

him who held the highest place in her affection. Here too had their children first beheld the light, and given to her joys unknown before. She beheld them blooming in health and infantile beauty, and she dreaded lest the change might prove injurious to them. All the precepts of her sister Mary against the gaieties of fashionable life, were still fresh in her memory, strengthened yet more by the letters she continued to receive from her, though Mrs. Annealey endeavoured to counteract their impression by setting forth, in vivid colours, the advantages she would derive from the high and elevated society into which she was going. Lady Brereton shared in all the regrets of our young heroine, to whom she gave many valuable counsellings; but aware that the superior abilities of her son were wasted in a life of inaction, she reconciled the prospect of their leaving her in the reflection that the line he had chosen to adopt would bring these into full play.

It was not, however, till the spring of the second year, after the birth of his children, that Sir Claude proceeded to London. The day previous to their departure Beatrice wandered with him over the extensive grounds of Norwood, to take leave of all her favourite haunts—the flower garden, where she had spent so many hours—the lawns—the splendid avenues, amongst the trees of which the rooks were cawing, and the blackbird and the thrush sent forth their melodious strains. All were visited. Innumerable lovely flowers were springing into life at this delicious season, impregnating the air with their fragrance. Tears filled the eyes of Beatrice, as she exclaimed:

“And must I, indeed, leave these sylvan groves—these scenes of peace, and love, and joy. Oh! Claude, I cannot express to you my sorrow, since a painful presentiment tells me that, in quitting them, I bid farewell to happiness.”

“Do not yield to such a thought, my beloved girl,” replied Sir Claude, pressing her tenderly to his bosom; “you will but change the nature of your happiness, and in so doing realise the wishes of your mother—for now you will go to court, and be introduced to all my great friends—attend the balls, the operas, the concerts,—think how charming.”

The last few words were spoken ironically, and called a faint smile to the lip of Beatrice.

“Do not compare them with the scene now spread before us. Can the artificial splendour in crowded rooms equal the rich verdure of those magnificent woods on which the setting sun now sheds his golden beams? Can there be music so sweet as the song of those dear birds? Oh! no, no, I will not believe it.”

“Still the same sweet enthusiast as ever,” replied Sir Claude; “but to judge the merits of each, both must be tried. Three years ago, I confess, I would not have plunged you into the life you are about to

enter, but now you are better prepared to resist its temptations.”

“Ah, do you indeed think so. I hope you are right, yet I cannot help indulging fears even for us both.”

“For us both—that is capital,” returned Sir Claude, laughing. “What is it you fear for me, dear?”

“Oh! you would not understand me were I able to tell you,” said Beatrice, blushing deeply. “Thoughts will crowd upon me like dark shadows—but I am sad today, and I cannot help them.”

While they thus conversed they were sitting beneath the spreading branches of an aged oak tree, round whose venerable trunk twined the youthful ivy—the clear, fine stream that rolled majestically past them, reflected on its bosom the old Abbey with its Norman architecture and proud battlements. Sir Claude now rose and stood gazing on the scene with folded arms, while Beatrice yielding to the romantic feeling of the moment, cut on the bark of the tree the initials of her own name, and underneath a heart, transfixed by arrows. Sir Claude smiled on perceiving her occupation.

“Come away, foolish child,” he said, taking her hand and kissing off her tears; “I have half a mind to leave you here and depart alone tomorrow.”

“Oh! no, no, never?” cried Beatrice, clinging to him. “In a desert with you rather than in a paradise without you.”

“You are a loving little mortal, my fairy queen,” said Sir Claude, stroking her face. “It is almost a pity to blunt those warm, fresh feelings, yet we must run the risk. Come, dearest, let us return to the house, for I promised to see old Harleigh, the steward, at this hour.”

Beatrice followed him with lingering steps, stooping to gather the flowers as she went along, and forming them into a bouquet, with the intention of carrying them with her on the morrow, to speak to her (as she said) of dear Norwood when far distant.

One short week after this found Sir Claude and the youthful Lady Brereton established in a handsome house in Grosvenor Square. What a new existence now opened on the still unsophisticated Beatrice from this time, whether for weal or for woe, remains yet to be told. At first she felt like a newly caught bird, whose wings have been clipped, and she sighed for the freedom of the wide open fields, where she could bound along in all the freedom of her happy childhood, regardless of those forms and ceremonies to which she found herself obliged to conform. Her new home possessed every luxury that money could purchase, and it was certainly pleasant, she thought, to see a retinue of servants entirely at her command, and to only wish for a thing and be able to obtain it in five minutes. Yet the lengthened absences of Sir Claude, who, necessarily much engaged in public matters, could