

have become a jewelled diadem, his dark wreathing hair partly shading it. There was an expression of pride and decision on the beautifully chiselled and firmly compressed lips, which might have appeared too severe, but for the deep blue eyes which softened their character, and which cast over the whole a gravity almost amounting to melancholy. Mary never beheld one who so completely realised her ideas of manly beauty; and she continued to gaze on him with the admiration of an artist, who would have gladly made him the subject for a picture, as he stood apparently listening to the unmeaning prattle of his fair companion, who, it was evident, tried to usurp his exclusive attention.

Lady Brereton smiled on perceiving Miss Annesley's fixed attention, and whispered to her, "That is my son. I suppose you scarcely recognize in him the youth you may remember, many years ago, at Annesley Park. Claude," she added to him, "will you not speak to your old acquaintance, Mary Annesley?"

Colonel Brereton hastily turning round, and for the first time perceiving Mary, instantly advanced towards her, and holding out his hand, expressed a hope that she was fast recovering, and would find the air of Norwood Abbey beneficial to her health and strength. Mary felt gratified and encouraged by this address, and replied to him in her own sweet and natural manner. To the astonishment of the whole party, he offered her his arm to lead her down to the dinner table, placing himself by her side, and continuing to converse with her in preference to the Lady Julia Russel, who had contrived to occupy the seat on his other hand. None felt more surprised than the meek and humble-minded Mary, at his selecting her rather than the fashionable beauty, whose dark eyes looked so bewitchingly languid each time they encountered his. From the want of personal attraction, she was unaccustomed to receive much attention, except from those who loved her for her real worth; and that the admired, the courted, yet inaccessible, Colonel Brereton, should shew it to her so pointedly, struck her as passing strange. He talked to her about years gone by, when, as a boy, he used to visit Annesley Park, inquiring after the beautiful child, Beatrice, and whether she was as great a romp as ever?

"Not quite so great a one at sixteen as when only five," replied Mary, affectionately smiling at the mention of her sister; "yet I cannot say much for her sedate behaviour even now."

"Is she petted and spoiled as she used to be?" was the next question.

"Ah, I find you have not forgotten," returned Mary; "you must see her to judge, and I think you will say, that you never beheld so fair a creature."

Colonel Brereton regarded her with kindness, as she uttered this warmly, while he continued to dwell

upon the subject which he perceived interested her the most.

From this day, he attached himself more particularly to her than to any one else. She was still weak and delicate, and unable to join the gay riding and driving parties enjoyed by the rest. He therefore supplied her with books, which proved the greatest delight to her, as she wandered alone amidst the shady groves and lawns of the Abbey. From Lady Brereton she also received every polite and kind attention which good breeding could dictate or she could expect; yet in her manner there was a pride and hauteur natural to her, which chilled the warm-hearted Mary. To those he did not like, Colonel Brereton assumed the same demeanour, and Mary felt often surprised, as she gazed on him while in this mood, mentally saying, "Will those stern features ever relax into that beautiful smile again?"

As his character became better known to her, she discovered that with much to admire, yet were there blemishes which she earnestly wished removed. As a companion, she found him highly gifted, intellectual and refined; as a son, respectful; as a soldier, brave, chivalrous, yet perhaps too strict a disciplinarian to be much liked; as a man, proud, ambitious, and truly honourable; but as a Christian, in its extended sense, wanting in many points. Mary, when she knew him better, would occasionally venture to touch upon the subject of religion with him; when he would smile and listen to her attentively, but scarcely make any reply to her observations. Thus daily and hourly, in the society of one so richly endowed by nature, and possessing so many attractive qualities, he gradually, without her being aware of it, gained a powerful influence over her, though he never breathed a word which could imply the slightest partiality beyond a sincere friendship. Lady Brereton, who desired a very high alliance for her son, smiled at his attentions to Mary, which she conceived were bestowed to pique those who had been pre-determined to win his admiration; but in this she did him less than justice, for he really admired the good sense and amiable disposition of Mary, contrasting them with the affectation, the vanity and lispng folly he beheld in the others, who despised and slighted her. Poor Mary! at the close of two months she returned home, the beautiful image of Claude Brereton engraven on her heart and thoughts; while he left the Abbey a few days subsequent, almost forgetting that there was such a being in existence as herself.

Mrs. Annesley, after her return, felt a strong desire to behold him, of whom Mary was never weary talking, and as she gazed on her lovely Beatrice, she would indulge in golden dreams for her future advancement, in which he appeared before her as the "sunshine in the shady place," brightening her onward path. Imagine, then, the delight she experienced on receiving the letter which announced his