

sion, ruled by turns the hour. And I had sufficient mental activity to regard any exercise of mind as a source of real enjoyment. I admired the powerful reasonings of Langley, and believed my 'beau ideal' of a noble character, completely realized.

"But, my young friends, all these specious systems were superstructures without a foundation. My new associates argued from mistaken premises, and their conclusions were consequently false. They assumed, that man has an inherent principle of goodness, sufficient, if cultivated, to secure him in the paths of rectitude; that he needs no guide save the light of reason; no power but his own unassisted strength. Having established, as they said, these fundamental truths, they discoursed largely on the nature of virtue, whether it consist in the sacrifice of our will, or in the gratification of a will essentially amiable; whether matter be under the control of mind, or mind owes its impressions to matter; whether duty, feeling, or interest, should be the guide of our actions; with a variety of other similar questions. And after having expended a world of thought and a torrent of eloquence, how had we really been employed?—As profitably as we should in describing how objects look in the dark, or trying to prove that they present varied appearances. It is not my intention, however, to lead your youthful minds through all the labyrinths that bewildered mine: suffice it to say, the images of virtue and vice became confounded; the barriers of right and wrong thrown down; doubt usurped the place of early principle; indecision marked the present; and uncertainty hung over the future. Intellectual superiority among us, seemed only to say its possessor more open to the seductions of sophistry. 'Professing ourselves wise, we became fools; we were indeed vain in our imaginations, and our foolish hearts were darkened.'

"After a time, I thought Langley's mind appeared less at ease, and more irritable than formerly. I made this remark to Sandford, and was informed that he labored under pecuniary difficulties: and though I rather wondered at his not making any attempt to retrench, I attributed it to his lofty spirit, unable to brook abasement. This conjecture was perfectly correct, but my excuse of his conduct most erroneous, for true strength of mind consists, not in disregarding, but in firmly meeting the exigencies of our condition. Can I in any way assist him, I asked myself: with his high spirit and exquisite feelings, where shall I find sufficient delicacy to name such a subject? At length, however, I summoned courage; my offer was graciously accepted; and I felt equal pride and pleasure in rescuing such a man from temporary inconvenience. Thus months passed on; my debt was not merely unpaid, but various plausible pretences for increasing it were made from time to time; while I, scarcely suffering him to explain his painful necessities, inwardly exclaimed, 'Such is the confidence of perfect friendship!' But the ideas of Langley, (for I will not call them principles) seemed now to be undergoing an extraordinary change. Instead of those high disquisitions on honor and virtue we were accustomed to hear, I trembled at the bitter sarcasm and pointed ridicule with which he attacked every sacred bond that ties the union between man and man. He had become familiar with some of the most exceptionable of the French authors,

and his talents were, from this time, constantly employed in levelling every exalted sentiment and disinterested emotion. Still I believe it was theory alone; a few dark clouds which his bright orb of reason had encountered, in its daring passage; and over which it would soon rise triumphant, to shine forth again resplendently. Truth is great, I said, and must prevail; and the end of investigation must be, to clear away all error. And so it will, when with purified hearts and minds we follow the light of nature, of revelation, and of grace. Such however, was not the case with Langley.

"Things proceeded thus, till one memorable day, when my fascinating friend, tapping me on the shoulder, said, 'You will spend the evening with me, Hanmer.' 'Not this evening,' I replied, 'I have taken a considerable sum of money for my father to-day, and should not feel justified in being out late.' It so happened, however, that unexpected business detained the clerks longer than usual; and as it was the depth of winter, darkness had overtaken me before I reached home. The road about three quarters of a mile from our residence was exceedingly lonely; and to the right lay a still more lonely lane. As I passed this lane, I heard the quick trampling of a horse; and in a moment my bridle was seized, and the words, 'Your money or your life,' hastily uttered. The tone in which they were spoken was disguised; but no disguise could conceal from me voice, to which I had so often listened with delight. It might have been more prudent not to betray my knowledge, but surprise and anguish rose too high to be controlled. 'Langley!' I exclaimed, 'are you in jest, or has reason deserted your brain?' 'You know me then,' he replied desperately, 'and I am undone.' Then grasping the reins more firmly, he added, 'You must give me your word of honor, Hanmer, never to breathe this affair to any one, till I am past the power of injury; otherwise I shall be under a fatal necessity—you know the act to which I shall be compelled.'

"He presented a pistol as he spoke; but I was too much excited by conflicting emotions to be much under the influence of fear. Summoning all the dignity I could master, I said coolly, 'Langley, relinquish your hold. I am not to be threatened into a promise which, if left to myself, for the sake of former friendship, I am most willing to make.' He complied, with an evident feeling of doubt; and being left free, I continued, 'The booty for which you have violated all principle, is safe with our employer: I would not venture it at this hour. But to all my purse contains you are welcome, and you may command a further supply from me to-morrow. O, how should I rejoice, if by relieving your pressing embarrassment, I could win you back to the path of rectitude. In retracing your fearful steps, all the advantage of my silence shall be yours. And I only request in return, that you will ride with me a little way, and receive advice from one, who in mental endowments, is greatly your inferior.'

"The infatuated man heard me with a groan of disappointment. He had proved himself a villain, and what was his reward?—a trifling sum, which would have been readily granted to his request. And thus, sooner or later, does sin always dupe its followers. We rode on side by side, as we had often done before; but oh, with

what different feelings! As soon as I felt able to break silence, I inquired, 'Langley, from the elevation you once possessed, how can you have fallen to this fearful depth? Surely the virtue you adored must be forgotten; and neither sense of duty, nor a desire of happiness, can be your guide at present.'

"His better feelings seemed to struggle for a moment; and in softened accents he exclaimed, 'Happiness, indeed! no, I am not happy; and the odds are fearfully against my ever being so. But'—and he resumed all his former determination,—'I cannot sink, I will not stoop. Hanmer I have bid adieu to those high sounding names: Virtue, honor, happiness, are mere chimeras; phantoms, about which men flourish and declaim, but whose realities they neither find nor seek. You have the misfortune to feel what you imagine, and to mean what you say. It is not so with others; and to this difference you owe your life-time: for whom else could I have trusted? Men talk of noble actions, emanating from pure principles: but believe me, Hanmer, he who enters society determined to rise above his seeming fellows, must consider interest the source, necessity the law, and circumstance the guide of his conduct. Where they lead I follow: why have I desired if not to gratify them; and why should I shrink from the necessary means? My destiny may be execrable; it shall not be mean: nor will I with the weak devotee, sacrifice present opportunity to future anticipation. That future is at best uncertain, and enters not into my calculations.'

"O Charles and Horace! I shuddered as I listened; and trembled at the awful precipice on which I had stood blindfold. I need not tell you that I renounced the guidance of this noble spirit; and sought elsewhere the treasure of a friend. But I find my first experiment has filled the sheet, and exhausted my present leisure. Should you be sufficiently interested by it to wish for a recital of two subsequent ones, they shall form the subject of another letter.

"And, now, my young friends, what improvement will you draw from the foregoing history? Shall I advise you to beware of exercising your reason, and to abstain from science and learning; O no; reason is a useful servant to religion, and a cultivated mind harmoniously assists the renovated soul. But beware of the pride of human intellect; of the arrogant assumption of human rectitude. Lean not to your own understanding; trust not to your own strength. Consult the page of inspiration, in humble dependence on divine illumination; contemplate the way of faith, love, and holiness, there laid down, with earnest prayer for grace that you may walk in it. Thus truth shall be established in your minds, christian virtue in your hearts. Beware lest any man spoil you through vain philosophy, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. Yet, while I warn you, I would not be understood to imply, that every self-sufficient reasoner plunges into the same vortex of impiety and guilt with Langley: doubtless, many have passed through life with outward credit. But this I do say,—when divine light is rejected, and man follows his own bewildered imagination, perverted will, and depraved affections, there is no answering where they may lead him. Dangers surround him on all sides; he has renounced the only security; and we can see no boundary, of which it may be said, Thus far shalt thou go,