

# A Lesson on Concealment

*Or, Memoirs of Mary Selwyn*

By Charles Brockden Brown

TO HENRY KIRVAN.

You will return, Harry, to an house of sorrow. Your presence will contribute to make my solitude less painful. I would, therefore, intreat you to come back immediately: but there is something to be first settled before I can meet you with satisfaction, or even before I can permit you to return to me. I have had something on my mind to disclose, which I have brooded over occasionally ever since we parted, but which it is now absolutely necessary to mention.

You could not but be aware of the effect which some mysterious appearances in your behaviour, for a few days before you left us, were adapted to produce in me. I saw trouble in your countenance; your eyes betrayed some little reluctance to meet mine. This alone was not much. It sometimes made me thoughtful, and to harbour a kind of possibility that all was not right; but my uneasiness would have been transient, if the effect had not been aided by the deportment of my wife.

Harry! my Mary is dead—but you know it already—I must not forget my duty—I must remember what becomes a man.

You remember, on a Thursday evening, when I returned from the country, and, entering the room abruptly, found you in company with my wife. My entrance, it was plain, was unexpected to you both. It created—What shall I say?

My wife was disconcerted. She had been weeping. I never saw before traces of such deep sorrow. Never did she meet me before with marks of confusion or terror. I was thunder-struck. I was overpowered with dejection. I suspected nothing inconsistent with her integrity; but *my* entrance had alarmed her.

From *me* there was something which she laboured to conceal. With *me* she strove to keep dry eyes, and to seem happy; but with you she thought herself at liberty to weep.

I could not be deaf to that secret voice which said—This terror, this concealment, this duplicity, is not due to an husband such as I have been. I upbraided her not. I could derive no comfort from upbraiding. I could not discuss the subject with her. This evidence of her want of confidence in my discernment, affection or integrity, could not be made stronger— could not be lessened by any words. She saw my distress, and her own was increased by perceiving it. The weight that hung upon her heart was too great to be borne. On the next day, and after a night of wakeful anguish, of which I was a silent observer, began that fever which hurried her to the grave.

For a time I indulged no forebodings of her fate. I deemed it a casual indisposition, which time and the usual remedies would conquer. I was quickly undeceived. Appearances grew hourly more dreadful, and the approach of death became too visible.

It was then that the spell of silence was broken, that I opened my eyes as if I had awakened in the grave. My fears for her life swallowed up every other fear, and I sought, with a vehemence that bordered upon frenzy, to extort from her the secret of her woe.

Serenity, however, resumed its place in her heart, in proportion as she felt the certainty of death. My claims, and the claims of her infant, lost all their force in her eyes. She left us without

pity or regret. She refused to confide in me the cause of her anguish; while she did not conceal from me that my devotion or my happiness was not enough to make existence desirable. She has gone, and left me the bitterest portion of the wretched. The loss of her is not all that I have to deplore. She has left me the torments of doubt: terrors which assume no fixed shape: misgivings that haunt my repose, and embitter every cup that I taste.

Part of this misery I believe it to be in your power to remove. You held secret conferences with her. I now remember them; though, at the time, void as I was of suspicion, they escaped my notice. You shared with her her tears. It was only after your admission to the house, that smothered grief, mournful thoughtfulness, were ever visible in her demeanour. There is something, something behind this veil. Henry! my brother! what did she conceal from me?

Fear not to tell me the truth. It cannot be worse than my present doubts. These doubts I must not name, I must not harbour—yet I cannot dismiss them.

Tell me, Henry, for you know; tell me, I beseech thee, what is it that has killed my wife.

ANSWER.

How hard is the task which you have assigned to me! In such immature, such green youth as mine, it is impossible not to err, except by forbearance. I have not the wisdom requisite to make me act safely—and yet that, perhaps, was my fatal error. In believing passiveness and concealment most suitable to my inexperienced years, I have possibly cut short the days of your Mary. A single word, a remote hint, might have set your mind upon discovery. The moment that rent the veil might have re-established her felicity and your content.

It is now too late. She is snatched away from us forever. The disclosure may now come: but whether it will enhance your misery or lessen it, I know not. Too surely it will not recall her from the grave. You shall know as much as is known to myself. You have doubts, you say; doubts indefinable and fearful. Alas! the image of your fear is unreal.

I need not dwell upon my own misfortunes, previous to my arrival on these shores. You are already sufficiently acquainted with them; and, besides, they are not necessary to the end for which I now take up the pen: but, in order to effect this purpose, I must carry you back to the period of my arrival from France. Some events, previous to my entering your house, it is necessary to relate; but my relation shall be brief.

When I first came on shore at New York, I had not a farthing in my pocket. Even my clothes were worn out, and my shoes would hardly stick to my feet. I knew nobody, even by name, except the captain who brought me over. He was a generous spirit; and, suspecting my destitute condition, had invited me to his house. I was obliged to accept his kindness, though sorely unwilling to receive obligations of this kind, and which I was wholly unable to repay.

He had promised to speak for me to some merchant or trader of his acquaintance, who might want the services of such a lad as I. He knew one who had been in Europe, by name Haywood; a man of wealth and of liberal temper, to whom he had confidential letters. On delivering these, he would seize the opportunity of stating my wants and my merits.

The captain was not unmindful of his promise; and, next day, brought from Haywood an invitation to his house. I went thither, and was introduced to a man, about thirty years of age, of a very noble aspect, and captivating manners. He received me with great kindness; and, mentioning the captain's representations in my behalf, desired to know in what way he could be serviceable to me. He gave a patient ear to my story, which I related with all the sensibility which such recent and horrible disasters could not but produce. I described the condition of my

parents while in England—the motives that induced them to migrate to America—the capture of the vessel by a French frigate—our long and rigorous imprisonment at Brest, and its mournful consequences.

My father's melancholy, on the plunder of all his little property—all that the malice of fortune had left him, after the toils and cares of thirty years—all that could save him from nakedness and hunger in a foreign land—joined to the untimely death of his darling Jane, whom scanty and unwholesome food had contributed to destroy—and to that pestilential atmosphere which, during seven months, he was compelled to breathe—put a miserable end to his life.

My father's corpse was treated by our inhuman keepers, as my sister's had been a little while before. It was dragged, naked, from the blanket where it lay, and thrown into a hole, dug in the court-yard for the reception of those who should die in the prison.

This spectacle was too much for my mother to behold without loss of reason. With these eyes I beheld my mother frantic and desperate. I saw her tear her clothes, and her ravings still sound in my ears. With these eyes I beheld her lie down upon that hard and tattered bed whence my father had lately been dragged: I saw her lie down and expire!

Good heaven!—But I meant not to repeat this tale to you. Forgive me; you have sorrow enough of your own, and I benefit not myself by reviving these images.

This artless tale had a powerful effect upon Haywood. It made his eyes overflow with compassion, and awakened a lively interest in my welfare. He offered me accommodation in his house, and a pecuniary recompence for my assistance in keeping and arranging his accounts; and his offer was eagerly and gratefully accepted.

I lived with him four months. During this period I was a near spectator of his manners and habits. So far as I could judge, they were free from reproach, and full of dignity. Me he treated with familiarity, and almost with tenderness; and I, in my turn, was not deficient in fidelity and gratitude. My situation made me somewhat acquainted with the state of his affairs, and afforded scope for that observation which my youth and my intellectual activity naturally prompted me to make; and yet my knowledge was vague and incomplete; consisting merely of conjecture and inference, and not the fruit of direct communication from him.

I found, or at least conjectured, that he was a native of Pennsylvania; that he had married at an early age; that he had gone, shortly after marriage, to Europe; that his wife, during his absence, had died; and this connection, in some way inauspicious, being thus dissolved, he returned to New-York, where he had not long resided when we first met.

I also discovered that he was making court to a woman of that city, young, beautiful, and possessed of many intellectual accomplishments, though without fortune. As the bearer of a note from him, I had once an opportunity of seeing this lady. Her deportment and mien fully justified the prepossessions I had formed respecting her, and I had good grounds for believing that marriage was at no great distance. At length I collected, by accident, that the bridal day was fixed.

The deportment of my friend announced his approaching felicity. Yet his joy was sedate, and occasionally mingled and chastised by some untoward, but undiscovered care. A cloud would sometimes gather on his brow at moments of loneliness, or when my occupation, though in the same apartment, left him, in some sense, alone. The cloud was transient, and I saw nothing in his destiny but serenity and brightness. Alas! the prospect was quickly obscured.

One evening, about a week prior to his nuptial day, some out-of-door engagement had occasioned me to spend much of the day abroad. I returned home late in the evening; I inquired for Mr. Haywood, but was told that he was absent. His evenings being usually devoted to his

mistress, his absence created no surprise. The servant added, that a gentleman had been waiting in the drawing—room, during more than an hour, for his master's return.

Imagining that, possibly, I might answer this visitor's purposes as well as Haywood, I went into the room. There were two lights on the mantle-tree, and the stranger was walking to and fro, with an air of much impatience and anxiety. He looked up eagerly at my entrance; but seeing who it was, withdrew his eyes in seeming disappointment, and resumed his pace.

These appearances, so wholly unlike what I had been accustomed to observe in those whose visits to my patron were prompted by mere business, that I was abashed, and was discouraged from addressing him. I quietly seated myself at a writing-desk, and began, according to my custom, to enter, in a little volume that I bore about me, the transactions of the day. While thus employed, I found time to steal glances at the visitant, and accurately to note his features and gestures. They were of a kind to raise all my curiosity, and fasten all my attention. They denoted habitual passions, lofty but vehement, and thoughts, at this time, full of perturbation and impatience. Seen in a strong light, and impassioned as it then was, his countenance sunk deep into my fancy, and never shall I cease to view it with as much distinctness and vividness as when it was before me.

My fingers trembled, the pen lost its regularity, and I merely scribbled at random, as affording opportunity of viewing this scene without being noticed by him. A thousand vague terrors and surmises crept into my heart, when I considered these impetuous but stifled feelings, as preludes to an interview with Haywood.

My mind quickly found other occupation. A step was heard in the entry, and a voice inquiring of the servant for me. The stranger checked his pace: he stood upon the hearth: he trembled, and, covering his eyes with his hands, muttered, scarcely articulately, "My God! assist me to keep down—."

Haywood entered the room, and his visitor turned quickly and approached him. My pen dropped, and I started up, involuntarily, to behold this scene. No sooner had Haywood cast his eyes upon the stranger, than they sunk to the floor. A blush of surprise, indignation, and horror, spread itself over his face. Both, for some moments, were silent; the pause seemed to rise, on the stranger's part, from the overflow of boiling passions, which choked his utterance. At length he spoke, falteringly:

"Haywood! I have found you at last. After the pursuit of years, you are met, and I am satisfied. Walk out with me: this is no place: the means are already provided: all we want is solitude and uninterrupted."

"What would you have?" said the other, hesitatingly.

"What? Can you ask? Villain, seducer, and assassin! Can you ask what? Vengeance for my sister's honour, for the blood of my friend, I demand and will have. Walk with me—all will be dispatched in twenty minutes."

"You have been to—Miss Addington," said the other.

"Ah hah!" replied the stranger, while his eyes sparkled with triumph, "I see you have already, in part, reaped the fruits of your crime. You have been with that devoted lady, whom, I thank God, I have come time enough to save from the fangs of a tyger. I have disclosed to her your past deeds, and painted your genuine character in colours which you will never efface."

Haywood's eyes flashed indignation. "I see you can be unjust in your turn. I have injured you, but did not merit *this* act of vengeance. Go before—you may lead me where you please."

Without more words, or deigning in the least to notice me, they left the room and the house together.

You will imagine with what trepidation and wonder I was inspired by a scene like this. It was unexpected and terrible. They had gone for a purpose easily divined. The interview brought about by such inveterate animosity, would not end but with the death of one of them. It was not in my power to avert the evil.

The guilt of seduction and blood rested on the head of Haywood. He had confessed the truth of the accusation, and had gone forth, perhaps, to perpetrate, or be the subject of an act which the world will excuse, though, in the eye of unprejudiced observers, nefarious and detestable.

Was it possible that such an one as Haywood had so long appeared, had been the destroyer of virgin innocence? Could he thus repel vengeance with vengeance, and not hasten, by contrition or reparation, to compensate for past misdeeds?

I was unable to go to bed. I waited in the parlour in the imperfect hope of Haywood's return. I had no curiosity which Haywood would condescend to satisfy. I had been a neglected and unthought-of witness of an interview big with tremendous consequences; but my presence would be remembered, and my agency be, in some way, necessary. I could not sleep till the event were known.

Occupied with these turbulent thoughts, two hours elapsed. At the end of this period, Haywood entered the house, and came directly to the room where I was. I darted inquisitive glances at his countenance. I saw there nothing but tokens of confusion and dismay. He appeared to be harrassed with fatigue. His cheeks were pale, his eyes haggard, and two hours had wrought a change in his appearance similar to the effect produced by a long sickness.

He was totally absorbed in reverie, and seating himself near the fire, appeared unconscious of my existence, or that of the surrounding objects. I was powerfully tempted to break the silence; but what could I say? A stripling like me, raw and unexperienced, was but ill adapted to be the monitor or counsellor on occasions like these. Besides, my advice was not required; my consolation was despised; my very existence was forgotten.

After a time he rose, and without speaking, withdrew to his chamber. After extinguishing the fires, and drawing the bolts, I followed his example. I went to my chamber, but not to sleep. My province was to ruminate on this mysterious incident, the features and deportment of the stranger, and the fearful but unknown consequences of this meeting. Miss Addington was the lady to whom Haywood was contracted. The stranger, apprised of his connection, had visited her, and wrought a breach between the lovers which no time would probably repair. Haywood doated on this lovely woman, and his love was amply returned. One disastrous event had been sufficient to turn that love into hatred and resentment, and, perhaps, to sever them forever.

These thoughts effectually excluded sleep, and I rose earlier than usual in the morning. I went into the room appropriated for writing, and my eyes instantly lighted on a packet, directed to me, in Mr. Haywood's handwriting, and lying on the desk. I opened it with a misgiving heart, and read these words:

"I wish you to deliver the inclosed papers to my friend Mr. H. and Miss Addington, according to their direction. They will authorize him to take possession of the property contained in my house. This arrangement is necessary, as I shall leave this city instantly, and quit America as soon as possible—never to return.

"You witnessed a strange scene last night, and have, no doubt, sagacity enough to perceive whither it tended. The consequences of that scene you will speedily know. Your candour will induce you to put the best construction on my conduct, and your gratitude and good sense will shew you the duty of concealing from the rest of mankind, both your own conjectures and the grounds on which they are built.

“I am in no mood to make this letter a confession; but, though the slave of the present impulse; though fickle, inconstant, and cowardly, I am not so wicked as one unacquainted with my motives might imagine.

“The unfortunate man whom you saw last night, once gloried in a lovely sister, the wife of his friend. Me he likewise called his friend, and, as such, presented me to her. I was an inmate of the same house. Her husband was gone upon a distant voyage. Our intercourse was frequent, familiar, and confidential. Such were the preludes to her dishonour, her infamy, and, perhaps, her death.

“Her husband’s return was shortly expected; but she waited it not. A living proof of her crime was preparing to testify against her; and her father, who lived under the same roof, had begun to suspect. She fled from the house, and, as I have this night heard, perished in obscurity and indigence.

“The husband doated on his wife, and the detection of her guilt was the signal of his destruction. He put an end to his own life. Of this dishonour, and this death, you know too much for me to desire to conceal the truth from you—I was the accursed cause.

“Such were the effects of one moment of infatuation! I had almost hushed my conscience and my fears to repose, in the belief that these effects were exhausted; but no! this night of horrors has added to the list.

“Heaven is my witness that I deeply deplored the injuries which, not my malice, not my selfishness, but the intoxications of a momentary passion had done him. I have endeavoured to compensate those wrongs by the subsequent integrity of my conduct, and looked forward to the union of happiness with duty, in the love of Miss Addington. I concealed from her my past offences, while the disclosure might have won her pity or forgiveness, but I feared to set my felicity to hazard, and postponed the confession till it was too late.

“The rage of Selwyn was not to be appeased. He turned the heart of Henrietta against me by outrageous accusations. He filled, with abhorrence and loathing, her in whose bosom I had entrusted my peace. Not content with this, he thirsted for my blood. No plea, no apology, no submission could avail, even to defer the strife of death for a single day. I did no more than comply with his bidding, and expose to the same chance, the safety of both.

“Farewell, good youth! I thank you for your faithful services. In reward for these services, and in token of my friendship, accept the inclosed bills. They will serve you till you find some profitable station.

E. HAYWOOD.”

These consequences were, indeed, speedily unfolded by time. Not a day had elapsed before rumour was busy in telling of a fatal encounter that took place in an unfrequented spot on the shore of the Hudson. It was late at night. The moonlight was remarkably brilliant, and the eye could see far and wide. Some persons walking in the road were alarmed by the report of two pistols fired nearly at the same instant. They hastened to the spot whence the sound proceeded, and found a man stretched upon the earth, in the agonies of death. He was insensible, and died before he could be removed to a hovel to which, as the nearest shelter, they had carried him.

Proper inquiries and examinations being made, it was found that the person killed was named Selwyn; that he was a native of Portsmouth, New-Hampshire; that he had come, a week before, from Boston; and was well known, in a small circle, as a man of probity and amiable manners. Appearances sufficiently bespoke the nature of the contest to which he owed his death; but none thought proper to communicate to the world, if any knew, the circumstances leading to this

contest, and the person of the adversary. It remained a topic of conjecture and speculation, which, as usual, was fed for a time by plausible fictions, and led to many feasible, though fallacious conclusions.

Meanwhile I hastened to perform the commissions with which I had been charged. I gained access to Mr. H. He was an elderly and grave person, who received the papers with the air of one who knew their contents, and dismissed me without interrogation or comment.

I found Miss Addington alone, and seated in a melancholy posture, with a guitar in her hand. On noticing the superscription of the letter which I offered her, her eyes were filled with tears, and I marked an internal effort to regain her composure. She appeared to hesitate a moment whether to accept or refuse it; but, at length, received and put it in her bosom.

I lingered a few moments in hope of some occasion or excuse for prolonging my visit; but, though she regarded me with looks of curiosity, she betrayed no desire to converse; and, having fulfilled my charge, I was obliged silently to retire.

I was once more let loose on the world. Haywoods's generosity had enabled me to be idle, for a time, without beggary. I need not recount again my adventures previous to my arrival in your city, the events which led to my acquaintance with you, and the design of becoming the pupil of your art. I was not startled by the approach of the late terrible pestilence, and cheerfully engaged to assist you in your benevolent endeavours to disarm this pest of some of its horrors. In resolving to become a physician, I had formed a sort of tacit contract to stand forth the adversary of disease, in all its forms.

When I took up my abode with you, your wife was absent. I knew her only by the picture which you had drawn, and by that evidence of her sagacity which your excellences afforded. She returned not till my own sickness began. She immediately assumed the office of my nurse. For some time I perceived merely that a good genius hovered over me in the form of a woman, but her figure was not examined. I heard her voice, and understood her requests and injunctions; but whether her accents were sweet or harsh, I was too much engrossed by my own sensations to determine.

The violence of my disease gradually abated, and I was able to observe what was passing. As often as I cast my eye upon the face of my nurse, somewhat appeared there that caused me to look again. Some intimation arose in my mind that these features had not now been seen for the first time. I reviewed the past incidents of my life. I called to memory the female faces I had met with in my own country and in this. I compared them with those of my nurse, but was able to detect no resemblance. I began, at length, to imagine that, perhaps, it had been my lot to meet with her somewhere in the city. Perhaps I had lighted on her in my rambles through the streets of this town, or had met her in some church into which I had entered. Yet that could not be. A face like that would not have flitted in my sight like any vulgar physiognomy; been glanced at, for a moment, and thought of no more.

It must not be imagined that this inquiry occupied much of my attention. It yielded place to those topics which my recent experience suggested. It occurred less frequently in her absence than her presence, and was thought upon with more or less intenseness according to the previous state of my mind. My musings upon every theme were, indeed, obscure and fluctuating, on account of my disease. I suppose I should sooner have lighted on the truth if my mind had possessed its customary energy.

One night, after the crisis of my malady had passed, I lay awake, and pursuing my thoughts with more accuracy of recollection, and more coherence than I had known since my indisposition. My eye was fixed upon a lamp on the table, whose oil was nearly exhausted, and

that burnt feebly. The solemnity and silence of the hour, the solitude around me, and especially the gleams darted from the ill supplied flame of my lamp, reminded me of what had passed in Haywood's house on the interview with Selwyn. I called up all the images which composed that scene, and traced once more the lineaments of Selwyn as they then appeared, pregnant with violent but mixed emotions; the acuteness of grief, the bitterness of hatred, and the vehemence of expectation.

No object, perhaps, ever existed so vividly in the imagination of man, as this spectacle existed, at that moment, in mine. Not a hue or a lineament was wanting in the portrait. All before me was colour and form. I thought myself restored to that apartment, and was wholly occupied in gazing on the scene. My attention was so much absorbed, that I did not notice the entrance of your wife, who softly opened the door and approached the lamp with a flask of oil in her hand. This she poured into the vessel, and the dying flame instantly revived. This sudden illumination recalled me from my dream, and I turned my eyes towards the light to discover the cause. My nurse's face was bent over it, her hands being still engaged in pouring out the liquid.

Engrossed as I was by the image of Selwyn, and scarcely conscious of the transition I had made from the ideal to the genuine object, this face being, like that, illuminated by the same reddish and dazzling beam, I was affected as if Selwyn's apparition was before me. The same cast of features was so strongly visible in both, that I doubted whether the figure tending the lamp, was not that of the dead in some new guise. I had not time to take a second view; for, her office being finished, she glided as softly and swiftly out of the room as she had entered it.

This incident arrested all my thoughts. At first, this resemblance was regarded as no more than a freak of fancy, but gradually it began to wear a more plausible appearance. I remembered the reflections that the countenance of this lady had so frequently excited, the vague but obstinate suggestion that I had somewhere met with it before, and the unsuccessful result of my inquiries. No woman that I ever met with, and whose image I was able to recal, possessed any remarkable resemblance to her.

Now, however, a similar visage was discovered; but what should I infer from this discovery? Surely it was merely casual. Human faces may exhibit resemblances, without affording any ground for concluding that any relationship exists between them. And yet, was not that conclusion hastily formed? What hindered but that some relationship subsisted between this woman and Selwyn?

This was a thought pregnant with affecting consequences. My mind incessantly brooded over it, multiplied and weighed conjectures as to the nature of this kindred, and the effects which Selwyn's disappearance had produced, and the conduct which it became me to pursue. Hitherto my lips had been sealed on the subject of these disastrous occurrences. No exigence had happened since my parting with Haywood, to extort from me disclosures of the truth; but it seemed as if my new condition might create new claims upon my caution, and new trials of my fortitude, and that it became me to demean myself with vigilance and circumspection.

Selwyn had been mentioned as having had parents and a sister. Nothing had been said precluding the conjecture that he might have more sisters than one. She that had fallen a sacrifice to the arts of the seducer, might have left one sister, at least, to mourn over her fall—and this might be she. I was the depository of a secret momentous to her happiness. That secret now became burthensome. It was scarcely ever absent from my thoughts. My perturbations were excessive. Whenever she was present, I gazed, with unconquerable solicitude, upon her countenance. Methought I could have given half my existence to ascertain the truth, but shuddered at the foresight of the consequences which a remote hint, or vague allusion, might

produce. If suspicions were awakened that her brother's destiny was known to me, I should be, probably, assailed by importunities from which I could not hope to escape.

She frequently noticed the intentness of my looks. At first they were regarded by her as tokens of dejection or pain; but this inference being earnestly denied, she betook herself to other guesses. At length she perceived that my eye followed her movements involuntarily, and that some confusion was manifested by me, when she inquired what it was that attracted my attention. I carefully evaded her questions; but, in so doing, only furnished new fuel to her curiosity.

I wanted to ascertain the truth. I was conscious that the resemblance I perceived might be merely casual; but this was outweighed by an opposite opinion: still a large portion of uncertainty always remained. Circuitous methods of arriving at the sentiments of others were new to me. I was not qualified, by habit, to employ them with skill. They involved some degree of falsehood, and from this I shrunk with strong repugnance. I felt as if my features would betray my secret intentions in spite of my will; and that to maintain a firm voice and sedate manner in conversation, which should lead to the desirable point, was impossible.

She spent many hours in my chamber, occupied with her needle or her infant, or a book which she read aloud for my amusement. No wonder that my soul melted within me, when looking at or listening to her. The conditions on which I remained in this house, the cheerful efforts that were made for my service, the unaffected benevolence of which I had been the object, made my heart glow. Added to this were the features of my nurse, her musical tones, the justness of her elocution, and her manners, expressive of boundless affection for her husband and child. When I, likewise, reflected on her similitude with Selwyn, and the calamities she had probably experienced, I was unable to restrain my tears.

Thought I dared not make direct or indirect inquiries, I noticed and compared appearances. I soon observed that the equanimity of Mrs. Molesworth was not invariable. When seated near the fire in an evening, her husband being absent, her child asleep, and no light but a glimmering from coals on the hearth, and forgetful that there was any to observe her, I sometimes perceived her features assume an expression of the deepest sorrow, and the tears secretly fall. If you chanced to enter during this reverie, she would start, dress her countenance in smiles, and seem to cast behind her every mournful recollection.

When reading a book, she would stop at certain incidents or reflections, muse pensively, or sigh, and then, by a kind of effort, regain her composure, and resume her task. These reflections and incidents had always some connection with the hardships to which the loss of reputation and honour subject her sex, and therefore tended to strengthen the conjecture, that the comparison was secretly made between her own experience and the reason—ings or relations of the book.

I had never force of mind enough to lead the conversation towards the same point. Even when accident suggested topics which possessed some affinity to those images which crowded my brain, I endeavoured to change the theme. To this I was not influenced merely by remembrance of Selwyn and his sister. I could never, on these occasions, forget that I also had a near relation, whose fate was not unlike that of the being whom Haywood had destroyed, and her image I was only happy in forgetting.

This perplexity, however, was destined to give place to a greater. One evening, when my sensations were more languid and dreary than usual, and my reflections were full of anxiety and hopelessness, she offered to beguile the hour with a book. The proposal was gratefully accepted. I did not expect to derive pleasure from attention to the volume; but the attitude which she assumed when reading, and the occupation which her eyes found in the page, allowed me to gaze

upon her features, and indulge the reveries of my fancy, without exciting observation. The book was a tissue of diffuse, irregular and superficial remarks upon solitude,<sup>1</sup> in which an anecdote occasionally appeared of much more value than the crude or injudicious reflections that preceded or followed it. One of these being connected with the author's character, and shewing the influence of parental folly in thwarting the affections of a child, was read with more pathos, and I listened to it with more attention than the rest.

A daughter fixed her choice on a youth who wanted no merit but that of being opulent and highborn. The father, whose hopes looked forward to the ennobling of his blood by his daughter's marriage, exacted from her the sacrifice of her choice. The sacrifice was made, and was followed by the death of the lover, by his own hand, and of the daughter, by a slow disease. This story, added to the features of the reader, which betrayed the deepest sympathy, operated on my fancy, distempered by sickness, and over-fraught with images pertaining to Haywood, in a manner that I never before experienced. I uttered an exclamation of horror. My companion, dropping the book, and turning to me, anxiously inquired into the cause of my alarm. I had not time to retrieve my presence of mind, and answered, "Nothing. I thought it real; but my vision was confused. It could not be."

"Could not be!" she replied: "What? what is it you speak of?"

"Be not alarmed," said I, endeavouring, in vain, to conceal my perturbations; "I mistook a spectre for a man. I thought—I thought it looked over your shoulder—at the book."

"Good God! a man? Where? What? Who is he?"

"It was shadowy, imperfect: I cannot tell what; but methought—me-thought it was—*your brother!*"

This word was no sooner uttered than she shrieked; and, clasping her hands, repeated, "My brother! Heaven save me from ever seeing him more! He was here! He was close at my shoulder, but is gone. O! whither, whither? I heard him not. I heard not his curses!" — While thus speaking, she looked on all sides with an air of the deepest affright. She seemed in expectation of beholding him once more.

At this moment the bell was rung. She noticed it, and perceived that the signal was yours. Instantly her terrors and tumults were controuled; yet the efforts that brought back the appearance of sedateness were vehement. The motive that could conquer this dismay must, indeed, have been powerful. Terrified and confounded at what I had done and witnessed, I rose before your entrance, and retired to my chamber.

No wonder that this new discovery astonished me: that I experienced a sort of relapse of my disease, and passed a feverish night. In the morning my heat and restlessness somewhat subsided, and I was able to review the incidents of the last evening without disorder.

Here was darkness that I could not penetrate. The name of Selwyn had not been mentioned; but a brother existed, or was imagined to exist, whose presence inspired terror, and this terror there was reason to conceal from you. No words can describe the tumult of my thoughts and resolutions. I was perplexed in a maze, from which I longed, with unspeakable ardour, for deliverance; but from which the hope of extrication was denied to me. I had rashly plunged into the stream too far to recover my footing, or to withstand the torrent that would bear me away. I had shewn that I possessed knowledge which would not fail to be extorted from me; and the effects of my disclosure it was not possible to estimate.

I looked, each moment, for the entrance of your wife, but she appeared not. At length you came to my chamber; and, among other questions, I ventured to inquire into her health. She was

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<sup>1</sup> Zimmerman on Solitude.

not well, you said. She had passed a sleepless night. Something, you knew not what, had greatly disquieted her; but you hoped that to-morrow would give her back her usual health.

Surely, thought I, her inquietudes have arisen from the dialogue of last evening. Her husband is a stranger to the cause. It is possible that my construction of appearances is just; but I am far more likely to err. She will imagine me, however, acquainted with the truth. The consciousness of this; the danger that her secret will escape from me, and reach those ears from which she has spent her life in endeavouring to conceal it, will subvert her peace, or tempt her to despair, or lead her to an interview with me that will put my fortitude to too hard a test.

But what is my ground for these surmises? Surely no supposition is more wild, than that this is the undone and degraded woman whom Haywood dishonoured, and her brother reported to be dead! If she were, who can believe that the truth is unknown to her husband? that any veil has been thick enough to hide these dreadful portions of her history from him? It is utterly incredible.

I drew temporary comfort from this reasoning; yet I looked forward, with shuddering, to the moment of our next meeting. I imagined to myself all that she would feel; and, fearless of any injury or accusation limited to myself, was plunged into the most exquisite suffering. I did not yet reason on the subject: I did not weigh the reasonableness of her grief or her terror: I did not inquire whether past events ought to exercise an evil influence on her present thoughts: whether former errors were not compensated by present rectitude. Much less did I speculate upon the means of repairing the ills which my rash or misjudging zeal might occasion. I thought only on the pangs which the detection of former offences, by the world or by her husband, would produce.

What pity, I exclaimed, that I had not died before I entered this house! That the benevolent exertions of this woman have rescued from the grave one to whom she will owe the death of her hopes! But the evil has not yet come. Let me shun another interview by flying from this roof. Let me hide myself forever from their inquiry, in the remoteness of the desert, and let my fatal knowledge be buried with me.

This design was conceived in a moment of imbecility. I gradually retrieved my fortitude. Why, said I, should I thus cherish a cowardly distrust of my own steadfastness? I shall shortly know the truth. This woman will seek an explanation. If she be deterred by delusive apprehensions, or spurious shame, it is my duty to unfold my thoughts, and to quiet her fears that her happiness will ever be subverted by me. Does she trust the permanence of her peace, her husband's happiness and his love, to his ignorance of her former condition? Does she tremble lest my fatal interference may remove that ignorance? Her terrors are groundless. I will never be such an enemy. I will sew up my lips, I will cut out my tongue, rather than betray the secret. I will impart my resolution to her. I will know the truth This moment.

What an idiot have I thus long been! 'Tis well that I have to plead the languors of sickness in extenuation of my folly. I would otherwise tear out this infirm heart. I would hang up this frame, the dwelling of a soul so contemptible, to be parched by the northern blasts—to be pecked at by vultures and crows. I hear her. It is her step. She is coming.

I was not deceived. She entered my chamber with faltering steps. A deep melancholy was visible. She did not look up, but placed herself on a seat near me. She came with a view to conversation; but her feet would more readily obey the impulse of her will than her tongue. She was silent; and would probably have been unable to introduce the subject which occupied her mind, had we continued together till the present hour. I plucked up my courage, and addressed her thus:

“My friend, since last night my hours have been full of disquiet. I have been wavering between different schemes, and driven to and fro by adverse resolutions. I desired to promote your happiness, but knew not by what means. The contest is now at an end. I see clearly the path which it is my duty to take, and shall tread in it with steadfastness.

“I am acquainted with a man by name Selwyn. Some years ago he brought with him a stranger, whom he introduced to his father and his sister as his friend. This friend resided in the family; and, finally, repaid the benefits which he received by the dishonour of that sister. Shall I go on to act and to speak as if that sister, whom her friends imagined to have perished in indigence and misery, is alive, and is now before me?”

She struggled to speak, but her words could not find utterance. Her breast throbbed, and she looked about her with wildness. At length, a burst of tears came to her relief, and she articulated with difficulty, “Goon: say all that you have to say, that I may know the utmost cruelty of my fate.”

“I have said all. You have only to point out the path which your dignity and happiness require me to pursue, and I pledge my existence for the observance of it. I know you to be virtuous, compassionate, and good. Do I not hold my life by your bounty, and shall not that life be readily forfeited in your cause? Impose upon me any task; you cannot impose upon me any inconsistent with virtue, and the task shall be performed.”

Her tears flowed with new vehemence, but she spoke not. I continued:

“Perhaps your calamity is not known to the man who possesses your hand and your heart. Perhaps his ignorance, in this respect, is deemed by you essential to your happiness. Shall that ignorance be prolonged? Is it in my power to prolong it? If it be, the sentence of eternal silence is passed, and shall be observed.”

“Alas! your silence will avail but little. What is known to you, will be known, by similar means, to others. It is vain to hope for oblivion but in the grave. While the author and witness of my shame exist, the danger is perpetual and imminent. I have lived long enough a slave to foreboding and terror. To pass another series of two years, pursued by remorse and alarm, is more than my nature will permit.”

“Henceforth your fears may be dismissed, for the author is far away, and the witness is—no more.”

“What!” she cried, “is my brother—?” She was unable to complete the sentence. I repeated, “Your brother is dead.”

She covered her face with her hands, and gave vent to a burst of grief, the most profound and impetuous, that I ever witnessed. At length she was able to inquire when and where his death took place.

“Selwyn died in New-York. Three months has since scarcely elapsed.”

She looked at me with earnestness: “You are sporting with my grief. It is impossible.”

“I shall not labour to convince you of my truth. If his eternal silence will contribute to the safety of your good name, and of your conjugal happiness, it is thus far safe. He will never more upbraid you, or propagate the tale of your dishonour. Haywood is the prey of remorse. Your spectre pursues him, and dashes with bitterness every cup that he drinks; but he prizes the esteem of mankind too much to make himself the historian of his own crimes.”

“How then came you to know them?”

“The concurrence of events rendered the confession of his misdeeds to me unavoidable. Accident had put so much in my possession, that he thought it needless to withhold the rest.”

“And thus,” she exclaimed, “has it been with others. Thus will it continue to be since he is not dead; and what remains for me? Where shall I find refuge? Who will give comfort and counsel to one thus forlorn?”

I thought it expedient to allow free scope to her sorrow, and waited, in silence, till nature should be exhausted, and the accents of comfort could be heard. After some time, she said:

“How came it thus? None, since the fatal hour when peace and innocence fled from my bosom, have partaken of my grief. I have shunned the scrutiny of others. I have treasured up my woes and feasted on them alone. I have not been supreme in misery as long as disgrace and reproach have been kept at a distance; and I imagined that for a human creature to penetrate my sentiments, was to forfeit that slender good that remained to me.

“Yet, this limit is past; and the prop on which I leaned is gone!”

“The prop on which you leaned was feeble, liable to be broken by every blast, and unworthy of your confidence; but it is not yet broken. There is one, only, in the world to whom your secret is known, and why should you be terrified at his knowledge? It is not the sympathy and reverence of mankind that you hate, but their scorn and their obloquy. You dread the disclosure of the truth, because it will be followed by contempt, not because it will awaken a more ardent approbation of your virtue, and a stronger zeal for your welfare. The misjudging world, whose errors flow from their ignorance, might deny you its esteem; but I that know you as you are, that know by what illusions you were betrayed, that know the extent of that expiation which has been made, am bound to you by stronger ties, am more devoted to the cause of your happiness than ever.”

“Ah! the reproaches of mankind affect me not but as their truth is acknowledged by my conscience. My heart is my accuser, and tells me that there is no punishment too great for my transgression. I have an husband whose peace depends upon his ignorance of my guilt. That ignorance has subsisted at the mercy of a thousand chances. That it has been prolonged till now, is only a subject of wonder; but the hour that reveals it to him, will be the last of his joys—perhaps the last of his life.” Here she again relapsed into sorrow, too violent to permit her either to speak or to listen.

At first, my despondency was scarcely less than her own, but at length I began to question the certainty of that consequence which she dreaded. The first burst of this knowledge on your mind, might be expected to overwhelm all courage, and prostrate all hope, but surely this was a calamity not beyond the reach of a cure. He that could upbraid and detest this woman, must be void of humanity. Most of all must her husband have abjured his understanding. He who so thoroughly knew the excellence of her heart, the purity of her present deportment, the untaintedness of her fidelity to him, the depth and variety of that anguish which her errors had produced, and which made her ten-fold more exempt from the possibility of falling from her duty, than if she had never fallen: what sentiments but pity, forgiveness, and augmented tenderness, could find their way to his heart?

When her grief could find words, she dwelt upon the loss of your esteem as the fate that awaited her. The censures of the world were terrible. The miseries which she had entailed upon her father and brother, were ever fresh in her remembrance; but these were not the last of evils. The bitterest of all calamities was yet to come. Her husband's happiness and life were to be reserved for the last victims. Till these were offered, she was not an outcast of hope; forlorn and irretrievably wretched; but too surely these would be offered.

I endeavoured to combat these fears. I dwelt upon the equanimity of your character. I dwelt upon her claims to your compassion and love; claims that the scorn of mankind, the loss of parents, and brother, and friends, could only tend to enhance. That you should be blind to her

excellence, insensible to the influence of compunction and amendment to atone for past errors; that these errors would be otherwise regarded than as the illusions of a powerful, but misguided understanding; of a heart betrayed by the mask of virtue, and by stratagems which owed their success to the confidence which is bred in us by ignorance of mankind, and freedom from suspicion, was impossible.

“Ah! my friend, you are deceived. I know him better than any other knows him. Think not that slight obstacles would have protracted my concealment till now. Think you that I have not weighed well the motives of my conduct, and that the miserable alternative of secrecy was adopted upon insufficient grounds? No. I was not so insensible of the hazards that beset me. I was not so blind to the duties of my condition.”

I still, however, insisted upon the rectitude of a frank deportment; on the placability of your nature; on the hazard that eternally hung over you of hearing the truth, but mangled by rumour, or distorted by malice; on the wisdom of performing a deed which could not be prevented, though it might be delayed, and of exhausting its effects as speedily as possible.

“I comprehend your distress,” continued I; “you dread that the tale you shall tell will be incoherent and imperfect, even from your lips. Your emotions will confuse your thoughts, and embarrass your utterance. This ought not to be, but it cannot be cured by conviction, and you therefore are unqualified to be an advocate in such a cause. Such are not my dis— qualifications. I am not born to shrink from any province, to falter and recoil from any task which justice and necessity prescribe. Assign to me the duty of contending with the grief and despair of your husband. Let me be the wall between his wrath and your offences. I will convey the horrid truth to his ears; I will urge your claims to the continuance of his love and his esteem, in terms which he cannot resist; I will cling to his knees; I will wrest from him the weapon which he aims at his own life, or at yours; I will root out his sorrow, and bring him to your feet, to pour out his forgiveness and renew his vows of eternal affection.”

At these words she started on her feet. “Good Heaven! whither would you carry me? To ruin? I charge you, by all the kindness I have shewn to you, to hold your peace: promise me eternal silence upon this head, or I die at your feet; I rid myself, by my own hand, of life and all the evils which it has entailed upon my head. I know the guilt of self murder: I know what I shall leave behind to my unhappy child, and what I shall meet in the state into which I shall pass; but no matter, plight to me your faith that you will not disclose my shame to any human being, or this night shall be the last of my life.”

I was terrified by the distraction of her looks and manner, and gave the promise she demanded. “Without your consent,” said I, “I will impart nothing.” She compelled me to repeat these words, and even to swear that my silence should never be broken.

Her tumults being somewhat hushed by this assurance, she relapsed into complaint of the cruelty of her fate. I listened to those effusions of her sorrow, because I hoped that the very act of pouring her distress into the ears of a friend, would gradually alleviate it. This was a privilege which hitherto she had never known. Communication and sympathy are, perhaps, the only sources of relief to a mind sorely charged. Grief owes its sting to the conviction of our own guilt, and the notion that the world is not only unanimous, but just, in its condemnation. The removal of this error is the revival of hope; but as long as our woes are not partaken, and our self-accusations not confuted by another, the error is inveterate and fatal.

I could not fail to express my wonder at her present situation. I mentioned my belief of her death, of the same belief adopted by her family and Haywood, and asked why she consented to

marriage on conditions so precarious as those of the obscurity of her past life. How could her husband's curiosity have been eluded or defeated as to her true condition?

"I will hide from you nothing; my story will enable you to estimate the degree of my guilt, and my penitence. It will make easy your adherence to the oath that you have taken, by shewing you the necessity of concealment.

"I know not how far your knowledge of my early life extends. You talk to me of my father and my brother; you know that I have been betrayed. O! how little is known to you! If you knew all, you would not weep with me; you would not talk to me in soothing accents; you would view me with abhorrence; you would deny my claim to be treated as an human being. No, I have undertaken an impossible thing; I cannot, I must not tell all."

"Perhaps," said I emphatically, "you underrate my knowledge."

She looked at me wistfully, and with a countenance of terror. "O! no; what I did is known to no human being but myself. Your eye would scowl at me instead of pitying; you would rush from a house polluted by the residence of such

"Pity for a wretch like me, would argue the capacity of perpetrating equal horrors. It would make you as detestable as I am in my own eyes.

Cannot you think? Paint to yourself—a wife and a mother—."

Here her utterance was suffocated by sobs. At length, recovering from her anguish, she resumed:

"The days of my childhood were serene. I knew no vicissitude but from pleasure to pleasure. A sportive prattler they called me, who was never at peace. O that some mortal disease had snatched me from life at that happy age! That such as I then seemed, was reserved for the miseries that have since been my lot! Till my mother's death, when I was ten years old, I was unacquainted with sorrow; but even then, the traces of my tears quickly vanished, and the tide of joyous sensations revisited my heart.

"I loved my brother—it is impossible to say how much. He was older than I, my preceptor and friend. He accompanied me in all my walks—he read, he talked to me. His purpose was to fit me for performing a useful part in the world, to inspire me with liberal curiosity, to make me rational beyond the common reach of my sex.

"He doated on his sister: he took no pride in any thing more than in the proofs of my advancement. I have seen his eyes glisten on hearing my eulogy pronounced by those whose suffrage was of value. 'Why, yes,' he would say, when listening to my praise, and with a smile of ineffable complacency, Mary, I must own, is a good girl.'

"O my brother! thou art dead, and, no doubt, I am in some mysterious way, the author of thy fate. Such has been the fruit of thy instructions!

"Time moved on smoothly till I was eighteen years of age. Every day added to my stores of knowledge, and to my brother's affection. My social sympathies were active. I had numerous friends of my own sex. I was the idol of my father as well as of my brother. He was a good old man, guileless as infancy, prone to confidence and love, and wrapping his existence in the welfare of his children!

"At that age, a cousin of my father's, a youth for whom he had performed the duties of a guardian, who had been some years in Europe in pursuit of medical knowledge, returned to Portsmouth. My father's house was his home. He had been brought up with me and my brother, and our affection for him was equal in degree and in kind. I knew him only as a brother, and treated him as such.

“Alas! would to heaven I had been to him no other than the object of fraternal regards. He loved me, but was unable to awaken, in my bosom, the same sentiment. He tendered his love; and God is my witness with what heartfelt grief I heard his confessions. My feelings were incompatible with his. There was no doubt as to their nature or duration. That they would not change, that I could never be his wife without a forfeiture of happiness, was my entire and immovable conviction.

“He entertained a different opinion. He confided in the influence of time and assiduities to win my heart. Knowing me to be unprepossessed, he trusted to that his ultimate success. It was in vain to assure him of my own belief; to assert the privilege of knowing myself better than another could know me; and to supplicate his forbearance. Love, he said, was the growth of esteem and gratitude. It was akin to pity; and these sentiments, he knew, existed in my heart; and would, finally, give place to love. Not contented with his own efforts, he called to his aid those of my brother.

“I was accustomed to make my brother’s judgment the criterion of my actions. I modelled myself by no consideration but that of securing his esteem. I hoped that he would see the reasonableness of my conduct, and assist me in contending with the headlong passions of my lover; but I was deceived. For the first time my conduct excited his regret, and he censured me for folly and caprice.

“No words can describe my mortification and dismay. I was heart—broken by his reproaches, and prone to doubt of the clearest evidence when in opposition to his verdict. That I ought to love him whom my brother deemed worthy of my love, had been fostered as the most incontestible of truths. In my juvenile reveries, I had frequently looked forward to wedlock, but it recurred to my thoughts merely as enabling me to reduce my brother’s precepts to practice, and affording the opportunity of proving my docility and gratitude. I could not deny the intellectual and moral excellence of *Colmer*: that love should have no other basis than esteem, was the sum of my creed as well as of his; but such was the perverseness of my heart, the depravity of my imagination, that while the claims of Colmer were seen to be just, my aversion to admit them was invincible.

“I was the prey of the most acute anguish. I felt that to be rejected and despised by my brother, was an evil not to be endured; I felt that I deserved his contempt; but still my indifference would not forsake me; and, what was worse, the conviction would not be suspended or outrooted that this indifference would continue for ever.

“Finding me refractory in this respect, my brother urged me to accept his friend, notwithstanding my indifference. He pleaded the merits of that friend, the fervour of his passion, the benefits to mankind and his family flowing from Colmer’s talents, provided they were not blasted in the bud. At present, his activity was at an end, his life itself was endangered by his disappointment. A wasting disease had already begun its progress in his frame. His mother and his sisters beheld this progress, which was to bereave them of protection and subsistence; they knew to whom it was ascribable. His mother was a second parent to me, his sisters were my friends. Their tears, their silence, their frantic apprehensions upbraided my cruelty. Still, such was my deep aversion to marriage void of love, that I hesitated; I wept, indeed; the pleasures of existence became tasteless and wearisome; I desired to die, but my intractable soul refused to make the sacrifice that was demanded, till Colmer was reduced to a sick bed; till my brother vowed eternal resentment on my in compliance: with tears, with forebodings, with heartbursting sighs, I decked myself in bridal ornaments, and purchased the peace of others at the price of my own.

“I found some consolation in witnessing the joy which my acquiescence diffused. I studied to conform my wishes to necessity, and, if happiness were beyond my reach, at least to secure content. My husband’s health made it useful to make a voyage to sea, and try the influences of a tropical winter. My brother, shortly after my nuptials, embarked for Europe. He returned in company with one, who took up his abode in my father’s house.

“The stranger was made an object of kindness and attention. To this, not only his general merits seemed to entitle him, but a pensive reserve, a musefulness, that studied to screen itself from observation, and bespoke some latent sorrow, enhanced his title to compassion and respect. I delighted in making others happy. My sympathy was particularly active for this man. I noted him in all his wandering; thought and spoke of him when absent, and pondered on the best means of diverting his dejection. I tried to engage him in discourse. I proposed employments and excursions whose tendency was to amuse. When he smiled, when his zeal engaged him in earnest talk, when he manifested satisfaction at the prospect of a visit, or declared himself pleased after an excursion, I congratulated myself on the success of my efforts, and acquired resolution, to persist in them.

“My anxiety on his account, was at length observed by him. It seemed to produce gratitude; and his respect for me, his deference for my capacity, his attachment to my company became more visible. He dwelt in the same house, and my brother was set out on a new voyage. Hence his attendance on me, in my walks and visits, was more frequent, as well as our unwitnessed interviews at home.

“Much of his time was spent in reading. His books were generally such as suited my taste. They abounded with instruction, from which I continually acquired new light, and our mutual circumstances allowed him to rehearse them to me. His utterance was in the highest degree proper and emphatic, and conferred new energies and graces on all that he read. I listened and found no satiety. I regretted when the book was finished, and intreated him to begin again. If the sentiments and language were sufficiently imprinted on my memory, his tones and looks, while thus employed, afforded a new and exquisite gratification. His absence left me in languor and impatience: the topics of our conversation were renewed. I mused on all that he had said or done during our latest interview, and alleviated the anguish of reflecting that they were past, by looking forward to the meeting of to-morrow.

“In this state of things it was impossible that proofs of confidence should not be mutually exchanged. I dwelt upon all the incidents of my life with candour and minuteness. I explained the state of my feelings with regard to my brother and my husband. I avowed my approbation of what I had done. I had chosen, among many evils, the least; and my choice had given me, not indeed felicity, but content.

“He praised the rectitude of my conduct, dwelt upon the value of sacrifices made to duty, upon the selfishness and infatuation of what is called love, upon the sufficiency of mere intellectual intercourse to impart all the benefit and pleasure which a rational being can know.

“There were many points on which I had meditated with some care, and on which I had formed opinions for myself. I was highly pleased to discover a conformity in these respects between my friend and me. With the rest of the world I disagreed, and this disagreement precluded an entire union of affections between me and any of my ancient friends. While pondering upon these topics, I acquired the utmost fervour of conviction, and I glowed with the love of that excellence which my reason investigated and acknowledged; but when I looked upon mankind, I saw none who reasoned and decided like myself. Hence dissatisfaction crept into my heart. A sort of uneasiness arose, coupled with doubt of the truth of opinions, which so many whose impartiality

and penetration, in general, were great, had rejected. I felt as if nothing was wanting to certainty but the concurrence of one whose judgment I respected. The approbation of the whole world, or of a great number, I could dispense with, provided the sympathy and co-decision of one were granted me.

“I had inferred, from my uniform experience, that it was vain to search for an human being whose taste and opinions were like mine, but now this similitude was found in as absolute a degree as I was able to conceive. I cannot describe my emotions upon this discovery. For the first time in my life I tasted happiness. My being seemed to be newly fashioned, my soul to imbibe a double portion of intelligence. Instead of barren content I found myself reserved for rapture. The *friend* who had hitherto existed a creature of my reveries and wishes, was embodied, brought to me by some auspicious fate, from a distance, and placed within the sphere of mutual knowledge and attraction.

“There was nothing in my situation to damp my enjoyments. I was conscious of no criminal or wayward thought. My heart was satisfied because it was full. My actual engagements were recalled to memory with the same emotions as formerly; or, rather, I had reason to regard them with more complacency. The void in my bosom I had formerly imagined could only be filled by love, but now was my mistake rectified. To think of our guest as the lover or husband of another, gave me no anxiety. To think that a bar existed by which a closer union between us was rendered impossible, excited no regret. The existence of a passion, purified from the impulses of sense, I conceived to be now verified by my own experience.

“The apprehensions of different sentiments in my friend were removed. He loved, but the object of his passion was dead. This love continued, and would never subside, would never give place to a new devotion, would never absolve him from a vow of eternal celibacy. He was contented with the enjoyments of friendship. In me he discovered properties more similar to his own than in any being but her whom death had severed from him. He rejoiced that my hand was possessed by another, because this circumstance precluded all misconstructions: it added still more strength to the motives which forbade him to regard me in any light but that of a rational being, whose feelings of attachment or aversion were uninfluenced by sex.

“My husband’s character was distinguished by probity and knowledge. Conscious of my purity, recollecting the conditions of our union, and determined to make him the witness and arbiter of all my sentiments and actions, I dreaded not any evil to him, or any impediment to my intercourse with Haywood from his notions of decorum or right.

“Thus did the hours pass. Haywood’s gloom vanished, or it revisited him only in moments of solitude. He became sprightly in demeanour, and fluent in discourse. All the powers of his mind seemed to expand as under a more genial temperature. He did not scruple to ascribe this propitious change to my influence, and hence I derived new topics of congratulation.

“This serenity lasted not long. Gradually, my friend contracted an air of pensiveness and discontent, but he was as much devoted to my company as ever. He was no less unreserved in his communications. He was equally attentive to the injunctions of decorum. In moments of the most unbounded confidence and sacred seclusion, he never treated me but with personal respect, and invariable sedateness of manners. Indeed, I will confess, that, in this respect, he was more austere than my reason or my inclination required. I asked no more reserve from him than was practised by my brother, or my female friends, and I saw no reason why I should be satisfied with less. If our emotions with regard to each other were precisely the same, why should particular restraints be adopted?

“Hence, indeed, arose the first interruption to my quiet. Comparing his deportment with that which my own heart prompted, and of these whose sex or affinity took away all doubt as to the nature of their love, I perceived an unacceptable difference. I imputed this difference to coldness. This imputation he repelled by new ardour of professions, by appealing to the hours which he spent in my society, and to the proofs of confidence which his behaviour continually afforded. Methought the inference was irresistible, and yet, while my understanding was convinced, my heart doubted.

“Infatuated girl! How lightly didst thou tread upon the brink of perdition! How ingenious wast thou in entangling thyself and thy friend in inextricable ruin! I looked into my own heart, but saw nothing to condemn. Not a spot adhered to my integrity. I was conscious of no evil. I was trained in no school of duplicity and stratagem. The consciousness of rectitude I thought would bear me up against the censures of the world, but sentiments so blameless as mine would forever shield me from that censure.

“I am almost ashamed to confess the urgency with which I sought those tokens of tenderness which were adapted to precipitate his ruin. In my guileless apprehension, they could not be bestowed too liberally. To withhold them was a proof of the want of affection, or argued an affection that was not legitimate; that annexed more importance to this privilege than it merited, and that was conscious of improper tendencies. I could not acquiesce in any other conclusion.

“Instead, however, of complying with my wishes, in this respect, he became more pensive and museful. He talked less during our interviews; these interviews were shorter and less frequent. His bloom and his health rapidly decayed. He immured himself for days in his chamber, and admitted my visits not without objections and reluctance. I urged him to explain the cause of this change. For a time, he obstinately denied the reality of any change in his health, and ascribed the revolution in his manners to caprice, to chance, to some cause beyond his power and inclination to explain.

“When his indisposition had made such progress as to make it no longer questionable, he denied admittance to a physician. He was sensible of no pain. His joints were feeble, and his frame emaciated, but all his functions were regular. He ate sparingly, and slept as usual. His thoughts were mournful and dejected; but he could not explain the cause that made his thoughts run in one channel more than another.

“His generous artifice was, for a time, successful; but in the agony of my fears, on his account—in my incessant meditations on the cause of this evil, I could not fail of lighting, at length, upon the true conjecture. It was too dreadful not to make me eager to banish suspense, and ascertain the truth. I besought an interview, and explained to him my fears. He strove in vain to hide his secret from my scrutiny, to elude my interrogations, or repulse my entreaties. He was the prey of an hopeless passion, of which my malignant destiny had made me the object.

“This detection opened my eyes to the horrors that environed me. I beheld a youth of unrivalled excellence, tarnished, and withered, and hurried to the grave, by a malady to which my temerity and infatuation had given birth, but to which I was utterly disabled from administering a cure. I was bound to another by inviolable obligations. The place which nature and reason had intended for Haywood was preoccupied by another. He was sinking before my eyes, but the hand that might have snatched him from the billows was constrained by bonds which no human force could break.

“It was never to be shut from my mind, that my fatal enchantments had seduced him into this snare. I had designed no evil, was wholly unaware of any hurtful tendency in the conduct which I had pursued; but this persuasion availed nothing to rescue me from terror, or blunt my remorse.

Now that the effect was produced, I regarded, with profound astonishment, the blindness that had so long been inattentive to its approach. The tokens of the truth were now remembered or imagined to have been incessant and palpable. My own efforts were now seen to have had no tendency but to infuse this venom. I had sported in the flowery path, though every step was beset with adders; and my senses were recalled from their trance, not till my progress was irrevocable, and to turn back was no longer in my power.

“I accused myself to Haywood. I poured forth floods of tears, and vowed not to survive him. To this self-upbraiding and despair, he always roused himself to the most tender and pathetic opposition. He absolved me from all censure, and imputed his calamity to his own perverse fate—to his incaution and folly. It was his province to have supplied the want of foresight in me; to have fled from the danger when its first approaches were descried: whereas, he had lingered till flight was impossible or useless.

“He was the most guilty and unfortunate of human beings. He had lived in defiance and contempt of his duty; had trampled on the claims of gratitude and service, which his friends, his country, and mankind had urged upon him. Indolence had eaten away the root of every virtue, subjected him to poverty and ignominy in his native country, and had accompanied him to his new abode. In vain had he struggled to shake off its chains: for every struggle, by being unsuccessful, had only added to their number and force.

“It was time to die. Longer life would only multiply his crimes, and aggravate his infamy. Life was, indeed, only to be purchased by conditions which would make the burthen of existence intolerable; which would heap calamity on all those whom he had most reason to love, and chiefly on me, whom he deemed the purest and most excellent of human creatures, and for the sake of whose peace he would cheerfully die a thousand deaths.

“It was vain for me to importune or mourn. No efforts of mine would postpone the inevitable hour: and, instead of desiring its postponements I ought to exult in its swift approach. My peace and honour were in hazard: his death alone would purchase their safety; and, to purchase it, he hastened to death with more alacrity than bridegroom ever hastened to the arms of his bride.

“Such was the usual strain of his discourse, to which I listened with heart-breaking anguish. I believed that I knew this man. I knew him to be enslaved by a thousand errors; but these errors were the growth of an unhappy education: they were productive of incessant compunction there was a species of discipline efficacious to his cure; and I had fondly hoped, that heaven had appointed me the minister of this cure. I knew his virtues as well as his faults, and perceived them to transcend, by far, the elevation of any of those whom I had previously known—to be such as fitted him for the instructor and delighter of mankind. Should such an one perish, in the bloom of his age, and I remain, to whom alone his disastrous and premature fate was to be imputed?

“My heart was rent; my tears flowed without remission; solitude and darkness, my chamber and the night were witnesses of my agony; the conflict of arguments and fears, and hopes; the eternal warfare of those principles which forbid me, on the one hand, to destroy Haywood and myself;—for our fates were not to be dissevered; the same hour should witness both our deaths, and the same grave open to receive us:—or, on the other, to blast the felicity of Colmer; to overwhelm my father and brother with horror and grief; to bring upon myself eternal obloquy, the loss of reputation, the tears of my friends, and the scoffs of the world. Such was the terrible, yet unavoidable alternative. Such was the fruit of my brother’s well-meant cruelty — of the obstinate devotion of my husband—of the incurable infatuation of Haywood—of the irrevocable

decree which made me the wife, which consecrated my person and affection to one to whom I was indifferent.

“That was my first crime. To have yielded my hand, contrary to all the dictates of my heart; to vow eternal affection where none was felt; to devote my thoughts and services to one for whom I felt no sympathy; who claimed, indeed, my reverence for the probity of his intentions, and the depth of his capacity, and the amplitude of his knowledge; but whose heart answered not to the pulsations of this heart, whose conceptions of the beautiful and the just were invincibly repugnant, whose employments and amusements were void of all resemblance to mine. That was my offence, from which every subsequent calamity has flown; which has cut me off from all activity and usefulness; which has made me the assassin of Haywood, and my own murderer. O, my brother! to thee am I indebted for that guilt. Into whatever gulph of death, or infamy, or poverty, my desperate footsteps may bear me, at thy door shall I lay the charge of being my destroyer; on thy conscience will the guilt of my blood rest.

‘O! how blest are they whose conduct is exempt from parental or fraternal dominion; who are suffered to consult the dictates of their reason, and are not driven, by imperious duties, to the sacrifice of independence, the abjuration of liberty, and the death of honour!’

“But to look back, to deplore the irremediable past, will avail me nothing. The toils are closed upon me: my dungeon is completed, and escape is only possible by two avenues; both lead into the midst of horrors and perils; either is abundant in evil, and I am terrified to madness by the consequences that will follow each; but the choice must be made. The ruin of my father’s peace, of my brother’s hopes, of my husband’s happiness; the loss of fame and of friendship; exile from my father’s house, are the evils which my spirit must endure, if the life of Haywood deserves to be saved; and these evils I will courageously encounter, and cheerfully sustain, for his sake.

“Such was the dreadful result of many days and nights of meditation. My resolution being formed, I hastened to impart it to my friend. He listened with a faint smile. ‘Heroic woman,’ said he, ‘how thou over-ratest the deservings of the wretch before thee! Thou wouldst fly with him from this scene! Thou wouldst loose thy hold on all that is dear to the heart of woman for his sake! Thou wouldst entrust thy happiness to his spontaneous fidelity! Thou wouldst share with him his nakedness, his famine, his obscurity! Alas! inconstant, cowardly, and feeble as I am, there are limits which I cannot overstep. No, remain in the bosom of thy father, thy brother, and thy husband. Cherish thy untainted honour, and thy devoted friends. To accept thy offer is no matter of desire; to refuse it is no cause of hesitation. I have gathered up all my wishes and views, and centered them in a speedy and quiet death.’

“I urged my proposal anew. I combated his scruples with entreaties and arguments; but all were ineffectual. His aversion to a scheme by which I should produce such extensive mischiefs to those whom my duty taught me to love, and mischiefs to myself which no incidental good could out—balance, was not to be subdued.

“One alternative remained. My continuance in my present condition, my father’s approbation, my brother’s love, my husband’s reverence, my own good name, were not already forfeited. I was adored by Haywood: I loved the proofs of his affection and his confidence, which he delighted to bestow. To watch his features, to be greeted by his smiles, to study the improvement of his understanding and his fortune, was all that my heart, formed for sympathy and tenderness, required. Of these I was not ashamed. They were incompatible with no conjugal duty. I avowed and exulted in my wishes, and none surely would calumniate or censure them. If they did, calumny and censure, by being unmerited, affected me not.

“But this, alas! was not sufficient. My friend languished, and perished. He was consumed by unsatisfied desires. Not contented with the homage of my understanding and my heart, he sought for that, the gift of which, if known, would blot my name, awaken enmity in all that loved me, and bring down inexorable vengeance on the head of my seducer.

“Let me not repeat the sophistries—exhibit again the illusions which bewildered me—which did not beget opinion, or terminate in belief; which did not successfully contend with all the impressions of my education; which did not hinder me from shuddering at the name of adultress; which did not blind me to the hazards and consequences of detection; make me callous to the stings of self-reproof; hide from me the deformities and hatefulness of falsehood;—prolific of terror, involving in its train a thousand stratagems, humiliations and iniquities, and sure, at last, to be unmasked; counteracted; baffled; punished.

“No! while I tumultuously reflected on the wrongs that I had suffered from my brother’s cruelty and my husband’s pertinaciousness; while I sought to load them with the guilt of every deviation from rectitude to which their fatal obstinacy had given birth; while I laboured to extenuate the crime, and exaggerate the ease of concealment; to reduce to nothing the moral tendencies, and intrinsic importance, of the gift that was exacted from me; and assiduously to meditate the benefits resulting from dishonour, I came no nearer to decision. My irresolution forsook me not. The reluctances that barred up my passage afforded not a momentary token of yielding.

“No reasonings and no fears could annihilate the woman in my breast; out-root from my constitution the materials of duty, the laws of my sex, the instinct of decorum, the powers and habits which recoiled, with mechanical necessity, from the part of solicitee, to any but *mental* intercourse. Yet such was the part which my fate had assigned me. Haywood was only to be won to existence and happiness by supplication from me!

“I had brought myself to offer him my company in flight and exile, but this had been rejected. I could endure every consequence of separation from my family, but not the making the inmate of their bosom and partaker of their confidence, a liar and dissembler; the eternal weaver of frauds; dressing her countenance in deceitful smiles; lavishing caresses on the man she betrayed; and practising tricks and subterfuges to gain, or prolong, or conceal her interviews with another. To this, no impulse of passion, no cogency of eloquence, could gain my assent.

“Alas! my fate was determined not in the moment of exertion, but of slumber. My reason, weary of its fruitless efforts and contests, had yielded place to an interval of precious and rare repose. The apartment was darkened by curtains, that the heat, as well as light, might be excluded. I had parted with my friend in expectation of taking a short journey; but my time of setting out being by some accident postponed, I withdrew to my chamber, and threw myself upon a sofa to indulge my wonted reveries. In this situation sleep stole upon my senses.

“Meanwhile, Haywood, seizing the opportunity of my absence, resolved to end my conflicts and his own, by withdrawing from the house and the country. He wrote a letter containing the reasons of his conduct and his last adieus. This he designed to leave upon my toilet; and, for that end, came softly to my chamber, which he reasonably imagined to be vacant.

“That was the crisis of my fate. I must not dwell upon the tumults of surprise in my own heart; the tremours that, in spite of virtue, disabled me from flying or resisting; that lulled my reason, and that of my betrayer, into an oblivion long enough to put our mutual destruction beyond the reach of prevention or recal. I must not dwell upon the remorse and humiliations that ensued. To what end would they serve?

“I am not anxious to extenuate my guilt or aggravate my calamity, by recalling the detestable series of sensations that followed. That event, on which I did not reflect till the reflection was too late to save me, came at length to open my eyes. Add to this, intelligence that Haywood was already married, and had a wife alive, and preparing to come to New-Hampshire and claim her privileges. My brother and my husband were likewise expected to return.

“To dwell upon my flight from my father’s house, the agony attending the untimely birth of my offspring, the indigence and dangers I encountered in my banishment from home, and my intercourse with strangers, my obscure abode in Ridgefield, a remote village in Connecticut, where I owed my subsistence to my labour, my reputation to my change of name and the ignorance of my neighbours respecting my true condition; to recount the watchful nights devoted to remembrance of my infantile and youthful days, the images of my associates and friends, of my brother, my venerable parent, and my unfortunate husband; to terrible conjectures as to the consequences of my disappearance, and keen regrets for the fate that prolonged my life only to accumulate my despair: to detain you by so long and so mournful a narration, would be useless.

“That grief is of no enormous kind which permits the sufferer to live, which does not prompt him to seek the quiet which the grave will bestow. This refuge, the affection of my neighbours denied me. After some time, by means needless to be mentioned now, I gained a knowledge of the effect which the detection of my guilt and my flight produced on my family. I will not paint the scene. Your hairs would arise, and my heart would bleed to death in attempting the recital. The news dissipated, in a moment, that torpor into which months of repose and security, of ignorance and solitude, had plunged me. I rushed to the river’s brink, and endeavoured to extinguish my woes with my being.

“My purpose was suspected, my track was pursued, my breathless corpse was dragged from the river time enough to be restored to life. The disappointment of my purpose made me moody and sullen. They guarded me, in the belief that I was a lunatic; and a second attempt to perish, by strangling myself with a cord, was, in like manner, frustrated by those whose unbought benevolence made them watchful of my conduct.

“Two years passed away in a gloomy reverie. Joy was flown from my heart, smiles from my lips. I lost the desire of society; the power of speech was grown difficult by disuse. While I lived, I procured subsistence by my needle; but this was my whole employment. When the edge of bitter remembrance was somewhat blunted, I admitted, sparingly, the consolations of society and books. The dejection and dreariness of my thoughts were insensibly alleviated, and existence ceased to be a burthen, of which I was impatient.

“In this state of things he who is now my husband came to the village as a visitant. He sought my obscure dwelling, introduced himself to my acquaintance, offered me his books, solicited permission to attend me in my walks, to sit with me while busy with my needle, to amuse my toil by rehearsing the poets and historians with whom he was familiar.

“I was become habituated to solitude and musing, and underwent a sort of violence in yielding to his wishes. My acquiescence was difficult, ungracious and slow. I immured myself in my chamber, and refused to be seen when he called at my lodgings; I walked out at different hours from those to which I had been used, and deviated from my customary tracks, in order to avoid meeting with him.

“He was not disheartened by my coldness and reserve; and, at length, I began to rebuke myself for ingratitude and incivility, and no longer raised impediments to our intercourse. Shortly I began to derive pleasure from his visits. When they were intermitted, I felt some degree of dejection and impatience; and his discourse awakened a cheerfulness to which I had, during

several years, been a stranger. While rehearsing the strains of the dramatist and poet, the memory of similar scenes, in which Haywood had been an actor, was revived, and called forth tears not unpleasurable.

“This man was, indeed, widely different, in character and person, from Haywood. I need not mention to you, who know him, his noble and expressive features, his eye beaming with benevolence and vivacity, his refinement of taste and variety of knowledge. His deportment was tender and pathetic, but was untinged by that impatience and moroseness which flow from compunctious recollections and unsatisfied wishes. He pursued no sinister ends, treasured up no illicit wishes, and contemplated no consequence but the cheering of my hours, and the promotion of my happiness.

“He was a native of Ridgefield. His parents and sisters resided there. I knew them well, and had been the object of their sympathy and kindness. His youthful deportment, his education, and his character, had often been the subjects of their talk, and of that of others, with whom I conversed. There was nothing but gracefulness and beauty in their portraits, nor were the expectations which they had taught me to form at all disappointed or confuted by my own observation.

“It was impossible to withhold complacency and gratitude from this man. That I should be the object of his disinterested kindness was a motive for self-approbation. I sometimes reflected on the happiness that might have been obtained by me, if such an one as this had been allotted to me instead of Colmer or Haywood. This reflection drew deep sighs from my heart; and that which, at first, had imparted pleasure, now augmented the sense of my forlornness.

“Conjugal sympathies and duties—the union of hearts, and opinions, and efforts—the smile of offspring—the gratulation of friends—the esteem of the world—were goods of which I was irretrievably bereft; but, till I knew Molesworth, was less acutely sensible of their value, and deplored, with less violence of passion, their loss.

“His visit lasted some months. He then returned to this city, where he proposed to settle as a physician. He solicited my correspondence, which I had no reason to decline. Our intercourse, in this way, was frequent, and unfolded new excellencies in my friend. He confided to me his schemes of benevolence and fortune without reserve, and addressed himself to me as to one whose integrity was worthy of implicit reliance, and whose council might enable him to shun the pits and quicksands to which his safety was exposed in the midst of a luxurious city.

“On my own adventures I observed a profound and timorous silence. Though conscious how little my genuine character deserved his respect, yet I valued it too much to forego it by a voluntary act. I was ingenious in inventing apologies for my concealment; but they, doubtless, originated in my cowardice. I was loath to relinquish my present abode, which habit had endeared to me, in which the means of subsistence had now become regular and permanent, and where I was, at least, exempt from the mortifications of neglect and contumely. To disclose the truth to Molesworth would, I imagined, instantly convert his esteem into abhorrence and contempt: he would hasten to unfold my infamy to his sisters and friends. I should be cast from their exasperated bosoms—driven from my sweet asylum—and compelled, once more, to encounter the vicissitudes and dangers attendant on the search of a new abode. These were evils, at the thought of which I shuddered, and to which my fortitude was wholly unequal.

“After a year’s absence, Molesworth returned. Weary of the turbulence and vices of the city, and disappointed in the hopes which he had formed of professional employment, he resolved to take up his abode in his native town. Our ancient intercourse was renewed with more complacency and frequency than ever. At length he proposed himself to me as a lover.

“This proposal produced the most violent and ambiguous emotions. My penetration had slept till the moment of disclosure, when I opened my eyes as from a trance, and was overpowered with astonishment. That the mournfulness and seclusion of my manners, the obscurity which hung over my early life, and the dubiousness that must thence have been reflected on my real character, did not preclude such views, in a mind so cautious and enlightened, was scarcely credible. But whatever were his modes of judging, and whatever apologies for former errors he discovered in the blameless and diligent tenour of my life, during my abode at Ridgefield, I could not hesitate in what manner to decide. To take advantage of his ignorance, his compassion, or his candour; to give to his arms a being polluted with the foulest stains that can adhere to humanity, would be an outrage upon duty not less heinous than those which I had formerly committed. The embarrassment accruing from the situation in which *I* was placed—the necessity of hiding the true motives of my dissent—the danger of incurring the imputation of caprice, folly and ingratitude, of insensibility or disdain, was ended by his impetuosity. My decision being precipitately sought, and my pleas for deliberation and delay impetuously repulsed, I was obliged to declare my resolution, without assigning my motives.

“His affliction was proportioned to his disappointment. For a time he acquiesced in my resolves, but remitted none of his benevolent attentions and services. At length, however, he renewed the subject, and besought me to explain the reasons of my procedure. He laid open all his own heart—he traced the origin of our acquaintance, and the progress of his passion—he shewed the reasons on which it was built, the steps by which it attained to maturity, the immutable foundation of his esteem, the long, and intimate, and steadfast observation which he had exercised upon my conduct, and the hopes of future happiness which he had thence derived from union with me—hopes which he had cherished too long, which he had reared on too rational a basis, to abandon but with his life.

“I viewed this man with emotions widely different from those with which I had been used to regard Colmer. That sympathy of views, that conformity of opinions and habits, which was wanting to the latter, were fully possessed by my new friend. I perceived that he was entitled to my whole heart, and that the sole obstacle to our alliance consisted in my worthlessness. Judge, then, with what anguish I must have reflected on this obstacle, which ages of remorse would not obliterate, which no time would lessen or remove, and which cut me off from such varied and abundant felicity; which not only placed happiness beyond my reach, but made me instrumental in the misery of one whose excellences were so transcendent and rare.

“It was impossible, in the full career of my feelings, to hide from him the state of my affections. This discovery gave new ardour to his hopes, new edge to his curiosity, new vigour to his perseverance. I confessed that I was bound by no matrimonial obligations to another; that no duty required me to seek the approbation to my choice of kindred or friends; that I was not influenced by the false refinements of pride, generated by reflection on the poverty of my condition and obscurity of my birth; that wedlock was a state to which I looked as the fountain of every joy, and the theatre of every virtue; that his character, his person, his family, his residence, his profession and fortune, were all such as my reason and my heart fondly and ardently approved. Still, however, there existed an impediment which no time would remove, and which was created by the incidents of my life, previous to my abode in this town.

“He enumerated all possible causes that could produce this effect; and, at length, extorted from me the confession, that the sense of faultiness formerly contracted—the persuasion that my mind was disqualified, by imbecility and vice, to associate with his, was the true cause of my reluctance. This intimation affected, in no degree, his wishes. He applauded the delicacy of my

scruples—inferred, from their duration and strength, the untaintedness of my heart. I might, perhaps, have been drawn aside, by momentary impulse or passion, from the path of virtue; but my remorse, and the blamelessness of my deportment, during the years that he had witnessed it, evinced the undepraved rectitude of my principles, and constituted a sufficient expiation for any guilt which an human being could contract. He did not seek my confidence farther than it had already been bestowed. I was at liberty to hide from him my juvenile adventures. He was not anxious for my vindication from any charge which the malice or misapprehension of the world might bring against me. He had no surmises to remove, or suspicions to confute. He was satisfied with the knowledge which his own senses had collected, and looked no further for evidence of my integrity, and sureties for the happiness of union with me.

“On this topic my friend’s eloquence was earnest and pathetic. While listening to his arguments, I gathered conviction. While his accents rung in my ears, I cherished the fond belief, that the years which I had passed in deploring, had atoned for, my misconduct; that to review the past with everlasting repinings and regrets was folly and guilt; that to allow former misdeeds, whose consequences were, perhaps, exhausted, to occupy our present thoughts, to the exclusion of beneficent designs, and the obstruction of wholesome activity, was to perpetuate and multiply the crime; that to regard our past misconduct with abhorrence was an argument of present virtue; but to suffer this abhorrence to incorporate itself with all our sentiments, to corrode our peace, to undermine our health or our life, and sink us into dreariness and torpor, was contemptible and wicked. I thought myself less hopelessly unworthy; and, while I pondered on the offices of tenderness, the assiduities of gratitude, the irreproachable fidelity which marriage with Molesworth would allow me to perform and exhibit, I felt hope revive in my heart, and was willing to concur with his proposal.

“These serene intervals, however, were transient as a shadow. The absence of my friend failed not to restore the dominion of habit, awaken anew my remorse, and make that obstacle, which, for a time, had disappeared, rise again more menacing than ever. I judged of his sensations by my own. At present he was wildering himself in speculation. The magnanimity of forgiveness—the sufficiency of penitence to expiate offences, and restore purity, were shadows which his understanding found it easy to subdue, as long as their existence was imaginary, and had no relation to himself. He sported with conjectures as to the crimes which it was possible for me to have committed; but none of his conjectures had hitherto reached the atrociousness of the truth—none were believed, by him, to possess any degree of probability: but as soon as the frightful truth should be discovered, the current of dispassionate reasoning would be changed—his gaudy theories, his artificial calm would vanish—dejection and abhorrence would succeed, and he would spurn me from him as the bane of his existence.

“These thoughts renewed my wavering or suspended determination. Molesworth, when he imagined my reluctance at an end, found that a few hours absence had given it more force than ever, and once more engaged in the task of contending with my scruples. My soul was torn by incessant struggles. There was no need to deliberate on the propriety of an immediate confession of my guilt. The confession, whether just or not, whether necessary or superfluous, was utterly impossible. My lips refused to open, my tongue was tied, when my unfaithfulness to Colmer, and its dreadful effects upon him, upon my father and my brother, were to be the theme of my discourse.

“I believed that this disclosure would terminate our controversy; but it would drive from my presence him whom my fluttering heart acknowledged for its sole possessor, whose company composed my chief delight: it would ravish from him all the hopes which he had built upon

conviction of my merits; it would make me an outcast from my present home, and doom me to poverty, reproach and neglect. What wonder that I recoiled from these consequences?

“In the midst of these distractions and misgivings, it occurred to me, at length, that my fame was built upon a mere deception. The goods which I at present enjoyed, were held by no tenure but that of the ignorance of those by whom they were bestowed. I had been anxious not to hide, but only not to publish my shame. My conduct had been open to the scrutiny of all; but *my* lips had been perpetually closed upon the subject of my past offences. I had dealt in no impostures and inventions. I had not, in a single instance, abjured my veracity, and misled my neighbours by deceitful representations of my life and character. In this manner I had acted towards Molesworth. I had not laboured to correct, neither had I taken pains to perpetuate his errors. In acting thus I did not conceive myself culpable: but if his affection and esteem for me, as a wife, were to be retained on the same conditions as those on which I had preserved his friendship, might they not, with equal blamelessness, be adopted?

“He knew my self-accusations. He knew that I regarded my faults as inexpiable, and as such as unfitted me for the provinces of wife and mother; but he, nevertheless, placed his happiness in my acceptance. He exacted from me no confession. He was willing to take me as I was, with all my real, and imaginary and imputed imperfections. My guilt might, by some fatal accident, be whispered in his ear, and his love and my felicity be ended at once; but this was contingent, and might never happen, or happen remotely, when the long experience of my worth, the cement of offspring and the progress of his reason, might hinder it from producing fatal effects. This discovery might, indeed, be anticipated by myself. I might gradually acquire confidence in his fortitude, in the agreement between his theoretical and practical deductions; I might seize some propitious moment, and reveal to him my story, and my peace and his affection may survive the shock.

“He proposes to spend his life here, where I have remained thus long, untraced and unsuspected. Every day adds to my security, by lessening the number of witnesses, and weakening the memory, of my dishonour, and fortifying the incredulity of my husband and my friends, by supplying them with new proofs of my constancy and virtue.

“Such were the reasonings that at length induced me to compliance. I was married, and conferred that happiness on Molesworth which I shall never know. The colour of my thoughts was by no means uniform. My misgivings, as to the events of futurity, my doubts as to the rectitude of what I had done bred, in my secret thoughts, a melancholy which the caresses of my husband and my friends dispelled for a time, though sure to revisit me in solitude. I found new difficulties in disclosure, new humiliations in concealment, and new terrors in contemplating the texture of human events, by which the truth is finally drawn forth from all the obscurities and folds in which human ingenuity might wrap it. I shuddered to think on how slender a thread my felicity depended, and have suffered all the torments of foreboding, on a short journey or unexpected absence of my husband. I have waited his return with trembling, and watched, with unspeakable anxiety, his looks as soon as he appeared. I have been prone to misconstrue appearances, to impute inquietude or indisposition to some untoward occurrence, or malignant intimation of my guilt.

“All these causes of alarm were aggravated by our removal to this city, to which Molesworth was induced by considerations, to which it was impossible for me either to admit with cheerfulness, or strenuously to object. I have seldom walked out but from necessity. I have been studious to evade the scrutiny of passengers. In so large a concourse from all parts of the United

States, it is scarcely possible not to meet with some who knew me during my residence at Portsmouth.

“I have, unfortunately, encountered some of these. I have even attracted observation, and been overpowered with terror at tokens which were once given of an intention to accost me by one who knew me well in my father’s house. My suspicions have been ceaseless, my subterfuges to escape abhorred detection without number; but still I have seemed to be for ever tottering on the verge of destruction.—It was not long before a new event occurred to give a new form to my fears.

“You will judge of my confusion when I descried, from my chamber, on about three months ago, passing the street, Haywood himself. My confusion at this incident threw me into a fever, from which I recovered not without difficulty, and contrary to all my wishes.

“Haywood was never hated or upbraided by me, on account of any guilt that I imputed to him. He was, indeed, the author of all my distresses, and as such the sound of his name, and the recurrence of his image, produced loathing and abhorrence. To mistake another for him was impossible. I was, by turns, fondling my babe, and looking out upon the passengers, when he abruptly appeared in sight.

“My husband, happily for me, was not present. Had he been at my side, I should have been undone. My emotions not even his presence would have enabled me to subdue. As it was, his unsuspecting tenderness, his sympathy for my pain, stung me to the soul. Such is my unhappy lot, that every proof of tenderness from him whom I fondly love, only wrings my heart with new anguish, with anguish which nothing but proofs of his hatred would increase.

“Haywood I beheld for a moment only. How long he had been in this city, how often he had passed this door, how often he had passed me in the street, and by what mere accident he had been hitherto prevented from seeing and accosting me, I had no means of knowing. Whether he continued in this city, and whether I was still reserved for a meeting with him, were equally uncertain. I could not make inquiries. I could not suffer his name to pass my lips; but his image was ever in my thoughts. In passing the street, I dreaded to look up, for fear his eyes should suddenly meet mine.

On entering the house of another, my secret terrors whispered that Haywood might be there. At every return of my husband to his home, I shuddered, lest some dire occurrence had revealed to him my shame.

‘Shortly after I went into the country; but the change afforded me but slender relief. I was no longer in danger of meeting with Haywood, but my safety was still exposed to hourly hazard; my blood was chilled at the sight of every letter which came from Molesworth. Tremblingly I opened it, as if the painting of my nightly dream was to be realized, and I was to be overwhelmed with his curses and invectives.

“Little did I think, in the midst of all my fears, that danger of detection was increased by the rashness or folly of Haywood himself. Little did I think that he had confided the secret of my shame to another; that the strange youth whom we had received into our very bosom, was apprized of my guilt; and this has set, in its true light, the hollowness of my hopes; has shewn me how baseless is the confidence which I reposed in the ignorance of mankind respecting me.

“Thousands may possess your knowledge. Those who daily converse with me, my husband’s kindred and friends, may know my true character. They hate or despise me in their heart, and pity Molesworth’s delusion, while they greet me with welcomes and smiles. A thousand times may the breath of Slander have blighted my name, and my crimes have been the subject of malignant whispers in the very circles which I frequent.

“Here then are my hopes of conjugal peace and unsullied reputation at an end. I have lived, in spite of conviction, that I merited abhorrence and infamy; but I have lived, because my life, and the belief of my purity, contributed to the happiness of the best of men. What shall become of me when that belief is subverted—when he shall cast me from him as baneful and poisonous? That moment cannot long be deferred, and when it comes

Such were the terms of this affecting narrative. Having finished it, some engagement called her away, and she left me to muse upon it. It was a subject from which I could not withdraw my attention. My mind was continually busy in ruminating on this mournful tale.

“What various misery,” said I, “has flowed from a single lapse! How ceaselessly watchful should we be against the first step that deviates from rectitude! A moment of forgetfulness of duty has been thus fertile of calamity; has laid so wide a scene of ruin!

“Where will it end? Can no penitence expiate this guilt, and no wisdom prevent future evils? Is it not enough that the husband and the brother have perished? That all the happiness which the continuance of life to Calmer and Selwyn might have produced, was extinguished in their blood? Has heaven provided no resource against despair? no antidote to future errors?

“To save a life endangered by the folly and guilt of Haywood, this unfortunate woman broke her conjugal faith, contracted through pity to Colmer, whose infatuation was no less culpable. Her crime was followed by the despair of her husband, and the vengeance of her brother. These passions were the growth of errors no less deplorable, and have led to effects equally disastrous. But the mournful series is not at an end. The tranquillity of Molesworth is the child of ignorance and stratagem. At the moment of discovered truth, the phantom will vanish. What a series of errors generating errors, and disasters flowing from disasters!

“But is it certain that to know the truth will subvert his happiness? His wife has a right to plead her tenderness and fidelity to him, in excuse for past faults. Surely, in dispassionate eyes, her claim to pardon and to continuance of affection, cannot be disputed. Would it not be wise, at least, to make trial of his equity and fortitude?

“She will never be persuaded to confession. Another must perform that task; but there is no substitute but myself, and as to me, would it not be madness and outrage to undertake a province like that? Have I not sworn to conceal her shame; and what, if, in the hope of effecting much good, I should violate my promise; what if Molesworth should prove to possess all the passions of an husband and a lover; if the happiness hitherto enjoyed should melt away from his grasp, like the phantom of sleep; and anger and hatred should succeed to pity and love; how shall I indure to behold the effects of my fatal interposition?”

No wonder that while such were my reveries, you should perceive embarrassment and thoughtfulness in my deportment. How little, when your eyes were compassionately fixed upon me, and they seemed to say—“Harry! what is the matter with you?” how little did you suspect what was passing within! And what answer, had I spoken the truth, should I have given to your question?

For some time after this interview, no opportunity occurred of renewing conversation of this topic. I saw a secret wish to this end on your wife’s looks, which seemed to fluctuate between curiosity and terror. It was only when your uncle’s sickness called you from town, that we could hope for uninterrupted conversation. You left us at noon, and intended, or expected not to return till next morning.

The day was past in separate occupations, or in the presence of visit—ants or servants. In the evening, we seated ourselves alone, and your wife took up some needlework. She did not, as usual, ask me to read to her. She sometimes sighed, and the handkerchief was often raised to

wipe away the mist that suffused her sight. At length, after a prelude of mournful silence, she stopt the needle, and said, in a tremulous voice:—

“We are now alone, Henry, and I may say to you something that—you will not wonder that I am desirous of knowing more of—Selwyn—my brother. You told me he had died, lately, in New-York—you know the circumstances.”

I understood her wishes, but was thrown into extreme embarrassment, by this disclosure of them. How could the truth of Selwyn’s destiny be disclosed to the sister? I was silent. She looked at me, and saw the marks of my inquietude. She was affected in her turn, and sunk into thoughtfulness.

Recovering from this reverie, she again spoke—“Tell me, where; how did he die?”

I was unable to answer. I could not deceive or prevaricate, and the truth could not be told.

“Why, are you silent? Tell me, Henry, how did he die? He was not in poverty I hope. How long had he lived in New-York? Was he not in good repute? It is long since I saw that sweet face.”

“He was not poor. He was in good repute. All that knew him, esteemed his probity and manners. He had arrived but a few days before.”

“Some sudden sickness, perhaps. How was it? Tell me!”

I was silent.

“Do you know the cause of his death?”

“I know it.”

“Then tell it me. Why should you conceal it? Knowing, as I do, that he is dead, surely I can bear to hear the manner of his death.”

I shook my head—“I am not sure of that.”

Her anxiety increased. “Was there any thing extraordinary in his death? Perhaps it was a sudden stroke.”

“It was.”

“Alas! But he was among his friends, I hope. He did not suffer through negligence or inattention.”

“He did not.”

“Why then do you look so sadly? Why hesitate to tell me the particulars? A lingering death is not better than a sudden one. In whose house did he breathe his last? At what hour? By what disease?”

“Under no roof. It was at midnight. By no disease.”

At these words, her heart throbbed with new violence, and her faltering increased—“Surely—he owed not his death—he owed his death—”

“To Haywood! whom your brother had pursued for years to avenge your shame in his blood. They met; the defiance was received, and your brother fell.”

Let me not attempt to paint the effect of these tidings. An hour after, when the tears whose assuaging influence had been for a long time, withheld, began to flow, and to impart some relief, you entered—unexpected and unwished by either, you entered the apartment.

Here I must stop. I have complied with your request. I have told you all that I know. I parted from you, in no fear for the life of my benefactress and friend, but—she is dead!—