

woman, and neither her influence nor example have been beneficial to her sister, who has grown up self-indulged, and perhaps exacting, where she is permitted, or feels herself privileged, to exercise power. But I am persuaded that you will shortly be able to correct all her faults; for she is too docile, and loves you too tenderly, not to be moulded by your will into the perfection which you desire."

"It might be so, Alice, but I confess in an affair of such consequence I tremble at encountering the slightest risk. Neither, in truth, am I at all ambitious to undertake the task of educating and disciplining a child, when it is a rational and intelligent woman, whom I seek for a companion. One, who by her tender sympathy may enhance my enjoyments, and make light the trials that must come to all, by the sunshine of her unclouded sweetness and affection."

"You have formed a bright ideal, Edward, but who, in actual life, ever found even a faint copy of that fair original which filled his youthful fancy? I fear we must all be content with a blending of good and ill in our chosen partners, since earth offers but few, if any, specimens of the rare perfection you seek."

"I expect not perfection, Alice, but I contend that in the absence of certain principles, qualities, and dispositions of the heart, which I deem essential to the formation of a virtuous and elevated character, there can exist no permanent basis for that confidence and esteem, which constitute the very bulwark of domestic peace and happiness. I have lived long, as you know, an exile from home and country, but the fond hope of at last returning to my own free land, to sit down amid my household gods, with one, who would be to me what our own dear mother was, Alice, to the home which she blessed with her virtues; this fond hope has dwelt with me amid polar snows, and the burning heat of the tropics, and has cheered me on in the pursuit of that wealth and knowledge, which, without such an object in view, had in all probability never been attained. But now——"

"Nay, Edward, do not say that now you are baffled in this hope," interrupted Mrs. Calthorpe; "you, who, a few weeks since, loved Lucia Maywood with such fervour, and saw in her all that could constitute your happiness, may well deserve the censure of more than feminine caprice, if for a venial fault or two, you judge her with such unsparing severity—schooling your heart to regard her with coldness, because she falls short of that standard of perfection, which, in the blindness of your love, you once believed her to have attained."

"You judge me harshly, Alice,—harshly and hastily, which is all unlike yourself—but the feeling which prompts you, springs as usual from a generous motive, and so I pardon it. Yet I will so far justify myself, as to say that I am far from in-

tending to judge Lucia with severity—neither has my love yet grown so cold towards her, as to wish to magnify her faults. That they pain me, I do not deny, nor that, of late, they have glared upon me in colours, sometimes so startling, that I confess there have been moments when I faltered in my purpose of linking my destiny with that of one, who with all her fascinations, could, at will, infuse such drops of bitterness into life's sweetest and most honied draught. Even in the earliest days of our betrothment, when with the intensity of a first and fervent passion, I abandoned myself to her witchery, I was not insensible to the foibles of her character, but I deemed them, as you do, the faults of youth and education, and thought, that with time, and better influences, the nobler traits which had won my love, would counteract and correct whatever was unworthy to pollute so fair a temple. In this hope I have been deceived.—Every interview reveals some page I would fain have left unread, in the mind which I once thought so transparent, and which makes me tremble for the future. Yet still I love her,—and much as I doubt her, my courage is unequal to the trial of a separation, though I confess, that, as the day approaches for our union, I am so overwhelmed with misgivings as to its happy result, that were it not for the blight which such an act would cast upon her young hopes, I should ere this have dissolved, by a few brief words, our mutual engagement."

"You surprise and pain me by this avowal, my dear Edward,—I have seen for several weeks past that your mind was ill at ease, and I have been often on the point of asking the cause of your disquiet,—but I still shrunk from doing so, for something told me that all was not right between you and Lucia, and I feared to increase your suffering by forcing you to speak upon the subject. Yet I cannot deny, that, I too have sometimes trembled lest your happiness was not to be secured by this marriage—and if you think so, Edward,—if you really have so much ground for doubt—let it not take place. If she can wantonly pain you now, trust me, her heart will not break, when the tie which has bound her to you shall be severed."

"No, Alice, I am not prepared for this, though my reason sometimes warns me that the act would be a wise one. But if she loves me as I honestly believe she does, I will fulfil my engagement with her at the altar, let the risk be what it may. Better to sacrifice myself, than shroud her heart in darkness; yet if she yield her, as I trust she will, when all my own, to the gentle teachings of love, our lot will still be a bright one, and my gloomy forebodings prove but sickly phantoms of the brain."

"God grant it, and indeed I think they will be nothing more. But pray what happened particularly this morning, so dreadfully to ruffle your serenity?"