

ticularly inattentive to her, and, in fact, had for some weeks neglected to call ; but as he now required her services, he made two or three attempts to see her at her own house, where she had the firmness to deny herself to him. However, as Alfred made it a standing rule never to commit himself by writing letters, though he carefully preserved those addressed to himself, he determined to await the *fête champêtre* at Madame de Geigenklang's villa, which was to take place in a few days, and where he knew he should meet Lady Catesby, and he doubted not he should soon obtain her co-operation, either by flattery or threats ; which latter was a weapon he never employed but as a last resource ; for he knew that Caspar was not more inextricably bound to the Demon, than the guilty but unfortunate Lady Catesby to himself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day of the Baroness's *fête*, which was to give Alfred the opportunity of seeing Lady Catesby, and which was so eagerly expected by those who were bidden, and so galling to those who were not invited, at length arrived: Hyde-park, St. James's-street, and the windows of the Clubs, were as forlorn and deserted as if it had been the month of September ; a few beaux were alone to be seen skulking along, as if ashamed of their loneliness. The road leading to the goal of pleasure was in the mean time crowded with gay and splendid equipages, hurrying with all the rapidity of life and death towards the spot ; their respective owners having put forth all the force of their stables, and all the splendour and neatness of their households. Here might be seen the semi-modern ducal coach, solemnly rolling after its train of six ponderous black Normans, their tails carefully gathered up, and confined by a profusion of massy buckles and well-polished straps, and their flanks fuming under the weight of their trappings ; the box at the same time appearing to groan under the

pressure of the huge and important body of the coachman, his vast circumference apparently bursting through the bonds of purple and silver lace by which it was confined, and his round and rubicund visage glowing in all the rosy demonstrations of unlimited October, from beneath a quaint three-cornered hat, and a triple battery of curls; his respectable deputy on the leader, ebbing and flowing in his saddle with the gravity of a senator, now and then mechanically casting his eyes back at the throne of his patron, his head decked with a gold-fringed velvet cap and his body enveloped in a *coutée*, having more the appearance of an ancient tabard than the light and airy jacket of a modern postilion; while an escort of three outriders, not less remarkable for the retrospective formality of their costume and the formidable size of their holsters, rose and sunk on their horses in front, with the regularity of the pistons of a steam-engine. Next might be observed the neat and fashionable britcka of some wealthy banker's lady, "following" with such lightness and ease as scarcely to require the exertion of the four thorough-bred grays, (apparently attached to it more as a matter of show than necessity,) whose neat and simple black harness, light and compact postilions, with their well-cleaned gloves and leathers, admirably-polished boots, white hats, and striped jackets, preceded by the dapper groom, and guarded by two spruce footmen on the hinder dicky, showed the modern taste and fortune of the owner, and was perhaps emblematic of the rapidity of the lady's elevation in the world. Farther on, the attention and alarm of the spectators were awakened by four or five young men in an open caleche who were endeavouring to urge their conductors, by dint of extra payment, to take as much as possible out of four of Mr. Newman's posters, paying back with the hurry and importance of cabinet messengers, and urging their blue or yellow jacketed drivers to risk their own necks and the limbs of the passing passengers, by the unnecessary and cruel rapidity of their speed. Then might be seen the simple but exquisitely-built chariot of some Peer, who, with affected contempt and indifference for all the pomp of heraldic bearings, exhibited no other symbol of his rank than a small and almost imperceptible coronet on the dark-green pan-

nel ; while a pair of high-stepping roans, driven by a coachman in a plain dark-gray frock, unadorned hat, and attended by a footman not less unassuming in his attire, gave sufficient proof that this simplicity had cost the noble inmate more intense study and calculation, and that there was no less vanity in the getting up of this laboured simplicity, than there would have been in the display of splendour more in union with his rank and fortune. Intermixed amidst a string of cabriolets, post-chaises, and vehicles of various descriptions, one might easily distinguish the equipage of some second-rate foreign minister, by the large coloured cockades, the glazed hats, and the mixture of filth and finery of the servants—not to forget the countless display of crosses, crests, mottoes, and quarterings emblazoned on the pannels of an ill-built chariot, the raw-boned jobs disguised in dull harness, together with that complete want of neatness and *ensemble* which is so perfectly characteristic of a foreign “turn out.” In short, the road to — and thence to the Baroness’s villa, was one continued cavalcade of animated splendour ; and ere the guests had arrived at Beau Regard, and had been welcomed by the respectable Townshend, they had already enjoyed to repletion all the prefatory dust, hair-breadth escapes, scratched pannels, and admiration, which are the usual forerunners of these entertainments.

Every necessity which taste could devise or wealth procure was put into requisition by the Baron and his Lady to render this fête one of the most distinguished of its kind ; nothing was omitted which could afford amusement or gratification either to the eyes or palates of the guests ; while Nature, who so often evinces her caprice and ill-humour on such occasions, was kind enough to withhold her accompaniment of rain. The walks and greenswards presented no danger for the thinnest shoe or most delicate constitution ; and the hair of the fair guests continued as “crisp” and compact on their brows as though they had that moment been liberated from the hands of Plaisir or Truefit. Smiling faces and a cloudless sky, laughing eyes and bright sun-beams, might be seen in all directions, and it appeared as if every individual of the party had shaken off their sorrows and chagrins for the

day. Corn Bills and Catholic Questions seemed to be forgotten by the senator; the stiffest and most mysterious diplomatists unbent their brows, and ceased to occupy themselves with the thought of Carbonaris and Constitutionals. Bankers kept their hands out of their pockets, and even the great Golden Bull of the city appeared pleased at exchanging for a few hours the sight of the black and mammon-like visages of his Israelite brethren, for that of the lovely countenances of the Christian damsels who were smiling around. The situation of Beau Regard, and the fine views which it commanded over the distant country, were well worthy of its name, and augmented in no small degree the beauty of the scene in the eyes of those who could spare a few moments from the serious operations of flirting and eating, to admire the prospect.

The mansion was built about midway on the gentle declivity of a range of hills, which, sinking gradually to the right and left, formed a species of sylvan amphitheatre round a portion of the park and grounds, and then lost themselves in the neighbouring vales. It was completely skreened from the eastern and northern winds by massive clumps of forest trees, or belts of thriving plantations which fringed the ridges of the eminences above, or feathered the gullies and undulations which intersected their flanks. A large sheet of water, so well contrived and disposed as to represent a natural river, flowed at the farther extremity of the park, where several head of cattle, half immersed in the stream, were seeking coolness and refreshment from the heat of the day; while a herd of deer were reposing amidst the fern which clothed its banks, tossing their antlers and agitating their ears to protect them from the flies. The beautiful and admirably distributed flower-gardens and pleasure-grounds, which extended in an easy slope to a considerable distance on either side the house, were laid out in the most perfect taste and science, and were divided from the park by a light invisible fence. Every species of indigenous or exotic plant which could attract the eye by the brilliancy of its colours, or delight the sense by the fragrance of its perfumes, were classed in distinct masses, or blended together so as to give relief and variety to each other. Here baskets formed of light bark, and suspended

by sylvan chains made from the fruit of the pine tree, were filled with several kinds of the most rare and costly geraniums ; while wreaths of convolvuli, cobæas, and other parasitical plants, twisted their light fibres around their fragile supporters, and gave them the appearance of garlands woven by some fairy hand. Parterres of the most graceful and informal shape intersected the lawns, and were interspersed with marble pedestals supporting classic vases filled with daturas, oleanders, or orange trees in full bloom. On one side, beds of many coloured larkspurs, varying as the tints of the rainbow, or masses of heliotropes, and carnations, were confined by a net work of iron ; around which the variegated ivy, creeping jasmine, or eglantine, interwove their slender stems ; while the passion-flower and papyrus, twisting themselves round the arching handles, flung their light blossoms around at the mercy of the breeze. On the other hand, baskets of odoriferous tube-roses shot their white and scented blossoms from amidst a mass of dazzling *cardinalis*, whose brilliant crimson flowers concealed the long and barren stems of the tender exotic. Shaded by the pendant branches of the tulip-tree, a statue of Diana caught the spectator's eye, as she stood half concealed amidst a mimic grove of the most costly camelias. Upon an elevated bed, planted with the most rare and brilliant roses, enclosed by a trellis-work of osier, and raised above the surrounding flowers, the God of Love, with quiver full of arrows and bow already bent, stood prepared to lance his weapon from amidst the blossoms.

In the centre of the parterres flowed a cool and bubbling fountain, whose oval basin was composed of spars, crystals, and fragments of various minerals, clothed with flowering lichens and other alpine plants, which had taken root between the interstices ; while its waters were half concealed by the broad and glossy leaves of a tribe of *nymphaea*, whose snow-white blossoms, or yellow buds, were now and then agitated by the gold and silver fish which frisked beneath their shade. Beneath the sweeping branches of an immense cedar, the band of one of the regiments of guards excited the admiration of the guests by the brilliancy and execution with which they performed several morsels of martial music. Farther, within a fan-

tastic pavilion, a troop of musicians, in the habits of Italian virtuosi, called forth shouts of applause, as they accompanied some pieces of music arranged for the occasion, with the sounds of penny trumpets, rattles, bird whistles, and cuckoo calls, which produced a degree of harmony, comic it is true, but inconceivable to those who have not witnessed the effect. Colinet and his minstrels, stationed in a rustic ball-room, attracted those who felt inclined to exercise themselves in the dance, if they did not prefer to remain spectators of a ballet performed by the principal artists of the Opera, in a sylvan theatre erected for the purpose, or to listen to a concert in the mansion, where the most distinguished foreign vocalists were putting forth all the vigour of their science. Beneath a temple dedicated to Pomona, stood Mr. Gunter, (worthy representative of the good old man who so often in our youth rewarded our incipient capers with refreshments from his own hand,) superintending a group of attendants in the costume of Valencian gardeners, who either offered bouquets of fragrant flowers to the sentimental, or more substantial viands to the epicure, from a buffet which was loaded with a profusion of the most delicious and rare fruits. Under the shade of a cool grotto, dressed as a Russian Moujek, stood the ingenious Mr. Jarrin, holding forth the temptations of ices, cool sherberts, and all the other treasures of his art; while the Baron's *maître d'hôtel*, as a Vintner from Epernay, was firing a continued *feu de joie* from an inexhaustible battery of champagne in a mimic cabaret. Deeper in the woods, a small band of wind instruments appealed in vain to the attention of the many, though it was from this spot that the view was most beautiful. Hence the eye wandered over a hundred rich and fertile valleys, teeming with towns, villages, and spires, until it rested on the Surry and Hampshire hills, whose dark blue flanks and chalky summits alternately gloomed in the shade of the fleeting clouds, or glittered for a while ere they melted into flakes of gold and purple, as they mingled with the bright and gorgeous beams of the sun which appeared resting on their summits. In the intervening space, thousands of villas, churches, and rural habitations, reared themselves like sparkling opals from amidst the trees, shining and glistening like plates of

burnished metal, as the rays of the evening illumined their casements.

A singular contrast to this gay prospect was formed by the black and cloud-capped aspect of the vast city, which stretched its ancient, huge, and endless masses of dark masonry over an extent of country which the eye could scarcely embrace; while the cupola of the metropolitan church on one side, and the towers of the abbey on the other, peeping from above the mist, appeared like some huge giant reposing amidst a chaos of rocks, and of whom the head and feet alone were visible. A long and tortuous wreath of light vapour, taking its rise far inland, marked the mazy course of the Thames, as it twined and rolled itself around the Berkshire and Oxford hills, or watered the plains in the vicinity of the city, where for a while it blended itself with its dark mists, and then appeared to the southward, converted into a broad expanse of water, crowded with myriads of masts, or whitened with the sails of numerous nations, wafting the produce and wealth of the world into the very heart of the capital.

But we must return to Alfred, who had been long waiting for an opportunity of conversing with Lady Catesby, and who, to the annoyance of the former, for the first time in her life, appeared to be attacked with a sudden fit of conjugal tenderness, and scarcely quitted her husband's side for ten minutes during the afternoon. Alfred plainly saw that this access of attachment for Sir Lawrence was not likely to be of long continuance, and he smiled as he saw her Ladyship tormenting herself with listening to what she always considered the prosy observations of the Baronet, while she would have given the world to have been waltzing or flirting. "This does not last an hour longer," said Alfred to himself, "or we shall have her fainting with restrained passion. I see she is fighting and working herself into a storm; but lime does not hold a bird more firmly than I hold you, my Lady." He had remarked that Lady Catesby not only avoided him, but that she had received with coolness and ill-humour the few words he had addressed to her during the morning: this, on any other occasion, would have been a sufficient pretext for his getting rid at once of any woman whom he was tired of, but she was

necessary to his plans at present, and he therefore resolved to dissemble.

At length the moment he had foretold arrived, and he saw her hastening alone to join a party, who were proceeding to walk round the grounds. Crossing the gardens, he contrived to head her, as a sportsman would say, in such a manner as to prevent her escape; and as soon as he was at her side, he immediately held out his hand, which she, however, declined; then, in the softest and most feeling tone, he exclaimed, "What! does Laura, I beg her pardon, Lady Catesby, refuse me even this slight mark of friendship?" Her Ladyship had watched the expression of Alfred's countenance, when he uttered these few words; but she could gather nothing from a face which never betrayed his real sentiments, and which he could, with consummate skill, adapt to the purpose of the moment. "Have I deserved this?" continued Alfred; "no, rather say at once you are tired of me; it would be more honourable to you, more kind to me, Lady Catesby, to confess that you are importuned by my attentions;—but speak, for God's sake! I cannot bear this cold, this cruel suspense."

After gazing earnestly at his face for some seconds, Lady Catesby answered: "Mr. Milton's conscience must sufficiently inform him that his conduct has deserved no warmer reception. There was a time when his manner was far otherwise; when, although he possessed a secret important to me as my life, yet he did not then treat me with insult and contempt, nor goad me with the degrading recollection of my being at his mercy."

"Dearest Laura," replied Alfred, "your accusations are most unjust; you are dearer, more necessary to me than ever. I own I have been in fault, but I was hurt and piqued at your apparent estrangement, and the preference you seemed to accord to Lord Taunton. Therefore, I confess I did *boudé* a little, being, as you know, too proud to make the first overtures, and I have therefore sighed and suffered in silence."

"Say, rather, that you have been sighing for Miss Manby," retorted her Ladyship; "say that you were only waiting for a pretext to cast me off, and that you have found another, who, if she fall into your snares, will, in her turn,

be forsaken and degraded like myself. But speak, Sir ; for once be candid ; when is it your intention to expose me ?" How long is it your good pleasure that I may continue to show myself in the world ?"

Alfred plainly saw that jealousy was the principal cause of Lady Catesby's anger, and he flattered himself, with a little exertion on his part, he should soon re-establish himself in her affection ; he therefore gently took her hand, pressed it to his breast, and exclaimed, in a voice of assumed emotion, " Oh, Laura, you little know the misery you cause me by your cruel suspicions ; have I not given you every proof of my devotion and attachment ? How can you suppose for an instant that I could be capable of any act which could disturb your happiness ?"

" Deceiver, arch deceiver !" exclaimed Lady Catesby, still leaving her hand in his.

Alfred saw his advantage, and continued : " While you, Laura, have been fostering these wicked, cruel suspicions, my only desire has been to consult you on a subject of the deepest interest to us both."

" Interest !" rejoined Lady Catesby ; " what interest can there be in common between us for the future ? you cannot deceive me."

" Be patient, for God's sake !" rejoined the other, " and you will find that it is a matter of the most urgent importance to us both."

" It must, indeed, be a most desperate case, which can induce Mr. Milton to condescend to consult the opinion of a person whom he has thought proper to treat with even more than the wonted insolence and ingratitude with which he is accustomed to repay every favour, every kindness he may have received, let the sacrifices made for him be what they will."

" Ingratitude ! Laura ; what can be your meaning ?" exclaimed Alfred, with a forced sigh of tenderness, while he was cursing her in his heart ; " is it thus you receive me, when my object is to draw the bonds which unite us still more closely ; when I am about to ask your advice and assistance ? For where can I apply for counsel more appropriately than to Lady Catesby, when skill, prudence, and female charms are required ?"

"What new scheme of wickedness has your fertile genius invented?" said Lady Catesby, withdrawing her hand: "who now is to be seduced,—who is to be ruined? What friend's wife or daughter is to be sacrificed? Whose horse is to be dosed? whose jockey to be bribed?"

"Have I deserved this language? can these reproaches flow from your mouth, Laura, with any degree of justice?" replied Alfred: "what, in Heaven! can have produced this sudden gust of passion, or rather what demon?"

"Demon!" rejoined the lady, with a look of bitterness, while a tear glistened in her eye; "that demon is yourself, Sir. Is it not enough that I was already sufficiently lost in my own estimation? Was not I sinful enough already, but you must add to my abasement? Is it not enough that I should have placed myself in your power, that I should have sacrificed the honour of my husband to purchase your secrecy? And yet, forsooth, lie not! you come to insult my misery and increase my shame, by desiring me to participate in some new crime which you are planning."

Lady Catesby had uttered this speech in a manner which plainly convinced Alfred that jealousy and wounded vanity had more to do with her displeasure than repentance or remorse: he therefore replied in the same affected voice: "Indeed, dearest Laura, I am at a loss to imagine to what you allude; what hateful tale-bearer has poisoned your mind against me, and filled your brain with fantasies, which, could I love you more, or was I less hurt, I should either laugh at or resent; but were your suspicions as true as they are unfounded, even then I should not have merited these harsh and cruel remarks."

"What is there you do not merit?" retorted Lady Catesby, who became every moment more irritated. "Do not pretend to trifle with my feelings any longer. I am well informed of your love, or rather your passion, for Miss Manby; for to call it love, where you are concerned, would be a mockery of the word. What, Sir, even this unfortunate orphan cannot escape you?" added her Ladyship, whose manner betrayed the most violent agitation; "but she shall, Sir; I will protect her—I will warn her against your treachery—I will unravel your plans, and, sooner than you should succeed, I will sacrifice myself, and bid her take

BB 7 orda

warning from my example. She shall learn to hate you as you deserve ; you shall become as odious and abhorrent to her, as the veiled prophet to the trembling Zeleika."

Alfred, who was little prepared for this violent resistance on the part of Lady Catesby, though she had often before broken out into fits of passion, had considerable difficulty to restrain his own rising anger ; but it was urgent for him that Emily Manby should be persuaded to take the step he wished her to adopt, and as he knew that she had a great regard for Lady Catesby, of whose character and history the former was ignorant, he determined to yield to her Ladyship's violence, and still endeavoured to soften and tune her to his purpose.

"Indeed, Laura, you do yourself and me the greatest injustice : if love has ever been profaned by me, if I have proved faithless and unkind to others, you, at least, ought not to taunt me with my want of constancy. Who is it, beautiful Laura, who has rendered all her sex indifferent to me ; who is it who has enthralled my heart, and for whom have I earned the reputation of being inconstant and volatile ? Whose charms have blinded me to the perfections of all other women ; for whom have I renounced the splendid marriages which it was in my power to contract ; and for whom have I formed and entered into a plot, which, if it succeed, will prove to you, dearest Laura, that for your sake I am ready to sacrifice every tie in life, and that I have no object in wishing to acquire a large fortune, but that I may participate my happiness with you ?"

"Avaunt, tempter !" cried her Ladyship, though evidently much softened by the fervour and apparent sincerity which Alfred threw into his words and manner—"avaunt ! there is poison in every syllable which escapes your lips—death lurks in your speech. Wo, wo to the woman who confides in you !"

"Laura, my dear Laura," rejoined Alfred, already aware of the advantage he was gaining ; "calm these angry transports, and do not reject my confidence."

"Confidence !" retorted her Ladyship ; "every word you utter is fraught with falsehood. What ! are you not content with the degree of abasement into which you have cast me, but you must now add to the upbraidings of my

conscience, by making me the depository of your infamous schemes upon another—for infamous they must be, whenever a woman is the object of your views ?”

Alfred was now beginning to get extremely tired of this scene, and would willingly have thrown her Ladyship over the steep bank where they were standing ; but he determined to make one other effort, ere he resorted to his usual reserve of menaces, which on more than one occasion he had been obliged to bring into action. “ Laura,” said he, “ this conduct is too cruel ! I plainly perceive it is your object to quarrel with me—be it so ; the day will come when you will learn to appreciate the value of the heart you have rejected. It is unnecessary, it would be useless, for me, under your present state of mind, to attempt to enter into the subject for which I anxiously sought an interview. All I shall therefore say is, I hate and despise Miss Manby,—but now farewell ! we never speak again. May he, for whom you thus abandon and reject me, never give you cause to regret your injustice and mal-treatment of the unhappy Alfred—” and then, squeezing a few tears into his eye, he pressed her hand, and exclaimed “ God bless you !” and pretended to turn from her.

Lady Catesby, who was visibly affected by this last effort, ran towards him, placed her hand upon his arm, and looking earnestly in his face, said : “ Do you indeed hate Miss Manby ? Are you really sincere ; are you not deceiving me ? Is it not true that you wish to make use of me as a tool, to forward your views upon her ? Have you no intention to marry her, or—”

“ Marry !” retorted Alfred, interrupting her with a laugh ; “ marry ! I—I, Alfred Milton, marry a sentimental girl, and pass the rest of my days, ‘ *à filer le parfait amour*,’ in a cottage ! I renounce my liberty and my love for Lady Catesby for an unknown orphan for the sake of a few paltry thousands ! How little you know me ! how completely you undervalue your own empire over me ! No—no, Laura ; the lion does not stoop to the mole. Married, it is true, she must be, but not to me.”

“ What !” rejoined Lady Catesby, whose jealousy again took fire ; “ married ! that you may with less inconvenience add her to the list of those unhappy creatures who have

nothing left but to hate the day that first threw them in your way. I was convinced there must be some scheme of this kind passing in your mind."

"A moment's patience," replied Alfred, "and you will find you are mistaken and misinformed; and beware lest I punish your informant; beware lest I revenge this conduct on your new admirer, Lord Taunton, for to him alone I am indebted for this treatment."

"You may kill the coxcomb on the spot," answered the lady, "but his death would not alter my opinions; he has told me nothing that I did not know before."

"I shall take an opportunity," rejoined Alfred, "of calling your noble lover to account, for thus daring to occupy himself with me. Could not the coxcomb content himself with his own rapid success with you, Laura—you were wont to have better taste—without meddling in my affairs? But listen a moment, and I will explain my meaning. Miss Manby must be married! nay, start not, and that speedily, to my cousin Herbert!"

"What!" exclaimed Lady Catesby, "must your own family, must your friend, the son of the man from whom I know you have received benefits, the cousin to whom you are so deeply indebted,—must he be selected from all London to bear the disgrace which you intend to heap upon him? This is indeed carrying your ingratitude and wickedness too far. I will have none of your confidence, Sir; I must indeed be lost and degraded, that you can thus dare to make me the depository of such horrible projects."

"If you imagine, Laura," rejoined he, "that I have a grain of passion, since you will not allow that I am capable of loving; if you suppose that I entertain a thought of Miss Manby, in any other light than as a stepping-stone to fortune, you do me wrong, and vilely underrate my talents."

"Then what can be your object? how can Miss Manby, unless you marry her yourself, be in any way instrumental to the advancement of your fortune?"

"Aye, there hangs the mystery," answered Alfred: "but you will see, Laura, that I have more confidence in your discretion, than you have in my morals or genius."

Listen : I know Miss Manby loves, has long been attached to my cousin. I have drawn her by degrees to betray the secret, and I am equally aware that Herbert is not less in love with her. I have indeed the certainty of the fact, from his letters, which have all been placed in my possession, through the agency of Perez."

"Perez!" exclaimed Lady Catesby; "what! your old valet!"

"The same," replied Alfred. "Well, it is my ardent desire to see them united, they love each other, and she is comparatively rich. In forwarding my own views, I ensure their happiness, I have there a double motive; regard for my cousin and my own interest. Besides," added he, "I wish to prove to you, Laura, that I am not the wicked, cold-hearted being which my enemies would persuade you is my nature,—no, marry they must, and then, in completing their felicity, my triumph over my calumniators will be complete. But, to effect this, there are many obstacles to be overcome. Sir Herbert's opposition, and Miss Manby's disinclination to marry Herbert without the consent of his father, not to mention my cousin's absurd prejudices about parental duty, obedience, and all the other goodly sentiments with which he will oppose my plans. But seriously, I have his happiness alone in view."

"You most consummate hypocrite!" rejoined Lady Catesby; "never did a spark of generosity or kindness enter your brain; or if it did, you were not then in your senses. But no more of this fooling; if you wish me to listen a moment longer, throw off the mask at once, declare your intentions without reserve, or leave me—leave me, for ever!"

"Well, then, to be plain," answered Alfred, "Herbert, you know, is an only son. He stands alone between me and his father's fortune, though, I flatter myself, I possess a larger share of the old Indian's favour."

"Plain, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Catesby, with a sincere look of alarm. "Good God! Sir, you make me tremble at my own thoughts. Perez!" added her Ladyship, meditating a moment,—“Perez was your servant, he was discharged by your cousin, he received money from

you as the price of his treachery, and the accounts of his being attacked and nearly assassinated by this very man at Lisbon were received last night by Mr. Sidney and Lady Milton."

"I am as well aware of that as you are," returned Alfred coolly; "I have heard from him myself; but, indeed," continued he with a smile of contempt, "your Ladyship is carrying your joke a little too far, to suppose me capable of getting up such a melodrame. No, madam, there is no necessity for my recurring to the bare bodkin, though in the event of Herbert's death, or of his dying without children, I should, it is true, inherit his fortune."

"Well, then," exclaimed Lady Catesby, who endeavoured to restrain her alarm, as she felt convinced Alfred was in some measure connected with the attack on Herbert, of which she had heard the details from Sidney,—“what can be your object in wishing your cousin to marry, and by this means most probably cut yourself off from all chance of the inheritance you covet?”

"Nothing can be more simple or more certain," replied the other. "In the first place, I know beyond all doubt that my uncle will disinherit his son, the instant he marries Miss Manby; in the next place, I am acquainted with the names of her parents, which secret is a sufficient guarantee to me, that Sir Herbert never would forgive his son, and that I infallibly step into his shoes."

"Good God!" exclaimed Lady Catesby "had I not reason to say you were a demon? By what black art have you discovered a circumstance which baffled all the researches of the Manbys for years? Are you the Wandering Jew, or Asmodeus?"

"It matters not how I became possessed of this secret," answered he; "suffice it to say, that the knowledge of this circumstance, though it has cost me dear, will amply repay me in the end; it shall be of more value in my hands than the mystery of the philosopher's stone itself."

"Beware," cried Lady Catesby, "most potent alchymist, that you do not perish by the exhalations from your own crucible!"

"Fear not," continued Alfred, "and do but lend me

your assistance to persuade Miss Manby to accept my cousin with or without his father's consent ; my fortune will then be made, and your debts as well as my own acquitted ; and surely you will not refuse your aid when you are certain to ensure the happiness of your young friend."

"I will never lend myself again to any of your schemes, Mr. Milton," rejoined Lady Catesby, "unless you declare most fully every previous circumstance, every probable result ; I will not, Sir, commit myself farther in any of your complots, unless my eyes are completely opened to the consequences ; therefore, at once reveal the secret of Emily's parentage, as well as the results you anticipate from your machinations."

"As far as regards Miss Manby," replied Alfred, "I fear I must deny your wish. I have sworn, solemnly sworn, never to divulge the secret ; and you well know," added he, with a significant look, "I can now and then keep my promises on this head ; for the rest, as I have before said, it is my grand object to induce Herbert to marry Miss Manby without the consent of his father, and it is necessary that you should use all your influence and art to persuade her to consent. You know, moreover, that she is independent ; and although Sir Herbert disinherits his son, they will even then have a very good income."

"Your plan," she immediately replied, "is worthy of Machiavelli himself ; it is a masterpiece of craft and wickedness, and I had, indeed, undervalued your talent for mischief ; but I will tell you fairly, that, unless you at once disclose the secret of Emily's birth, you must not reckon on my co-operation."

"Ask not an impossibility," answered Alfred. "I have not only sworn never to divulge what has been communicated to me, but I am bound by a heavy penalty—the success of my schemes also depends on the concealment of this circumstance—and you, at least, should be the last person in the world who should feel displeased at my proving that there are secrets which I can withhold from my dearest, most confidential friends."

"So, Sir," retorted Lady Catesby, "you wish to draw

me into a participation of your crimes ; you think you may safely make use of me as a blind and willing instrument to advance your fortunes, and yet you withhold from me the most important information, and merely affect to honour me with half confidences. But you have taught me lessons of caution, Mr. Milton, and I shall therefore adopt your own maxim, of never playing a card without calculating those in your adversaries' hand."

"Laura," rejoined Alfred, "this is too absurd ; you are really drawing too largely on my patience—it cannot be—therefore pray carry on this farce no longer. You well know that it is for the interest of both of us that we should continue friends, and your assistance at present is the price of my future friendship."

"And the price of my assistance," retorted Lady Catsby, "is your entire confidence ! You know my terms."

"Beware," rejoined Alfred, "that you do not exhaust my good nature !"

"Beware, Sir," replied the Lady, "that I do not divulge your infamous connexion with Perez ;—take care that I do not communicate the whole tissue of your villany to your cousin and Lady Milton !"

"Your Ladyship is at liberty to make what use you please of the knowledge you have obtained of my affairs ; you may, if you judge it prudent, repay my honourable silence, by your treacherous gossip :—" and then casting at her a look of mixed disdain and fury, he added, "but beware, woman, how you trifle with the sleeping tiger ! a word from your lips, a hint, a look which may disclose my plans, nay more, your refusal to assist them to the utmost of your power, and I forthwith publish your letters in every journal in England ; I make known your intrigues, and your former conduct ; and we will then see whether the ravings of your virtuous Ladyship will have greater effect with my cousin and the world, than my simple proofs. But I waste my time in talking to a woman, whom I had spared hitherto, because I despised her. You have been, and are useful to me still, madam ; improve this ability, or dread the consequences. But enough ; I once more caution you to beware, or I shake you off, and cast you into the mire from whence you sprung !"

"Monster of insolence and ingratitude!" screamed the now almost raving Lady Catesby; "I defy your malice! I scorn your treachery!"

"As you please, madam," rejoined Alfred, calmly and scornfully tapping her arm with his cane: "in the mean time, look narrowly to yourself; you are in my power, and you shall feel it. You are my victim, and you shall not escape me." Then, with a short sardonic laugh, he turned upon his heel, darted through the trees, and, arriving at the house by a circuitous path, entered into immediate conversation with one of the groups, with an air of reserve and timidity, as if he were the most shy and awkward person in the universe.

To depict the various emotions of Lady Catesby's mind after this scene would be impossible: shame, fear, hatred, and jealousy, racked her bosom; the violence of her passion was too much for her frame, and she sunk fainting in one of the garden chairs, nor was it for some minutes that she was enabled to totter towards the house, where she immediately retired to the Baroness's dressing-room, and, desiring her carriage to be ordered, sent for Sir Lawrence, and then making her excuses to her hostess, was in the course of a short time on her road home.

It would be impossible to present a better moral lesson, or a more forcible warning to all those who are on the eve of plunging themselves into similar immoralities, and disregard of every principle of virtue, than that offered by the wretched Lady Catesby. Who is there that would not pause ere they sacrificed themselves for ever, ere they cast themselves into that awful gulph from which years of repentance cannot redeem their consciences, even if the world shall have forgotten their errors? Who is there that would not shudder at the consequences of guilt, could they but feel for a moment the dreadful agonies which tore the heart of the miserable Laura, rendered still more acute by the gentleness and affectionate manner of her injured husband?

Sir Lawrence was aware that his wife was giddy, unthinking, and vain of her personal charms, but he reposed the utmost confidence and reliance on her virtue. He saw she was fond of admiration; but he trusted that time,

and a little experience, would contribute to correct these faults, which he attributed to the flatteries of the world, rather than to any propensity to evil. He had, it is true, ventured to remonstrate with her upon the eternal thirst she exhibited for "going out," but this was done from the fear of her health being injured by the constant round of dissipation in which her days were passed : he had moreover most earnestly entreated her to check the continued attentions of Mr. Alfred Milton, whom he justly represented as a young man of the most dangerous character ; but his remonstrance did not arise from any mistrust in her, but from his dread, lest her reputation should suffer in the opinion of the world, which he well knew is not wont to be over lenient in its judgments on similar occasions. Far, however, from being desirous to control Lady Catesby in the moderate and rational enjoyment of amusements becoming her rank and station, Sir Lawrence was even pleased and flattered at her success in society, which success he attributed entirely to her own merits and charms. Although his own occupations, and the fatigues of his duties, left him little leisure, and still less inclination for late hours, and hot rooms, yet he was anxious that she should obtain a footing in the most select and distinguished society. Indeed, in this matter he evinced a degree of eagerness almost inconsistent with his character and avocations. If a party was announced at Carlton House, or any other place proportionably select, Sir Lawrence was in a perfect fever until the card or note of invitation made its appearance ; and it then afforded him considerable gratification in arranging these fashionable passports in a conspicuous position, on the side of the great mirror, over the chimney-piece. In the present instance he evinced the utmost tenderness and sympathy for Lady Catesby ; and as she had scarcely quitted his arm for more than half an hour previous to his being sent for to the Baroness's *boudoir*, he was the more pleased with her for having afforded him (what he mistook for) so great a proof of her attention to his wishes respecting Alfred.

Immediately upon their arrival in Stanhope-street, Lady Catesby retired to her own apartment, told her husband she merely required repose ; and as soon as he quitted

the room, she hastily undressed herself, and then, dismissing her attendants, fastened the door, and gave way to all the bitterness of her feelings, which were still more acute from her having endeavoured to suppress her agitation during their drive to town.

For some time the unhappy lady continued pacing up and down her chamber with a hurried step, alternately bursting forth in torrents of convulsive tears and sobs, or uttering a short hysteric laugh, still more torturing to her bosom. The guilt of the past, the horror of the present, and her dread of the future; the remembrance of her parent who had died heart-broken on her elopement; her jealousy, her still unextinguished passion for Alfred, her conscience-stricken fears for her husband, all united to distract her mind with the most violent emotions of terror, shame, and remorse. The thought of Alfred's cruel and pitiless threats, the conviction that she durst not attempt to free herself from the odious bondage in which he held her, and the cruel avowal he had made, not only of his indifference, but of his contempt for her, drove her to a state of temporary frenzy. Striking her burning brow with her hand, the dreadful thought of self-murder crossed her maddening brain, and she looked around for some implement of destruction. For an instant, however, she paused: it was not the fear of death, it was not remorse, but the feelings of a mother which arrested her hand. She thought of her two children, of her two sleeping babes, to whom, notwithstanding her guilt, she was fondly attached; the recollection of her own situation, and of the innocent creature who must perish with her, recalled her for a moment to her senses. She threw herself on her knees, clasped both her trembling hands across her bosom, and endeavoured to utter a short prayer for mercy and forgiveness to the great Being, into whose dread presence she had been about to rush unrepenting, and loaded with guilt. For months, nay for years, Lady Catesby had not prayed: it was the first time since her marriage with Sir Lawrence that she had even attempted to pour forth a sentiment of supplication; and it appeared, at present, as if the demon who possessed her was resolved not to renounce his victim. In vain the unhappy woman essayed to repeat

a prayer,—the words died in her utterance. Her thoughts of the Deity and of her children vanished from her mind, and were replaced by that of Alfred taunting her to destruction; and the sound of his last words again rung in her ears. Springing on her feet, she rushed to her dressing-table, and seizing a phial of opium, uttering aloud, “Alfred! my death be on your head!” she swallowed the contents. Her head soon became dizzy, every object swam around her, and falling senseless on the carpet, her sorrows and her guilt were buried in oblivion!

CHAPTER X.

AFTER the scene with Lady Catesby, Alfred sought the earliest opportunity of communicating his project to the Baroness, who had, he knew, considerable influence over Emily, and whom he found seated in her *boudoir*. As he approached, she exclaimed, “Oh! there you are, *Barbaro Tiranno, Crudel Vincitor!* why we have had Lady Catesby in fits, *grandissima scena*;—there was the *marito* in an agony with Eau de Cologne and æther, and the new Cavaliere, Lord Tauton, in tears. ‘*O quante lagrime snor’ versai!*’ and you, Sir, where were you? Oh, I am certain you have been playing the cruel! or else Sir Lawrence and the *prima donna* have been quarrelling. But tell me all about it;—there, sit down, and do not look so very good. Now for the *premier coup d’archet*.”

“Upon my word,” replied Alfred, as soon as the Baroness gave herself time to take breath, “indeed I am shocked to hear Lady Catesby has been taken ill, but I am completely ignorant of the cause; in fact, I have scarcely spoken to her twice during the whole day: and instead of quarrelling with Sir Lawrence, she appeared to have been seized with a sudden fit of conjugal tenderness. She scarcely left his side for a moment during the whole day; and, between ourselves, that was enough to have made any one ill.”