

I was now eighteen, and I resolved to avail myself abundantly of my legal liberty. I took a splendid residence in town, purchased the companionship of a tonnish widow, and delightfully resigned myself to the intoxication of the triumphs that awaited my entrance on the gay world. I trod the spacious apartments of my mansion with a transported and exultant sense of freedom and independence. I danced along, the mistress of its brilliant revels—song, and light, and odour, floated around my steps, and my free heart bounded gaily to the beat of mirthful music. Life seemed a feast—a gorgeous banquet—I, an exempted creature, whom no sorrow nor vicissitude could reach. The young and brave, the affluent and noble, strove for my favour as for honour and happiness; every eye offered homage, every lip was eager to utter praise. Ah! it is something to walk the earth arrayed in beauty, clad in raiment of nature's own glorious form and dye. And what though it be not fadeless? What though the disrobing hand of death must cast it off to "darkness and the worm?" is it not something to have been a portion of the "spirit of delight," a dispenser of so many of the "stray joys" that lie scattered about the highways of the world? Surely loveliness is something more than a mere toy, when but to look on it ennobles the gazer, and raises him nearer to truth and heaven. For me, although in the giddy years of youth, I knew not how to prize aright my gift of nature: I yet felt that the joy of being beautiful springs from a warmer and purer source of vanity. Still I prized too highly the potency of personal attractions, when I believed them absolute over the affections. I lived to learn that their are hearts which it can not purchase.

Meantime, the gloss of novelty grew dim: my keen zest for pleasure began to pall, and the monotony of dissipation grew distasteful to me: The flowery opening of the world's path had been bright and gay; but it was now no longer new, and I began to inquire whither it would lead. I was hourly assailed by the importunities of my noble suitors; but I was in no haste to abridge the triumphal reign of vanity. I was a stranger to the only sentiment that could render marriage attractive to one situated as I was, and I consequently regarded it as an event that would diminish my power and independence.

I had, too, considerable acuteness: and I believed that many of my most ardent admirers would have been less impassioned, had my dowry been less munificent. In this class I was secretly disposed to rank Lord E—, the handsomest and most assiduous of the competitors for my heart, hand, and estates. I was quite indifferent to him; and his pleadings gratified no better feeling than vanity. But my coldness seemed only to heighten his ardour, and he had the art of making the world believe that he ranked high in my regard. By his pertinacity, and the tyranny of etiquette, I found myself his almost constant partner in the dance, and he neglected no opportunity of exhibiting the deportment of a favoured lover. Reports were constantly circulated of our engagement & approaching union, yet I did not dismiss him from my train; I contented myself with denying any positive encouragement to his pretensions, because, though I did not love him, his society pleased me as well as that of any one else: and I sometimes thought that, should I marry, he deserved reward as much as another. True there were some young and generous hearts among my suitors—some who might perhaps have loved me disinterestedly, who were captivated by the charms of my gaiety, youth, and fresh enjoyment of life; but love cannot always excite love even in an unoccupied heart, and mine was alike indifferent to all—so that I was in danger of forming the most important decision of my life from motives that ought not to influence the choice of a companion for an hour. But fate, or rather providence, had reserved a painful chastening for my perverted nature. Freed as I was from the ties of kindred or affection, I had no friends through whom death might afflict me, and pecuniary distress could not touch one so high in fortune's favour. There was but one entrance through which moral suffering could pass into my soul, and that entrance it soon found. Nothing seemed so unlikely as that I should ever nourish an unhappy affection, or know the misery of "loving, unloved again;" yet even such was the severe discipline destined to exalt and purify my character.

I was in the habit of attending the parish church of the fashionable neighbourhood in which I resided. I went partly from an idea that it was decorous to do so, but chiefly from custom, and the same craving after