of Morton since my departure from Hatfield. The only way of accounting for this, was to suppose that Mary and he had met, and that the former, persuaded of the equity of his claim, had resigned to him the money which he had remitted to her brother.

The silence which she had observed, involved me in the deepest perplexity. I spared no pains to discover Mrs. Valentine's residence, but my pains were fruitless. My inquiries rendered it certain that, at least, no such person resided in New−York.

Thus occupied, the winter passed away. On a mild, but blustering evening in March, I happened to be walking, in company with Clara, on the battery. I chanced, after some time, to spy before me, coming in an opposite direction, the man whose fate had engaged so much of my attention. It was Morton himself. On seeing me, he betrayed much satisfaction, but no surprise. We greeted each other affectionately. Observing that he eyed my companion with particular earnestness, I introduced him to her.

This meeting was highly desirable, as I hoped to collect from it an explication of what had hitherto been a source of perplexity. I likewise marked a cheerfulnes in my friend's deportment, which shewed that some favourable change had taken place. He seemed no less anxious than I for a confidential interview; and an appointment of a meeting on the same evening was accordingly made.

Having conducted Clara home, I hastened to the place appointed. I was forthwith ushered into a parlour, where Morton was found in company with a lady of graceful and pensive mein, with a smiling babe in her arms, to whom he introduced me as to his wife. This incident confirmed my favourable prognostics, and I waited, with

impatience, till the lady's departure removed all constraint from our conversation.

In a short time, she left us alone. I congratulate you, said I, on your reunion with your family, but cannot help expressing my surprise that you never favoured me with a second visit, or gave me any intelligence of your good fortune.

He apologized for his neglect, by saying, that the arrival of his wife and daughter, in New−York, obliged him, shortly after our interview, to hasten to this city, where successive engagements had detained him till now. He was, nevertheless, extremely desirous of a meeting, and intended, as soon as pleasant weather should return, to go to Hatfield, on purpose to see me. This meeting, however, had fortunately occurred to preclude the necessity of that journey. He then inquired into the health of miss Wilmot, and her present situation. I was anxious to see her, he continued, on account of that affair, on which we conversed at our last meeting. As her brother's friend, I was, likewise, desirous of seeing her, and tendering her any service in my power, but when taking measures to bring about an interview, I received a letter from my wife, who, to my infinite surprise and satisfaction, had embarked for America, and arrived safely at New−York. My eagerness to see my family, made me postpone this interview for the present, and one engagement has since so rapidly succeeded another, that I have never been at leisure to execute this design.

What, said I, has no meeting taken place between Mary Wilmot and you? Has she not restored the money you claimed?

Surely, replied he, you cannot be ignorant that I have never received it. I doubted whether I ought to receive it, even if my title were good. It was chiefly to become acquainted with her, that I looked for her, and my good fortune has since enabled me to dispense with any thing else. The property, left by her brother, may rightfully belong to her, notwithstanding present appearances. At any rate, her possession shall be unmolested by me.

He then proceeded to inform me, that his wife's parents being deceived by his long silence, and the intelligence of his shipwreck, into the opinion of his death, had relented, and settled an independent and liberal pension on their daughter, on condition of her chusing some abode at a distance from them. She proposed to retire, with her child, to some neat and rural abode in Cornwall, and was on the point of executing this design, when letters were received from her husband, at Algiers, which assured her of his safety, and requested her to embark for America, where it was his intention to meet her. She had instantly changed her plans, and selling her annuity on good terms, had transported herself and her property to New−York, were her husband being apprised of her arrival, hastened to join her.

Thus, continued Morton, you have, in my destiny, a striking instance of the folly of despair. My shipwreck, and my long absence, in circumstances which hindered all intercourse between me and my family, were the most propitious events that could have happened. Nothing but the belief of my death, and the consequent distresses of my wife, could have softened the animosity of her parents. Her disobedience, they though, had been amply punished, and fate having taken from me, the power of receiving any advantage from their gift, they consented to make her future life secure, at least, from want.

It was also lucky, that their returning affection stopped just where it did. Their resentment was still so powerful as to make them refuse to see her, and to annex to their gift, the stern condition of residing at a distance from them. Hence she was enabled to embark for America, without detecting their mistake, as to my death. They carefully shut their ears against all intelligence of her condition, whether direct or indirect, and will probably pass their lives in ignorance of that, which, if known, would only revive their upbraidings and regrets.

I am not sorry for the hardships I have indured. They are not unpleasing to remembrance, and serve to brighten and endear the enjoyments of my present state, by contrast with former sufferings. I have enough for the kind of life which I prefer to all others, and have no desire to enlarge my stock. Meanwhile, I am anxious for the welfare of miss Wilmot, and shall rejoice in having been, though undesignedly, the means of her prosperity.

I heard, in Philadelphia, that a marriage was on foot between her and you. I flattered myself, when I met you this evening, that your companion was she, and secretly congratulated you on the possession of so much gracefulness and beauty. In this, it seems, I was partly mistaken. This is a person very different from Mary Wilmot; but a friend, whom I met, shortly after parting from you, and to whom I described her, assured me that this was the object of your choice. Pray, what has become of miss Wilmot?

I frankly confessed to him, my ignorance of her condition, and related what had formerly been the relation between her and us. I expressed my surprise at finding that she was still in possession of the money, after the

representations I had made; and at the silence she had so long observed.

When I recollected in what manner, and in whose company, she had left Abingdon, I could not shut out some doubts, as to her integrity. She was, indeed, mistress of her own actions, and Sedley was not unworthy of her choice; but her neglect of my letter, and her keeping this money, were suspicious accompanyments. This belief was too painful, to attain my ready acquiescence, and I occasionally consoled myself, by imagining her conduct to proceed from some misapprehension, on the one or other part. Mrs. Valentine's reputation was unspotted, and under her guardianship, it was scarcely possible for any injury to approach my friend's person or morals.

My anxiety to discover the truth, was now increased. After being so long accustomed to partake her cares, and watch over her safety, I could not endure this profound ignorance. I was even uncertain, as to her existence. It was impossible, but that my friendship would be of some benefit. My sympathy could not fail to alleviate her sorrow, or enhance her prosperity.

But what means had I of removing this painful obscurity. I knew not which way to look for her. My discoveries must be wholly fortuitous.

Notwithstanding my own enjoyments, I allowed the image of Mary Wilmot to intrude into my thoughts too frequently. Some change in my temper was discerned by Clara, and she inquired into the cause. At first, I was deterred by indefinite scruples, from unfolding the cause, but some reflection shewed me that I was wrong, in so long concealing from her, a transaction of this moment. I, therefore, seized a favourable opportunity, and recounted all the incidents of my life, connected with this poor fugitive.

When I began, however, I was not aware of the embarrassment which I was preparing to suffer and inflict. We used to sit up much longer than our friends, and after they had retired to repose, taking their places on the sofa, allowed the embers to die gradually away, while we poured forth, unrestrained, the effusions of the moment. It was on one of these occasions that, after a short preface, I began my story. I detailed the origin of my intercourse with miss Wilmot, the discovery of her passion for me, the contest between that passion and my indifference on one side, and the claims and solicitations of Sedley on the other. I was listened to with the deepest emotion. Curiosity enabled her to stifle it for some time; but when I came to the events of Wilmot's death, the discovery of his property, and the consequent agreement to marry, she was able to endure the recital no longer. She burst into tears, and articulated with difficulty: Enough, my friend, I know the rest. I know what you would say. Your melancholy is explained, and I see that my fate is fixed in eternal misery.

I was at once shocked, astonished, and delighted, by the discovery which was thus made, and made haste, by recounting subsequent transactions, to correct her error. She did not draw the same inferences from the flight and silence of the girl, or drew them with less confidence than I. She was not consoled by my avowals of passion for herself, and declared that she considered my previous contract as inviolable. Nothing could absolve me from it, but the absolute renunciation of miss Wilmot herself.

I considered the disappearance and silence of Mary, as a sufficient renunciation of her claims, and once more dwelt upon the scruples and objections which she had formerly raised to our alliance; which had been, imperfectly, and for a time, removed by the death of her brother, and which, Morton's arrival, had restored to their original strength. Some regard, likewise, was due to my own felicity, and to that of one whose happiness deserved to be as zealously promoted as that of the fugitive. It was true, that I had tendered vows to miss Wilmot, which my understanding, and not my heart; which gratitude, and not affection, had dictated. This tender, in the circumstances in which I was then placed, was necessary and proper; but these circumstances had now changed. My offer had been tacitly rejected. Not only my love, but my friendship, had been slighted and despised. My affections had never been devoted to another, and the sacrifice of inclination was limited to myself. This indifference, however, existed no more. It was supplanted by a genuine and ardent attachment for one in all respects more worthy. I was willing to hope that this attachment was mutual. Fortune and her parents, and her own heart, were all propitious to my love; and to stifle and thwart it for the sake of one, who had abjured my society and my friendship; who renounced my proffered hand, and cancelled all my promises; who had possibly made herself unworthy of my esteem, by the forfeiture of honour itself, or more probably had given up all her claims on my justice and compassion, by accepting another, would be, in the highest degree, absurd and unjustifiable.

These arguments wrought no effect upon Clara. It was her duty, she answered, to contend with selfish regards, and to judge of the feelings of others by her own. Whatever reluctance she might experience in resigning me to

another, in whatever degree she might thwart the wishes and schemes of her parents, it was her duty to resign me, and she should derive more satisfaction from disinterested, than from selfish conduct. She would not attempt to disguise her feelings and wishes, and extenuate the sacrifice she was called on to make, but she had no doubt as to what was right, and her resolution to adhere to it would be immovable.

This resolution, and this inflexibility, were wholly unexpected. I was astonished and mortified, and having exhausted all my arguments in vain, gave way to some degree of acrimony and complaint, as if I were capriciously treated. At one time, I had thoughts of calling her parents to my aid, and explaining to them my situation with regard to Mary, and soliciting them to exert their authority in my behalf with Clara.

A deep and incurable sadness now appeared in my friend, and strong, though unostentatious proofs were daily afforded, that an exquisite sense of justice had dictated her deportment, and that she had laid upon herself a task to which her fortitude was scarcely equal. It appeared to me the highest cruelty to aggravate the difficulty of this task, by enlisting against her those whose authority she most revered, and whose happiness she was most desirous of promoting.

My eagerness to trace miss Wilmost to her retreat, to find out her condition, and make her, if possible, my advocate with Clara, was increased by this unhappy resolution. I began to meditate anew upon the best means of effecting this. I blamed myself for having so long failed to employ all the means in my power, and resolved to begin my search without delay. Clara, whose conclusions respecting miss Wilmot's motives were far more charitable than mine, was no less earnest in inciting me to this pursuit. She believed miss Wilmot's conduct to have been consistent with integrity, that it flowed from a generous but erroneous self−denial, and that the re−establishment of intercourse between us, would terminate in the happiness of both.

The incidents formerly related, had made it certain that miss Wilmot had flown away in company with Sedley. Sedley's patrimony and fixed abode were in Virginia. There, it was most probable, that he and the fugitive would be found. There, at least, should Sedley have abandoned his ancient residence, was it most likely that the means of tracing his footsteps, would be found. Mary, if not at present in his company, or in that of his sister, had not perhaps concealed her asylum from them, and might be discovered by their means. Fortunately, Mr. Howard had engagements at Richmond which would shortly require his own presence, or that of one in whom he could confide. He had mentioned this necessity in my presence in such a way as shewed that he would not be unwilling to transfer his business to me. Hitherto I had been unwilling to relinquish my present situation; but now I begged to be entrusted with his commission, as it agreed with my own projects.

In a few days I set out upon this journey. Passing, necessarily, at no great distance from Hatfield, I took that opportunity of visiting my uncle and sisters. You may imagine my surprise on finding, at my uncle's house, a letter for me, from Mary, which had arrived there just after my departure, in the preceding autumn, and had lain, during the whole winter, neglected and forgotten, in a drawer.

This letter was worthy of my friend's generous and indignant spirit, and fully accounted for her flight from Abingdon. She was determined to separate herself from me, to die in some obscure recess, whither I should never be able to trace her, and thus to remove every obstacle in the way of my pretentions to one, younger, lovlier and richer than herself. In this letter was enclosed an order for the money, which, as I had taught her too hastily to believe, belonged to another.

I believe you know that I am not a selfish or unfeeling wretch. What but the deepest regret, could I feel at the ignorance in which I had so long been kept of her destiny; what, but vehement impatience to discover the place of her retreat, and persuade her to accept my vows, or, at least, to take back the money to which Morton's title was not yet proved, which would save her at least from the horrors of that penury she was so little qualified to endure, and to which, for more than six inclement months, she had been, through unhappy misapprehension, subjected?

In this mood I hastened to this city, but my heroism quickly evaporated. I felt no abatement of my eagerness to benefit the unhappy fugitive, by finding her; counselling her; consoling her; repossessing her of the means of easy, if not of affluent subsistence; but more than this I felt myself incapable of offering. I knew full well, that, when acquainted with the whole truth, she never would accept me as hers; but I despaired of gaining any thing with respect to Clara, by that rejection. I despaired of ever lighting again on miss Wilmot. Besides, my pride was piqued and wounded by resolutions that appeared to me absurd; to arise from prejudiced views and a narrow heart; from unreasonable regards bestowed upon one, of whose merits she had no direct knowledge, and blamable indifference to another whom she had abundant reason to love.

The letters that passed between us only tended to convince me that she was implacable, and I left the city for Virginia with a secret determination of never returning. I resolved to solicit Mr. Howard's permission to accompany some surveyors employed by him, who were to pass immediately into the western country. By this means, I hoped to shake off fetters that were now become badges of misery and ignominy.

The wisdom of man, when employed upon the future, is incessantly taught its own weakness. Had an angel whispered me, as I mounted the stage for Baltimore, that I should go no further on that journey than Schuylkill, and that, without any new argument or effort on my part, Clara would, of her own accord, call me back to her and to happiness, I should no doubt have discredited the intimation. Yet such was the event.

In order to rescue a drowning passenger, I leaped into the river. The weather being bleak and unwholesome, I was seized, shortly after my coming out, with a fever, which reduced me, in a very few days, to the brink of the grave. Now was the solicitude of my Clara awakened. When in danger of losing me forever, she discovered the weakness of her scruples, and effectually recalled me to life, by entreating me to live for her sake.

I have not yet perfectly recovered my usual health. I am unfit for business or for travelling; and standing in need of some amusement which will relieve, without fatiguing my attention, I called to mind your claims on me, and determined to give you the account you desired.

When I received your letter, informing me of your design to meet me in New−York, I was utterly dispirited and miserable. My design of coming southward, I knew, would prevent an immediate meeting with you, and as I had then conceived the project of a journey to the western waters, I imagined that we should never have another meeting.

Now, my friend, my prospects are brighter, and I hope to greet you the moment of your arrival in New−York. I shall go thither as soon as I am able. I shall never repose till my happiness with Clara is put beyond the power of man to defeat.

But, alas! what has become of Mary Wilmot. Heaven grant that she be safe. While unacquainted with her destiny, my happiness will never be complete; day and night I torment myself with fruitless conjectures about her. Yet she went away with Sedley, a man of honour, and her lover, and with his sister, whose integrity cannot be questioned. With these she cannot be in danger, or in poverty. This reflection consoles me.

I long to see you, my friend. I hope to be of some service to you. You will see, by this long detail, that fortune has been kind to me. Indeed, when I take a view of the events of the last year, I cannot find language for my wonder. My blessings are so numerous and exorbitant, my merits so slender.

I wish thee patience to carry thee to the end of this long letter.

Adieu.

E. H.

LETTER XIV.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *April 28.*

Why don't you come home, my love? Are you not quite well? Tell me when; the day, the hour, when I may expect you. I will put new elegance into my garb; new health into my cheeks; new light; new love; new joy into my eyes, against that happy hour.

Would to heaven I were with you. I represented to my father what an excellent nurse I should prove, but he would not suffer me to accompany him. I have a good mind to steal away to you, even now; but are you not already quite well? Yes, you are; or, very soon will be. Time and care are all that are required to make you so.

But, poor Mary....Does not your heart, my Edward, bleed for poor Mary? Can I rob her of so precious a good; bereave her of the gem of which she has so long been in secure possession?

Can I riot in bliss, and deck myself in bridal ornaments, while she lives pining in dreary solitude, carrying to the grave an heart broken by the contumelies of the world; the horrors of indigence and neglect; and chiefly by the desertion of him on whom she doated? Do I not know what it is to love? Cannot I easily imagine what it is to bear about an unrequited passion? Have I not known, from infancy, the pleasures of affluence and homage? Cannot I conceive the mortifications to one thus bred up, of poverty and labour? Indeed, my friend, I conceive them so justly, that till Mary Wilmot is discovered, and is either been found happy, or been made happy, no selfish gratification, whatever, can insure my peace.

I should not thus be deeply interested for a mere stranger. I know your Mary. Your details, full of honesty and candour, have made me thoroughly acquainted with her. You have given me, in the picture of her life, the amplest picture of an human being that I ever was allowed to survey. Her virtue, my friend, has been tried. Not without foibles, she is, for which she was indebted to her education; but her signal excellence lies in having, in spite of a most pernicious education, so few faults.

My friend, you *must* find her. As you value my happiness, you *must*. Nay, as you value my love. If your zeal did not lead you to move heaven and earth in her cause, you would be, in my eyes, a wretch. Nay, if you did not....But I am straying from the path. I must not think of her, lest my admiration and my pity for her get the better of my love for you.

Pray, make haste and be well, that you make as happy as she can be, your fond, your devoted

Clara.

LETTER XV.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *April 30.*

I will never yield to you, my friend, in zeal for one whom I reverence and love so much as Mary Wilmot. How I adore your generous, your noble spirit. While limited to the real good of that girl; while zealous to confer happiness on her, without an equivalent injury to others, I applaud, and will strive to emulate your generosity....

An incident has just occurred, that seems to promise some intelligence concerning her. It has made me very uneasy. I am afraid she is not happy. I am afraid she is....is not happy; I mean, I fear she is....unhappy. But I know not what I would say. I am bewildered....by my terrors on her account. Let me tell you what I have heard. Judge for yourself. Unhappy the hour that I wrote the last letter from Hatfield. Yet, who could imagine that the intelligence contained in it would suggest so rash, so precipitate a flight!

This Sedley, whose fidelity, whose honour I have so often applauded, is, I am afraid, a miscreant; a villain. Mary....the very thought takes away my breath....is, I fear, a lost, undone creature....

Yet how? Such a fall surely was impossible. Mary Wilmot, whose whole life has been exposed to my view; whom I have seen in the most unguarded moments; whose indifference to Sedley; whose unconquerable aversion to his most honourable and flattering offers, I have so often witnessed, could not forget herself; her dignity. I will not believe it.

But what am I saying? Let me recollect myself, and lay, distinctly, before you, the cause of my apprehensions.

This morning being disengaged, and the air mild, instead of going on with this letter, I stole abroad to enjoy the sweet breath of heaven. My feet carried me, unaware, to the door of the house in which I formerly passed a servitude of three years. My old master, Watkins, of time−measuring memory, has been some time dead. The widow turned her stock into revenue, and now lives at her ease. Though not eminently good, she is far from being a bad woman. She never behaved otherwise than kindly to "Neddy Sobersides," as she used to call me, and I feel somewhat like gratitude, which would not let me pass the door. So I called, to see the old dame.

I found her by a close−stove, in the parlour, knitting a blue stocking.... Lack a day, said she, why as I's a living soul, this is our Ned.

After the usual congratulations and inquiries were made, she proceeded: Why, what a fine story is this, Neddy, that we hear of you? Why, they say you've grown a rich man's son, and are going to be married to a fine rich, great lady, from some other country.

I avoided a direct answer. She continued: Ah! dear me, we all thought you were going to be married to poor Molly Wilmot, the mantua−maker. Nay, for the matter o' that, my poor dear man, I remember, said, as how, that if so be, we'd wait a year or so, we should see things turn up so, that you and her should be married already; at that time; and that, I remember, was just as your time was up. But Molly, (with a very significant air this was said) has carried her goods to a much worse market it seems.

Why, know you any thing of miss Wilmot?

Why, I don't know but as I does. I doesn't know much to her advantage though, you may depend, Neddy.

I was startled. What do you know of her? Tell me, I beseech you, all you know?

Why, I don't know much, not I; but Peggy, my nurse, said something or other about her, yesterday. She drank tea with me....

Pray, said I, impatiently, what said your nurse of miss Wilmot?

Why, I don't know as I ought to tell.... But I will not tease you, Clara, as I was tired with the jargon of the old woman. I will give you the sum of her intelligence in my own words.

The nurse had lately been in the family of Mr. Kalm, of Germantown....between which and that of Mrs. Valentine, I have long known that much intimacy subsisted. Sedley, it seems, passed through this city about three weeks ago, and spent a day at Mr. Kalm's. At dinner, when the nurse was present, the conversation turned upon the marriage of Sedley, which, it seems, was just concerted with the daughter of a wealthy family in Virginia. The lady's name was mentioned, but the nurse forgot it.

Mrs. Kalm, who is noted for the freedom of her discourse, reminded Mr. Sedley of the mantua−maker who eloped with him from Abingdon last autumn, and jestingly inquired into her present condition. Sedley dealt in

hints and innuendoes, which imported that he was on as good terms with Molly Wilmot as he desired to be; that all his wishes, with respect to her, were now accomplished; that she knew her own interest too well to allow any obstruction to his marriage to come from her; that she would speedily resume her customary station in society, as the *cause* of her present *disappearance* was likely to be soon removed.

I will not torment you or myself, by dwelling on further particulars. My informant was deplorably defective in the means of imparting any clear and consistent meaning. An hour was employed in recollecting facts and answering questions, all which, taken together, imported nothing less than that an improper connection had, for some months, subsisted between Sedley and my friend; a connection of such a nature as was consistent with his marriage with another.

Comfort me; counsel me, my angel. I gathered from the beldame's tale, the probability at least, that miss Wilmot was still in this city. Shall I seek her? shall I.... Tell me, in short, what I must believe? what I shall do?

E. H.

LETTER XVI.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 2.*

Ah! my friend! art thou so easily misled? Does slander find in thee a dupe of her most silly and extravagant contrivances? An old nurse's envious and incoherent tale! At second hand, too! With all the deductions and embellishments which must cleave to every story, as it passes through the imagination of two gossips.

Art thou not ashamed of thyself, Edward? To impute black pollution to the heart, whose fortitude, whose purity, so many years of trial have attested, on the authority of a crazy beldame, repeating the malignant inferences, and embellishing the stupid hints of an old nurse. Sedley is a villain and a slanderer. Had *I* been present when he thought proper to blast the fame of the innocent and absent, I should not have controuled my indignation. I should have cast the furious *lie* in his teeth.

And is it possible, my friend, that on such evidence as this, you build your belief that Mary has become an abandoned creature! I am ashamed of such credulity. She is in the same city, you believe, yet sit idly in your chamber, lamenting that depravity which exists only in your fancy, and finding in such absurd and groundless suspicions, a reason for withholding that property which, whether she be vile as dirt, or bright as heaven, is equally her right.

Seek her out this moment. Never rest till you have found her. Restore to her, her own property; tender her your counsel; your aid. Mention me to her as one extremely anxious to cultivate her good opinion, and enjoy her friendship. Do this, Edward, instantly, I exhort, I intreat, I command you; and let me know the result?

C. H.

LETTER XVII.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 4.*

I have just returned from Germantown, and find your letter on my table. Thank heaven, I have not merited all your rebukes. That anxiety to ascertain the truth, and that unwillingness to trust to such witnesses as gossips and nurses, which you think I ought to feel, I really have felt. My last was written in the first tumult of my thoughts. The moment I laid down the pen, and began more deliberately to reflect upon the subject, doubts and hopes thronged into my imagination. I resolved to bend every nerve to discover the retreat of Mary, and ascertain her true situation.

As Sedley was so well known to Mrs. Kalm, I resolved to visit that lady. I had no acquaintance with her, but I overlooked the impropriety of my application, and set out immediately to Germantown.

Being admitted to an apartment in which I found that lady alone, I introduced myself in some confused way, I scarcely know how, and inquired whether she knew the person whom Sedley was about to marry, and whether she could afford me any information of the place where Mary Wilmot was likely to be found.

She answered, with great civility, that Sedley's sister was her dear friend; that Mrs. Valentine resided, at this time, in New−England; that her brother, passing lately through this city, in order to join her, had spent part of a day with Mr. Kalm; that Sedley had given his friends leave to consider him as upon the eve of marriage, but had not thought proper to disclose to them the name and family of the lady; that they were totally in the dark on both these heads, but were inclined to believe that she was a woman of Boston; that as to Mary Wilmot, she knew nothing of her or her affairs.

Mrs. Kalm's curiosity was somewhat excited by the singularity of my introduction, and she soon became inquisitive in her turn. Encouraged by her frank and communicative humour, I ventured to explain, unreservedly, the motive of my inquiries. She smiled at the impression which the tale of the nurse and gossip had made on my fears.

Your uneasiness, said she, was without any foundation. Perhaps we might have jestingly talked of Miss Wilmot's elopement with Sedley, because his pretensions to that girl are pretty well known; but I am not now to be told that your friend was, on that journey, the companion, not of the brother, but the sister, and that Miss Wilmot's reputation and virtue, could not be safer under her own guardianship than under Mrs. Valentine's. Besides, there is not a man in the world, of stricter principles than Sedley. What you have heard, or something like it, might actually have passed at that dinner, but no one could have construed it in a way injurious to Sedley or your friend, but who was wholly unacquainted with the parties, or who was very hungry after slander.

Sedley certainly talked as if he knew more of Miss Wilmot than he just then thought fit to disclose. What he said was accompanied with nods and smiles of some significance; but I should just as readily have put an evil construction on his hints, had he been talking of his own sister. All the world knows that a woman of merit would be sure to receive from Sedley, exactly the treatment which an affectionate brother would be disposed to give.

As to Miss Wilmot's *disappearance*, I never knew, till now, there was any thing mysterious or suspicious in her conduct. It is true, she left her former residence, but, considering in whose company she left it, and the privacy and solitude in which she had previously lived, I was inclined to think she had risen into sight and notice, and instead of retiring from observation, had come forth more conspicuously than ever. This was necessarily the case, if she lived, or associated, as she probably did, with Mrs. Valentine.

When Sedley talked of the cause of her journey being removed, and her reassuming her station among us, I confess he was unintelligible to me. I knew of no cause for her journey, but her own pleasure, and perhaps, Mrs. Valentine's intreaties. The construction which a casual hearer seems to have put upon his words, was foolish and preposterous. Indeed, it is highly offensive to me, since it presupposed that I could patiently hear any one utter such insinuations at my table.

Mrs. Kalm seemed much hurt at the misapprehensions of the nurse, and was very earnest in vindicating Sedley's innocence. She bore testimony to the undeviating and exemplary propriety of Miss Wilmot's conduct, ever since it had been within the reach of her observation.

Thou wilt imagine, Clara, with what unspeakable delight I listened to her eulogy. I was astonished at my own

folly, in drawing such extravagant conclusions. My own heart pleads guilty to thy charges of credulity and precipitation, but I hope I shall not be so grossly or so easily deceived a second time.

Mrs. Kalm could give me no account of the present situation of my friend, but she gave me Mrs. Valentine's address. From her, no doubt, I shall be able to obtain all the information I want. I was a stupid wretch, not sooner to inquire among that lady's numerous friends, where she was to be found. I will write to her immediately.

Congratulate me, my beloved, on this opening of brighter prospects for one who is equally and deservedly dear to both of us. Unless you make haste to write, I shall receive your congratulations in person, for I feel myself, already, well enough to travel, in your company, to the world's end. Adieu.

E. Hartley.

LETTER XVIII.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 5.*

Though I am so soon to be with you, and have received no answer to my last, yet I cannot be alone in my chamber, and be within reach of pen and paper, without snatching them up and talking to my friend thus. This is a mode of conversing I would willingly exchange for the more lively and congenial intercourse of eyes and lips, but 'tis better than total silence.

What are you doing now? Busy, I suppose, in turning over the leaves of some book. Some painter of manners or of nature is before you. Some dramatist, or poet, or historian, furnishes you with occupation. The day, here, is celestially benigh. Such, only, as our climate can know. It is not less splendid and serene with you. So, you have strolled into that field, which is not excelled, for the grandeur of its scenery, the balsamic and reviving virtue of its breezes, its commodiousness of situation, for the purpose of relieving those condemned to a city life, by any field on this globe. The batttery....what a preposterous name! Yet not the only instance of a mound, serving at once the double purpose of pleasure and defence. Did you not say the *bulwarks* of Paris were pleasure−walks? You have been in Sicily and Provence. Did you ever meet with sun, sky, and water, more magnificent, and air more bland, than you are *now* contemplating and breathing? For methinks I see that lovely form gliding along the green, or fixed, in musing posture, at the rails, and listening to the ripling of the waters.

Perhaps, some duty keeps you at home. You expect a visitant; are seated at your toilet; adding all the inchantments of drapery; the brilliant hues and the flowing train of muslin, to a form whose excellence it is to be beautiful when unadorned, and yet to gain from every ornament, new beauty.

What a rare lot is yours, Clara! One of the most fortunate of women art thou. Wealth, affluence, is yours; but wealth is only the means of every kind of happiness; it is not happiness itself. But you have not only the tools, but the inclination and ability to use them. In no hands could riches be placed so as to produce more felicity to the possessor, and to those within reach of her munificence.

Which is the most unerring touchstone of merit, poverty or riches? Ingeniously to supply the place, or gracefully to endure the want of riches, is the privilege of great minds. To retain humility and probity, in spite of riches, and to effect the highest good of ourselves and others, by the use of them, is the privilege of minds still greater. The last privilege is Clara's. The first....vanity has sometimes said....no matter what. It was, indeed, vanity that said it. Vanity, that is now humbled into wisdom and self−distrust. So far from bearing poverty with dignity, I cannot justly call my former situation by that name, and was far from bearing even the moderate privations of that state with fortitude.

And are, indeed, these privations forever at an end? Is the harder test of wisdom, the true use of riches, now to be imposed upon me? It is. Clara Howard, and all that she inherits, will be mine. I ought to tremble for the consequences of exposure to such temptations. And, if I stood alone, I *should* tremble; but, in reality, whatever is your, or your father's gift, is not mine. Your power over it shall ever be unlimited and uncontrouled by me, and this, not more from the equity of your claim to the sole power, than from the absolute rectitude with which that power will be exercised by you. Had I millions of my own acquiring, I should deem it no more than my duty to resign to you the employment of them.

Ah! my divine friend! I will be no more than your agent; your almoner; one whose aid may make charity less toilsome to you; may free the pleasures of beneficence from some of those pains by which they are usually attended. I will go before you, plucking up thorns, and removing asperities from the path that you chuse. All my recompense shall be the consciousness in whose service I labour, and whose pleasures I enhance.

They tell us that ambition is natural to man: that no possession is so pleasing as power and command. I do not find it so. I would fain be an universal benefactor. The power, that office or riches confers, is requisite to this end; but power in infirm hands, is productive only of mischief. I who know my own frailty, am therefore undesirous of power. So far from wishing to rule others, it is my glory and my boast to submit to one whom I deem unerring and divine. Clara's will is my law: her pleasure the science that I study; her smiles the reward that, next to an approving God, my soul prizes most dearly.

Indeed, my friend, before you honour me with your choice, you should contrive to exalt me or lower yourself.

Some *parity* there ought to be between us. An angel in the heavens, like thee, is not a fit companion for a mere earth−worm, like

Hartlly.

LETTER XIX.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 6.*

Ah hah! give them to me. Two letters at once. This is unexpected happiness. Charming papers! Lie *there* and still the little rebel, that will not allow me speech.

And thinkest thou my lips said this, as my father threw thy letters into my lap? No such thing. My heart was mutinous, 'tis true, but no one present....there were many present.... was aware of its tumults, except, indeed, my mother. Her observant eye saw what was passing within. Or rather she guessed, from the superscription, what I felt, and therefore, considerately furnished me with an excuse for retiring.

"Clara, my dear, I imagine your good woman has come. I think I saw her go down the steps. My friends will excuse you for a moment."

I hastily withdrew; and *then*, Edward, having gained the friendly covert of my chamber, I eagerly, rapturously, kissed and read thy letters.

I thought it would prove a mere slander; and yet I was uneasy. The mere possibility of its truth, shocked and distressed me, more than I can tell; but thy intelligence has not only removed the disquiet which thy foregoing letter had produced, but, in reality, has given me uncommon pleasure. I flatter myself that your letter to Mrs. Valentine will receive a speedy and satisfactory answer.

Human life, Edward, is a motley scene. Thou wilt not thank me for the novelty of that remark, but the truth of it I think has received new illustration in the little incidents on which thy last letters have commented. Had not the old nurse's tale incited thee to inquiry, thou would'st not, at this moment, have been in the way to gain any knowledge of poor Mary. Had not thy sad prognostics filled me with melancholy, my mother's attention would not have been excited to the cause of my uneasiness.

I did not conceal from her the cause. I made her pretty well acquainted with the history of Mary. She was deeply interested in the story I told, and suggested many inquiries respecting her, which I had overlooked. She has made me extremely anxious as to some particulars, on which perhaps you can give me the desired information.

Pray tell me what you know of the history of her family before her father's leaving Europe. Where was he born? Where lived he? What profession did he follow? What know you of the history of Mary's mother?

Excuse me for confining myself, at present, to these inquiries. Tell me all you know on this subject, and I will then acquaint you with the motive of my inquisitiveness. I shall expect to hear from you, on Thursday morning.

Adieu. Be careful of thyself, if thou lovest thy

Clara.

LETTER XX.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 8.*

I am at a loss, dear girl, to account for thy questions, but I will answer them to the utmost of my power. The same questions frequently occurred to me, in my intercourse with the Wilmots. It was natural, you know, to suppose that they had left relations in their native country, with whom it might be of some advantage to renew their intercourse.

Mary was ten years old, when her father took up his abode in Delaware, but he had been already five years in the country, so that, you will easily perceive, she was not likely to possess much personal knowledge of events previous to their voyage. Her mother's death happened just before their removal to Wilmington. It appears to have been the chief cause of that removal.

Your letter has put me on the task of recollection. I am sorry that I am able to collect and arrange very few circumstances; such as you demand. The Wilmots were either very imperfectly acquainted with the history of their parents, or were anxious to bury their history in oblivion. The first was probably the situation of the son, but I have often suspected, from the contradictions and evasions of which Mary was at different times guilty, when this subject was talked of between us, that the daughter pretended ignorance, for the sake of avoiding the mortification of telling the truth. When once urged pretty closely on this head, she, indeed, told me, the subject was a painful one to her; that she knew nothing of her European kindred which would justify the searching them out; and that she would hold herself obliged to me, if I never recalled past events to her remembrance. After this injunction I was silent, but, in the course of numberless conversations, afterwards, hints were casually dropped, which afforded me, now and then, a glimpse into their family history.

When Mary spoke of her father, it was always with reverence for his talents, gratitude for his indulgence to her, and compassion for that frailty of character, which made him seek in dissipation, relief from sorrow on account of the death of a wife whom he adored; and a refuge, as she sometimes obscurely intimated, from some calamity or humiliation, which befel him in his native country.

My friend's heart always throbbed, and her eyes were filled with tears, whenever her mother was remembered. She took a mournful pleasure in describing her mother's person and manners, in which, she was prone to believe, all human excellence was comprized. Her own melancholy temper and gloomy destiny, she imagined to have descended to her by inheritance, and she once allowed me to collect from her discourse, that her mother had died the victim of some early and heavy disappointment.

We were once, the winter before last, conversing, by an evening fire, on that most captivating topic, ourselves. Having said something on my attachment to my country, and especially to the hill−side where I first drew breath, and inquired into her feelings in relation to the same objects,

Alas! said she, I should be puzzled to say to what country I belong. I am a German by my father; English by my mother. I was born at an hotel in Paris, I was nursed by a woman of Nice, where I passed my infancy; and my youth and womanhood, and probably my whole life, belong to America. Now, what is the country, Germany, England, France, Italy or America, which I have a right to call my own. The earliest object of my recollection is the face of my nurse, who accompanied us in all our wanderings, and who died just before my father, on Brandywine. The olives, the orange walks, and the sea−shore scenery of Savoy, are still fresh in my remembrance. Should I visit them again, no doubt my feelings would be strongly affected, but I never expect to visit them.

But your father's, your mother's natal spot, would have some charms, methinks, to one of your sensibility.

Some influence, no doubt, the contemplation would have, but no charms. Strange, if I should ever have an opportunity of trying their effect upon my feelings.

You are acquainted, then, with the birthplace of your father and mother.

Yes, I have heard them described so often, and with such minuteness, that I should recognize them, I think, at any distance of time. My father was born in the Grey−street, next to the chapel of St. Anne, at Altona. My mother and family have subsisted, from the days of William the Norman, at a spot, five miles from Taunton, in Devonshire.

I was in hopes that these particulars were preliminary to more interesting disclosures, but my friend now changed the subject of conversation, and would not be brought back to the point I wished.

Mr. Wilmot was a man of liberal education and cultivated taste. This appears from the representations of his daughter, and likewise from several books, which she preserved by connivance of his creditors, and which are enriched by many notes and memorandums in her father's hand−writing. These betoken an enlarged mind and extensive knowledge. She has, likewise, a sort of journal, kept by him when a mere youth, during two or three years residence in Bologne, in the character, as I suspect, of a commercial agent. This journal, which I have occasionally seen, affords many proofs of a sprightly and vigorous mind.

This, my friend, is the whole of my present recollections on this subject. I am anxious to know what has suggested your inquiry. Is your mother acquainted with any of the family in Europe? With the history of Wilmot before he came hither? Pray tell me all you know in your next.

Adieu.

E. H.

LETTER XXI.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 10.*

As soon as I had read your letter, I hurried to my mother. All her conjectures are ascertained. A native of Holstein.... Family abode near Taunton.... Victim of some early distress. These circumstances place the truth beyond controversy. But I will tell you the story with somewhat more order.

I told you that my mother's curiosity was awakened by the effect of your gloomy prognostics. I told her every thing respecting Mary Wilmot, but her love for you.

Wilmot.... Wilmot....said she. An English family....Came over twenty−four years ago. I think I know something of them. Their story was a singular one; a disastrous one. I should like to know more of their history. I think it not improbable that these are the same Wilmots with those with whose history I am perfectly acquainted: Nay, more, who were no very distant relations of our own. Pray write to Ned, and get from him all he knows of their early adventures. Inquire if the father was from Holstein, and the mother from Devonshire, and if Mary was born at Paris.

You see, my friend, your letter has satisfactorily confirmed these guesses; and now, will I relate to you, the early history of this family, in the words of my mother. Mary will be greatly astonished when she comes to find how much you know of her family....much more, 'tis probable, than she herself knows.... and to discover that the nearest relations he has in the world is myself. Being alone with my mother, on Thursday evening, she fulfilled the promise she had made, to tell me all she knew of the Wilmots, in these words:

Mary Anne was the only daughter of my father's only brother; consequently she was my cousin. She was nearly of my own age, and being the only child of a man, respectable for birth and property, and my near relation, and particularly of my own sex, we were intimately connected at an early age. She lost her mother in her infancy, and our family having several daughters, our house was thought more suited to her education than her father's. She lived with me and my sisters till she was eighteen years of age, receiving from us, our brothers, and our parents, exactly the same treatment which a real sister and daughter received.

There was no particular affection between Mary and myself. Our tempers did not chance to coincide. Her taste led her to one species of amusement, and mine to another. This difference stood in the way of that union of interests, which, however, took place between her and my elder sister. Still, there were few persons in the world for whom I had a more ardent esteem, or more tender affection, than for my cousin Mary Anne. She parted from us at the age of eighteen, in obedience to the summons of her father, who wished to place her at the head of his household. We lived in the north, and Mr. Lisle lived in Devonshire, so that we had little hope of any intercourse but by letter. This intercourse was very punctually maintained between her and my sister, and it was by means of this correspondence, that we obtained the knowledge of subsequent events.

On leaving our family, my cousin entered into a world of strangers; a sphere very incongenial with her temper and habits. So long a separation had deprived the parental character of all those claims to reverence and confidence, which are apt to arise when the lives of father and daughter are spent under the same roof. She saw in my uncle a man, who, in many essential particulars, both of speculation and of practice, was at variance with herself, and to whom nature had given prerogatives which her fearful temper foreboded would be oftener exerted to her injury than benefit. His inmates, his companions, his employments, his sports, were dissonant with all the feelings she was most accustomed to cherish. In short, her new situation was in the highest degree irksome.

She naturally looked abroad for that comfort which she could not find at home. She formed intimacies with several persons of her own sex, among others, with miss Saunders, the daughter of a Bristol merchant, with whom she spent as much time as her father would allow her to spend. Her winter months were generally passed in the society of that young lady at Bristol; while her friend, in summer, was her guest in the country.

It was at the house of Mr. Saunders that she became acquainted with Veelmetz, or Wilmot, a young man of uncommon elegance and insinuation. He was a native of Germany, but had received his early education in England. He had, at this time, been for two or three years chief, or confidential clerk, in an English mercantile house, at Bologne, but made occasional excursions on behalf of his employer to the neighbouring countries. Some concerns detained him a few months at Bristol, and being on a familiar footing with the family of Saunders, he

there became acquainted with my cousin.

On the first interview, my cousin was in love with the stranger. It is impossible to tell how far the laws of strict honour were observed by Wilmot in his behaviour to my cousin, either before or after the discovery of her attachment to him. Certain it is, that his heart was devoted to another at the period of his interview with Mary Anne; that she, at all times, earnestly acquitted him of any duplicity or treachery towards her, and ascribed the unfortunate cause of their mutual shame and embarrassment to some infatuation; in consequence of which a man, who concealed not his love and his engagement to another, and without the sanction or the promise of marriage, prevailed on her to forget her dignity and her duty.

Both parties deserved blame. Which deserved it most, and how far their guilt might be extenuated or atoned for by the circumstances attending it, it is impossible to tell. Mary Anne was a great, a mixed, and doubtless, a faulty character. The world, in general, was liberal of its eulogies on the probity, as well as on the graces and talents of Wilmot. His subsequent behaviour lay claim to some praise; but his fatal meeting with my cousin, proved that the virtue of both was capable of yielding, when the integrity of worse people would easily have stood firm.

About the same time, Wilmot returned to Bologne, and my cousin accompanied her father to Paris. The lady to whom the former was betrothed, was the daughter of the principal in that house, where Wilmot had long been a servant, and in which, in consequence of his merits, he was now shortly to become a son and partner. The nuptial day was fixed.

Before the arrival of that day, he wrote a letter to Mary Anne, acquainting her with his present situation, reminding her that he never practised any fraud or concealment in his intercourse with her; yet, nevertheless, offering to come, and either by an open application to her father, or by a clandestine marriage, prevent any evil that might threaten her safety or her reputation.

This letter placed my cousin in the most distressful dilemma that can be conceived. Her heart was still fondly devoted to him that made this offer. A fair fame was precious in her eyes. Her father's wrath was terrible. She knew that the accident, which Wilmot was willing to provide against, would soon and inevitably befal her. Yet, in her answer to his letter, the possibility of this accident was denied; her attachment was denied, and he was earnestly conjured to complete his own happiness and that of a worthier woman.

There were many generous pleas by which my cousin might have accounted for her conduct. She knew that the marriage he offered would never be crowned with her father's consent; that, on the contrary, his hatred and vengeance would pursue them forever. That Wilmot would thereby forfeit the honour already plighted to another; would inflict exquisite misery on that other and on himself, and would forever cut himself off from that road to fortune, which had now been opened to him.

She was candid enough to confess that these considerations, though powerful, did not singly dictate her conduct. Her heart was, in reality, full of grief. Despondency and horror took possession of her whole soul. She hoped to protract the discovery of her personal condition to a very late period, and then, when further concealment was hopeless, designed to put a violent end to life and all its cares.

Meanwhile, Wilmot's conscience being somewhat relieved by my cousin's answer, he gave himself up without restraint, to the pleasurable prospects before him. The day of happiness was near at hand. He had little leisure for any thing, but the offices of love and tenderness, and was engaged, on the evening of a fine day, to accompany his mistress, with a numerous party, on a rural excursion. The carriage, ready to receive them, was at the door, and he only waited, in a court before the house, till the lady had adjusted her dress for the occasion.

His mistress, Adela, having made the requisite adjustments, came out. She looked around for her lover in vain. Some accident, it was easily imagined, had called him for a few moments away. She collected patience to wait; but she waited and expected in vain. Night came, and one day succeeded another, but Wilmot did not appear. Inquiries were set on foot, and messengers were dispatched, but Wilmot had entirely vanished.

Some intelligence was, at last, gained of him. It appeared, that while walking to and fro in the court, two persons had came up to him, and after a short dialogue, had retired with him to an inn. There they had been closeted for a few minutes. After which they came forth, and mounting horses that stood at the gate, hastily left the city together.

The suspense and anxiety which this circumstance produced in the lady and her family, may be easily imagined. Their conjectures wandered from one object to another, without obtaining satisfaction. They could gain from all their inquiries, no knowledge of the persons who had summoned the young man away. They inferred that

the messengers were the bearers of no good tidings; since the attendants at the inn reported that Wilmot's countenance and motions betrayed the utmost consternation, on descending from the chamber where the conference was held.

Their suspense was at length terminated by the return of the fugitive himself. Wan, sorrowful, and drooping, an horseman languidly alighted, about ten days after Wilmot's disappearance, at the gate. It was Wilmot himself. The family flocked about, eager to express their joy, terror, and surprise. He received their greetings with affected cheerfulness, but presently requesting an interview with Adela, retired with her to her closet.

I suppose, my dear, you conjecture the true cause of all these appearances. My cousin's secret was betrayed, by an unfaithful confidant, to her father, whose rage, at the discovery, was without bounds. He rushed into his daughter's presence, in a transport of fury, and easily extorted from her the author of her disgrace. Without a moment's delay, he ordered horses, and in company with a friend, made all possible haste to Bologne. The daughter's uncertainty as to the cause and object of his journey, was ended by the return of Mr. Lisle, in company with Wilmot. The alternative offered to the youth, was to meet the father with pistols, or to repair his child's dishonour by marriage. Mr. Lisle's impetuosity overbore all my cousin's opposition, and Wilmot, the moment he discovered her true situation, was willing to repair the wrong to the utmost of his power.

The ceremony being performed, Mr. Lisle's pride was so far satisfied, but his rage demanded nothing less than eternal separation from his daughter. Wilmot was obliged to procure lodgings in a different quarter, and my poor cousin left her father's presence, for the last time, with his curses ringing in her ears.

The horror occasioned by these events, brought on a premature labour, the fruit of which did not perish, as might have been expected, but has survived to this day, and is no other than your Mary Wilmot.

Poor Wilmot had an arduous office still to perform. These events, and his new condition, were to be disclosed to Adela. This it was easy to do by letter, but he rather chose to do full justice to his feelings in a formal interview. And this was the purpose for which he returned to Bologne.

It is not possible to imagine a more deplorable situation than that in which Wilmot was now placed. He was torn forever from the object of his dearest affections. At the moment when all obstacles were about to disappear, and a few days were to unite those hearts which had cherished a mutual passion from infancy, he was compelled to pay the forfeit of past transgressions, by binding himself to one who had his esteem, but not his love. Adela was the pride and delight of her family, and Wilmot had made himself scarcely a less fervent interest in their affections. That privilege he was now compelled to resign, and by the same act, to break the heart of the daughter, and excite unextinguishable animosity in the bosom of her friends. Every tie dear to the human heart, was now violently broken: every flattering scheme of honour and fortune, baffled and defeated. Nor had he the consolation to reflect, that by these sacrifices he had secured the happiness of, at least, one human being. My cousin was an involuntary actor in this scene. She had been overborne by her father's menaces, and even by the expostulations and entreaties of Wilmot himself. The irrevocable ceremony was hurried over without a moment's deliberation or delay, and before she had time to collect her thoughts and form her resolutions, to recover from the first confusions of surprise and affright, she found herself a wife and a mother.

It was, perhaps, merely the very conduct which my cousin's feelings taught her to pursue, that secured her ultimately some portion of happiness. All the fault of the first transgression she imputed to herself. Wilmot was the innocent and injured person: she only was the injurer and criminal. Those upbraidings which the anguish of his heart might have prompted him to use, were anticipated; dwelt upon and exaggerated; all the miseries of this alliance passed, in as vivid hues before her imagination, as before his. These images plunged her into the most profound and pitiable sorrow.

Wilmot's generosity would by no means admit, that her's only was the guilt. On the contrary, his candour, awakened by her example, was busy in aggravating his own crime. His heart was touched by the proofs of her extreme dejection; her disinterested regard. He reflected, that her portion of evil was at least equal to his own. Her sensibility to reputation, her sense of right, her dependance on her father for the means of subsistence, her attachment to her country and kindred, all contributed to heighten her peculiar calamity, since she believed her fame to be blasted forever; since her conscience reproached her with all the guilt of their intercourse; since her father had sworn never to treat her as his child; since she had lost, in her own opinion, the esteem of all her relations and friends, and solemnly vowed never to set foot in her native country.

Wilmot's efforts to console his wife, produced insensibly a salutary effect on his own feelings. Being obliged

to search out topics of comfort for her use, they were equally conducive to his own, and a habit of regarding objects on their brightest side; of considering my cousin as merely a subject of tenderness and compassion; somewhat abated the edge of his own misfortunes.

My father took infinite, though unsolicited pains to reconcile the parent and child, but my uncle could not be prevailed on to do more than allow Wilmot a small annuity, with which he retired to the town of Nice, and by a recluse and frugal life, subsisted, if not with elegance, at least with comfort. Mary Anne was extremely backward to cultivate the society of her old friends. Their good offices she took pains to repel and elude, and her only source of consolation, with regard to them, appeared to be the hope that they had entirely forgotten her. We, her cousins, were not, however, deterred by her repulses, but did every thing, in our power, to befriend her cause with her inexorable father, and to improve her domestic situation. We had the pleasure to find that Wilmot, though his vivacity, his ambitious and enterprizing spirit was flown, was an affectionate husband and provident father.

At my uncle's death we had hopes that Mary Anne's situation would be bettered. His will, however, bequeathed all his estate to his nephew, my elder brother, and the Wilmots were deprived even of that slender stipend which they had hitherto enjoyed. This injustice was, in some degree, repaired by my brother, who, as soon as the affairs of the deceased were arranged, sent a very large present to Wilmot. They did not make us acquainted with the motives of their new resolutions. We were merely informed, indirectly, that on the receipt of this sum, Wilmot repaired with his family to some port in France, and embarked for the colonies. Time insensibly wore away the memory of these transactions, and 'tis a long time since my sisters and I have been accustomed, in reviewing past events, to inquire "What has become of poor Mrs. Wilmot and her children?"

Such, Edward, was my mother's relation. Is it not an affecting one. And is, indeed, thy Mary the remnant of this family? They had several children, but most of them found an early grave in Europe, and the eldest, it seems, is the sole survivor. We must make haste, my friend, to raise her from obscurity and make her happy.

Is it not likely that Mary knows nothing of her mother's history? Being only ten years old at her death, the child would scarcely be made the confidant of such transactions. The father, it is likely, would be equally prone to silence, on such a topic.

Our fortune is strongly influenced by our ignorance. What can be more lonely and forlorn than the life thy poor friend has led. Yet had she returned to her mother's native country, and disclosed her relation to the present mistress of *Littlelisle*, she would have been instantly admitted to the house and bosom of a fond mother.

My uncle, to whom I told you the estate of Mary's grandfather was bequeathed, died unmarried and left this property to the sister, who was the intimate of Mary Anne, and who never lost the tenderest respect for her youthful friend. This happened some years after Wilmot's voyage to the colonies. My aunt being childless and a widow, was extremely solicitous to discover Mary Anne's retreat, and restore her, or her children to at least, a part of that property, to the whole of which their title was, strictly speaking, better than her own. For this end, she made a great many inquiries in America, but none of them met with success.

I have written a long letter. Yet I could add much more, were I not afraid of losing this post. So let me hear thy comments on all these particulars, and tell me, especially, when I may certainly expect thy return. Adieu

Clara.

LETTER XXII.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 11*.

Thanks, a thousand thanks, my beloved friend, for thy story. It has absorbed and overwhelmed every other thought and feeling. Since I received it, I have done nothing but peruse and ponder on thy letter. It has opened cheerful prospects for my poor friend. Shall we not see her restored to her native country: to her original rank, and the affluence to which she is entitled by her birth, her education and her former sufferings? I trust, we shall.

'Tis impossible to guess how far she is acquainted with the history of her parents: but that and every other doubt will, I hope, speedily be put to flight.

I hope that this is the last letter I shall have occasion to write to you. The next time I shall address you, will be through no such wild and ambiguous medium.

May I find my Clara all gentleness; all condescension; all love. So, with all his heart, prays her

Edward.

LETTER XXIII.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 11.*

By the calm tenor of this letter you will hardly judge of the state of my mind before I sat down to write. To describe it would be doing wrong to myself and to you. I am not anxious to pass for better than I am; to hide my weakness, or to dwell upon my folly. In this letter to paint the struggles between reason and passion, would be making more arduous that task which I must assign to you.

I have formerly concealed these struggles. My motive was not shame. I aimed not to shun contempt, by concealing my defects; for, alas! the spirit with which I had to deal, modelled his opinions by a standard different from mine. That which was selfish and base in my eyes, was praise−worthy in his. I passed for obdurate and absurd, in proportion as I acted in a manner which appeared to me generous and just.

I concealed these struggles, because I hated to reflect upon my own faults; because they were past, and the better thoughts that succeeded were sources of complacency too precious to be lost, and attained and preserved with so much difficulty, that to review the conflicts which it cost me to gain them, would hazard their loss.

Thus it is, at present. I write to you, not to give utterance and new existence to anguish no longer felt. I write to you to tell my present views, and they cannot waver or change.

My friend, the bearer of this is your Mary. She is not happy. She is not anothers. She is poor, but good, and no doubt as much devoted to you as ever. Need I point out to you the road which you ought to take! Need I enforce, by arguments, that duty which compels you to consult her happiness, by every honest means?

Could I but inspire you, my friend, with the sentiments that now possess my heart: could I but make your convictions at once just and strong, and convert you into a cheerful performer of your duty, I should, indeed, be happy.

You will wonder by what means Mary has been made known to me. I will tell you. I went to pay a visit, long since due, to Mrs. Etheridge. It was but yesterday. After cursory discourse she mentioned that she expected in a few minutes to see a lady, who was going on the morrow to Philadelphia. I had written to you, and was not unwilling to make use of this opportunity. What, I asked, is her name? Her character? Her situation?

Mary Wilmot. She has just come from New−Haven, where she has passed the winter with a friend. She is amiable, but unfortunate.

You will imagine with what emotions I listened to these words. For some minutes I was too much surprised to think or to speak clearly. My companion noticed my emotion, but before she could inquire into the cause, a visitant was announced, and Miss Wilmot herself entered the room. Being introduced to each other, my name occasioned as much surprise and embarrassment as hers had given to me. The interview ended abruptly, but not till I had so far collected my thoughts, as to request her to be the bearer of a letter. She mentioned the place where it might be left and we parted.

I ought to have acted in a different manner. I ought to have asked her company home, have sought her confidence, have unbosomed myself to her, and removed every obstacle to her union with you, which might arise from an erring judgment or an unwise generosity.

But I was unfitted for this by the suddenness of our interview. I had not time to subdue those trembling and mixed feelings which the sight of her produced, before she withdrew, and I had not courage enough to visit her at her lodgings, and be the bearer of my own letter. so much the more arduous is the task which belongs to you. My deficiencies must be supplied by you. Act uprightly and ingenuously, my friend, I entreat you. Seek her presence, and shew her this and every other letter from me. Offer her, beseech her, compel her, to accept your vows.

Accuse me not of fickleness. Acquit me of mean and ungenerous behaviour. Dream not that reasoning or entreaty will effect any change in my present sentiments. I love you, Edward, as I ought to love you. I love your happiness; your virtue. I resign you to this good girl as to one who deserves you more than I; whose happiness is more dependent on the affections of another than mine is. What passion is now wanting in you time will shortly supply. In such a case, you must and will act and feel as you ought.

Let me not hear from you till you have seen her. I know whence will arise the failure of your efforts on such an interview. If she withstand your eloquence, it will be because you have betrayed your cause, or because she acts

from a romantic and groundless generosity with regard to me. The last obstacle, it will be my province to remove. I will write to her, and convince her that by rejecting you on my account she does me injury and not benefit, and is an enemy to your happiness; for while Mary lives, and is not bound to another, I will never be to you any thing but

Your friend,

C. H.

LETTER XXIV.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 13.*
MY FRIEND,

I do not mean to reason with you. When I tell you that you are wrong, I am far from expecting your assent to my assertion. I say it not in a tone of bitterness or deprecation. I am calm, in this respect, as yourself. There is nothing to ruffle my calm. We fluctuate and are impatient, only when doubtful of the future. Our fate being sealed, and an end being put to suspense and to doubt, the passions are still. Sedateness and tranquillity at least are ours.

There is nothing, I repeat, to ruffle my calm. I am not angry with you, for I know the purity and rectitude of your motives. Your judgment only is misguided, but that is no source of impatience or repining to me. It is beyond my power, or that of time, to rectify your error.

I do not pity you. You aspire to true happiness, the gift of self−approbation and of virtuous forbearance. You have adopted the means necessary to this end, and the end is gained. Why then should I pity you? You would not derive more happiness from a different decision. Another would, indeed, be more happy, but you would, perhaps, be less. At any rate, your enjoyments would not be greater than they now are; for what gratification can be compared to that arising from the sense of doing as we ought?

I believe you in the wrong, and I tell you so. It is proper that the truth should be known. It is proper that my opinion, and the grounds of it should be known to you. Not that after this disclosure, *you* will think or act differently. Of that I have not the least hope.

You are wrong, Clara. You study, it seems, the good of others. You desire the benefit of this girl; and since her happiness lies in being united to me, and in possessing my affections, you wish to unite us, and to transfer to her my love.

It cannot be done. Marry her I may, but I shall not love her. I cannot love her. This incapacity, you will think argues infirmity and vice in me, and lessens me in your esteem. It ought not to produce this effect. It is a proof of neither wickedness nor folly. I cannot love her, because my affections are already devoted to one more attractive and more excellent than she.

She has my reverence. If wedlock unites us, my fidelity will never be broken. I will watch over her safety with unfailing solicitude. She shall share every feeling and thought. The ties of the tenderest friendship shall be hers, but....nothing more.

You will say that more is due to her; that a just man will add to every office of a friend the sanction of ineffable passion. I will not discuss with you the propriety of loving *my wife*, when her moral and intellectual excellence is unquestionable, and when all her love is bestowed upon me. I will only repeat, that passion will never be felt.

What then will be the fruit of marriage? Nothing but woe to her whom you labour, by uniting us, to make happy. You rely, however, on the influence of time and intercourse to beget that passion which is now wanting. And think you that this girl will wed a man who loves her not?

She never will. Our union is impracticable, not from opposition or refusal on my side, but on hers. As to me, my concurrence shall be full, cheerful, zealous. Argument and importunity will not be wanting. If they fail, you will ascribe their failure to my coldness, ambiguity or artifice, or to mistaken generosity in her with regard to you. The last motive, after due representations, will not exist. The former cause may possess some influence, for I shall act with scrupulous sincerity. I shall counterfeit no passion and no warmth. The simple and unembellished truth shall be told to her, and this I know will be an insurmountable impediment.

But suppose, for a moment, this obstacle to disappear, and that Mary is happy as the wife one who esteems her, indeed, but loves her not. Your end is accomplished. You proceed to reap the fruits of disinterested virtue, and contemplate the felicity which is your own work.

This girl is the only one of God's creatures worthy of benevolence. No other is entitled to the sacrifice of your inclination. None there are in whose happiness you find a recompence for evils and privations befalling yourself.

As to me, I am an inert and insensible atom, or I move in so remote a sphere that my pains or pleasures are

independent of any will or exertion of yours. But no; that is a dignity of which I must not boast. I am so far sunk into depravity, that all my desires are the instigations of guilt, and all my pleasures those of iniquity. Duty tells you to withstand and to thwart, not to gratify my wishes.

I love you, and my happiness depends upon your favour. Without you, or with another, I can know no joy. But this, in your opinion, is folly and perverseness. To aspire to your favour, when it is beyond my reach, is criminal infatuation. Not to love her who loves me, and whose happiness depends upon my love, is, you think, cruel and unjust. Be it so. Great indeed, is my demerit. Worthless and depraved am I, but not single in iniquity and wretchedness; for the rule is fallacious that is not applicable to all others in the same circumstances. That conduct which in me is culpable, is no less culpable in others. Am I cruel and unjust, in refusing my love to one that claims it? So are you, whose refusal is no less obstinate as to me, as mine with respect to another; and who hearkens not to claims upon your sympathy, as reasonable as those of Mary on mine.

And how is it that miss Wilmot's merits tower so far above mine? By placing her happiness in gaining affections which are obstinately withheld; by sacrificing the duty she owes herself, her fellow−creatures, and her God, to grief, because the capricious feelings of another have chosen a different object of devotion, does she afford no proof of infatuation and perverseness? Is she not at least sunk to a level with me?

But Mary Wilmot and I are not the only persons affected by your decision. There is another more entitled to the affections of this woman than I, because he loves her; because, in spite of coldness, poverty, and personal defects; in spite of repulse from her, the aversion of his family, and the inticements of those to whom his birth, fortune, and exterior accomplishments have made him desirable, continues to love her. With regard to this man is she not exactly in the same relation as I am to her? Is it not her duty to consult his happiness, and no longer to oppose his laudable and generous wishes? For him and for me, your benevolence sleeps. With regard to us you have neither consideration nor humanity. They are all absorbed in the cause of one, whose merits, whose claim to your sympathy and aid, if it be not less, is far from being greater than Sedley's or mine.

My path is, indeed, plain. I mean to visit miss Wilmot; but before I see her, I shall transmit to her all the letters that have passed between you and me on this subject, and particularly a copy of *this* . She shall not be deceived. She shall judge with all the materials of a right judgment before her. I am prepared to devote myself to her will; to join my fate to hers to−morrow. I do not fear any lessening of my reverence for her virtues, of that tenderness which will be her due, and which it becomes him to feel in whose hands is deposited the weal or woe of a woman truly excellent. We have wherewith to secure the blessings of competence. With that we will seek the shores of the Ohio, and devote ourselves to rural affairs. You and yours I shall strive to forget. Justice to my wife and to myself, will require this at my hand.

Adieu.

E. H.

LETTER XXV.

TO MARY WILMOT. − Philadelphia, − *May 14.*

I am impatient to see you, and assure myself from your own lips, of your welfare; but there is a necessity for postponing my visit till to−morrow evening. Then I will see you; meanwhile, read the inclosed papers. One is a narrative of occurrences since the date of my last letter to you from Hatfield. The rest are letters that have been written to miss Howard, or received from her, down to the present hour. Read them, and reflect deeply and impartially on their contents. They require no preface or commentary. Make up your mind by evening, when I will attend you with an heart overflowing with the affection of a friend, and prepared to perform, with zeal and cheerfulness, whatever the cause of your felicity requires from

E. H.

LETTER XXVI.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 15.*

I sit down to relate what, perhaps, will afford you pain instead of pleasure. I know not whether I ought to give you pain, by this recital. Having no longer the power of living for my own happiness, I had wrought up my mind to the fervent wish of living for the sake of another. I found consolation in the thought of being useful to a human being.

Now my condition is forlorn and dreary. That sedate and mixed kind of happiness, on which I had set my wishes, is denied to me. My last hope, meagre and poor as it was, is extinguished forever. The fire that glowed in my bosom, languishes. I am like one let loose upon a perilous sea, without rudder or sail.

I have made preparation to leave this city to−morrow, by the dawn of day, on a journey from which I neither wish nor expect to return. I at this moment anticipate the dawn of comfort, from the scenes of the wilderness and of savage life. I begin to adopt, with seriousness, a plan which has often occurred to my juvenile reveries.

In my uncle's parlour there hangs a rude outline of the continent of North−America. Many an hour have I gazed upon it, and indulged that romantic love of enterprize, for which I have ever been distinguished. My eye used to leap from the shore of Ontario, to the obscure rivulets which form, by their conflux, the Allegheny. This have I pursued through all its windings, till its stream was lost in that of the Ohio. Along this river have I steered and paddled my canoe of bark, many hundreds of leagues, till the Missisippi was attained. Down that mighty current I allowed myself to be passively borne, till the mouths of Missouri opened to my view. A more arduous task, and one hitherto unattempted, then remained for me. In the ardours of my fancy, all perils and hardships were despised, and I boldly adventured to struggle against the current of Missouri, to combat the dangers of an untried navigation, of hostile tribes, and unknown regions.

Having gained the remotest sources of the river, I proceeded to drag my barque over mountains and rocks, till I lighted upon the vallies and streams that tend to the north and west. On one of these I again embarked. The rivulets insensibly swelled into majestic streams. Lurking sands and overhanging cliffs gradually disappeared, and a river flowed beneath me, as spacious in its breadth and depth, and wandering through as many realms, as the Wolga or the Oronoco. After a tedious navigation of two thousand miles, I at last entered a bay of the ocean, and descried the shores of the great Pacific. This purpose being gained, I was little anxious to return, and allowed my fancy to range at will over the boundless field of contingencies, by some of which I might be transported across the ocean to China, or along the coast to the dominions of the Spaniards.

This scheme, suspended and forgotten for awhile, I have now resumed. To−morrow I go hence, in company with a person who holds an high rank in the Spanish districts westward of the Missisippi.

You will not receive this letter, or be apprised of my intentions, till after I am gone. I shall dispatch it at the moment of my leaving this city. I shall not write to Mr. Howard. I want not his aid or his counsel. I know that his views are very different from mine. I shall awaken opposition and remonstrance, which will answer no end but to give me torment and inquietude. To you I leave the task of informing him of my destiny, or allow him, if you please, to be wholly unacquainted with it. Either conduct is indifferent to me.

But there is one in whose welfare you condescend to take some interest, and of whom I am able to communicate some tidings. Some commands which you laid upon me in relation to Mary have been fulfilled, and I shall now acquaint you with the result.

She sent me your letter not many hours after it was written, with a note, informing me of her place of abode, and requesting a meeting with me. A letter from you, by her hands, was a cause of sufficient wonder; but the contents of your letter were far more wonderful than the mode of its conveyance. The handwriting assured me it was yours. The style and sentiments were alien to all that my fancy had connected with your name. With these tokens of profound indifference to my happiness, of ineffable contempt for my person and character, I compared the solicitude and tenderness which your preceding letter had breathed, and was utterly lost in horror and doubt. But this is not the strain in which I ought to write to you. Reason should set my happiness beyond the love or enmity of another not wiser or more discerning or benevolent than myself. If reason be inadequate to my deliverance, pride should hinder me from disclosing my humiliation; from confessing my voluntary servitude.

After my discomposure was somewhat abated, I proceeded to reflect on what was now to be done. Compliance with your dictates was obvious. Since I was no longer of importance to your happiness, it was time to remember what was due to that angelic sufferer.

I have already told you that I sent your letters, and promised to see her in the evening. I went at the appointed hour. I entered her apartment with a throbbing heart, for she is my friend. Near a year had passed since I had last seen her. This interval had been tormented with doubts of her safety, of her happiness, of her virtue, and even her existence. These doubts were removed, or about to be solved. My own eyes were to bear testimony to the truth of her existence.

I was admitted to her. I hastened to communicate my wishes. I enforced them by all the eloquence that I was master of, but my eloquence was powerless. She was too blind an admirer, and assiduous a follower of Clara Howard, to accept my proffers. I abruptly withdrew.

Heaven protect thee and her! I shall carry, I fear, the images of both of you along with me. Their company will not be friendly to courage or constancy. I shall shut them out as soon as I can.

E. H.

LETTER XXVII.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 13, Noon.*

I feel some reluctance and embarrassment in addressing you in this manner, but am enabled, in some degree, to surmount them, by reflecting on the proofs which are now in my hands, of the interest which you take in my welfare, and of the inimitable generosity of your sentiments. I am likewise stimulated by the regard, which, in common with yourself, I feel for an excellent youth, to whose happiness this letter may essentially contribute.

I have seen you but for a moment. I was prepared to find in you all that could inspire veneration and love. That my prepossessions were fully verified, will, perhaps, redound little to the credit of my penetration or your beauty, since we seldom fail to discover in the features, tokens of all that we imagine to exist within.

I know you by more copious and satisfactory means; by several letters which Edward Hartley has put into my hands. By these it likewise appears, that you have some acquaintance with me, collected from the same source, and from the representations of my friend. The character and situation, the early history and unfortunate attachment of Mary, and that expedient which she adopted to free herself from useless importunities and repinings, are already known to you.

This makes it needless for me to mention many particulars of my early life; they authorise the present letter, and allow me, or, perhaps, to speak more truly, they enjoin me to confide in you a relation of some incidents that have lately occurred. Your sensibility would render them of some moment in your eyes, should they possess no relation but to a forlorn and unhappy girl; but their importance will be greater, inasmuch as they are connected with your own destiny, and with that of one, whom you justly hold dear. I shall claim your attention for as short a time as possible.

A letter, written last autumn, to Edward Hartley, informing him of the motives that induced me to withdraw from his society, has been shewn to you. It will, therefore, be needless to explain these motives anew. I console myself with believing, that they merited and obtained the approbation of so enlightened and delicate a judge as Clara Howard.

The place of my retreat was determined by the kind offers and solicitations of a lady, by name, Valentine. In other circumstances, similar solicitations from her had been refused, but now I was anxious to retire to a great and unknown distance from my usual home; to retire without delay, but my health was imperfect. I was a female without knowledge of the world, without the means of subsistence, and the season was cold and boisterous. Mrs. Valentine was opulent; her character entitled her to confidence and love; her engagements required her immediate departure; she would travel with all possible advantages; her new abode was at a great distance from my own; and she meant to continue absent during the ensuing year. There was but one consideration to make me hesitate.

Her brother had long offered me his affections. Mrs. Valentine had been his advocate, and endeavoured to win my favour, or at least, to facilitate his own exertions, by promoting our intercourse.

I had been hitherto unjust to the merits of this man. His constancy, his generosity, his gifts of person, understanding and fortune, might have won the heart of a woman less prepossessed in favour of another. My indifference, my aversion, were proportioned to that fervent love with which my heart was inspired by another. I thought it my duty to avoid every means by which the impracticable wishes of Sedley might be fostered. For this end, I had hitherto declined most of those offers of friendship and intercourse with which I had been honoured by his sister.

My unhappy situation had now reduced me to the necessity of violating some of my maxims. I should never have accompanied Mrs. Valentine, however, had I not been previously assured that her brother designed to live at a distance. It was impossible to object to his design of accompanying us to the end of our journey.

That journey was accomplished. We arrived, at the eve of winter, in the neighbourhood of Boston. The treatment I received from my friend, was scrupulously delicate. She acted with the frankness and affection of a sister; but I think with shame, on that absurd pride which hindered me from practising the same candour. I was born in an affluent condition, but the misfortune of my parents, while they trained me up in a thousand prejudices, left me, at the age of eighteen, totally destitute of property or friends. There was no human being on whom the customs of the world would allow me to depend. My only relation was a younger brother, who was still a boy,

and who needed protection, as much as myself. In this state, I had recourse for honest bread, to my needle; but the bread thus procured was mingled with many bitter tears. I conceived myself degraded by my labour; my penury was aggravated by remembrance of my former enjoyments. I shrunk from the salutation, or avoided the path, of my early companions. I imagined that they would regard my fallen state with contempt, or with pity, no less hard to be endured than scorn. I laboured sometimes by unjustifiable and disingenuous artifices, to conceal my employments and my wants, and masked my cares as well as I was able, under cheerful looks.

This spirit led me to conceal from Mrs. Valentine my forlorn condition. I looked forward without hope, to the hour when new labour would be requisite to procure for me shelter and food. For there, I was at present indebted to my friend; but I loved to regard myself merely as a visitant, and anticipate the time when I should cease to lie under obligation. Meanwhile, there were many little and occasional sources of expense, to which my ill−supplied purse was unequal; while a thousand obstacles existed under this roof, to any profitable application of my time. Hence arose new cause of vexation, and new force to my melancholy.

All my stratagems could not conceal from my friend my poverty. For a time, she struggled to accommodate herself to my scruples, and to aid me, without seeming to know the extent of my necessities. These struggles were frustrated by my obstinate pride. I steadily refused either money or credit.

At length, she resolved to enter into full explanations with me, on this subject. She laid before me, with simplicity and candour, all her suspicions and surmises, and finally extorted from me a confession that I was not mistress of a single dollar in the world; that I had no kinsman to whom I could betake myself for the supply of my wants; no fund on which I was authorized to draw for a farthing.

This declaration was heard with the strongest emotion. She betrayed surprise and disappointment. After a pause, she expressed her astonishment at this news. She reminded me how little it agreed with past appearances. She had known me, during the latter part of my brother's life, and since. My brother's profession had apparently been useful to my subsistence, and since his death, though indeed the period had been short, I had lived in a neat seclusion, and at leisure.

These hints induced me to be more frank in my disclosures. I related what is already known to you, the fate of the money which I inherited from my brother, the doubtful circumstances that attended my brother's possession, and the irresistible claim of Morton.

Every word of my narrative added anew to my friends surprise and disappointment. She continued for a long time silent, but much disquiet was betrayed by her looks. I mistook these for signs of disapprobation of my conduct, and began to justify myself. Dear madam! Would you not, in my place, have acted in this manner?

Just so, Mary. Your conclusion was highly plausible.

I believe my conclusion, replied I, to be certain. I did not require any stronger proof of Morton's title.

And yet his claim was fallacious. This money was yours, and only yours.

This assertion was made with a confidence that convinced me of its truth, and caused my mind instantly to adopt a new method of accounting for the acquisition of this money. My eyes, fixed upon my companion, betrayed my suspicion that my benefactress was before me. Humiliation and gratitude were mingled in my heart. Tears gushed from my eyes, while I pressed her hand to my lips.

Ah! said I, if Morton were not the giver, who should know the defects of his title, but the real giver?

Your gratitude, Mary, is misplaced. You might easily imagine that my funds would never allow me to be liberal to that amount.

Is it not you? Whose then was the bounteous spirit? You are, at least, acquainted with the real benefactor.

I confess that I am, but may not be authorized to disclose the name.

I besought her to disclose her name.

The motive, said my friend, is obvious. It could only be the dread that, knowing your scrupulousness on this head, you would refuse the boon, and thus frustrate a purpose truly benevolent. This apprehension being removed, there can certainly be no reason for concealment. I am entirely of your opinion, that the author of every good deed should be known not only to the subject of the benefit, but to all mankind.

After much solicitation she, at length, confessed that this money was the gift of Mr. Sedley to my brother. She stated the motives of this uncommon liberality. Sedley had made his sister acquainted with his passion for me, and had engaged her counsel and aid. Her counsel had always been, to abandon a pursuit whose success was hopeless....Perceiving your reluctance, continued my friend, and finding it to arise from a passion for another, I

earnestly dissuaded him from persisting in claims which were hurtful to you without profiting himself. His passion sometimes led him to accuse you of frowardness and obstinacy, and, at those times, I had much ado to defend you, and to prove your right to consult your own happiness.

But these moments, I must say in justice to my brother, were few. I could generally reason him into better temper. He could see, at least for a time, the propriety of ceasing to vex you with entreaties and arguments, and was generous enough to wish you happiness, even with another. This spirit led him to inquire into the character and condition of your chosen friend. For this purpose he cultivated the acquaintance of your brother, and discovered that the only obstacle to your union with young Hartley, was your mutual poverty. After many struggles, many fits of jealousy, and anger, and melancholy, he determined to lay aside every selfish wish, and to remove this obstacle to your happiness, by giving you possession of sufficient property.

This undertaking was in the highest degree arduous and delicate. To make the offer directly to you, was chimerical. No power on earth, he well knew, could persuade you to receive a free gift in money from one whose pretensions had been such as his. To bestow it upon Hartley, would be exposing the success of his scheme to hazard. His scruples would be as likely to exclaim against such a gift, as loudly as yours, especially when attended with those conditions which it would be necessary to prescribe. There was likewise no certainty that his gift might not be diverted by Hartley to other purposes than those which he sought. Neither did he wish to ensure your marriage with another, upon terms which should appear to lay you under obligations to that other. Besides, your union with Hartley, was, in some degree, uncertain. A thousand untoward events might occur to protract or prevent it, whereas your poverty was a present and constant evil.

After discussing a great number of expedients, he adopted one, at length, which, perhaps, was as unskilful as any which he could have lighted on. By talking with your brother, he found him possessed of a quick, indignant, and lofty spirit; one that recoiled from pecuniary obligations; that placed a kind of glory in being poor, and in devoting his efforts to benevolent, rather than to lucrative purposes. He saw that direct offers of money, to any considerable amount, and accompanied with no conditions, or by conditions which respected his sister, would be disdainfully rejected. He determined, therefore, to leave him no option, and to put a certain sum in his possession without it being possible for him to discover the donor, or to refuse the gift. This sum was, therefore, sent to him, under cover of a short billet, without signature, and in a disguised hand.

This scheme was not disclosed to me till after it was executed. I did not approve it. I am no friend to indirect proceedings. I was aware of many accidents that might make this gift an hurtful one, or, at least, useless to the end Sedley proposed. Your brother's scruples, which hindered him from openly accepting it, were likely to prevent him from applying so large a sum to his own, or to your benefit. He would either let it lie idly in his coffers, under the belief that so ambiguous a transfer gave him no right to it, or he would, more probably, spend it on some charitable scheme. I was acquainted with his enthusiasm, in the cause of what he called the good of mankind, and that his notions of the goods and evils of life differed much from those of his sister.

This act, however, was not to be recalled, and it was useless to make my brother repent of his precipitation. I hoped that his intention would not be defeated, and watched the conduct of your brother very carefully, to discover the effect of his new acquisitions. The effect was such as I expected. Your brother's mode of life underwent no change; and the money, as there were easy means of discovering, lay in one of the banks, untouched.

My curiosity was awakened anew at your brother's death, and Sedley had the satisfaction of perceiving that your condition was visibly improved. You no longer hired out your labour. You lived in retirement, indeed, but with some degree of neatness; and your time was spent in improving and adorning your mind, and in those offices of kindness and charity, which, however arduous in themselves, are made light by the consciousness of dignity attending them.

I admire and love you, and that day which would make you my sister, I should count the happiest of my life. You have treated me with much distance and reserve, but I flattered myself that my overtures to intimacy, had been rejected not on my own account, but on that of my brother. Since you have been my companion, I have noticed the proofs of your poverty, with great uneasiness. I know, that your money, all but a few hundred dollars, still lies in one of the banks. Will you pardon me for having been attentive to your conduct? For my brother's sake, and for your own, I have watched all your movements, and could tell you the times and portions in which these hundreds have been drawn out; and have formed very plausible guesses as to the mode in which you have

disposed of them.

How to reconcile your seeming poverty with the possession of some thousands, how to account for your acquiescence in my wishes to attend me hither, and for forbearing to use any more of this money for the supply of your own wants, has puzzled me a great deal. I perceive that you have dropped all intercouse with your former friend, and given up yourself a prey to melancholy. These things have excited, you will imagine, a great deal of reflection, but I have patiently waited till you yourself have thought proper to put aside the curtain that is drawn between us. This you have at length done, and I in my turn have disclosed what I am afraid my brother will never forgive me for doing.

I could not but be deeply affected by this representation. The generosity of Sedley and his sister, their perseverance in labouring for my good, when no personal advantage, not even the homage of a grateful spirit, could flow to themselves, made me feel the stings of somewhat like ingratitude. The merits and claims of Sedley came now to assume a new aspect. I had hitherto suffered different objects to engross my attention. I did not applaud or condemn myself for my conduct towards him, merely because I did not think of him. I was occupied by gloomy reveries, in which no images appeared but those of Hartley and my brother.

Now the subjects of my thoughts were changed. Time had insensibly, and, in some degree, worn out those deep traces, which I brought away with me from Abingdon. Pity and complacency, and reverence for Sedley; gratitude to his sister, from whom I had received so many favours, and who would deem herself amply repaid by my consent to make her brother happy, hourly gained ground in my heart.

These tendencies did not escape my friend, who endeavoured to strengthen and promote them. She insisted on the merits of her brother, arising from the integrity of his life, the elevation of his sentiments, and especially the constancy of his affection to me. She praised my self−denial with regard to Hartley, and hinted, that my duty to him was but half performed. It became me to shew that my happiness was consistent with self−denial. Marriage with miss Howard will give him but little pleasure, she said, while he is a stranger to your fate, or while he knows that you are unhappy. For his sake, it becomes you, to shake off all useless repinings. To waste your days in this dejection, in longings after what is unattainable, and what you have voluntarily given up, is contemptible, and, indeed, criminal. You have profited but little by the lessons of that religion you profess, if you see not the impiety of despair, and the necessity of changing your conduct.

You have, indeed, fallen into a very gross error with regard to your friend. In some respects, you have treated him in an inhuman manner.

Good heaven, Mrs. Valentine, in what respect have I been inhuman?

Have you not detailed to me the contents of the letter which you left behind you at Abingdon? In that letter have you not assured him that your heart was broken; that you expected and wished for death....wishes that sprung from the necessity there was of renouncing his love! Have you not given him reason to suppose that you are enduring all the evils of penury and neglect; that you are languishing in some obscure corner, unknown, neglected, forgotten, and despised by all mankind? Have you not done this?

Alas! it is too true.

Not to mention that this picture was by no means justified by the circumstances in which you left Abingdon, and in which you could not but expect to pass the winter, amidst all the comforts which my character, my station in society, my friends, my fortune, and my friendship must bestow....not to mention these things, which rendered your statement to him untrue, what must have been the influence of this picture upon the feelings of that generous youth? Can you not imagine his affliction?

O yes, indeed, I can. I was wrong: I now see my error. I believed that I should not have survived to this hour. I wanted to cut off every hope, every possibility of his union with me.

And do you think that, by that letter, this end was answered? Do not you perceive that Hartley's sympathy for you must have been infinitely increased by that distressful picture? that his resolution to find you out in your retreat and compel you to be happy, would receive tenfold energy? You imagine yourself to have resigned him to miss Howard, but your letter and your flight could only bind him by stronger ties to yourself. Should this lady be inclined to favour Hartley, of what materials must her heart be composed, if she do not refuse, or at least, hesitate to interfere with your claims? If she do not refuse, how must her happiness be embittered by reflections on your forlorn state? for no doubt the young man's sincerity will make her mistress of your story.

Do not dwell upon this theme, said I. I am grieved for my folly. I have been very wrong. Tell me rather, my

beloved monitor, what I ought to have done: what I may still do.

It would be useless to dwell on what is past, and cannot be undone. The future is fully in your power. Without doubt you ought to hasten to repair the errors you have committed.

By what means?

They are obvious. You must dismiss these useless, these pernicious regrets, which, in every view, religious or moral, are criminal. You must give admission to cheerful thoughts; fix your attention on the objects of useful knowledge; study the happiness of those around you; be affable and social, and entitle yourself to the friendship and respect of the many amiable persons who live near us. Above all, make haste to inform Hartley of your present condition; disclose to him your new prospects of being useful and happy; and teach him to be wise by your example.

But let your kindness be most shewn, where your power is greatest, and where you are most strongly bound by the ties of gratitude. Think of my brother, as he merits to be thought of. Hasten to reward him, for those years of anguish which your perverseness has given him, and which have consumed the best part of his life.

But how shall I gain an interview with Hartley? I know not where he is. You say that my draught has never been presented. It must be so; since the money is still there, in my own name. Some accident, perhaps, has befallen him. He may not be alive to receive the fruits of my repentance.

Set your heart at rest, replied my friend, with a significant smile; he is well.

Indeed? You speak as if you had the means of knowing. Surely, madam, you know nothing of him.

I know enough of him. He is now in New−York, in the same house with miss Howard.

In the same house? And....perhaps....married?

Fie upon you, Mary. Is this the courage you have just avowed? To turn pale; to faulter, at the mere possibility of what you have so earnestly endeavoured to accomplish.

Forgive me. It was a momentary folly. He is then....*married*.

No. They live under the same roof; but it is nothing but a vague surmise that they will ever be married.

Dear lady! By what means....

Through my brother's letters; which, if you please to read them, will give you all the information that I possess. Why that sudden gravity? They will not taint your fingers, or blast your sight. They are worthy of my brother, and will depict, truly, that character which you could not fail to love, if you were but thoroughly acquainted with it.

This rebuke suppressed the objection which I was going to raise against perusing these letters. They were put into my hands. They contained no information respecting Hartley, but that he resided at New−York.

They contained chiefly, incidents and reflections relative to Sedley and to me. In this respect they were copious. I read them often, and found myself daily confirmed in the resolutions which I began to form. I need not dwell upon the struggles which I occasionally experienced, and those fits of profound melancholy into which I was still, sometimes, plunged. I shall only say, that listening only to the dictates of justice and gratitude, and to the pathetic remonstrances of my friend, I finally prevailed upon myself to consent to her brother's wishes.

I should have written to Hartley, informing him of my destiny, but I proposed to return to Philadelphia, with Mrs Valentine, and hoped to meet him there, or at New−York.

I was not unaware of the effects of an interview with him. My soul was tremulous with doubt, and torn by conflicting emotions. I was ready, in dreary moments, to revoke my promise to Sedley, to trust once more to some kind chance that might make Hartley mine, or to consecrate my life to mournful recollections of my lost happiness. These were transient moments, and the bitter tears which attended them were soon dried up. I found complacency in the resolution to devote my life to Sedley's happiness, and to the society of his beloved sister.

Having arrived at New−York, I was told of Hartley's absence, and learned that he was then somewhere southward. I was informed by Mrs. Etheridge, with whom Sedley made me acquainted, of your general character. I wanted to see you; to know you; to repose my thoughts in your bosom; to be Hartley's advocate with you; but I could not procure sufficient courage to request an introduction to you. A thousand scruples deterred me. I thought, that to justify confidence and candour on such delicate topics, much time and many interviews would be necessary; but I could not remain in New−York beyond a day.

I went to Mrs. Etheridge strangely perplexed. Perhaps, I should have ventured to beseech that lady's company to your house; but the meeting that took place, on that occasion, confused me beyond the possibility of regaining composure. The superscription of your letter added to my surprise, and made me more willing to decline a

meeting, since this letter would guide me to the very spot where Hartley was to be found.

I once more entered my native city. Sedley was prepared to meet and welcome me. He was apprised of my intention as to Hartley, and did not disapprove. He even wrote the billet by which I invited your friend to come to my lodgings.

My purpose was, to unfold the particulars contained in this letter to Hartley, and to introduce my two friends to each other. In answer to my billet, I received a voluminous pacquet, containing certain letters and narratives relative to him and to you.

How shall I describe my feelings on perusing them? They supply the place of a thousand conversations. They leave nothing to be said. They take away every remnant of hesitation. They inspire me with new virtue and new joy. I am not grieved that Hartley and his Clara are subjected to trials of their magnanimity, since I foresee the propitious issue of the trial. I am not grieved that the happiness of Mary has been an object of such value in your eyes, as to merit the sacrifice of your own. I exult that my feelings are akin to yours, and that it is in my power to vie with you in generosity.

But Hartley's last letter gives me pain; the more, because, in the tenor of yours, which preceded it, there is an apparent harshness not, perhaps, to be mistaken by an unimpassioned reader, but liable to produce fallacious terrors in an heart deeply enamoured. I see the extent of this error in him, but am consoled by hoping that my reasoning, when we meet, or, at least, that time, will dispel this unfriendly cloud. I am impatient for his coming.

M. W.

LETTER XXVII.

TO MISS HOWARD. − Philadelphia, − *May 13.*

My friend, we have met, but such a meeting!....

The letters had told me of his sickness, but I expected not to behold a figure so wan, so feeble, so decayed. I expected much anxiety, much conflict in his features, between apprehension and hope; but not an aspect so wild, so rueful, so melancholy. His deportment and his words were equally adverse to my expectations.

After our first tears of congratulation were exhausted, he exclaimed in a tone of unusual vehemence:

Why, my friend, have you thus long abandoned me? You have been unjust to yourself and to me, and I know not how to pardon you, except on one condition.

What is that?

That we now meet to be united by the strongest ties, and never to part more. On that condition I forgive you.

I was prepared for this question; but the tones and looks with which it was accompanied, and especially its abruptness, disconcerted me. I was silent.

I came to this interview, resumed he, with one determination. I will not tremble, or repine, or upbraid, because my confidence in the success of my efforts, is perfect, and not to be shaken. I came to offer you the vows of an husband. They are now offered, and received. You have no power to decline them. Let me then salute you as....my wife.

I shrunk back, and spread out my hand to repulse him. I was still unable to speak.

I told you the purpose of my coming, said he, in a solemn tone. This purpose is the dearest to my heart. Of every other good I am bereaved, but to the attainment of this there can be no obstacle, but caprice, or inhumanity, or folly, such as I never can impute to you. If you love me, if you have regard to my welfare, if you wish me to love, grant me that good which is all that remains to endear existence. If you refuse this gift, I shall instantly vanish from society. I shall undertake a journey, in which my life will be exposed to numberless perils. If I pass them in safety, I shall be dead to all the offices and pleasures of civilized existence. I shall hasten to embrute all my faculties. I shall make myself akin to savages and tygers, and forget that I once was a man.

This is no incoherent intimation. It is the fixed purpose of my soul, to be changed only by your consenting to be mine. Ponder well on the consequences of a refusal. It decides my everlasting destiny.

Have you not read my letter? Have I not read yours and Clara's? How then can you expect my concurrence? Have you not anticipated my refusal?

I anticipated misery. Having found injustice and a callous heart in another, where I least expected to find them, I was prone, in the bitterness of disappointment, to ascribe them to every human creature; but that was rash and absurd. Mary cannot be unjust.

To whom do you impute an hard heart?

Not to you. You merit not the imputation. You will prove yourself compassionate and good. You will not scorn me; cast me off; drive me into hopeless exile, and inextricable perils. You are too good, and have been too long my friend; the partaker of my cares; the solace of my being; the rewarder of my tenderness. You will not reject me, banish me, kill me.

You know not what you say. Your thoughts are confused. You love and are beloved by another; by one who merits your eternal devotion and gratitude. They are due to her, and never will I rob her of them.

What mean you. Did not you say you had read the pacquets? and do not these inform you that I have no place in the affections of any human being but yourself? Convince me that I have, indeed, a place in yours; that I am not utterly deserted. Consent to be mine own, my beloved wife, and thus make me as happy as my fate will permit.

Alas, my friend! you are not in your right mind. Disappointment has injured your reason, or you could never solicit me thus; you could never charge Clara Howard with a hard heart.

Talk not of Clara Howard. Talk only of yourself and of me. Rid me of suspense and anxiety, by consenting to my wishes. Make me happy. Take away, at least, the largest portion of my misery, by your consent. Will you not be mine?

Never. Former objections time has rendered more strong; but your letters would have fixed my resolutions, had

they wavered. These shew how far the happiness of miss Howard and your own depend upon my perseverence; and persevere I must.

What mean you? Miss Howard's happiness, say you, depends upon your incompliance with her wishes? on your rejecting the prayers she has made, with the utmost degree of earnestness?

They are generous prayers, which suppose me weaker and more infatuated than I am. They are prayers which counteract their own purpose, since they exhibit an example of disinterestedness and self−oblivion, which I cannot fail to admire and to imitate. Our cases are, indeed, not parallel. Her love for you is answered and returned by equal love. To me your heart is indifferent, and I have resolved to conquer my perverse affections, or perish.

You have read her letters, her last letter, and yet you talk of her love! Once, I grant, it might have been, it was so, but that time of affability, of softness, of yielding, is gone. She is now rugged, austere, unfeeling. Her preposterous abstractions and refinements have gained force through the coldness of her heart. There is no self−sacrifice, for she loves me not. There is no regard for my welfare or felicity, for she loves me not.

O, Edward! can you be so perverse; so unjust? You merit not the love of so pure a spirit. You merit not the happiness which such an one is qualified to give you. But your disappointment has disturbed your reason. I can pity and forgive you, and will intercede with her for your forgiveness. I see her merits and her superior claims too clearly, ever to consent to your separation.

You are discomposed, I continued. Surely you have been very sick. You seem to have just risen from the grave; you are so pale; so wan; so feeble. Your state of health has made you unfit to judge truly of the motives of your friend, and to adopt her magnanimity.

If you will have patience I can convince you that it is my duty to reject your offers, and that Clara Howard may still, if you please, be yours.

Then, replied he, you do reject them?

Do not look so wildly. I am sure, you are not well. You seem ready to sink upon the floor. You are cold, *very* cold. Let us defer this conversation a little while. I have much to say on the subject of my history, since we parted. That being known to you, you will see reason to judge differently of my motives in rejecting your offers. Instead of making that rejection more difficult by importunity and vehemence, you will see the justice of concurring with me, and of strengthening my resolution.

Impossible, said he, that any thing has happened to change my views. Are not your affections, merits, and integrity, the same as formerly? Answer me sincerely.

I will. I have no reason for concealment. Time has not lessened my merits, it is true, but....

That assurance is enough for me. I will eagerly listen to your story, but not until my fate is decided. Have pity on that sinking frame, and that wounded heart which you behold. There is but one cure, and that is deposited in your hands. To every other my joy or sorrow; my life or death, is indifferent. Will you take me to your bosom; shall my image be fostered, and my soul find peace there; or shall I cast myself upon a sea of storms and perils, and vanish from this scene forever?

How you grieve me! I beseech you be not so impetuous. Listen to my story first, and then say in what manner I ought to act.

There is no room for delay. Say you will be mine, and then I shall enjoy repose. I shall be able to listen. Till then I am stretched upon the rack. Answer me; will you be mine?

O no! I replied; while I have an heart not wholly sordid and selfish, I cannot consent. My conscience will not let me.

Find consolation, he answered, in the approbations of that conscience, for a sentence that has ratified the doom of one who deserved differently from you. I perceive you are inflexible, and will therefore leave you.

But whither are you going? Will you not return to Clara?

To Clara! No. Far different is the path that I am to tread. I shall never see her more.

He now moved towards the door, as if going.

Edward! what can you mean? Stay. Do not go till you have heard me further. I entreat you, as you value my peace, and my life, hear me further.

Will you then consent? said he, returning with a more cheerful brow. How good you are! The same dear girl; the same angelic benignity as formerly. Confirm my happiness by new assurances. Confirm it by permitting this embrace.

I was compelled to avert my face; to repulse him from my arms. To what unlooked for trials have you subjected me! But I must not retract my resolutions. No, Edward, the bar between us is insuperable. I must never be yours.

Never!....never!....be mine!....Well, may the arms of a protecting Providence encircle thee! May some other rise to claim and possess thy love! May ye never, neither thou nor Clara, know remorse for your treatment to me!....Saying this, he snatched his hat from the table, and ran out of the house. I called, but he was gone beyond my hearing.

I was justly alarmed by this frantic demeanour. I knew not how to account for it, but by imagining that some remains of delirium still afflicted his understanding. I related this conversation to Sedley. I entreated him to pursue Edward to his lodgings, to prevail upon him to return hither, or to calm his mind, by relating what his abrupt departure had prevented me from saying.

Sedley cheerfully complied with my request, but Hartley was not to be found at his lodging. He waited his return till ten, eleven, and twelve o'clock, but in vain.

Meanwhile, I found some relief in imagining they had met; that Sedley's address and benevolence had succeeded in restoring our friend to better thoughts. My disappointment and alarm, at his return, on hearing that Hartley had not been met with, were inexpressible. That night passed away without repose. Early in the morning, I again entreated Sedley to go in search of the fugitive. He went, but presently returned to inform me that Hartley had set out, in the stage for Baltimore, at daydawn.

I cannot comprehend his intimations of a journey to the wilderness; of embruting his faculties; of exposing his humanity, his life, to hazard. Could he have interpreted your letters into avowals of hatred or scorn, or even of indifference? One, indeed, who knew you less perfectly, might impute to you a rigour in judging; a sternness not suitable to the merits of this youth. Your letters are void of that extenuating spirit, that reluctance to inflict sufferings, which, perhaps, the wisest inflexibility will not be slow to feel, or unwilling to express....but Edward had sufficient knowledge to save him from a wrong construction.

Yet that, alas! is not true. He ought to have had that knowledge....but it was wanting.

Possibly he has not told you his designs. He cannot inform you of the truth with respect to me. My present situation should be known to you, to enable you to act with propriety. I shall not prescribe to you. I am not mistress of your thoughts and motives. May heaven direct you right.

A friend will go to Baltimore on Tuesday, time enough for you to receive this, and to write to Hartley. If sent to me, I will intrust it to my friend. I have not time to add a word more.

Accept the reverence and love of

Mary.

LETTER XXVIII.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 15.*

Hartley! how shall I address you! In terms of indignation or of kindness? Shall I entreat you to return, or exhort you to obey the wild dictates of your caprice? Shall I leave you to your froward destiny, and seek, in the prospect of a better world, a relief from the keen distress, the humiliating sorrows of this scene of weakness and error?

Shall I link my fate with one who is deaf to the most pathetic calls of his duty? Who forgets or spurns the most urgent obligations of gratitude? Whom the charms of nature, the attractions of science, the claims of helpless and fond sisters, who trust for shelter, for bread, for safety from contempt and servitude and vice, to his protection, his counsel, his presence, cannot detain from forests and wilds, where inevitable death awaits him?

Shall I bestow one drop of tender remembrance on him who upbraids and contemns me for sacrificing every selfish regard to his dignity; for stifling in my bosom, that ignoble passion, which makes us trample on the claims of others; which seeks its own gratification at the price of humanity and justice; which can smile in the midst of repinings and despair, of creatures no less worthy, no less susceptible of good?

You say that I love you not. Till this moment your assertion was untrue. My heart was not free, till *these* proofs of your infatuation and your folly were set before me. Till now, I was willing to account you not unworthy. I hoped that time and my efforts, would reclaim you to some sense of equity and reason.

But now....must I then deem you utterly lost? Have you committed this last and irretrievable act? O no! it was surely but a momentary madness. The fit will be past before this letter reaches you. You will have opened your eyes to the cowardice, the ignominy, the guilt of this flight. You will hasten to close those wounds which have rent my heart. You will return to me with the speed of the wind, and make me, by the rectitude of your future conduct, forget that you have ever erred.

Has it come to this! now, that the impediment has vanished, that my feelings may be indulged at the cost of no one's peace; now that the duty which once so sternly forbad me to be yours, not only permits, but enjoins me to link together our fates; that the sweet voice of an approving conscience is ready to sanction and applaud every impulse of my heart, and make the offices of tenderness not only free from guilt, but coincident with every duty; that now....

Edward! let me hope that thou hast hesitated, doubted, lingered in thy fatal career. Let me foster this hope, that I may retain life. My fortitude, alas! is unequal to this test. No disaster should bereave me of serenity and courage; but to this, while I despise myself for yielding, I must yield. If this letter do not reach thee; if it fill not thy heart with remorse, thy eyes with tenderness; if it cure thee not of thy phrenzy, and bring thee not back....

It must....it will.

C. H.

LETTER XXIX.

TO E. HARTLEY. − Philadelphia, − *May 15.*

What has become of that fortitude, my friend, which I was once accustomed to admire in you. You used to be circumspect, sedate, cautious; not precipitate in judging or resolving. What has become of all these virtues?

Why would you not give your poor friend a patient hearing? Why not hesitate a moment, before you plunged all whom you love into sorrow and distress? Was it impossible for six months of reflection to restore the strength of my mind, to introduce wiser resolutions and more cheerful thoughts, than those with which I parted from you?

I was then sick. My lonely situation, the racking fears your long silence had produced, a dreary and lowering sky, and the tidings your letter conveyed, of my return again to that indigence so much detested by my pride, were surely enough to sink me deeply in despondency; to make me, at the same time, desire and expect my death.

I saw the bright destiny that was reserved for you. My life, I thought, stood in the way of your felicity. I knew your impetuous generosity, your bewitching eloquence. I knew the frailty of my own heart. Hence my firm resolve to shun an interview with you, to see you no more, at least, till your destiny had been accomplished.

Happy was the hour in which I formed this resolution. By it I have not only secured that indirect happiness, arising from the contemplation of yours, but the ineffable bliss of requiting that love, of which my heart was so long insensible.

Yes, my friend, the place that you once possessed in my affections, is now occupied by another. By him, of whose claims I know you have always been the secret advocate; by that good, wise, and generous man, whom I always admitted to be second to yourself, but for whom my heart now acknowledges a preference.

Had you waited for an explanation of my sentiments, you would have saved me, your beloved Clara, yourself, and all your friends, the anxieties your present absence has produced. That rashness may excite remorse, but it cannot be recalled. Let it then be speedily forgotten, and let this letter put a stop to your flight.

Dear Edward! come back. All the addition of which my present happiness is capable, must come from you. The heart−felt approbation, the sweet ineffable complacensy with which my present feelings are attended, want nothing to merit the name of perfect happiness, but to be witnessed and applauded by you.

Your Clara, that noblest of women, joins me in recalling you, and is as eager to do justice to *your* passion, as *I* am to recompence the merits of Sedley. Therefore, my friend, if you value my happiness or Clara's, come back. Will you not obey the well known voice, calling you to virtue and felicity, of

Your sister

Mary.

LETTER XXX.

TO CLARA HOWARD. − Wilmington, − *May 17.*

I have received and have read your letter. To say thus much is enough. From what a depth of humiliation and horror have I emerged! How quickly was I posting to my ignominy and my ruin? Your letter overtook me at this place, where a benignant fate decreed that I should be detained by sickness. Clara, thou hast judged truly. My eyes are open on my folly, and my infatuation. The mists that obscured my sight, are gone; I am once more a reasonable creature.

How shall I atone for my past misconduct, or compensate thee, my heavenly monitor, for the disquiet which thou hast endured for my sake? By hasting to thy feet, and pouring out before thee the tears of my repentance? Thy forgiveness is all that I dare claim. Thy tenderness I do not merit. Years of service and self−denial, are requisite to qualify me for receiving that best gift.

Your letter, with one from Mary, were left upon my pillow, by a traveller, passing through this town to Baltimore. I had swallowed laudanum, to secure me some sleep, on the night of my arrival hither. I was unable to proceed further, my mind and body being equally distempered. After a perturbed sleep, I awoke before the light, and lifting my head from the pillow, to acquaint myself with my situation, I perceived, by the light of a candle on the hearth, a pacquet lying beside me. I snatched it with eagerness, and found enclosed, thy letter, and one from Mary.

For a time, I imagined myself still dreaming. The contents of each letter so far surpassed and deceived every expectation, every wish, that I had formed; such pure and unmerited felicity was offered me, and by means so abrupt and inexplicable, that I might well hesitate to believe it real.

Next morning, on inquiry, I discovered that a midnight coach had arrived, in which a traveller, chancing to hear of my condition, and my name, entered my apartment while I slept, and left this pacquet, which, as I saw, was intended to have been conveyed to Baltimore.

My fever, though violent, proved to be merely an intermittent. By noon this day, though feeble and languid, I was freed from disease; I am also free from anxiety. The purest delight thrills in my bosom; mixed, now and then, and giving place to compunction for the folly of my late schemes. In truth, I have been sick. Since the perusal of thy letter by Mary, I have been half crazy, shivering and glowing by turns; bereft of appetite, and restless. Every object was tinged with melancholy hues.

But I shall not try to extenuate my fault. May thy smiles, my beloved Clara, and thy voice, musical and thrilling as it used to be, disperse every disquiet. No time shall be lost in returning to thee. My utmost haste will not enable me to offer thee, before Tuesday morning, the hand and heart of

E. H.

LETTER XXXI.

TO E. HARTLEY. − New−York, − *May 19.*

You are coming, my friend. I shall chide you and thank you, in the same breath, for your haste. I hope you will incur no injury by a journey at night. Knowing that you mean not to lay by, I am unable to go to bed. The air was blustering in the evening, and now, at midnight, it blows a storm. It is not very cold, but an heavy rain is falling. I sit by my chamber−fire, occupied in little else than listening to it, and my heart droops, or gains courage, according to the pauses or increases of the wind and rain.

Would to Heaven thou hadst not this boisterous river to cross. It is said to be somewhat dangerous, in an high wind. This is a land of evils; the transitions of the seasons are so quick, and into such extremes. How different from the pictures which our fancy drew in our native land?

This wind and rain! How will you endure them in your crazy vehicle, thumping over rocks, and sinking into hollows? I wish you had not been in such haste. Twenty hours sooner or later, would be of no moment. And this river!.... To cross it at any time, is full of danger; what must it be at night, and in a storm? Your adventurous spirit will never linger on the opposite shore till day dawns, and the wind has died away.

But well know I the dangers and toils of a midnight journey, in a stage−coach, in America. The roads are kneedeep in mire, winding through crags and pits, while the wheels groan and totter, and the curtains and roof admit the wet at a thousand seams.

It is *three*, and the day will soon come. How I long to see thee, my poor friend! Having once met, never, I promise thee, will we part more. This heart, with whose treasures thou art imperfectly acquainted, will pour all its sorrows and joys into thy honest bosom. My maturer age and more cautious judgment shall be counsellers and guides to thy inexperienced youth. While I love thee and cherish thee as a wife, I shall assume some of the perogatives of an elder sister, and put my circumspection and forethought in the balance against thy headlong confidence.

I revere thy genius and thy knowledge. With the improvements of time, very far wilt thou surpass the humble Clara; but in moral discernment, much art thou still deficient. Here I claim to be more than equal, but the difference shall not subsist long. Our modes of judging and our maxims, shall be the same; and this resemblance shall be purchased at the cost of all my patience, my skill and my love.

Alas! this rain is heavy! The gale whistles more loudly than ever. Would to heaven thou wast safely seated near me, at this quiet fire−side!—

LETTER XXXII.

TO MARY WILMOT. − New−York, − *May 21*.

Rejoice with me, my friend. Hartley is arrived, and has been little incommoded by his journey. He has brought with him your letter. Will you pardon me for omitting to answer it immediately, and as fully as it deserves? As soon as the tumults of my joy settles down into calm, unruffled felicity, I will comment upon every sentence. At present, I must devote myself to console this good lad for his sufferings, incurred, as he presumes to say, entirely on my account.

And so you have deferred the happiness of your Sedley for a whole month. I wonder he has any patience with you; but he that has endured, without much discontent, the delay of six or eight years (is it not so long?) ought to be ashamed of his impatience at a new delay of a few weeks.

Dear Mary, shall I tell you a secret? If you add one week of probation to the four already decreed, it is, by no means, impossible, that the same day may witness the happiness of both of us. May that day, whenever it shall come, prove the beginning of joy to Mary, and to her who, in every state, will be your affectionate

Clara.

THE END.