

its endearing tones, the severe glance of a censorious eye! the harsh infliction of a reproving voice! How bitter to remember all *one has been to some dear departed being*—and to feel that *one is nothing—comparatively nothing*, to any living creature in this wide, wide world! Some of these sad experiences had fallen not unfrequently to the lot of the fair orphan—had fallen like ice-bolts on the youthful enthusiasm of her confiding nature; but though checked by that untimely frost, the sensitive blossom had but shrunk inward, nourished in secret by the warm well spring of Hope, which lay hidden in the deep recesses of her heart.

Twice since her residence in the family of Mr. L——, the monotonous existence of Blanche had been diversified by occurrences of unspeakable importance to her. Twice had she received letters from India—Voluminous letters, penned by more than one hand, though contained in the same envelope directed by her brother. She wept abundantly over the first of these packets—over her brother's letter—his reply to that in which she had communicated to him their mutual loss, and her own plans to seek an honourable subsistence as governess in some English family. It is easy to conceive the deeply affecting purport of that fraternal answer. Even from that fearful distance, the hearts of the orphans met and mingled. The tears of Theodore had blotted the lines, on which those of Blanche fell as she read, like summer rain-drops—as free, as fast, and as kindly, lightening her heart of the long pent-up load of unparticipated grief. But Theodore's letter contained one written in a different hand-writing, and though the tears of Blanche still fell as she perused those characters, they were the last drops of the shower through which a sunbeam was already breaking. Upon the contents of that packet she might have been said to live for many weeks—for day after day her eyes fed upon them, till one of her little innocent observers asked, in a tone of artless sympathy, if she were not tired of trying to learn all that close long writing by heart, which had vexed her so much too, at the first reading?

The second letters were as eagerly and anxiously opened as the former had been. But these were read with glistening eyes only, while the rekindled light of gladness beamed on the ingenuous countenance of Blanche; and sometimes, in the midst of some twentieth re-perusal, as if her heart sought sympathy in the exuberance of its happiness, she would catch up in her arms, and half smother with playful kisses, one of the wandering children—as ready, however at least, to share the joy of their young instructress, as to participate in her sorrows. With those last letters came an ivory work box, an elegant oriental toy, lined with sandal wood, and fitted up with many compartments, each containing some ingenious nick-nack—some small tool of fairy workmanship fashioned for a lady's hand, or some exquisite essence in its flacon of gilded glass. The delight it was to the inquisitive children to pry over and over again, into every drawer and compartment in this beautiful box! And Blanche was too sweet-tempered to refuse the often asked indulgence, only she watched with jealous care, lest their little busy fingers should unwittingly injure any part of the delicate workmanship; and if Miss Crawford was present, she resisted with evident annoyance their importunities to be allowed to take out of a cunning secret drawer (which had not long remained secret for them,) two beautiful little pictures—“so beautiful!” they said, and “one so like Ma'amselle!”—That one was her brother's miniature; and when they asked her if she did not love him dearly for sending her such a fine present, she smiled and blushed, and simply answered, that she did indeed dearly love him. The little girls were not long in discovering, moreover, that the return of this dear brother had been announced in his last letter. The regiment was recalled to Europe, and he wrote on the eve of embarkation.

No wonder that, on the evening of that day which had brought her such blissful tidings, the fair face of Blanche was radiant with such a glow of happiness, to attract even the passing notice of Mrs. L——, and the more benevolent observation of her husband, as their young inmate with her pupils modestly approached the awful verge of her drawing-room circle. The exuberant gladness of her heart was longing to communicate and diffuse itself; and the look and tone of almost affectionate filial confidence with which she replied to Mr. L——'s accustomed salutation, was so irresistibly winning, that it drew from him another, and another sentence, till at last he found him chatting with her, almost with the affectionate familiarity of a father, and had actually gone the length of calling her “My dear!” without being conscious how insidiously the natural kindness of his nature had encroached on that dignified condescension to which he conceived it proper to confine all manifestations of good will towards his daughter's governess.

Mademoiselle d'Albi's continuance in the evening circle, or rather in its *out-works*, was usually restricted to the space of half an hour, while the tea and coffee were carried round, and till the bed time of her pupils, when with a silent curtsy, she left the drawing room with them, and having accompanied them to their apartments, joyfully retired to the unmolested quiet of her own. But it sometimes happened, that, Mrs. L——'s party being enlivened by the accession of several young persons, music and quadrilles became the order of the evening. At such times the talents of Blanche were put in requisition, and she was detained to play for the benefit of the dancers, whose enjoyment was en-

hanced in no trifling degree by the spirit and correctness of the musician, and by the variety of beautiful airs in which she was a proficient.

Poor Blanche! how often, in the days that were gone, had she tripped it to those very measures—the admired of all eyes, and the beloved of all hearts, amongst the lovely and beloved, the happy band of her young companions! It was wonderful (with all those recollections in her heart,) how she could sit before that instrument, looking so patient and contented, playing on hour after hour with unerring touch, and unflagging spirit! Yes—there she sat, regardless and disregarded of every creature in the gay assemblage, unless it were that every now and then some gentleman of the party stole a farther glance of admiration at the lovely foreigner, inwardly desirous, may be, that he could exchange his sprawling, bounding partner, with all her newly-imported Parisian graces and frippery clumsily tacked upon English awkwardness, for that young sylph-like creature so elegant in her unadorned simplicity; for Blanche, still in mourning for her parents, wore a plain black robe; and a profusion of soft, fair silky ringlets, and one thick gloss braid encircling and confining them like a diadem, were the only decorations of a head remarkable for its classical beauty, and the peculiar gracefulness of carriage, which was its characteristic expression.

It so happened, that on the very evening when the heart of Blanche was overflowing with its secret hoard of gladness,—Oh! how long had that poor heart been a stranger to such blissful feelings!—Mrs. L——'s circle was a large and gay one, and a proposal to form quadrilles being suddenly made, and as promptly acceded to, Mademoiselle was detained to take her patient sitting at the piano forte. She had always acceded with willing sweetness to similar requisitions, but this evening she sat down to the instrument with even joyous readiness, and the exuberance of her happiness found expression in such sprightly measures, that her flying fingers soon outstript the common time of the dancers, and many breathless calls for moderation were sent towards her from the scampering and despairing performers. Then would she laugh and blush, and shake her head in playful self-reproach at her own lawless performance, and for a while—a very little while—the restless fingers were restrained to slower movements—once or twice she looked towards the dancers, as if with a vehement longing to spring up and mingle in their gay evolution; but those glances were momentary, and her eyes dropt again upon the ivory keys; but such a smiling and half-exulting playfulness lurked about her mouth, as if she were anticipating some hour of future gladness, when she should join hands once more in the merry dance with the companions of her youth, on the earth—the lovely greenwards of her own dear country. Whatever were the fond reveries of poor Blanche, it is certain that her musical task was so unequally performed that evening, as to cause much discomfiture among the dancers, at length despairingly manifested in their relaxing exertions, and the tedious, lounging pauses between the sets.

During one of these, a small knot of gentlemen were conversing with Mrs. L——, close to the piano forte, on which, mingled with music books and manuscripts, lay several pamphlets and newspapers. One of the gentlemen carelessly glancing his eye over the miscellaneous heap, caught up a paper with suddenly excited interest, exclaiming, “Ah! here is already a public account of the melancholy occurrence, of which my letters from Madras make mention.” Then rapidly he read aloud the paragraph which stated that, “The Regiment de Meuron being under orders for Europe, had been safely embarked on board the transports provided for its reception, all but the last boat, consisting of the Lieutenant Colonel, his lady, and their family, and two young officers of the regiment, when by some mismanagement the boat was suddenly upset in the tremendous surf, and notwithstanding the exertions of the natives on their attending catamanans, every soul perished, except the wife and youngest daughter of the Colonel, and one of the young officers, Lieut. D'Albi.” Then followed the names of those who had found a watery grave, and the gentleman ran them quickly over, till just as he had pronounced that of “Horace Vandrenil,” a sudden crash of the piano keys caused a general start, and all eyes turning simultaneously towards the young musician, who had been awaiting the pleasure of the dancers in silence, patient and unnoticed; it was perceived that she had fallen forward on the instrument, her face and arms resting on the keys, and almost hidden by the redundancy of fair ringlets, which had burst in rich disorder from the confining braid.

She was raised up, and conveyed to a sofa in a state of death-like insensibility, from which, after long application of various stimulants, she revived only to relapse into successive faintings. The family apothecary being summoned, by his direction she was conveyed to her chamber and to her bed, and his prognostics were unhappily verified towards morning when she awoke from a sort of trance in which she had lain some hours, in a high paroxysm of delirious fever. Great was the consternation occasioned in the family of Mr. L——, by this sudden seizure of the young creature, whose personal importance in the establishment, except in relation to the labors of the school-room and the piano, had hitherto been very subordinate to that of Mrs. L——'s Maccaws and Persian Cat.

A peculiar horror of all contagious and infectious disorders, was

amongst the many peculiar horrors to which the sensitive lady of poor Mr. L—— was peculiarly liable. It was in vain that the worthy man himself, having ascertained the decided opinion of the apothecary, again and again assured her, that “Mademoiselle's disorder was brain fever, which, however likely to terminate fatally, was not of a nature to be communicated even to attendants of the sick chamber.” These assurances, backed by all the apothecary's assertions, were insufficient to allay the lady's horrors. “If not now infectious, the disorder might become so;” and then she was convinced “all fevers were catching;” and “If Mr. L—— was so indifferent to her safety, she could not think of her children and emulate his heroic composure. Not for worlds should they continue in that house two hours longer—and she felt it her duty as a mother, to be careful, for their sakes, of her own life, and to accompany them from that dangerous spot. It was madness in Mr. L—— to stay there. If he would be persuaded—” But Mr. L—— was not to be persuaded; so after conscientiously fulfilling her duty as a wife, by pathetically warning him of the probable consequences of his obstinacy, she bade farewell with admirable firmness, and after a last parting injunction from the carriage windows, to fumigate all letters he might address to her from that house, she was driven from the door and safely and luxuriously lodged before evening at her husband's Richmond Villa, with her children and Miss Crawford. Great indeed—unspeakably great, “she assured all her friends, was her anxiety on Mr. L——'s account, and they might conceive how agonizing it was to her feelings to leave him in so perilous a situation. Had she followed the dictates of her heart—But those sweet darlings! Could she risk the lives of both their parents?” And then tears of sensibility trickled from her eyes, at the idea of their orphan state, had she fondly yielded to the temptation of sharing her husband's danger, and fallen a victim to the indulgence of her tender weakness.

Mr. L—— was truly and humanely concerned for the distressing situation of poor Blanche. So young! so fair! so friendless! so utterly dependent now, in her unconscious state, on the mercy and charity of strangers—on the world's cold charity—But there are warm hearts amidst the frozen mass—and all the kindly feelings of Mr. L—— were now called into action by the affecting circumstances of that helpless being so cast on his benevolence. He was a fond and anxious father, and as the natural thought suggested itself, that in the vicissitudes of human life, a fate as forlorn as that of the young foreigner might one day be the portion of his own darlings, Mr. L—— inwardly pledged himself to act a parental part by Blanche D'Albi, in this hour of her utmost need, and the vow was not less rigorously observed, because unuttered to mortal ear, and registered in the depths of his own heart. By his order a careful nurse was provided, and a skilful physician called in, when, at the close of the second day from her seizure, Mademoiselle D'Albi was pronounced by the apothecary to be in imminent danger. Dr. M's opinion coincided but too perfectly with that of his medical subaltern, and in spite of their united endeavours to save the interesting young creature entrusted to their care, it soon became evident that the hand of death was on her, and that human art was powerless to unloose that fatal grasp. Previous to her dissolution, she lay for many days in a state of perfect stupor, far less painful to contemplate than the previous delirium, during which she had talked incessantly with the embodied creatures of her fancy, rambling volubly in her native tongue, and now and then breaking out into snatches of wild song or wild laughter. But at last that fearful mirth died away in fainter and fainter bursts, and broken syllables, and inarticulate sound succeeded the voluble speech, like dying murmurs of a distant echo, and “then,” as the nurse expressed it, “she lay as quiet as a lamb,” for many, many days, with eyes half closed, but not in slumber, or at least only in that slumbrous torpor, the gentle harbinger of a more perfect rest.

More than once or twice, or many times, Mr. L—— visited the sick chamber of poor Blanche, while she lay like a waxen image in that death-like trance. More than once as he stood gazing on that fair, pale face, had large tears stole down his own cheeks—and once, when there was a momentary glimmering of hope—a momentary amendment of pulse—he had caught the hand of the physician with a sudden energy, strangely contrasting his usual habits of formal reserve—exclaiming, “Save her, my dear sir! spare no pains, no cost, a consultation, perhaps—” and his agitated voice and incoherent words carried conviction to the heart of the good doctor, that if half the wealth of Mr. L—— could have purchased the life of Blanche D'Albi, he would not have hesitated to make the sacrifice.

But neither care nor skill, nor aught that wealth could command or kindness lavish, could prolong the days already numbered, or reverse the decree that had gone forth.

Towards the close of the fourteenth day of Blanche's illness the respiration of the unconscious sufferer became quick and laborious, and Dr. M., whose finger was on her pulse, directed that the curtains of her bed should be drawn aside, and a free current of air admitted through the open windows. Mr. L—— had entered with the physician and stationing himself at the bed's foot, stood there with folded arms, and eyes fixed in sad and hopeless contemplation on the affecting object before him. Though the eyes