

## THE OLD GENTLEMAN.

## A TALE.

FOR days, for weeks, for months, for years, did I labour and toil in the pursuit of one bewildering, engrossing, overwhelming object. Sleep was a stranger to my eyelids; and night after night was passed in undivided, unmitigated application to the studies, by which I hoped (vainly, indeed) to attain the much desired end; yet all through this long and painful period of my existence, I trembled lest those who were my most intimate friends, and from whom, except upon this point, I had no concealment, should discover, by some incautious word, or some unguarded expression, the tendency of my pursuits, or the character of my research.

That I had permitted the desire with which my heart was torn, and my mind disturbed, to obtain such complete dominion over every thought, every wish, every feeling, seems, at *this* period of my life, wholly unaccountable; and I recur to the sufferings I endured in concealing its existence, with a sensation of torture little less acute than that, by which I was oppressed during the existence of the passion itself.

It was in the midst of this infatuation, that one evening in summer, when every body was out of town, and not more than eight hundred thousand nobodies were left in



it, I had been endeavouring to walk off a little of my anxiety by a tour of the outer circle in the Regent's Park, and, hearing a footstep close behind me, turned round, and beheld a venerable looking old gentleman, dressed entirely in green, with a green cravat tied round his neck, and wearing a low-crowned hat upon his head, from under which, his silver hair flowed loosely over his shoulders. He seemed to have his eyes fixed on me when for a moment I looked round at him; and he slackened his pace (however much he had previously quickened it to reach his then position relative to me), so as to keep nearly at the same distance from me, as he was, when I first noticed him.

Nothing is more worrying to a man, or to one so strangely excited as I *then* was, more irritating, than the constant *pat pat* of footsteps following him. After I had proceeded at my usual pace for about ten minutes, and still found the old gentleman behind me, I reduced my rate of going, in order to allow my annoyance to pass me. Not he; *he* equally reduced *his* rate of going. Thus vexed, and putting faith in inferior age and superior strength, I proceeded more rapidly; still the old gentleman was close upon me; until before I reached the gates of Park-crescent, leading to Portland-place, I had almost broken into a canter, with as little success as attended my other evolutions. I therefore resumed my original step, and thinking to effect by stratagem what force could not accomplish, I turned abruptly out of Portland-place into Duchess-street—the old gentleman was at my heels: I passed the chapel into Portland-street—for a moment I lost sight of him; but before I had reached the corner of Margaret-street, there he was again.



At that time I occupied lodgings in the house of two maiden sisters in Great Marlborough-street, and considering that the police-office in that neighbourhood would render me any aid I might require to rid myself of my new acquaintance, should he prove troublesome, I determined to run for my own port at all events.

I crossed Oxford-street, and, in order to give myself another chance of escape, darted down Blenheim-steps and along the street of that name; but the old man's descent was as rapid as mine; and happening, as I passed the museum and dissecting rooms of the eminent anatomist Brooks, to turn my head, my surprise was more than ever excited by seeing my venerable friend actually dancing in a state of ecstasy along the side of the dead wall which encloses so many subjects for contemplation. At this moment I resolved to stop and accost him rather than make the door-way of my own residence the arena of a discussion.

"Sir," said I, turning short round, "you will forgive my addressing you, but it is impossible for me to affect ignorance that I am, for some reason, the object of your pursuit. I am near home; if you have any communication to make, or desire any information from *me*, I would beg you to speak now."

"You are perfectly right, sir," said the old gentleman, "I *do* wish to speak to you; and you, although perhaps not at this moment aware of it, are equally desirous of speaking to *me*. You are now going into your lodgings in Marlborough-street, and so soon as you shall have divested yourself of your coat, and enveloped yourself in that blue silk gown which you ordinarily wear, and have taken off your boots and put your feet into those morocco



slippers which were made for you last March by Meyer and Miller, you purpose drinking some of the claret which you bought last Christmas of Henderson and Son, of Davies-street, Berkley-square, first mixing it with water; and immediately after you will apply yourself to the useless and unprofitable studies which have occupied you during the last five or six years."

"Sir," said I, trembling at what I heard, "how, or by what means, you have become possessed of these particulars I ——"

"No matter," interrupted my friend: "if you are disposed to indulge me with your society for an hour or so, and bestow upon me a bottle of the wine in question, I will explain myself. There, sir," continued he, "you need not hesitate; I see you have already made up your mind to offer me the rights of hospitality; and since I know the old ladies of your house are advocates for early hours and quiet visitors, I will conform in all respects to their wishes and your convenience."

Most true indeed was it that I had determined *coute qui coute* to give my new old friend an invitation and a bottle of wine; and before he had concluded his observations we were at the door of my house, and in a few minutes more, although my servant was absent without leave, we were seated at a table on which forthwith were placed the desired refreshments.

My friend, who continued to evince the most perfect knowledge of all my private concerns, and all my most intimate connexions, became evidently exhilarated by the claret; and in the course of one of the most agreeable conversations in which I had ever participated, he related



numerous anecdotes of the highest personages in the country, with all of whom he seemed perfectly intimate. He told me he was a constant attendant at every fashionable party of the season; in the dull time of the year the theatres amused him; in term the law-courts occupied his attention; and in summer, as, he said, I might have seen, his pleasures lay in the rural parts of the metropolis and its suburbs; he was at that time of the year always to be found in one of the parks or in Kensington-gardens. But his manner of telling his stories afforded internal evidence of their accuracy, and was so captivating, that I thought him without exception the pleasantest old gentleman I had ever encountered.

It was now getting dark, the windows of my drawing-room were open, the sashes up, and the watchman's cry of "past ten o'clock" was the first announcement to me of the rapid flight of Time in the agreeable society of my friend.

"I must be going," said he; "I must just look in at Brooks's."

"What, sir," said I, recollecting his grotesque dance under the wall in Blenheim-street, "over the way?"

"No," replied he, "in St. James's-street."

"Have another bottle of claret," said I, "and a devil—"

At this word my friend appeared seriously angry, and I heard him mutter the word "cannibalism." It was then quite dark, and, as I looked at his face, I could discern no features, but only two brilliant orbs of bright fire glittering like stars; those were his eyes, the light from which was reflected on his high cheek-bones and the sides of his nose, leaving all the rest of his face nearly black. It was



then I first heard a thumping against the back of his chair, like a gentleman "switching his cane;"—I began to wish he would go.

"Sir," said the old gentleman, "any disguise with me is useless; I must take my leave; but you must not imagine that this visit was unpremeditated, or that our meeting was accidental: you last night, perhaps unconsciously, invoked my aid in the pursuit to which you have so long devoted yourself. The desire of your heart is known to me; and I know that the instant I leave you, you will return to your fascinating study, vainly to seek that, which you so constantly languish to possess."

"I desire"—I was going to say, "nothing;"—but the pale fire of his dreadful eyes turned suddenly to a blood-red colour, and glistened even more brightly than before, while the thumping against the back of his chair was louder than ever.

"You desire, young gentleman," said my visitor, "to know the thoughts of others, and thirst after the power of foreseeing events that are to happen: do you not?"

"I confess, sir," said I, convinced, by the question and by what had already passed, that *he*, whoever he was, himself possessed the faculty he spoke of—"I confess, that for such a power I have prayed, and studied, and laboured, and——"

"——You shall possess it," interrupted my friend. "Who *I* am, or what, matters little: the power you seek is wholly in *my* gift. You last night, as I have just said, invoked me;—you shall have it, upon two conditions."

"Name them, sir," said I.

"The first is, that however well you know what is to



happen to others, you must remain in ignorance about yourself, except when connected with them."

"To that," said I, "I will readily agree."

"The other is, that whatever may be the conduct you adopt in consequence of possessing the power of knowing the thoughts of others, you are never to reveal the fact that you actually *do* possess such a power: the moment you admit yourself master of this supernatural faculty, you lose it."

"Agreed, sir," said I; "but are these all the conditions?"

"All," said my friend. "To-morrow morning, when you awake, the power will be your own; and so, sir, I wish you a very good night."

"But, sir," said I, anxious to be better assured of the speedy fulfilment of the wish of my heart (for such indeed it was), "may I have the honour of knowing your name and address?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the old gentleman: "*my* name and address—Ha, ha, ha!—my name is pretty familiar to you, young gentleman; and as for my address, I dare say you will find your way to me, some day or another, and so once more good night."

Saying which, he descended the stairs and quitted the house, leaving me to surmise who my extraordinary visitor could be;—I never *knew*; but I recollect, that after he was gone, I heard one of the old ladies scolding a servant-girl for wasting so many matches in lighting the candles, and making such a terrible smell of brimstone in the house.

I was now all anxiety to get to bed, not because I was sleepy, but because it seemed to me as if going to bed would bring me nearer to the time of getting up, when I should be



master of the miraculous power which had been promised me: I rang the bell—my servant was still out—it was unusual for him to be absent at so late an hour. I waited until the clock struck eleven, but he came not; and resolving to reprimand him in the morning, I retired to rest.

Contrary to my expectation, and, as it seemed to me, to the ordinary course of nature, considering the excitement under which I was labouring, I had scarcely laid my head on my pillow before I dropped into a profound slumber, from which I was only aroused by my servant's entrance to my room. The instant I awoke I sat up in bed, and began to reflect on what had passed, and for a moment to doubt whether it had not been all a dream. However, it was daylight; the period had arrived when the proof of my newly acquired power might be made.

"Barton," said I to my man, "why were you not at home last night?"

"I had to wait, sir, nearly three hours," he replied, "for an answer to the letter which you sent to Major Sheringham."

"That is not true," said I; and to my infinite surprise, I appeared to *recollect* a series of occurrences, of which I never had previously heard, and could have known nothing: "you went to see your sweetheart, Betsy Collyer, at Camberwell, and took her to a tea-garden, and gave her cakes and cider, and saw her home again: you mean to do exactly the same thing on Sunday; and to-morrow you mean to ask me for your quarter's wages, although not due till Monday, in order to buy her a new shawl."

The man stood aghast: it was all true. I was quite as much surprised as the man.



"Sir," said Barton, who had served me for seven years without having once before been found fault with, "I see you think me unworthy your confidence; you could not have known this, if you had not watched, and followed, and overheard me and my sweetheart: my character will get me through the world without being looked after: I can stay with you no longer; you will please, sir, to provide yourself with another servant."

"But, Barton," said I, "I did not follow or watch you; I——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," he replied, "it is not for *me* to contradict; but, you'll forgive me, sir, I would rather go—I *must* go."

At this moment I was on the very point of easing his mind, and retaining my faithful servant by a disclosure of my power, but it was yet too new to be parted with; so I affected an anger I did not feel, and told him he might go where he pleased. I had, however, ascertained that the old gentleman had not deceived me in his promises; and elated with the possession of my extraordinary faculty, I hurried the operation of dressing, and before I had concluded it, my ardent friend Sheringham was announced; he was waiting in the breakfast-room; at the same moment a note from the lovely Fanny Hayward was delivered to me—from the divine girl who, in the midst of all my scientific abstraction, could "chain my worldly feelings for a moment."

"Sheringham, my dear fellow," said I, as I advanced to welcome him, "what makes you so early a visitor this morning?"

"An anxiety," replied Sheringham, "to tell you that my uncle, whose interest I endeavoured to procure for you,



in regard to the appointment for which you expressed a desire, has been compelled to recommend a relation of the Marquess ; this gives me real pain, but I thought it would be best to put you out of suspense as soon as possible."

"Major Sheringham," said I, drawing myself up coldly, "if this matter concern you so deeply, as you seem to imply that it does, might I ask why you so readily agreed to your uncle's proposition, or chimed in with his suggestion, to bestow the appointment on this relation of the Marquess, in order that *you* might, in return for it, obtain the promotion for which you are so anxious?"

"My dear fellow," said Sheringham, evidently confused, "I—I—never chimed in ; my uncle certainly pointed out the possibility to which you allude, but *that*, was merely contingent upon what he could not refuse to do."

"Sheringham," said I, "your uncle has already secured for you the promotion, and you will be gazetted for the lieutenant-colonelcy of your regiment on Tuesday. I am not to be told that you called at the horse-guards, in your way to your uncle's yesterday, to ascertain the correctness of the report of the vacancy which you had received from your friend Macgregor ; or that *you*, elated by the prospect before you, were the person, in fact, to suggest the arrangement which has been made, and promise your uncle to 'smooth me over' for the present."

"Sir," said Sheringham, "where you picked up this intelligence I know not ; but I must say, that such mistrust, after years of undivided intimacy, is not becoming, or consistent with the character which I hitherto supposed you to possess. When by sinister means the man we look upon as a friend descends to be a spy upon our actions, confidence is at an end, and the sooner our intercourse ceases



the better. Without some such conduct, how could you become possessed of the details upon which you have grounded your opinion of my conduct?"

"I——" and here again was a temptation to confess and fall; but I had not the courage to do it. "Suffice it, Major Sheringham, to say, I knew it; and, moreover, I know, that when you leave me, your present irritation will prompt you to go to your uncle and check the disposition he feels at this moment to serve me."

"This is too much, sir," said Sheringham; "this must be our last interview, unless indeed your unguarded conduct towards me, and your intemperate language concerning me, may render one more meeting necessary; and so, sir, here ends our acquaintance."

Saying which, Sheringham, whose friendship even to my enlightened eye was nearly as sincere as any other man's, quitted my room, fully convinced of my meanness and unworthiness: my heart sank within me when I heard the door close upon him for the last time. I now possessed the power I had so long desired, and in less than an hour had lost a valued friend and a faithful servant. Nevertheless, Barton *had* told me a falsehood, and Sheringham *was* gazetted on the Tuesday night.

I proceeded to open Fanny Hayward's note; it contained an invitation to dinner with her mother, and a request that I would accompany them to the opera, it being the last night of the last extra subscription. I admired Fanny—nay, I almost loved her; and when I gazed on her with rapture, I traced in the mild and languishing expression of her soft blue eye, approbation of my suit, and pleasure in my praise. I took up my pen to answer her *billet*, and intuitively and instinctively wrote as follows:



"Dear Miss Hayward,

"I should have much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation for this evening, if it were given in the spirit of sincerity, which has hitherto characterized your conduct; but you must be aware that the plan of going to the opera to-night was started, not because you happen to have a box, but because you expect to meet Sir Henry Witherington, with whom you were so much pleased at Lady G.'s on Thursday, and to whom you consigned the custody of your fan, on condition that he *personally* returned it in safety at the opera to-night; as I have no desire to be the foil of any thing in itself so intrinsically brilliant as your newly discovered baronet, I must decline your proposal.

"Your mother's kindness in sanctioning the invitation would have been more deeply felt, if I did not know that the old lady greatly approves of your new acquaintance, and suggested to you the necessity of having me to play propriety during the evening, call up her carriage, and hand her to it, while Sir Henry was making the *aimable* to you, and escorting *you*, in our footsteps. Tell Mrs. Hayward that, however much she and you may enjoy the joke, I have no desire to be admitted as a 'safe man,' and that I suggest her offering her *cotelette* to Sir Henry as well as her company. With *sympathetic* regards,

Believe me, dear Miss Hayward,

yours, —————."

This note I immediately despatched, overjoyed that the power I possessed enabled me to penetrate the flimsy mask with which Mrs. Hayward had endeavoured to disguise her real views and intentions, and had scarcely finished breakfast before Mr. Fitman, my tailor, was



ushered in, in company with a coat of the prevailing colour, and the most fashionable cut: in less than five minutes it was on, and the collar, the cuffs, the sleeves, and the skirts, became at once the objects of the author's admiration.

"Him is quite perfect, I declare," said the tailor, who, of course, was a foreigner.

After his high eulogium upon the cloth, I told him that it was not what he represented, and actually detailed the place at which he had bought it, and the name of the shopkeeper who had sold it: this irritated the tailor, who became extremely insolent, and our interview ended with my kicking him down stairs, from the bottom of which, he proceeded to the police-office, in my own street, and procured a warrant for the assault, by which I was compelled to appear before the magistrates on the following day, knowing, before I went, the whole course the case would take, and the decision they would make, in precisely the terms which they subsequently adopted.

Still, however, I stood alone in power, unless indeed my old friend in green did actually share the talent I possessed; and not being able to make up my mind to put an end to the enjoyment of an object I had so long laboured to attain, I contented myself with resolving to be more cautious in future, and less freely or frequently exhibit my mysterious quality.

After the little disagreeable adventure I have just recounted, I thought perhaps I had better proceed to the Temple, and consult my lawyer, who, as well as being professionally concerned for me, had been for a long time my intimate acquaintance. I knew what the decision of the justices would be, but I thought the attendance of a legal adviser would make the affair more respectable in the



eyes of the public, and I accordingly bent my steps city-wise.

When I reached the Temple, my worthy Maxwell was at home; as usual his greetings were the warmest, his expressions the kindest. I explained my case, to which he listened attentively, and promised his assistance, but in a moment I perceived that, however bland and amiable his conduct to me might appear, he had several times during the preceding spring told his wife that he believed I was mad. In corroboration of which, I recollected that she had on the occasion of my last three or four visits placed herself at the greatest possible distance from me, in the drawing-room, and had always rung the bell, to have her children taken away the moment I entered.

In pursuance of my cautious resolution, however, I took no notice of this; but when I spoke of the length of time which had elapsed since I had seen Mrs. Maxwell, I found out, from what was passing in her husband's mind, that she had determined never to be at home when I called, or ever dine in her own house if I was invited. Maxwell, however, promised to be with me in the morning, in time to attend the magistrates, and I knew he meant to keep his promise; so far I was easy about that affair, and made several calls on different acquaintances, few of whom were at home—some were—but as I set down the exclusion which I found so general as the result of the wild abstracted manner consequent upon my abstruse studies, and my heart-wearing anxiety, I determined now to become the gayest, most agreeable person possible, and, profiting by experience, keep all my wisdom to myself.

I went into the water-colour exhibition at Charing-cross; there I heard two artists complimenting each other,



while their hearts were bursting with mutual envy. There too, I found a mild, modest-looking lady, listening to the bewitching nothings of her husband's particular friend; and I knew, as I saw her frown and abruptly turn away from him with every appearance of real indignation, that she had at that very moment mentally resolved to elope with him the following night. In Harding's shop I found authors congregated to "laugh the sultry hours away," each watching to catch his neighbour's weak point, and make it subject matter of mirth in his evening's conversation. I saw a viscount help his father out of his carriage with every mark of duty and veneration, and knew that he was actually languishing for the earldom, and estates of the venerable parent of whose health he was apparently taking so much care. At Howell and James's I saw more than I could tell, if I had ten times the space afforded me that I have, and I concluded my tour by dropping in at the National Gallery, where the ladies and gentlemen seemed to prefer nature to art, and were actively employed in looking at the pictures, and thinking of themselves.

Oh! it was a strange time then, when every man's heart was open to me, and I could sit and see and hear all that was going on, and know the workings of the inmost feelings of my associates: however, I must not detain the reader with reflections.

On this memorable first day of my potency, I proceeded after dinner to the opera, to satisfy myself of the justness of my accusation against Fanny. I looked up to their box, and immediately behind my once single-minded girl, sat Sir Henry Witherington himself, actually playing with the identical fan, of which I had instinctively and intuitively written without ever having seen it before. There



was an ease and confidence about the fellow, and he was so graceful and good-looking, and Fanny gazed at him so long and so frequently, that I could bear it no more, and thinking that after our long intimacy my letter of the morning might have gone for nothing, I proceeded to their box, determined to rally. Of Sir Henry's thoughts about me, I was utterly ignorant, for he did not even know my name, so that I could have shared none of his consideration. I was aware, however, that the mother was downright angry, and Fanny just so much piqued as to make our reconciliation a work of interest and amusement.

I certainly did not perfectly appreciate Mrs. Hayward's feelings towards me, for when as usual I entered her curtained territory, her glance was instantly averted from *me* to Fanny, who looked grave, and I found was seriously annoyed at my appearance: however, I knew I had influence, and with my commanding power I resolved to remain. After a pause, during which Sir Henry eyed me, and the ladies alternately, he inquired of Mrs. Hayward if I were a friend of hers.

"Assuredly not, Sir Henry," said Mrs. Hayward. "I *did* know the person, but his conduct renders it impossible that our acquaintance should continue."

Fanny's heart began to melt; *she* would have caught me by the hand, and bid me stay. I relied on this, and moved not.

"Pray, madam," said Sir Henry, "is this person's presence here disagreeable to you?"

"Particularly so, Sir Henry," said the old lady, with all the malice of offended dignity.

"Then, sir," said Sir Henry, "you must leave the box."



"Must I, indeed, sir?" said I, becoming in turn much more angry than the old lady.

"Pray! pray!" said Fanny.

"Be quiet, child," said her obdurate mother.

"Yes, sir," said Sir Henry, "must! and if this direction is not speedily obeyed, the boxkeeper shall be called to remove you."

"Sir Henry Witherington," said I, "the society you are in, seals my lips and binds my hands. I *will* leave the box, on condition that for one moment only, you will accompany me."

"Certainly, sir," said Sir Henry, and in an instant we were both in the passage.

I drew a card from my case, and putting it into his hand, said, "Sir Henry Witherington, your uncalled for interference of to-night must be explained; here is the card of one who has no other feeling for your insolence but that of the most ineffable contempt." Saying which, I walked out of the Opera-house, and he rejoined the ladies, who were in a state of serious agitation—Fanny on *my* account, and her mother on account of her.

This affair ended, I returned once more to bed, and once more fell into a deep slumber, from which I was aroused by Barton, who informed me that Colonel MacManton was waiting to speak a few words to me in the drawing-room.

Of course I knew the object of *his* visit; he came to invite me to Chalk Farm, where, probably, he had already ordered pistols for two, and breakfast for four; and I hastened down stairs, rather anxious than otherwise to exhibit my person in the field of honour, that I might at once become the friend of the brave, and the idol of the fair.



I entered the drawing-room, and found my visitor waiting.

"Sir," said the colonel, "I imagine, after what past last night between you and my friend, Sir Henry Witherington, I need hardly announce the object of my visit. I will not offend you by mentioning the alternative of a meeting, but merely request you to refer me to some friend of yours, with whom I may make the necessary arrangements as speedily as possible."

"Sir," replied I, speaking, as it were, not of myself, "I must decline a meeting with Sir Henry Witherington; and I tell you in the outset of the business, that no power will induce me to lend myself to any arrangement which may lead to one."

"This is a most extraordinary resolution, sir," said the colonel. "I can assure you, although I have stated the matter as delicately as I could, that Sir Henry will accept of no apology; nor indeed could I permit him to do so, even if he were so inclined."

"You have had my answer, sir," said I: "I refuse his challenge."

"Perhaps," inquired the colonel, "you will be good enough to state your reason?"

"Precisely this, sir," I replied. "Our quarrel and rencontre of last night arose out of the perverseness of an old lady, and the inconsiderateness of a young one: they both regret the circumstance as much as I do; and Sir Henry himself, in thus calling me to account, is obeying the dictates of fashion rather than those of feeling."

"But that, sir," said the colonel, "is Sir Henry's affair. I must endeavour to extract some better reason than this."

"Well then, sir," I rejoined, "if Sir Henry meets me he will fall—it must be so—and I will not consent to imbrue



my hands in the blood of a fellow-creature in such a cause."

"Is *that* your only motive, sir, for declining his invitation?" exclaimed the gallant colonel, somewhat sneeringly.

"It is."

"Then, sir, it becomes me to state, in distinct terms, that Sir Henry Witherington must in future consider you unworthy to fill the station of a gentleman in society; and that he will, on the first opportunity, exercise the only means, left him under the circumstances, of satisfying his offended honour, by inflicting personal chastisement upon you wherever he meets you."

Saying which, the colonel, believing me in his heart to be the arrantest coward alive, took his leave; but however annoyed I felt at the worldly consequences of this affair, I gloried in my privilege of prescience, which had informed me of the certain result of our hostile interview. I then prepared myself to receive my lawyer, and attend the magistrates:—that affair was soon settled—the tailor entered into sureties to indict me at the sessions, and I knew that the worshipful personages on the bench calculated on no slight degree of punishment, as the reward of my correction of Fitman's insolence.

The story of Sir Henry's challenge soon got wind. Those who had been my warmest friends saw something extremely agreeable on the other side of the way, if they met me walking; and remarks neither kind nor gentle assailed my ears as I passed the open windows of the club-houses in St. James's-street. Although I yet had not had the ill-fortune to meet my furious antagonist, I did not know how long it might be before he would return to town, I therefore decided upon quitting it; and driven, as it



were, out of society, fixed my abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, between forty and fifty miles from the metropolis.

How sweet and refreshing were the breezes which swept across that fertile valley, stretching to the feet of the lofty South Downs—what an expanse of view—what brightness and clearness of atmosphere—what serenity—what calm—what comfort! Here was I, domesticated with an amiable family, whose hearts I could read, and whose minds were open to me:—they esteemed, they loved me—When others would oppress and hunt me from the world, their humble home was at my disposal.

My friends had been married many years, and one only daughter was their care and pride. She was fresh and beautiful as a May morning, and her bright eyes sparkled with pleasure as she welcomed me to the cottage; and then, I knew, what years before I had so much desired to know, but never yet believed, that she loved me. “This effect of my knowledge repays me for all that is past,” said I; “now shall I be truly happy.”

I soon discovered, however, that although Mary’s early affection for me (for we had been much together in our younger days) still reigned and ruled in her heart, that I had a rival, a rival favoured by her parents, for the common and obvious reason, that he was rich; but the moment I saw him, I read his character, and saw the latent workings of his mind—I knew him for a villain.

The unaffected kindness of Mary for her old playmate, and the endearing good-nature with which she gathered me the sweetest flowers from her *own* garden; the evident pleasure with which she recurred to days long past, and the marked interest with which she listened to my plans



for the future, soon aroused in her avowed lover's breast hatred for *me* and jealousy of *her*; and although to herself and the family his manner remained unchanged, I, who could fathom depths beyond the ken of other mortals, watched with dreadful anxiety the progress of his passion; the terrible workings of rage, and doubt, and disappointment, in his mind. Mary saw nothing of this; and considering her marriage with him a settled and fixed event, gave him her society with the unreserved confidence of an affianced bride. And although *I* knew that she would gladly have left his arm to stroll through the meadows and the groves with me; that, which she considered her duty to her parents, and to her future husband, led her to devote a great proportion of her time to him. Still he was not to be satisfied with what, he could not but feel, was a divided affection; and gradually the love he once bore her, began to curdle on his heart, until it turned, as I at once foresaw, to deadly hate; and the predominant passion of his soul was revenge on me, and on the ill-fated innocent girl for whom he once would have died.

At length the horrid spectacle presented itself to my all-searching and all-seeing eye of two "minds o'erthrown." Mary, as the period fixed for their marriage approached, sickened at the coming event; and too sincere, too in-artificial for concealment, owned to me the dread she felt of marrying the lover accepted by her parents:—there she paused, but I knew the rest; and pressing her to my heart, received from her rosy lips the soft kiss of affection and acceptance. She had resolved to fly with me from the home of her parents, rather than fulfil the promise *they* had made. My prescribed ignorance of my own fate, and of my own affairs, hindered my knowing that her in-



tended husband had overheard this confession. We had fixed the hour for flight the evening following that, on which she owned her love, and preceding the day intended for his marriage. The blow was too powerful for him to resist: rage, jealousy, disappointment, and vengeance, occupied his whole mind; and the moment that my individual and particular conduct was disconnected from his proceedings, I discovered his desperate intention towards my poor Mary.

That evening—the next she would be mine—that evening we had agreed that Mary should take her usual walk with her lover; and although he had appeared gloomy during the day, I had detected nothing in his thoughts which could justly alarm me; but when the evening closed in, and he by appointment came to fetch her for their ramble, then my power enabled me to foresee the train of circumstances which were to follow. The weapon was concealed in one of his pockets which was to give his victim her deathblow; its companion, which was to rid him of life, rested in the other. The course of his thoughts, of his intentions, was before me: the spot where he intended to commit the double murder evident to my sight. As she was quitting the garden to meet him, I rushed after her; I entreated, I implored her not to stir. I foretold a storm—I suggested a thousand probable ills which might befall her if she went; but she told me that she had promised to meet Charles, and go she must: it was for the last time, she said—she must go. Was I jealous of her?

“No, no, my sweet girl!” said I: “your life, dearer to me than my own, depends upon your compliance with my desire, that you will stay.”

“My life?” said Mary.



"Yes, beloved of my heart!" exclaimed I: "your cruel lover would be your murderer!"

"Charles murder me!" said she, half wild, and quite incredulous: "you are mad."

"No, no; *I know it*," said I, still holding her.

"This is the height of folly," replied Mary, calmly: "pray let me go—I have promised—it will lull suspicions—am I not yours?"

"Yes, yes, and go you shall not."

"Tell me how you have gained this information," said she, "and I will attend to it."

"If you go, you perish!" said I. "Stay, and the rage which this desperate madman now would vent on *you* will turn upon himself."

"What a thought!" said the half-distracted girl. "I'll go this instant!"

"No, no, my beloved! What shall I say to hinder you?"

"Tell me how or by what means you have attained this knowledge, and, I repeat, I will stay."

I had the power to save her; by confessing it, I should preserve her, but I should lose my envied faculty, the object of my life—was there a moment to doubt?

"Mary," said I, "I have a supernatural knowledge of events—I surrender it—stay!"

At that instant the report of a pistol near the place of appointment roused our attention from ourselves; and running to the place whence the noise proceeded, we found the unhappy victim of jealousy stone dead, and weltering in his blood: the pistol intended to take my Mary's life was yet clenched in his cold hand.

From this moment my power was gone, and I began



again to see the world as my fellow-creatures do. Mary became my wife with the consent of her parents; and as I was returning from church, I saw, amongst the crowd before the village inn, my old friend in green, who accosted me with great good-nature, and congratulated me upon my enviable situation.

"Sir," said I, "I thank you; and I thank you for having, by some means inexplicable by me, gratified the ruling passion of my heart. In the ignorance of my nature, I desired to possess a power incompatible with the finite character of the human mind. I have now learnt by experience that a limit is set to human knowledge for the happiness of man; and in future I shall be perfectly satisfied with the blessings which a wise and good Providence has afforded us, without daring to presume upon the bounty by which we are placed so pre-eminently above all other living creatures."

"A very moral and proper observation," said my friend, evidently displeased with my moralizing.

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

Saying which, he turned upon his heel, and was lost among the throng.

I have several times since seen the old gentleman walking about London, looking as hale and as hearty as ever, but I have always avoided him; and although I have reason to believe he has seen me, more than once; by a sort of tacit consent we never acknowledge each other.

I returned to my home, blest with an affectionate wife; hoping for the best, profiting by the past, enjoying the present, and putting our trust in God for the future.