

THE PAINTER.

BY W. H. HARRISON.

OUR devoted regard to the fairer sex, not less than a desire to gratify the curiosity which our Frontispiece, we would fain hope, is calculated to inspire, has induced us, of all our dramatis personæ, to present first to the reader, the heroine of our tale. That the said heroine was a *rara avis*, not in this lower and breathing world of realities, but in the world of romance, we can adduce no more satisfactory evidence, than the fact of her having her fair and full share of the faults which are the inheritance of humanity. Beautiful, to a degree beyond the power even of our gifted artist to describe to the eye, she certainly was, if the elements of beauty be a brow to which a phrenologist would bow with doting homage, an eye for which the fire-worshipper would abandon the god of his idolatry, and a form which would convince Phidias himself of the folly of endeavouring to perpetuate in marble what His hand hath been pleased to create of that frailer and more perishable material—clay.

Caroline Marston had been left an orphan in infancy,

and thus had never been conscious of the care of a parent. The gentleman to whose guardianship she had been bequeathed had, as respected both her person and her property, acquitted himself affectionately and conscientiously of his trust; having taken her under his own roof, from the moment that her last surviving parent resigned her to his charge; while he had so husbanded her little property, that before she attained her majority, she was rendered independent of the world; that is to say, relieved from the necessity of embracing any of the few professions to which well educated females are but too frequently compelled to resort for a livelihood.

The society to which, through the connections of her guardian, Mr. Wentworth, she became introduced, embraced some of the first families in the county, and thus, exclusively of the natural grace of her manner, she had acquired the ease and polish which mark the well-bred young woman. And yet, setting aside her personal attractions, which, as we have already stated, were of no common order, Caroline Marston, at the period at which we first made her acquaintance, was not very distinguished, nor altogether a favourite, in the circle in which she moved. There was a nonchalance, nay a kind of indolence in her habit, which argued little intellectual energy. True it is, she was a great reader, but as far as the result was concerned, it was impossible to conjecture to which of the many descriptions of readers she belonged. We remember, in the days of our boyhood, once to have attended a lecture on the Belles Lettres, delivered

by one whose eloquence made an impression on our memory, which time we believe will never efface ; we allude to Coleridge, who with great quaintness, but equal truth, reduced readers to four classes. One he compared to an hour-glass ; for what they read, he alleged, ran in, and ran out, and left not a grain behind. Another class he likened to a jelly bag, which retained all that was gross and foul, suffering all that was pure and valuable to escape. For a third description, he found a parallel in a sponge, which absorbed every thing, and gave it back again, only a little dirtier. The fourth and last order, however, he compared to the slaves working in the mines of Golconda, who cast aside all that was worthless, and retained only the pure gem.

We know not in which of these classes to assign a place to our heroine ; she read much, but to what purpose, we must leave to be gathered from our brief and imperfect sketch of her history.

Mr. Wentworth was a good man, and very fond of his ward, but withal prudent and far-casting ; and thus it was with no slight degree of uneasiness that he observed an unequivocal attachment on the part of his youngest son for Caroline Marston ; while he had reasons, amounting almost to conviction, to conclude, that the feeling was reciprocal. Now Mr. Wentworth, although possessing an unencumbered estate, and holding a prominent position in his county, was not a rich man. His family was large, and his landed property being entailed, he had not much to spare in starting

his younger sons in the world. Henry Wentworth, the youngest, had been well educated, but, whether from indecision on his own part or his father's, had arrived at years of discretion without having chosen, or been urged to choose a profession. He was a man of great animal spirits, gentlemanly manners, kind, and open-hearted, and withal, possessed of a face and figure which might well draw a second look from the most fastidious belle in the county.

That Mr. Wentworth should regard with apprehension an attachment of a serious character between Henry and Caroline, must not be referred altogether to worldly feelings, when it is considered, that her income, not more than sufficient to support herself in respectability, would afford but a scanty provision in the event of her union with one, to whom he could give little or nothing, and for whom he, when too late, regretted he had not sought a profession. Direct interference between the young people, he was man of the world enough to feel, would be worse than useless; he therefore resorted to the interest which he happened to possess, to procure for Henry an appointment abroad, and thus remove him from attractions which were likely to prove so detrimental to his worldly prosperity.

Now it happened, that Henry, with plenty of time on his hands, a good horse at his command, and Caroline Marton to make love to, was eminently satisfied with matters as they were; and if any thing could induce him to abandon the agreeable monotony of his life, it would have been a commission in a crack regiment.

Thus it will be very readily imagined, that he did not receive, with exuberant joy, his father's announcement of his having applied to an influential East India Director for a writership, which, he added, as a matter of course, Henry would be but too happy to accept.

Overwhelmed with consternation, Henry Wentworth hastened to pour out his grief at the feet of his lady-love, who, whatever graver emotions she might indulge on the occasion, was by no means disposed to part from the playmate of her childhood and the companion of her youth.

Accordingly, sympathizing heartily in his feelings, and anxious to avert a catastrophe so fatal to the happiness of one of them at least, she promised to exert the little influence she possessed with her guardian in order to induce him to abandon the project. We have said that Caroline exhibited an indolence of disposition—a repugnance to exertion of any kind, but of all things, as she openly avowed, she hated “a scene,” and thus her affection for Henry may be held to have been of no ordinary intensity, since it compelled her to broach this somewhat delicate subject to her guardian.

I should premise, that the apprehensions entertained by Mr. Wentworth of an “untoward” match on the part of his son, had never altered his deportment towards his ward, who had always treated him with an affectionate familiarity which the natural kindness of his heart induced him rather to encourage than repress.

“And so, sir,” she said to him one day, while they

were walking together in the park which surrounded the old-fashioned manorial residence, "you are going to send poor Henry abroad!"

"True, Caroline," was the reply; "he has been too long idle, and it is time that he look to some means of maintenance; for as a younger son, you know, he has little to expect when Providence shall remove me. What objection have you to it, that you look so sorrowful on the occasion?"

"Simply that the thought of it makes Henry very miserable; and, indeed, I think it very cruel," rejoined the maiden.

"Caroline," said Mr. Wentworth, after a short pause, "I will be candid with you, and I am sure that a girl of your sense will take what I am about to say in good part, particularly as I impute blame on the occasion to none but myself. I ought to have foreseen the attachment to which a residence under the same roof was likely to give rise, an attachment, apparent enough on one side, which, with reference to your respective circumstances in life, cannot but be destructive of the happiness of each, and therefore I have resolved on sending him abroad."

"Really, sir," retorted Caroline, with unwonted animation, "I must solemnly protest against a doctrine which makes love for me a transportable offence. I desire votaries, but not victims, and if your bill once pass into a law, I shall not have a worshipper at my shrine."

"My dear," said Mr. Wentworth, "I do not jest,

nor does it become you to do so, or rather to affect it, on such a subject."

"Indeed, sir," was the reply, "I was never more in earnest in my life; and I do hope that you will pause before you commit your son to a pursuit in life to which he has an unconquerable repugnance."

"Caroline, be honest," rejoined her guardian, "and acknowledge that you plead not for him alone. Your own heart will tell you—"

"Nay," said the damsel, evading so close an application of the argument, "I never ask my heart any questions, for I have no reliance whatever on its replies."

The conversation, much, we believe, to the relief of the young lady, was here interrupted; for, emerging from a clump of trees through which they had been walking, they came suddenly upon a stranger, who appeared to be engaged in making a sketch, in which the mansion was a prominent feature. The artist rose as the others approached him, and apologizing for what he feared might be a trespass on their privacy, was about to shift his quarters. Mr. Wentworth, however, somewhat flattered perhaps by his domain having been made the subject of the sketch, politely begged that he would not disturb himself, and finally requested a sight of his portfolio, alleging that his fair companion took some interest in the art.

The stranger was a young man, about five-and-twenty, rather above the middle height, of a complexion rather embrowned by the sun than naturally dark, for

when he removed his hat, his high and expansive forehead was as white and smooth as marble, contrasting agreeably with the deep auburn hair that curled luxuriantly around it.

The artist submitted his portfolio to their inspection readily enough ; but Caroline thought that there was an air of indifference in his manner of doing it, which indicated that either he thought little of his performances, or set small store by their opinion of them. Whether Mr. Wentworth was really a judge of their excellence, or that, as we before hinted, his self-love was gratified by the nature of the subject, I know not, but certain it is, that he invited the stranger up to the mansion ; an invitation, however, which, although courteously acknowledged, was declined ; and immediately afterwards, the painter, gathering up his materials, put his portfolio under his arm, and, with a slight bow, passed the confines of the park, and entered a small cottage on the opposite side of the high-road.

Induced by curiosity to make some inquiries regarding his new acquaintance, Mr. Wentworth gleaned that he had been a sort of lodger in the widow's cottage for a week or two previous to the meeting we have described ; that he occupied two rooms, lived plainly, almost abstemiously, paid the rent and all other demands upon him with scrupulous exactness, and had greatly attached his hostess by the quiet urbanity of his manner, and his repugnance to giving trouble, the latter, perhaps, being one of the most prominent characteristics of the true gentleman.

By degrees, the apparently natural coldness of the stranger's manner yielded to the desire which Mr. Wentworth evinced for his society, and, on one or two occasions, he passed an hour at the hall; and in the course of conversation, alleged as the reason of his protracted stay in that part of the country, that he was preparing a series of views for the gallery of a nobleman, the Earl of E——, of whose reputation as a patron of the arts, and particularly of young artists, Mr. Wentworth had often heard.

Thus it happened that a sort of intimacy sprung up between the limner and the Wentworths, and, at length, it was not difficult for a keen observer to perceive, even through the frost of the stranger's reserve, that his admiration of the beautiful in Nature was not confined to the inanimate portion of her works. Of this fact Caroline herself became aware, for as he was turning over the contents of his portfolio in her presence, in quest of a sketch he was desirous of exhibiting, her eye caught a portrait, which, notwithstanding his endeavours to conceal it, she instantly recognised as designed for herself. A flush, arising probably from a mixed feeling of gratification and displeasure, suffused her cheek at the discovery, while in a half-serious, half-playful manner, she said, "I hope that subject is not included in your commission, for if it be, I must protest against being hanged, even in the good company which grace the gallery of your patron."

"Miss Wentworth," replied the painter, in some confusion, "I fear you will think I have taken a liberty

which circumstances do not warrant ; but I assure you it was done from memory, and if you will allow me to retain the sketch, I pledge you my word—if you will take the gage of a stranger—that it shall never pass out of my possession.”

Whether this assurance quieted the lady’s fears, or gratified her vanity, it is not for us to determine ; but he was allowed not only to retain the sketch, but afterwards to finish it from the life ; “subject,” however, as the lawyers have it, “to the terms, conditions, and stipulations, hereinbefore mentioned.”

We will let the reader a little more into our confidence, and inform him that every day of the artist’s sojourn in the neighbourhood added to the interest he felt in the graceful girl to whom he had been thus accidentally introduced. But while lingering within the spell of her enchantment, he could not disguise from himself the peril to which his future peace of mind was exposed. That she was, if not engaged, warmly attached to young Wentworth, he could have no doubt ; and that Henry was affectionately fond of her, was a matter of notoriety ; indeed, so far from disguising his feelings on the subject, he appeared to glory in displaying them.

Our painter, it was quite evident, was a man of no ordinary stamp of mind ; his reading had been extensive ; he had travelled much, and he loved his art to a degree of enthusiasm which was often expressed in language of extraordinary eloquence. He had remarked, on more than one occasion, when

he had been descanting on the beauty of a prospect, that the eye of his fair auditor would kindle, and sometimes a flush would come over her cheek, as if she had caught his ardour. Hence he was often betrayed into the hope, that beneath the indolence and listlessness which he had lamented to observe in her character, there might be hidden an energy of soul and thought, requiring for its development only society of a more intellectual character than that in which she moved.

There is perhaps no dearer occupation on earth than cultivating the minds of those we love, and whom we love the more, as we do our garden, as each fresh blossom opens to our eye. That the delight of such a task, in the instance before us, had occurred to our artist, we do not deny; but the thought was ever checked by his reflection on their relative positions. "She is engaged," thought he, "to an amiable, honest-hearted youth, who loves her affectionately in return; and what right have I to interrupt the even course of their happiness by inspiring her with tastes which may open her eyes to his intellectual deficiencies?" The argument was an admirable one, but he found it no easy matter to reduce it to practice; and he often paused in the midst of one of his enthusiastic dissertations, as he observed its effect on his auditor.

It happened one evening that Caroline encountered the painter alone in the park, while he was endeavouring to select a spot from whence to sketch a scene which he had heard her express a wish to see transferred to canvass. At the moment, a part of her dress became

entangled in a briar, and the artist stepped hastily forward with the intention of disengaging it ; but in so doing, his foot slipped into a cart-rut which had been concealed by the overgrowing grass, and being unable at the moment to withdraw it, he fell on his side, and so severely sprained his ankle, that he lay without motion on the ground, while a deadly paleness passed over his countenance.

With a shriek, and a bound which left the entangled portion of her dress in the safe custody of the bramble, she was in an instant at his side. The injury, although it did not amount to a dislocation, was attended by such acute agony, that he was unable to articulate a word in answer to her hurried inquiries. Severe, however, as was the pain he endured, the expressions of tenderness which the agitation of the moment extorted from her lips, fell not unregarded on his ears ; and when he was so far recovered as to be able to express his acknowledgments he said ;

“How shall I thank you, Miss Marston, for this sympathy for a stranger?”

“Nay, Sir,” rejoined Caroline, with a deep blush as the words in which that sympathy had been conveyed recurred to her memory ; “not quite a stranger ; and even if you were, the circumstance should not deprive you of the commiseration which so painful an accident must naturally inspire.”

“I shall not regret the result of my clumsiness, Miss Marston, since it has drawn from your lips words which my memory will long treasure.”

Caroline blushed more deeply, and said hesitatingly, "Really, Sir, I am not aware—"

"For pity's sake recall them not," exclaimed the painter, with passionate earnestness; "let me live on in the dear delusion until I am awakened from my dream,—a blessed but a brief one—by your marriage bell."

"My marriage bell!" exclaimed the maiden, with some surprise, but with a degree of calmness to which she had in manner forced herself: "What can my marriage bell ever be to you?"

"The knell of my happiness," was the reply.

"Indeed, sir!" returned the lady; "you speak in enigmas, and assuredly appear to have information which, as I am the party chiefly interested, it is a little singular I do not possess myself. Who told you I was about to be married?"

"It is somewhat difficult," said the other, "to individualize one of the hundred tongues of Rumour, which speaks of your union with Mr. Henry Wentworth as a matter settled beyond all doubt."

"I am much indebted to Rumour, then," rejoined Caroline, "for giving to me so excellent and amiable a person, who notwithstanding will never be anything more to me than he is at present."

"But he loves you passionately," was the exclamation of the painter, "or I am greatly mistaken."

"He has some such notion himself," said the maiden, with a slight smile; "but you are both wrong. He fancies he sees in me qualities which would constitute his happiness; but he does not know me."

"Indeed!" returned the artist, with unaffected surprise; "then he must have made marvellously bad use of his time, for if I am rightly informed, you have been known to each other from childhood."

"I do not impugn my friend Henry's quickness of perception," said Caroline; "for long acquaintance does not necessarily involve the knowledge of character: to know a person is one thing, to study him another. Henry and I differ very essentially in many points."

"And yet," was the reply, "I see you joining in the same pursuits, and mingling in the same society."

"Because I have no other society to mingle in," said the maiden. "True it is, the circle in which we move is wealthy, and as respectable as any in the county; but less discernment than I give you credit for, would easily discover that it is not an intellectual society. Do not misunderstand me; I am not a blue-stocking; but I have read other books than novels, and studied other things than quadrilles and gallopades."

"And yet," resumed the artist, "I see you an unconstrained participator in the amusements of the society to which you belong; nor, in your general bearing among your friends, can I recognise any want of sympathy in their tastes."

"You mean to say," returned the lady, "that I do not reply to an inquiry after my health by a quotation from Dante, or solve a question as to the figure of a quadrille, by a reference to Euclid. To a certain extent, one must trifle among triflers or be dumb, and consequently disagreeable. You know there is a Latin

proverb which I might quote, in support of my maxim. I cannot shut myself up in my chamber for ever, and if I go into society, there is neither reason nor good-nature in confining my conversation to subjects which are interesting only to myself."

A pause ensued in the dialogue, but in that brief interval what new and ecstatic thoughts crowded on the bosom of the painter ! The most precious was the knowledge that she was not betrothed to Henry Wentworth, and that consequently her heart might yet be free. The next "comfortable thought" was that there was in her heart a well of deep feeling, which, like a fountain in a wood, though overgrown with flowers, and, it may be, some stray weeds, is yet pure and bright beneath.

The nature of his accident was such as to preclude any very rapid progression, nor do we think, that had no such impediment existed, our artist would have felt any disposition to shorten the interview by quickening his pace. New hopes were fluttering at his heart ; but anxious as he was to resolve them into certainties, he yet hesitated to provoke a further explanation, lest those hopes should be changed to despair. They were, notwithstanding the slow pace at which they had walked, getting near to the mansion ; the artist, dreading the agony of suspense, to which, if he parted without ascertaining his destiny, he would, for some hours, be subjected, paused, and said, with a voice which, though somewhat faltering from agitation, had lost none of its full, deep music :

"Miss Marston, may I hope that the blessed words

which so lately fell like balm upon my senses, had yet a deeper source than the occasion which immediately called them forth—nay, hear me; I know that the hope is presumption, but, oh! if you cannot bid me be happy, at least pardon my offence, if offence it be to love you beyond all the treasures which earth can promise, or ambition sigh for.”

As he spoke he fixed his eyes on the face of the lovely being beside him, and saw there agitation and a tear—an expression rather of perplexity than displeasure. There was a strength of character about Caroline perfectly in unison with feminine softness of heart and manner, that enabled her to rally against the feelings which the address of her companion had excited. Her hand was resting on his arm as he spoke; he ventured to lay his own upon it; it was gently but immediately withdrawn, and with some dignity she replied:

“Sir, I will not affect to undervalue the attentions which you have been pleased to show me, and I should be unjust did I not acknowledge my gratitude for the respect you have displayed in the rare courage with which you have told me of my faults; but as you so lately said,—I repeat it not offensively,—you are a stranger.”

“I know and bitterly feel it,” was the reply; “and I do not ask you to plight your faith to an unknown, and for any proof that you have to the contrary, it may be an unworthy, man,—certainly unworthy of the high boon to which I aspire. Yet am I what I seem,—a

painter—a poor one it is true ; and all I ask is, that if I prove to you that my poverty is not coupled with dishonour, you will allow me to encourage the hopes to which your own sweet words have given birth.”

“ Admitting that I could do so,” said Caroline, “ you have referred to your own poverty, but you have forgotten that I am not rich.”

“ Nay,” answered the artist, “ I am not mad enough to despise that competence, the absence of which must necessarily embitter any situation in life ; but if you will allow me to hope, I shall pursue my profession with an ardour proportionate to the value of the glorious prize to which I aspire ; and with the favour of the nobleman, to whom you have heard me allude,—and I am not likely to forfeit it,—I must succeed.”

As he spoke these words, his fine, manly, and very handsome features were lit up with unwonted animation, and there was an openness and candour in their expression which would have won the confidence of one more chary of giving credence to appearances than Caroline Marston.

Her reply was, “ I have no right to doubt your sincerity, and I do not. More, however, than the probation you ask I cannot grant ; I may not encourage you to hope, but I will not bid you despair.”

At this period of the conversation they had arrived at the hall, when the painter, declining the cordial invitation of its hospitable owner to pass the rest of the evening with him, returned to his cottage with feelings of a very different kind from those with which

he quitted it. And yet those feelings were of a mixed character. Lovers are certainly most unreasonable beings. He had obtained more than he could expect to gain on first broaching the subject—an acknowledgment that her heart was free—nay, that she was not indifferent to him; and yet he was not satisfied. Through the warp and woof of his joy, there ran certain threads of doubt, which perplexed him greatly, and troubled his dreams.

However, the stimulus imparted by the encouragement he had received induced him, on the following day, to prepare for his departure, in order, doubtless, to commence that professional career, which was to lead him to fame and Caroline Marston.

On his taking leave of Mr. Wentworth, the old gentleman expressed great interest in his future success; adding that he was about to visit London with his ward in the autumn, and should be much gratified by an opportunity of seeing the paintings of those familiar scenes, of which our artist had made sketches. The other informed him that, by that time, all those which he should be enabled to finish would be in the gallery of the nobleman he had alluded to; but, he continued, drawing a card from his case, it would be only necessary for Mr. Wentworth to present that at the Earl's to ensure admission to himself and any friends he might choose to take with him.

Of course, not having avowed his sentiments to the young lady's friends, our artist could take no other than a formal leave of her; but in doing so, he fancied

—and perhaps it was only fancy—that he had never seen her look so sad: of one thing, however, he was certain, namely, that she returned the pressure of his hand at parting; and upon the meagre diet of that assurance, his love luxuriated for the next fortnight.

Well, time flew by, as fly it will, whether we make love or mischief, kiss or quarrel; and the leaves which our anonymous artist—for he had not yet got a name—left green upon the boughs were most of them of another colour, and *lying*—as leaves very often do—under the trees. In the mean time, the good folks at the hall had heard nothing of their acquaintance, the painter, to the great marvel and mystification of the old gentleman, who, so exalted was his opinion of our hero's ability, and the beauty of the subjects he had selected, thought, simple man! that London would be ringing with the praises of the scenery of — Park, and the talents of the artist who had immortalized them on canvass. Whatever were Caroline's thoughts, she kept them to herself, and expressed nothing but her wonder when Mr. Wentworth would put in execution his intention of taking her to London. He, however, who thought more of Joe Mantons and Dartford gunpowder, than of the bow and arrows which symbolize the best shot of heathen or modern times, could not think of quitting the country until after the first week of pheasant-shooting; and thus it happened that it was quite the end of the month sacred to double-barrels and double-ale, before our heroine and her guardian

were introduced to the sights, sounds, and smoke of London.

We will, however, do our rural friend the justice to say that, when he had achieved the journey, he was quite as eager as his ward to pay a visit to the gallery in which they were led to suppose they should see the pictures which, as well as the painter, had so much interested them. Accordingly they presented themselves and the artist's card at the door of the Earl of E——, and after some little delay, were admitted to a sight of his collection.

They passed through two or three rooms which, although lined with gems of art, contained not the gems which had a superior brilliancy in their eyes, namely the series of views of —— Park. On entering the fourth room, however, they discovered that the painter had told them truth. There they were, in all the glory of gold frames and fresh paint, and so admirably faithful, that Mr. Wentworth uttered an exclamation of wonder; and it is impossible to say how far his ecstasies might have carried him, if he had not discovered that Caroline and the attendant were not the only witnesses of his raptures. Great, however, was his surprise in recognising his old acquaintance in an individual who, in a dressing gown, with pallet on thumb, and brush in hand, was engaged in putting a few finishing touches to a freshly painted picture.

Our artist, having motioned to the attendant to withdraw, advanced to the visitors, by each of whom he

was cordially greeted; the old gentleman remarking on his singular good fortune in meeting with the painter as well as the pictures. Some conversation ensued, referring partly to the subject before them, and partly to the events which had marked their intercourse in the country; when Caroline's eye happened to rest upon the picture on which the artist had been employed, and a cloud passed over her brow as she perceived that it was the portrait of herself, to which we have already alluded.

"I thought, sir," she said with some coldness, "that you pledged yourself, that that picture should never pass out of your possession."

"It is true, I did so pledge myself," was the reply.

"Then how is it that I see it here?" rejoined the lady. "You have deceived me."

"Nay, is it not still in my possession? Can I not take it away with me? In preferring to finish it by this light, instead of by that of my own studio, I am not aware that I violate my pledge."

"Indeed," said the damsel, a flush of indignation passing over her cheek as she spoke; "this is a subterfuge, of which I could not have conceived you capable;" and the bitter consciousness of having been deceived by the being, whom, notwithstanding the caution with which she received his avowal of attachment, she had clothed with every attribute of manly virtue, struck a pang to her heart, and brought the tear into her eye.

The painter, by this time, had laid aside his tools

of trade, and stepping up to the indignant and mortified fair one, he took her reluctant hand, and looking with his smile of fascination in her face, said ;

“ But suppose the peer and the painter are one ? ”

Caroline snatched away her hand, and looking full at the speaker, exclaimed, “ Impossible ! ”

“ But true, nevertheless,” was the calm reply, the correctness of which was confirmed by the entrance of a servant, who prefaced his errand by “ My Lord ; ” and who having retired, the earl continued : “ Nor in this, Caroline—for I will now venture to call you so—have I deceived you ? I told you I was a painter, a very *poor* one, as these performances would convince the most sceptical. I did not tell you that I was not a peer as well. But my probation is ended, and with the permission of my kind friend and hospitable host here, I claim the prize.”

As he spoke he took the hand which had been so recently withdrawn from his own. Mr. Wentworth, who had just emerged from his mystification, and began to comprehend the state of affairs, called Caroline “ a sly puss,” and congratulated her in the same breath.

Affairs took their natural course ; Caroline became a countess ; and so, good night ! my tale is told.