

Theresa Marchmont

Mrs Charles Gore

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THE MAID OF HONOUR.

A TALE.

BY MRS. CHARLES GORE

"La cour est comme un edifice bati de marbre; je veux dire
qu'elle est composee d'hommes fort durs, mais fort polis."
LA BRUYERE.

London, MDCCCXXIV

CHAPTER I.

"Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
shall never tremble. Hence horrible shadow!
Unreal mockery, hence!"--_MACBETH_

It was a gloomy evening, towards the autumn of the year 1676, and the driving blasts which wept from the sea upon Greville Cross, a dreary and exposed mansion on the coast of Lancashire, gave promise of a stormy night and added to the desolation which at all times pervaded its vast and comfortless apartments.

Greville Cross had formerly been a Benedictine Monastery, and had been bestowed at the Reformation, together with its rights of Forestry upon Sir Ralph de Greville, the ancestor of its present possessor. Although that part of the building containing the chapel and refectory had been long in ruins, the remainder of the gloomy quadrangle was strongly marked with the characteristics of its monastic origin. It had never been a favourite residence of the Greville family; who were possessed of two other magnificent seats, at one of which, Silsea Castle in Kent, the present Lord Greville constantly resided; and the Cross, usually so called from a large iron cross which stood in the centre of the court-yard, and to which thousand romantic legends were attached, had received few improvements from the modernizing hand of taste. Indeed as the faults of the edifice were those of solid construction, it would have been difficult to render it less gloomy or more convenient by any change that art could affect. Its massive walls and huge oaken beams would neither permit the enlargement of its narrow windows, nor the destruction of its maze of useless corridors; and it was therefore allowed to remain unmolested and unadorned; unless when an occasional visit from some member of the Greville family demanded an addition to its rude attempts of splendour and elegance.

But it was difficult to convey the new tangled luxuries of the capital to this remote spot; and the tapestry, whose faded hues and moulding texture betrayed the influence of the sea air, had not yet given place to richer hangings. The suite of state apartments as cold and comfortless in the extreme, but one of the chambers had been recently decorated with more than usual cost, on the arrival of Lord and Lady Greville, the latter of whom had never before visited her Northern abode. Its dimensions, which were somewhat less vast than those of the rest of the suite, rendered it fitter for modern habits of life; and it had long ensured the preference of the ladies of the House of Greville, and obtained the name of "the lady's chamber," by which it is even to this day distinguished. The walls were not incumbered by the portraits of those grim ancestors who frowned in mail, or smiled in fardingale on the walls of the adjacent galleries. The huge chimney had suffered some inhospitable contraction, and was surmounted with marble; and huge settees, glittering with gilding and satin, which in their turn would now be displaced by the hand of Gillow or Oakley, had dispossessed the tall straight backed-chairs, which in the olden times must have inflicted martyrdom on the persons of our weary forefathers.

The present visit of Lord Greville to the Cross, was supposed to originate in the dangerous illness of an old and favourite female servant, who had held undisturbed control over the household since the death of the first Lady Greville about ten years before. She had been from her infancy attached to the family service, and having married a retainer of the house, had been nurse to Lord Greville, whom she still regarded with something of a maternal affection. Her husband had died the preceding year; equally lamented by the master whom he served, and the domestics whom he ruled; and his wife was now daily declining, and threatening to follow her aged partner to the grave. It was imagined by the other members of the establishment, that the old lady had written to her master, with whom she frequently corresponded, to entreat a personal interview, in order that she might resign her "steward-ship" into his hands before her final release from all earthly cares and anxieties; and in consideration of the length and importance of her services, none were surprised at the readiness with which her request was granted.

Lord Greville had never visited the North since the death of his first wife, a young and beautiful woman whom he had tenderly loved, and who died and was interred at Greville Cross. She left no children, and the heir, a fine boy in the full bloom of childhood and beauty, who now accompanied Lord Greville, was the sole offspring of his second marriage.

Helen, the present Lady Greville, was by birth a Percy; and although her predecessor had been celebrated at the Court of Charles, as one of the most distinguished beauties of her time, there were many who considered her eclipsed by the lovely and gentle being who now filled her place. She was considerably younger than her husband; but her attachment to him, and to her child, as well as her naturally domestic disposition, prevented the ill effects often resulting from disparity of years. Lord Greville, whose parents were zealous supporters of the royal cause, had himself shared the banishment of the second Charles; had fought by his side in his hour of peril, and shared the revelries of his court in his after days of prosperity. At an age when the judgement is rarely matured, unless by an untimely

encounter with the dangers and adversities of the world, such as those disastrous times too often afforded, he had been employed with signal success in several foreign missions; and it was universally known that the monarch was ever prompt publicly to acknowledge the benefit he had on many occasions derived from the prudent counsels of his adherent, as well as from his valour in the field.

But notwithstanding the bond of union subsisting between them, from the period of his first marriage, which had taken place under the Royal auspices, Greville had retired to Silsea Castle; and resisting equally the invitations of his condescending master, and the entreaties of his former gay companions, he had never again joined the amusements of the court. Whether this retirement originated in some disgust occasioned by the licentious habits and insolent companions of Charles, whose present mode of life was peculiarly unfitted to the purer taste, and intellectual character of Lord Greville; or, whether it arose solely from his natural distaste for the parasitical existence of a courtier, was uncertain; but it was undeniable that he had faithfully followed the fortunes of the expatriate king, and even supplied his necessities from his own resources; and had only withdrawn his services when they were no longer required.

After the death of Lady Greville, his secluded habits seemed more than ever confirmed; but when he again became possessed of a bride, whose youth, beauty, and rank in society, appeared to demand an introduction to those pleasures which her age had hitherto prevented her from sharing; it was a matter of no small mortification to Lord and Lady Percy, to perceive that their son-in-law evinced no disposition to profit by the Royal favour, or to relinquish the solitude of Silsea, for the splendours of the Capital. But Helen shared not in their regrets. She had been educated in retirement; she knew but by report the licentious, but seductive gaieties of the Court of Charles, and she had not the slightest wish to increase her knowledge of such dangerous pleasures. Content with loving, and being beloved by a husband whom she regarded with profound veneration, her happiness was not disturbed by a restless search after new enjoyments; and her delighted parents soon forgot their disappointment in witnessing the contentment of their child.

For some years succeeding her marriage, they perceived no change in the state of her feelings, but at length the anxiety of parental love led them to form surmises, which renewed their former disapprobation of the conduct of Greville. During their frequent visits to Silsea, they observed that his love of study and retirement had deepened almost to moroseness; that his address, always cold and reserved, was becoming offensively distant; and that he was subject to fits of abstraction, and at other times to a peevish discontent, which materially threatened the happiness of their daughter. They also discovered that Helen, whose playful humour and gaiety of heart had been their solace and amusement, even from her infancy, was now pensive and dispirited. By degrees the bright expression of her countenance had lost all that becoming joyousness of youth, which had been its great attraction, and though still

"Sphered in the stillness of those heaven-blue eyes,
The soul sate beautiful,"

it was the soul of melancholy beauty.

Alarmed and unhappy, Lady Percy wearied her daughter with inquiries as to the cause of this inauspicious change; but in vain. Helen denied that any alteration had taken place in her feelings; and declared that the new and serious tone of her character arose naturally from her advance in life, and from the duties devolving upon her as a wife and mother.

"Be satisfied, dear madam," said she, "that I am still a happy and adoring wife. You well know that my affections were not won by an outward show of splendour and gay accomplishments, nor by the common attraction of an idle gallantry. It was on Greville's high reputation for just and honourable principles, and on his manly and noble nature, that my love was founded, and these will never change; --and if, at times, unpleasant circumstances should arise, into which my sex and age unfit me to inquire to throw a cloud over his features, or a transient peevishness into his humour, it would ill become me--in short," continued she in a trembling voice, and throwing her arms around Lady Percy's neck, to conceal her tears, "in short, dear Madam, you must remember that dearly, tenderly, dutifully, as Helen loves her mother, the wife of Greville can have no complaints to make to the Countess of Percy*." *[See "The family Legend"]

But however well the suffering wife might succeed in disguising the bitterness of wounded affection from her inquiring family, she could not conceal it from herself. She had devoted herself, in the pride of youthful beauty, to the most secluded retirement, through romantic attachment for one who had appeared to return her love with at least an equal fervour. Her father's house--her own opening and brilliant prospects--her numerous family connexions and "troops of friends,"--she had deserted all for him, in her generous confidence in his future kindness. "His people had become her people, and his God, her God!" She had fondly expected that his society would atone for every loss, and compensate every sacrifice; that in the retirements she shared with him, he would devote some part of his time to the improvement of her mind, and the development of her character, and that in return for her self devotion, he would cheerfully grant her his confidence and affection. But there--"there where she had garnered up her heart,"--she was doomed to bear the bitterest disappointment. She found herself, on awaking from her early dream of unqualified mutual affection, treated with negligence, and at times with unkindness, and though gleams of his former tenderness would sometimes break through the sullen darkness of his present disposition, he continually manifested towards both her child and herself, a discontented and peevish sternness, which wounded her deeply, and filled her with inquietude. She retained, however, too deep a veneration for her husband, too strong a sense of his superiority, to permit her to resent, by the most trifling show of displeasure, the alteration in his conduct. She forbore to indulge even in the

"Silence that chides, and woundings of the eye."

Helen's was no common character. Young, gentle, timid as she was, the texture of her mind was framed of "sterner stuff;" and she nourished an intensity of wife-like devotion and endurance, which no unkindness could tire, and a fixedness of resolve, and high sense of moral rectitude, which no meaner feeling had yet obtained the power

to blemish.

"Let him be as cold and stern as he will," said she to herself in her patient affliction, "he is my husband--the husband of my free choice--and by that I must abide. He may have crosses and sorrows of which I know not; and is it fitting that I should pry into the secrets of a mind devoted to pursuits and studies in which I am incapable of sharing? There was a time when I fondly trusted he would seek to qualify me for his companion and friend; but the enchantment which sealed my eyes is over, and I must meet the common fate of woman, distrust and neglect, as best I may."

Anxious to escape the observation of her family, she earnestly requested Lord Greville's permission to accompany him with her son, when he suddenly announced his intention of visiting Greville Cross. Her petition was at first met with a cold negative; but when she ventured to plead the advice she had received recently from several physicians, to remove to the sea coast, and reminded him of her frequent indispositions, and present feebleness of constitution, he looked at her for a time with astonishment at the circumstance of her thus exhibiting so unusual an opposition to his will, and afterwards with sincere and evident distress at the confirmation borne by her faded countenance to the truth of her representation.

"Thou art so patient a sufferer," he replied "that I am somewhat too prone to forget the weakness of thy frame--but be content--I must be alone in this long and tedious journey."

The tears which rose in her eyes were her only remonstrance, and her husband stood regarding her for some minutes in silence, but with the most apparent signs of mental agitation on his countenance.

"Helen," said he at length, in a low, earnest tone, "Helen, thou wert worthy of a better fate than to be linked to the endurance of my waywardness; but God who sees thine unmurmuring patience, will give thee strength to meet thy destiny. Thou hast scarcely enough of womanly weakness in thee to shrink from idle terrors, or I might strive to appall thee," he added faintly smiling, "with a description of the gloom and discomfort of thine unknown northern mansion; but if thou art willing to bear with its scanty means of accommodation, as well as with thy husband's variable temper, come with him to the Cross."

Helen longed to throw herself into his arms as in happier days, when he granted her petition, but she had been more than once repulsed from his bosom, and she therefore contented herself with thanking him respectfully; and in another week, they became inmates of Greville Cross.

The evening whose stormy and endless commencement I have before described, was the fourth after her arrival in the North; and notwithstanding the anxiety she had felt for a change of habitation, she could not disguise from herself that there was an air of desolation, a general aspect of dreariness about her new abode which justified the description afforded by her husband. As she crossed the portal, a sensation of terror ill-defined, but painful and overwhelming, smote upon her heart, such as we feel in the presence of a secret enemy, and Lord Greville's increasing uneasiness and abstraction since he had returned to the mansion of his forefathers,

did not tend to enliven its gloomy precincts. The wind beat wildly against the casement of the apartment in which they sat, and which although named "the lady's chamber," afforded none of those feminine luxuries, which are now to be found in the most remote parts of England, in the dwellings of the noble and wealthy. By the side of a huge hearth, where the crackling and blazing logs imparted the only cheerful sound or sight in the apartment, in a richly-carved oaken chair emblazoned with the armorial bearings of his house, sat Lord Greville, lost in silent contemplation. A chased goblet of wine with which he occasionally moistened his lips, stood on a table beside him, on which an elegantly-fretted silver lamp was burning; and while it only emitted sufficient light to render the gloom of the spacious chamber still more apparent, it threw a strong glare upon his expressive countenance and noble figure, and rendered conspicuous that richness of attire which the fashion of those stately days demanded from "the magnates of the land;" and which we now only admire amid the mummeries of theatrical pageant, or on the glowing canvas of Vandyck. His head rested on his hand, and while Lady Greville who was seated on an opposite couch, was apparently engrossed by the embroidery-frame over which she leant, his attention was equally occupied by his son, who stood at her knee, interrupting her progress by twining his little hands in the slender ringlets which profusely overhung her work, and by questions which betrayed the unsuspecting sportiveness of his age.

"Mother," said the boy, "are we to remain all winter in this ruinous den? Do you know Margaret says, that some of these northern sea winds will shake it down over our heads one stormy night; and that she would as soon lie under the ruins, as be buried alive in its walls. Now I must own I would rather return to Silsea, and visit my hawks, and Caesar, and--"

"Hush! sir, you prate something too wildly; nor do I wish to hear you repeat Margaret's idle observations."

"But mother, I know you long yourself to walk once again in your own dear sunshiny orangery?"

"My Hugh" said Lady Greville without attending to his question, "has Margaret shewn you the descent to the walk below the cliffs, and have you brought me the shells you promised to gather?"

"How? with the spring tide beating the foot of the rocks, and the sea raging so furiously that the very gulls dared not take their delicious perch upon the waves. Tomorrow perhaps--"

"What now, my Hugh, afraid to venture? When I walked on the sands at noon, there was a bowshot spare."

"No! mother, no, not afraid, not afraid to venture a fall, or meet a sprinkling of sea spray, and good truth I have enough to do with fears in doors, here in this grim old mansion, without--"

"Fears?"--

"Yes, fears, dear mother," said the boy, looking archly round at his attendant, who waited in the back ground, and who vainly sought by signs to silence her unruly charge.

"Do you know that the figure of King Herod, cruel Herod, the murderer of his wife, and the slayer of the innocents, stalks down every night from the tapestry in my sleeping room and wanders through the galleries at midnight; and then the cross, where the three Jews were executed a long, long time ago, in the reign of King John I think; they say that it drops blood on the morning of the Holy Friday;--and then mother, and this is really true," continued the child, changing from his playful manner to a tone of great earnestness, "there is the figure of a lady in rich attire, but pale, very pale, who glides through the apartments--yes; Herbert and Richard and several of the serving men have seen it; and mistress Alice, poor old soul once was seen to address it, but she would allow no one to question her on the subject; and they say it was her doom, and that she must therefore die of her present sickness. Ay: 'twas in this very room too--the lady's chamber."

"Boy," interrupted Lord Greville sternly, "if thou canst find no better subject for thy prate, than these unbecoming fooleries, be silent--Helen! why should you encourage his forwardness, and girlish love of babbling? Go hence, sirrah! take thyself to rest; and you, Margaret," added he, turning angrily to the woman, "remember that from this hour I hear no more insolent remarks, on any dwelling it may suit your betters to inhabit, nor of this imp's cowardly apprehensions."

Margaret led her young charge from the room; who, however sad his heart at being thus abruptly dismissed, walked proud and erect with all the welling consciousness of wounded pride. Helen followed him to the door with her eyes; and when they fell again upon her work, they were too dim with tears to distinguish the colours of the flowers she was weaving. Lord Greville had again relapsed into silent musing; and as she occasionally stole a glance towards him, she perceived traces of a severe mental struggle on his countenance; the muscles of his fine throat worked convulsively, his lips quivered, yet still he spoke not. At length his eyes closed, and he seemed as if seeking to lose his own reflections in sleep.

"I will try the spell which drove the evil spirit from the mind of the King of Israel," thought the sad and terrified wife; "music hath often power to soothe the darkness of the soul;" and she tuned her lute, and brought forth the softest of its tones. At length her charm was successful; Lord Greville slept; and while she watched with all the intense anxiety of alarmed affection, the unquiet slumbers which distorted one of the finest countenances that sculptor or painter ever conceived, she affected to occupy herself with her instrument lest he should awake, and be displeased to find her attention fixed on himself.

With the sweetest notes of a "voice ever soft and low, an excelling thing in woman," she murmured the following song, which was recorded in her family to have been composed by her elder brother, on parting from a lady to whom he was attached, previous to embarkment on the expedition in which he fell, and to which it alludes:

Parte la nave
Spiegati le vele
Vento crudele
Mi fa partir.

Addio Teresa,
Teresa, addio!
Piacendo a Dio
Ti rivedro.
Non pianger bella,
Non pianger, No!--
Che al mio ritorno
Ti sposero.

Il Capitano
Mi chiama a bordo;
Io faccio il sordo
Per non partir!
Addio Teresa,
Teresa, Addio!
Piacendo a Dio
Ti rivedro.
Non pianger bella,
Non pianger, No!--
Che al mio ritorno
Ti sposero.

Vado a levante
Vado a ponente
Se trovo gente
Ti scrivero.
Addio Teresa,
Teresa, Addio;
Piacendo a Dio
Ti rivedro.
Non pianger bella,
Non pianger, No!--
Che al mio ritorno
Ti sposero.

Helen had reached the concluding cadence of her soft and melancholy song, when raising her eyes from the strings to her still sleeping husband, she beheld with panic-struck and breathless amazement, a female figure, standing opposite resting her hand on the back of his chair--silent, and motionless, and with fixed and glassy eyes gazing mournfully on herself. She saw--yes!--distinctly saw, as described by little Hugh, "a Lady in rich attire, but pale, very pale;" and in the stillness and gloom of the apartment and the hour,

"'Twas frightful there to see
A lady richly clad as she,
Beautiful exceedingly."

The paleness of that pensive face did not lessen its loveliness, and the hair which hung in bright curls on her shoulders and gorgeous apparel, was white and glossy as silver. Helen gazed for a moment spell-bound; for she beheld in that countenance without the possibility of doubt, the resemblance of the deceased Lady Greville, whose portrait, in a similar dress, hung in the picture gallery at Silsea Castle. She shuddered; for the eyes of the spectre remained steadfastly fixed upon her; and its lips moved as if about to address her--"Mother of God--protect me!" exclaimed Helen convulsively, and she fell insensible on the floor.

CHAPTER II.

"Sorrow seems pleased to dwell with so much sweetness;
And now and then a melancholy smile
Breaks loose like lightning on a winter's night
And shows a moment's day."--_DRYDEN_

On the succeeding morning, when Lady Greville recovered sufficiently from a succession of fainting fits to collect her remembrances of the dreadful cause of her illness, she eagerly demanded of her attendants in what manner, and by whom, she had been placed in her usual sleeping-room. They replied, that Lord Greville had conveyed her there insensible in his arms; and had summoned them in great agitation to her assistance. He had since frequently sent to inquire after her health, and had expressed great delight when the last message, announcing her recovery, had reached him. But he came not himself to watch over her; and though the shock she had received, had brought on an alarming degree of fever, which confined her for several days to her room, he never visited her chamber. Helen was the more surprised and pained by this neglect, as she knew he made frequent visits to the sick bed of old Alice, and she wept secretly and bitterly over this fresh proof of his alienated love.

During the tedious hours of illness, the mental sufferings of the neglected wife far exceeded those of her corporal frame. She could reflect but on one subject--one idea, one pervading horrible idea had taken possession of her soul. She felt that through every person to whom she might impart her tale would listen with incredibility, and mockery, that the truth of that awful visitation could not be questioned by her own better judgment. She considered herself one

"To whom the world unknown
In all its shadowy shapes is shown."

She shuddered over the remembrance of the past, she trembled from apprehension of the future. The approach of night was beginning to be terrible to her feelings; the very air appeared, to her disordered imagination, instinct with being; low whisperings seemed to approach her ears; and if the female attendant whom she had stationed by her bedside disappeared for a moment, she instantly fancied she saw the noble figure approach, that pale soft countenance once more gazing upon her, and those cold lips about to address her; and in an agony of approaching insanity, she prayed aloud to the God of all Grace, for deliverance from the torture that assailed her. Her prayers were heard; for as her constitution recovered from the shocks it had sustained, her mind gradually returned to its wonted serenity; the impression of the event became less vivid, and in less than a week she was enabled to resume her accustomed habits.

Her return was more warmly greeted by Lord Greville than she had

expected. There was something of "long syne," in his manner of welcoming her to her sitting apartment, which rejoiced her warm and affectionate heart. She did not, however, approach it without trembling; for it was the lady's chamber. Her feelings were fortunately too much occupied by the unusual kindness displayed by Lord Greville, and as she silently and gratefully pressed the hand which led her to her seat, she was thankful that he made no inquiries into the particular cause of her illness. She knew that he treated all supernatural terrors with especial contempt, and considered them as fit subjects for the discussion of the low-minded and ignorant. She had formerly heard him reason soundly, and express himself strongly, on the subject, and her own scepticism on the possibility of spectral visitation, was principally owing to the arguments she had heard from his lips. Frequently had he praised her in former times, for her composure of mind in peril, and for her unfeminine superiority to all ideal terrors; and she did not now dare provoke his surprise and contempt by a revocation of her principles, or by a relation of the mysterious event which had befallen her.

As soon as he left her, she descended into the court enclosed by the quadrangle of the mansion; and as long as daylight lasted she continued to walk there, in order to avoid the solitude of her own dreaded apartment. As she traversed the pavement with hurried steps, she gazed on the huge iron cross, and no longer regarded with indifference the terrific legends attached to it. But at length the closing evening, accompanied by tempestuous winds, compelled her to retire to the house.

Once more she found herself installed for the evening in the abhorred chamber. All was as before--her husband was seated opposite to her in the same chair, by the same lamp-light--the ticking of the time-piece was again painfully audible from the wearisome stillness of the apartment; and her own trembling hands were again lingering over the embroidery-frame from which she dared not lift her eyes. Her heart beat painfully, her breath became oppressed, and she ventured to steal a look at her husband, who to her surprise was regarding her with an air of affectionate interest. Relieved for a moment, she returned to her occupation; but her former terrors soon overcame her. She would have given worlds to escape from that room, from that dwelling, and wandered she cared not how, she knew not wither, so she might be rescued from the sight of that awful figure, from the sound of that dreaded voice.

The conflict in her mind became at length too strong for endurance; and suddenly flinging down her work, she threw herself at her husband's feet, and burying her face in his knees she sobbed aloud; "save me from myself--save me, save me from _her_!" He raised her gently, and folded her in his arms. "Save thee from whom, my beloved Helen?"

"Greville, believe me or not as thou wilt, but as the Almighty hears and judges me, I have beheld the apparition of thy wife. I saw her freely, distinctly, standing beside thee even where thou sittest; clearly visible as the form of a living being; and she would have spoken, and doubtless revealed some dreadful secret, had not the weakness of my nature refused to support me. Oh! Greville, take me from this room--take me from this house--I am not able to bear the horrible imaginings which have filled my mind since that awful hour. My very brain is maddened--oh! Greville, take me hence."

Even in the agony of her fear, Helen started with delighted surprise to feel the tears of her husband falling on her hand. Yes! he,--the stern Greville, the estranged husband, moved by the deep distress manifested in the appearance of his wife, acknowledged his sympathy by the first tears shed in her presence.

"This is a mere phantasm of the brain," said he at length, attempting to regain his composure; "the coinage of a lively imagination which loves to deceive itself by--but no," continued he, observing her incredulous and agonized expression of countenance, "no, my Helen, I will not longer rack thy generous mind by these sufferings, however bitter the truth may be to utter or to hear. Helen! it was no vision--no idle dream,--Helen, it was a living form, a breathing curse to thee and me! Thou who hast accused me of insensibility to thy charms, and to thine endearing affection, judge of the strength of my love by the labyrinth of sin into which it hath betrayed me. Helen, my wife still lives, and I am not thy lawful husband."

It was many hours before the unfortunate Lady Greville sufficiently recovered her composure to understand and feel the full extent of the fatal intelligence she had received, and the immediate bearing it must have upon her happiness, her rights, and those of her child. As by degrees the full measure of her misery unfolded to her comprehension, she fell into no paroxysm of angry grief; she vented her despair in no revilings against the guilty Greville. Sorrowfully indeed, but calmly, she requested to be made acquainted with the whole extent of her miserable destiny.

"Let me know the worst," said she, "I have been long, too long deceived, and the only mercy you can now bestow upon me is an unreserved and unqualified confidence."

But Lord Greville could not trust himself to make so painful a communication in words, and after passing the night in writing, he delivered to her the following relation:--

LORD GREVILLE'S HISTORY

"I need not dwell upon the occurrences of my childhood, I need not relate the events which rendered my youth equally eventful and distinguished. My early life was passed so entirely in the immediate service of my sovereign, and in participation of the troubles and dangers which disastrous times and a rebellious people heaped upon his head, that the tenor of my life has been as public as his own.

"Yet Helen, forgive me for saying that I cannot even now, in this my day of humiliation, but glory in the happy fortune which crowned with success my efforts in the royal cause, both in the field and in the cabinet, and won for me at once the affection of my king, and the approbation of my fellow-countrymen, when I remember that to these flattering testimonies I owe not only the friendship of your father, but the first affections of his child. How frequently have you owned to me, in our early days of joy and love, that long before we met, my public reputation had excited the strongest interest in your mind--those days, those happy days, when I was rich alike in the warmest devotion of popular favour, and the approval of--but I must not permit myself to indulge in fond retrospections; I must steel my

heart, and calmly and coldly relate the progress of my misery and guilt, and of its present remorse and punishment.

"You have heard that soon after the restoration of Charles Stuart to the throne of his ancestors, I was sent on a mission of great public moment to the Hague, where I remained for nearly two years, and having succeeded in the object of government, I returned home shortly after the union of the king with the princess of Portugal. I was warmly received by his majesty, and presented by him to the young queen, as one whom he regarded equally as an affectionate friend, and as one of the most faithful servants of the crown. Thus introduced to her notice, it is not wonderful that my homage was most graciously received, and that I was frequently invited to renew it by admission into the evening circle at Whitehall. The very night after my arrival in London, I was called upon to assist at a masque given on the anniversary of the royal nuptials, at which their majesties alone, and their immediate attendants, were unmasked. The latter, indeed, were habited in character; but among the splendidly-attired group of the maids of honour, I was surprised at perceiving one, in a costume of deep mourning. Her extreme beauty and the grace of her demeanour excited an immediate interest in her favour; and her sable suit only served to render yet more brilliant, the exquisite fairness and purity of her complexion.

"It was not so much the regular cast of her features as their sweet and pensive expression which produced so strong an effect on the feelings. At the moment I was first struck by her appearance, I happened to be conversing with His Majesty who was making the tour of the apartment, graciously leaning on my arm; and my attention was so completely captivated by her surpassing loveliness, that the king could not fail to perceive my absence of mind. 'How now, Charles, how now,' said he kindly, 'twenty-four hours in the capital, and beauty-struck already? which among our simple English maidens hath the merit of thus gaining the approval of thy travelled eyes?--what Venus hath bribed the purer taste of our new Paris? Ha! let me see--Lady Joscelyn? Lady--No! by heaven,' said he following my looks, 'it is as I could wish, Theresa Marchmont herself. How, man--knowest thou not the daughter of our old comrade, who fell at my side in the unfortunate affair at Worcester?'

"The king took on an early opportunity of making my admiration known to Her Majesty; and of requesting her permission for my introduction to Miss Marchmont; who, although born of a family distinguished only by its loyalty to the house of Stuart, having been recommended to the royal attention from the loss of her only surviving parent in its cause, had sufficiently won the good will of the monarch, by her beauty and elegant accomplishments, to obtain a distinguished post about the person of the new Queen.

"From this period, admitted as I was into the domestic circle of the Royal household, I had frequent opportunities afforded me of improving my acquaintance with Theresa; whose gentle and interesting manners more than completed the conquest which her beauty had begun. Helen, I had visited many foreign courts, and had been familiarized with the reigning beauties of our own, at that time eminently distinguished by the brilliancy of female beauty, but never in any station of life did I behold a being so lovely in the expressive sadness of her fine countenance, so graceful in every movement of her person. But this was not all. Theresa possessed beyond other women

that retiring modesty of demeanour, that unsullied purity of look and speech, which made her sufficiently remarkable in the midst of a licentious court, and among companions whose levity at least equalled their loveliness. On making more particular inquiries respecting her family connexions, I found that they were strictly respectable, but of the middle class of life; and that she had passed the period intervening between the death of her father, General Marchmont, and her appointment at court, in the family of an aged relative in the county of Devon, by whom indeed she had been principally educated. It was at the dying instigation of this, her last surviving friend and protector, that her destitute situation had been represented to the king by the Lady Wriothsesly, to whose good offices she was indebted for her present honourable station. Being however, as it were, friendless as well as dowerless, and backed in my suit by the powerful assistance of the king's approbation, I did not anticipate much opposition to my pretensions to the hand of Miss Marchmont, which had now become the object of my dearest ambition. I knew myself to be naturally formed for domestic life; and while the disastrous position of public affairs had obliged me to waste the days of my early youth in camps or courts, and in exile from my own hereditary possessions, I resolved to pass the evening of my life in the repose of a happy and well-ordered home in my native country.

"To the vitiated taste of the gallants of the court, many of whom might have proved powerful rivals, had they been so inclined, marriage had no attractions. The acknowledged distaste of Charles for a matrimonial life, and his avowed infidelities, sanctioned the disdain of his dissolute companions for all the more holy and endearing ties of existence. I had therefore little to fear from competition; indeed among the maids of honour of the Queen, whose situation threw them into hourly scenes of revelry and dissipation, Theresa Marchmont, who was universally acknowledged to be the loveliest of the train, excited less than any those attentions of idle gallantry, which however, sought and prized by her livelier companions, are offensive to true modesty. I attributed this flattering distinction to the respect ensured by the extreme retenue and propriety of her manners, but I have had reason since to ascribe the reserve of the courtiers to a less commendable motive. On occasion of a masqued festival given by Her Majesty on her birth-day at Kew, the king, in distributing the characters, allotted to Miss Marchmont that of Diana. 'Your Majesty' said the Duchess of Grafton, 'has judiciously assigned the part of the frigid goddess, to the only statue of snow visible among us. Mademoiselle se rencherit sur son petit air de province, si glacial et si arrange,' continued she, turning to the Comte de Gramont. 'Madam,' said the king, bowing respectfully to Theresa, with all that captivating grace of address for which he was distinguished, 'if every frozen statue were as lovely and attractive as this, I should forget to wish for their animation; and become myself a votary of the

"Queen and huntress, chaste and fair!"

"Ay," whispered the Duke of Buckingham, 'even at the perilous risk of being termed Charles, king and Lunatic.'

"This sobriquet of Diana had passed into a proverb; and such was Theresa's character for coldness and reserve, that I attributed to her temper of mind, the evident indifference with which she received

my attentions. Meeting her as I did, either in public assemblies, or in the antechamber of the Queen among the other ladies in waiting, I had no opportunity of making myself more particularly acquainted with her sentiments and character. When I addressed her in the evening circle, although she readily entered into conversation on general subjects, and displayed powers of mind of no common order, yet, if I attempted to introduce any topic, which might lead to a discussion of our mutual situation, she relapsed into silence. At times her countenance became so pensive, so touchingly sorrowful, that I could not help suspecting she nourished some secret and hidden cause of grief; and once on hinting this opinion to the king, who frequently in our familiar intercourse rallied me on my passion for Theresa, and questioned me as to the progress of my suit, he told me that Miss Marchmont's dejection was generally attributed to her regret, for the loss of Lady Wriothesly, the kind patroness who had first recommended her to his protection, and by whose death, immediately before my return from Holland, she had lost her only surviving friend. 'It remains to be proved,' added he, 'whether her lingering affection for the memory of an old woman will yield readily to her dawning attachment for her future husband.'

"Another suspicion sometimes crossed my mind, but in so uncertain a form, that I could scarcely myself resolve the nature of the evil I apprehended. I observed that Theresa constantly and anxiously watched the eye of the king, whenever she formed a part of the royal suite; and if she perceived his attention fixed on herself, or if he chanced to approach the spot where she stood, she would turn abruptly to me, and enter into conversation with an air of empressment, as though to confirm his opinion of our mutual good understanding. Upon one occasion as I passed through the gallery leading to the Queen's apartments, I found His Majesty standing in the embrasure of a window, in earnest conversation with Miss Marchmont. They did not at first perceive me; and I had leisure to observe that Theresa was agitated even to tears. She turned round at the sound of approaching footsteps, but betrayed no distress at my surprising her in this unusual situation. In reply to some observation of the King's, she answered with a respectful inclination, 'Sir, I will not forget;' and left the gallery; while Charles, gaily taking my arm, led me into the adjoining saloon, and informed me that he had been pleading my cause with my fair tormentor, as he was pleased to term her.

"'The worst torment I can be called to endure, Sire,' said I haughtily, 'is longer suspense; and I must earnestly request your Majesty's gracious intercession of Miss Marchmont's early reply to my application for the honour of her hand. Should it be refused, I must further entreat your Majesty's permission to resign the post I so unworthily hold, in order that I may be enabled to pass some years on the continent.'

"Charles appeared both startled and displeased by the firm tone of resolution I had assumed. 'Were I inclined for idle altercation,' answered he coldly, 'I might argue something for the dignity of the fair sex, who have ever claimed their prescriptive right of holding us lingering in their chains; and Lord Greville would do well to remember that his services are too important to his country to be held on the caprices of a silly girl's affected coyness. But be it so--since you are so petulant a lover, be prepared when you join her Majesty's circle to-night, to expect Miss Marchmont's answer.'

"It happened that there was a splendid fete given at the palace that evening in honour of the arrival of a French ambassador. When I entered the ball-room I caught the eye of the king, who was standing apart, with his hand resting negligently on the shoulder of the Duke of Buckingham, and indulging in an immoderate gaiety apparently caused by some 'foolborn jest,' of the favourite's; in which, I know not why, I immediately suspected myself to be concerned. On perceiving my arrival however, Charles forsook his station, and approaching me with the graceful ease which rendered him at all times the most finished gentlemen of his court, he took me affectionately by the hand, and congratulating me on my good fortune, he led me to Theresa who was seated behind her companions. Occupied as I was with my own happiness, and with the necessity of immediately expressing my gratitude both to Theresa and the King, I could not avoid being struck by the dreadful paleness of her agitated countenance which contrasted frightfully with her brilliant attire; for I now saw her for the first time out of mourning for Lady Wriothesly. When I entreated her to confirm by words the happy tidings I had learned from his Majesty, who had again returned to the enlivening society of his noble buffoon, she spoke with an unfaltering voice, but in a tone of such deep dejection, and with a fixed look of such sorrowful resolution that I could scarcely refrain, even in that splendid assemblage, from throwing myself at her feet, and imploring her to tell me whether her consent had not been obtained by an undue exertion of the royal authority. But there was always in Theresa an apparent dread of every cause of emotion and excitement, which made me feel that a wilful disturbance of her calm serenity would be sacrilege.

"During the short period intervening between her consent and our marriage, which by the command of the king, was unnecessarily and even indecorously hastened, these doubts, these fears, constantly recurred to my mind whenever I found myself in the presence of Theresa, but during my absence I listened to nothing but the flattering insinuations of my own heart, and I succeeded in persuading myself that her coldness arose solely from maidenly reserve, and from the annoyance of being too much the object of public attention. I remembered the sweetness of her manner, when one day in reply to some fond anticipation of my future happiness, she assured me, although she could not promise me at once that ardour of affection which my present enthusiasm seemed to require, that if a grateful and submissive wife could satisfy my wishes, I should be possessed of her entire devotion. But although thus reassured, I could scarcely divest myself of apprehension, and on the morning of our nuptials, which took place in the Royal Chapel, in presence of the whole court, her countenance wore a look of such deadly, such fixed despair, that the joy even of that happy moment when I was about to receive the hand of the woman I adored, before the altar of God, was completely obliterated.

"She had been adorned by the hand of the Queen, by whom she was fondly beloved, with all the splendour and elegance which could enrich her lovely figure; and in the foldings of her bridal veil, her countenance assumed a cast of such angelic beauty, that even Charles, as he presented me with her hand, paused for a moment in delighted emotion to gaze upon her. But even thus late as it was, and embarrassed by the royal presence, I was so pained by her tears that I could keep silence no longer. 'Theresa,' I whispered to her as we

approached the altar, 'if this marriage be not the result of your own free will, speak--it is not yet too late. Heed not these preparations--fear not the King's displeasure, I will take all upon myself. Speak to me dearest, deal with me sincerely.--Theresa, are you willing to be mine?' She only replied by bending her knee upon the gorgeous cushion before her. 'Hush!' said she in a suppressed tone, 'hush! my lord--let us pray to the Almighty for support,' and the service instantly began."

CHAPTER III.

"Let not the Heavens hear these tell-tale women,
Rail on the Lord's anointed."--_RICHARD III._

"The month which followed our marriage we passed in the happy retirement of Silsea; and there for the first time I became acquainted with the real character of my Theresa. Her beauty had indeed been the glory of the court, but it was only amid the privacy of domestic life that the accomplishments of her cultivated mind, and the submissive gentleness of her disposition became apparent. Timid almost to a fault, I sometimes doubted whether to attribute her implicit obedience to my wishes, to the habit of early dependence upon the caprice of those around her, or to the resignation of a broken spirit. Still she did not appear unhappy. The wearisome publicity and etiquette of the life she had been hitherto compelled to lead, was most unsuitable to her taste for retirement; and she enjoyed equally with myself the calm repose of a quiet home. When she made it her first request to me that I would take the earliest opportunity to retire from public life, and by settling on my patrimonial estate release her from the slavery of a court, all my former apprehensions vanished; and I began to flatter myself that the love I had so fondly, so frankly, bestowed, had met with an equal return. Prompt as we are to seize on every point which yields confirmation to our secret wishes, and eagerly credulous, where the entire happiness of our lives is dependent on our wilful self-deception, is it wonderful that I mistook the calm fortitude of a well-regulated mind for content, and the gratitude of a warm heart for affection? I inquired not, I dared not inquire minutely into the past; I shrunk from any question that might again disturb the serenity of my mind by jealous fears. 'I will not speak of past storms on so bright a day,' said I secretly while I gazed upon my gentle Theresa; 'it might break the spell.' Alas! the spell endured not long; for however unwillingly, we were now obliged to resume our situation at Whitehall.

"Our re-appearance at court was marked by the most flattering attentions on the part of the King and Queen. Several brilliant fetes were given by their Majesties on occasion of our marriage; and I began to fear that the homage which everywhere seemed to await my young and lovely bride, and the promising career of royal favour which opened to her view, might weaken her inclination for the retirement we mediated. To me however she constantly renewed her

entreaties for a furtherance of her former wishes on the subject; in consequence of which I declined the gracious offers of his Majesty, who was at this time particularly desirous that I should take a more active part in public measures, and accept a situation in the new ministry which would formerly have placed the utmost bounds to my ambition. I was now however only waiting a favourable opportunity, to retire altogether to the happy fire-side, where I trusted to dream away the evening of my days in the society of my own family.

"In this position of our affairs, it chanced that we were both in attendance on the Queen at Kew; where one evening a chosen few, distinguished by her Majesty's favour, formed a select circle. The conversation turned upon music, and the Queen who had been describing with national partiality the beauty of the hymns sung by the Portuguese mariners, suddenly addressing me, observed that since she left her native country she had heard no vocal music which had given her pleasure except from the lips of Miss Marchmont: 'I cannot' said she kindly smiling, 'as you may perceive, forget the name of one whose society I prized so highly; but if 'Lady Greville' will pardon my inadvertence, and oblige me by singing one of those airs with which she was wont formerly to charm me to sleep when I suffered either mental or bodily affliction, I will in turn forgive _you_, my lord, for robbing me of the attendance of my friend.'

"Theresa instantly obeyed, and while she hung over her instrument her attitude was so graceful, that the Queen again observed to me, 'we must have our Theresa seen by Lely in that costume, and thus occupied she would make a charming study for his pencil; and I promise myself the pleasure of possessing it as a lasting memorial of my young friend.' The portrait to which this observation gave rise, you must have seen yourself, my Helen, in the gallery at Silsea castle.

"While I was thus engaged by her Majesty, I observed the Duke of Buckingham approach my wife with an air of deference bordering on irony; he appeared to make some unpleasant request which he affected to urge with an earnestness beyond the rules of gallantry or good breeding, and which she refused with an appearance of haughtiness I had never before seen her excise. He then respectfully addressed the Queen, and entreated her intercession with Lady Greville for a favourite Italian air, one, he said, which her Majesty had probably never enjoyed the happiness of hearing--but before the Queen could reply, before I had time to inquire into the cause of the agony and shame which were mingled in Lady Greville's looks, she covered her brow with her hands, and exclaimed with hysteric violence, 'No, never more--never again. Alas! it is too late.'

"The queen, herself too deeply skilled in the sorrows of a wounded heart, appeared warmly to compassionate the distress which had robbed her favourite of all presence of mind; and rising evidently to divert the attention of the circle, whose malignant smiles were instantly repressed, she invited us to follow her into the adjoining gallery, at that time occupied by Sir Peter Lely for the completion of his exquisite series of portraits of the beauties of Charles's court. In their own idle comments and petty jealousies arising from the resemblances before them, Lady Greville was forgotten.

"While I was deliberating the following morning, in what manner I could with delicacy interrogate Theresa on the extraordinary scene I

had witnessed, I was surprised by her sudden but firm declaration that she could not, _would not_ longer remain in the royal suite, and she concluded by imploring me on her knees, as I valued her peace of mind, her health, her salvation, to remove her instantly to Silsea. 'I have obtained her Majesty's private sanction,' said she, shewing me a billet in the hand-writing of the queen, 'and it only remains for you publicly to give in our resignation.' The letter was written in French, and contained the following words: 'Go, my beloved Theresa--dearly as I prize your society, I feel that our mutual happiness can only be ensured by the retirement you so prudently meditate. May it be a consolation to you to reflect that you must ever be remembered with respect and gratitude by, 'Your affectionate friend.'

"The terms of this billet surprised me, and I began to request an explanation, when Theresa interrupted me by saying hastily, 'Do not question me, for I cannot at present open my mind to you--but satisfy yourself that when I linked my fate to yours in the sight of God and man, your honour and happiness became precious to me as my own; and may He desert me in my hour of need, if in aught I fail to consult your reputation and peace of mind. Let me pray of you to leave this place without delay. I know that you will urge against me the benefit of avoiding the various surmises which will arise from the apparent precipitancy of our retreat; but trust to me, my lord, that it is a necessary measure, and that we have nothing to fear from the opposition of the king.

"The pretext we adopted for our hasty retirement from public life was the delicate state of Lady Greville's health, who was within a few months of becoming a mother; and having hastily passed through the necessary ceremonies, we again exchanged the tumults of the capital for the exquisite enjoyments and freedom of home. As we traversed the venerable avenue at Silsea, amid the acclamations of my assembled tenantry, I formed the resolution never again to desert the dwelling of my ancestors; but having now entered into the bonds of domestic life, to seek from them alone the future enjoyments of existence. I had in one respect immediate reason to congratulate myself on the change of our destiny, for Theresa, whose health had for some months gradually declined, soon regained her former strength in the quiet of the country. She occupied herself constantly in some active employment. The interests of the sick, the poor, and the decrepit, led her frequently to the village; where I doubt not you have often heard her named with gratitude and affection; and when she returned to the castle, the self-content of gratified benevolence spread a glow over her countenance which almost dispelled the clouds of sorrow still lingering there. All went well with us, and if I dared not flatter myself with being passionately beloved, I felt assured that I should in time obtain her entire confidence.

"I was beginning to look forward with the happy anxiety of affection to the event of Lady Greville's approaching confinement, when one morning I was surprised by the arrival of a courier with a letter from the Duke of Buckingham. I was astonished that he should take the trouble of renewing a correspondence with me; as a very slight degree of friendship had originally subsisted between us; and the displeasure publicly testified by Charles on my hasty removal from his service, had hitherto freed me from the importunities of my courtier acquaintance. The letter was apparently one of mere complimentary inquiry after the health of Lady Greville, to whom

there was an enclosure, addressed to Miss Marchmont, which he begged me to deliver with his respectful services to my much-esteemed lady. He concluded with announcing some public news of a nature highly gratifying to every Briton, in the detail of a great victory obtained by our fleet over the Dutch admiral, De Ruyter. It was that, my Helen, in which your noble brother fell, a the moment of obtaining one of the most signal successes hitherto recorded in the naval annals of our country. You were too young to be conscious of the public sympathy testified towards this intrepid and unfortunate man, but I may safely affirm with the crafty Buckingham, that his loss dearly purchased even the splendid victory he had obtained. 'What news from the court,' said Theresa, as I entered the apartment in which she sat.

"'At once good and bad,' I replied. 'We have obtained a brilliant victory over De Ruyter; but alas! it has cost us the lives of several of our most distinguished officers.'

"She started from her seat, and wildly approaching me, whispered in a tone of suppressed agony, 'Tell me--tell me truly--_is he dead_?'

"'Of whom do you speak?'

"'Of _him_--of my beloved--my betrothed--of Percy, my own Percy,--' said she with frantic violence.

"Helen--even then, heart-struck as I was, I could not but pity the unfortunate being whose very apprehensions were thus agonizing. I dared not answer her--I dared not summon assistance, lest she should betray herself to others as she had done to her husband; for she had lost all self-command. I attempted to pacify her by an indefinite reply to her inquiries, but in vain. 'Do not deceive me,' said she, 'Greville, you were ever good and generous; tell me did he know all, did he curse me, did he seek his death?'

"It occurred to me that the letter which I held in my hand might be from--from her dead lover; and with a sensation of loathing, I gave it to her. She tore it open, and a lock of hair dropped from the envelope. I found afterwards that it contained a few words of farewell, dictated by Percy in his dying moments; and this sufficiently accounted for the state of mind into which its perusal plunged the unhappy Theresa. Before night she was a raving maniac, and in this state she was delivered of a dead infant.

"Need I describe my own feelings? need I tell you of the bitter disappointment of my heart in finding myself thus cruelly deceived? I had ventured all my hopes of earthly happiness on Theresa's affection; and one evil hour had seen the wreck of all! The eventful moment to which I had looked forward as that which was to confirm the blessings I held by the most sacred of ties, had brought with it misery and despair; for I was childless, and could scarcely still acknowledge myself a husband, till I knew how far I had been betrayed. Yet when I looked upon the ill-starred and suffering being before me, my angry feelings became appeased, and the words of reviling and bitterness expired upon my lips.

"Amid the ravings of her delirium the unfortunate Theresa alternately called upon Percy and myself, to defend her against the arts of her enemies, to save her from the King. 'They seek my

dishonour,' she would say with the most touching expression, 'and alas! I am fatherless!' From the vehemence of her indignation whenever she mentioned the name of Charles, I became at length persuaded that some painful mystery connected with my marriage remained to be unfolded; and the papers which her estrangement of mind necessarily threw into my hands, soon made me acquainted with her eventful history. Such was the compassion with which it inspired me for the innocent and injured Theresa, that I have sat by her bedside, and wept for very pity to hear her address her Percy--her lost and beloved Percy, and at other times call down the vengeance of heaven upon the king, for his licentious and cruel tyranny.

"It was during her residence on the coast of Devonshire that she formed an acquaintance with Lord Hugh Percy, whose ship was stationed at a neighbouring port. They became strongly attached to each other; and with the buoyant incautiousness of youth, had already plighted their faith before it occurred to either, that her want of birth and fortune would render her unacceptable to his parents knowing, which he did, that they entered very different views for his future establishment in life, he dared not at present even make them acquainted with his engagement; and it was therefore mutually agreed between them that she should accept the proffered services of Lady Wriothlesly for an introduction to the royal notice, and that he in the mean while, should seek in his profession the means of their future subsistence. Secure in their mutual good faith, they parted, and it was on this occasion that he had given her a song, which in her insanity she was constantly repeating. The refrain, 'Addio Teresa, Teresa Addio,' I remembered to have heard murmured by the Duke of Buckingham with a very significant expression, on the night when the agitation of Lady Greville had made itself so painfully apparent in the circle of the Queen.

"You will believe with what indignation, with what disgust, I discovered that shortly after her appointment at court, she had been persecuted with the licentious addresses of the king. It was nothing new to me that Charles, in the selfish indulgence of his passions, overlooked every barrier of honour and decency, but that the unprotected innocence of the daughter of an old and faithful servant, whose very life-blood had been poured forth in his defence, should not have been a safeguard in his eyes, was indeed incredible and revolting. But it was this orphan helplessness, this afflicting destitution which marked her for his prey.

"Encompassed by the toils of the spoiler, and friendless as she was, the unhappy Theresa knew not to whom to apply for succour or counsel; and in this painful exigence, she could only trust to her own discretion and purity of intention to shield her from the advances from which she shrunk with horror. Irritated by the opposition he encountered, and astonished by that dignity of virtue, which, 'severe in youthful beauty,' had power to awe even a monarch in the consciousness of guilt, the king by the most ungenerous private scrutiny of her correspondence, made himself acquainted with her attachment to Lord Hugh; and while she was eagerly looking for the arrival of the ship which contained her only protector, the authority of His Majesty prolonged its station in a distant and unhealthy climate, where her letters did not reach him, and whence his aid could avail her nothing.

"In this dilemma, when the death of Lady Wriothlesly had deprived her

of even the semblance of a friend, I was first presented to Miss Marchmont. The motive of the king in encouraging my attachment I can hardly guess, unless the thought to fix her at court by her marriage, where some future change of sentiment might throw her into his power; or possibly he hoped to make my addresses the means of separating her from the real object of her attachment, without contemplating a farther result, and thus the same wanton selfishness which rendered him regardless of every tie of moral feeling towards Theresa, led him to prepare a life of misery and dishonour for his early friend and faithful adherent.

"Agitated by a daily and hourly exposure to the importunities of Charles; insulted by the suspicions which the insinuations of Buckingham had excited in the minds of her companions; friendless--Helpless--hopeless--dreading that she might be betrayed by her ignorance of the world into some unforeseen evil, and knowing that even in the event of Percy's return, her engagement with him must long remain unfulfilled, the unhappy girl naturally looked upon her union with me as the only deliverance from the assailing misfortunes; and in an hour of desperation she gave me her hand. That her strongest efforts of mind had been exerted, from the moment of her marriage, to banish all remembrance of her former lover I firmly believe. The letter acquainting him with the breach of faith which her miserable destiny seemed to render inevitable, had never reached him, and happily, alas! how happily for him, his last earthly thoughts were permitted to rest on Theresa, as his beloved and affianced wife. I am persuaded that had he returned in safety to his native country, she would have avoided his society as studiously as she did that of the king; and that had she been spared the blow which deprived her of reason, her dutiful regard, and in time her devoted affection, would have been mine as firmly, as through the vows which gave them to my hopes and been untainted by any former passion. As it was, we were both victims. I, to her misfortunes--she through the brutality of the king.

"It appeared to me that on our return to court after our ill-fated union, the king had for some time refrained from his former insulting importunities; and had merely distressed Lady Greville by indulging in a mockery of respectful deference, which exposed her to the ridicule of those around her who could not fail to observe his change of manner. Perceiving by my unconstrained expressions of grateful acknowledgment for his furtherance of my marriage with Theresa that she had kept his secret, and incapable of appreciating that purity of mind, which rendered such an avowal difficult, even to her husband; and that prudence which foresaw the evils resulting to both from such a disclosure, he drew false inferences from her discretion, and gradually resumed his former levities. Nor was this the only evil with which she had now to contend. Some malicious enemy had profited by her absences to poison the mind of the queen, with jealous suspicions of her favourite, and to inspire her with belief, that Miss Marchmont's propriety of demeanour in public, had only been a successful mask of private indiscretion; and that Charles had not been an unsuccessful lover.

"Unwilling to confide to me the difficulties by which she was assailed, unable alone to steer among the rocks that impeded her course, Theresa at length adopted the bold measure of confiding her whole tale to her royal mistress; whose knowledge of the king's infidelities was already too accurate to admit of an increase of

affliction from this new proof; and on receiving a letter from the avowed friend of her husband--the grateful patron of her dead father--the august Father of his people, containing the most insolent declarations of passion, she vindicated her innocence by placing it in the hands of the Queen; at the same time entreating permission that her further services might be dispersed with. Her Majesty's reply, equally gratifying and affectionate, you have already seen; and it was in savage and unmanly revenge towards Theresa, for the frankness and decision of her conduct, that the king had directed his favorite to enclose me that letter whose sudden perusal had wrought the destruction of my unhappy wife. You will easily conceive that the terms of my answer to the Duke of Buckingham were those of unmeasured indignation--yet he, the parasite, the ready instrument of royal vice, and the malignant associate of Charles in his last act of premeditated cruelty, suffered the accusations of the injured husband to pass unnoticed and unrepelled; and I am persuaded that nothing but the dread of exposure prevented me from feeling the full abuse of the power of the crown by the master I had served with so much fidelity and affection. I have never since that period held direct or indirect communication with a court where the basest treachery had been my only reward.

"For many months the paroxysms of Lady Greville's distemper were so violent as to require the strictest confinement; and the medical man who attended her assured me that when this state of irritation should subside, she would either be restored entirely to the full exercise of her mental faculties, or be plunged into a state of apathy, of tranquil but confirmed dejection, from which, although it might not affect her bodily health, she would never recover. How anxiously did I watch for this crisis of her disorder! and yet at times I scarcely wished her to awake to a keener sense of her afflictions; for being incapable of recognising my person in my frequent visits to her chamber, I have heard her address me in her wanderings for pardon and pity. 'Forgive me, Greville, forgive me,' she would say. 'Remember how forlorn a wretch I shall become, when thou too, like the rest, shalt abandon and persecute me. Am I not thy wedded wife, and as faithful as I am miserable! am I not the mother of thy child? and yet I know not;--for I seek my poor infant, and they will not, will not, give it to me--tell me,' she whispered with a ghastly smile, 'have they buried it in the raging sea with him whom I must not name?'

"The decisive moment arrived; and Lady Greville's insanity was, in the opinion of her physicians and attendants, confirmed for life. She relapsed into that state of composed but decided aberration of mind, in which she still remains. I soon observed that my presence alone appeared to retain the power of irritating her feelings; and she seemed to shrink instinctively from every person with whom she had been in habits of intercourse previous to her misfortune. I therefore consigned this helpless sufferer to the charge of the nurse of my own infancy, Alice Wishart; whom, from her constant residence at the Cross, Lady Greville had never seen.

"This trustworthy woman, and her husband, who was also an hereditary retainer of our house, willingly devoted themselves to the melancholy service required; and hateful as Silsea had now become to my feelings, I broke up in part my establishment and became a restless and unhappy wanderer, seeking, in vain, oblivion of the past, or hope for the future. Would to God I had possessed sufficient fortitude to

remain chained to the isolation of my miserable home! for then had we never met; and thou, my Helen, wouldst have escaped this hour of shame and sorrow."

CHAPTER IV.

"Courteous Lord--one word--
Sir, you and I have lov'd--but that's not it--
Sir, you and I must part."--_ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA_

"Hitherto I have had to dwell in my recitation on the vices and frailties of my brothers of the dust, and to describe myself as an innocent sufferer; but I now approach a period of my life, from the mention of which I shrink with well-grounded apprehensions. Yet judge me with candour; remember the strength of the temptation through which I erred; and divesting yourself, if possible, of the recollection of your own injuries, moderate your resentment against an unfortunate being, who for many long years of his existence has not enjoyed one easy hour.

"It was nearly three years after the period to which I have alluded that an accident of which I need not remind you, my beloved Helen, introduced me to the acquaintance of your family. You may remember the backwardness with which I first received their approaches; the very name of Percy had become ominously painful to me, and yet it inspired me with a strange and undefinable interest. A spell appeared to attract me towards you, and in spite of my first resolution to the contrary, in spite of the melancholy reserve that still dwelt upon my mind, I became an acquaintance, and at length the favoured inmate and friend, of your father. Could I imagine the dangers that lurked beneath his roof? could I believe that while I thus once more indulged in the social converse to which I had been long a stranger, I should gain the affections of his child? The playful girl towards whom my age enabled me to assume an almost parental authority, while I exercised, in turn, the parts of playmate and preceptor, beloved as she was in all the charms of her dawning beauty, and artless naivete, inspired me with no deeper sentiment; not even when I saw her gradually expand into the maturer pride of womanhood, and acquire that feminine gentleness, that dignified simplicity of character, which had attracted me in Theresa Marchmont. Early in our intercourse, I had acquainted Lord Percy that the confinement of a beloved wife in a state of mental derangement, was the unhappy cause of my dejection and wandering habits of life; and I was rejoiced to perceive that his own seclusion from the world had prevented him from hearing my history related by others. He was also ignorant of the name and connexions of the lady to whom he knew his beloved and lamented son to have been attached; little indeed did he suspect his own share in producing my domestic calamity.

"The disparity of our years, and their knowledge of my own previous marriage, prevented them from regarding with suspicion the partiality displayed by their Helen for my society, and the influence which I

had unconsciously acquired over her feelings. For a length of time I was myself equally blind, and the moment I ventured to fear the dangers of the attachment she was beginning to form. I took the resolution of tearing myself altogether from her society, and without the delay of an hour, I returned to Silsea.

"But what a scene did I select to reconcile me to the loss of the cheerful society I had abandoned! My deserted home seemed haunted by the shadows of the past, and tenanted only by remembrances of former affliction. In my hour of loneliness and sorrow, I had no kind friend to whom to turn for consolation; and for the first time the sterile and gloomy waste over which my future path of life was appointed, filled me with emotions of terror and regret. My very existence appeared blighted through the treachery of others; and all those holy ties which enrich the evening of our days with treasures far clearer than awaited us even into the morning of youth, appeared withheld from me, and me only. Helen, it was then, in that moment of disappointment and bitterness, that the remembrance of thy loveliness, and the suspicion of thine affection conspired to form that fatal passion which has been the bane of thy happiness, and the origin of my guilt.

"Avoiding as I scrupulously did the range of apartments inhabited by the unfortunate Lady Greville, several years had passed since I had beheld her; and sometimes when I had been bewildered in the reveries of my own desolate heart, began to doubt her very existence. Yet this unseen being who appeared to occupy no place in the scale of human nature, this unconscious creature who now dwelt in my remembrance like the unreal mockery of a dream, presented an insuperable obstacle to my happiness. I saw my inheritance destined to be wrenched from me

"By an unlineal hand
No son of mine succeedingly,"

"and I felt myself doomed to resign every enjoyment and every hope for the sake of one to whom the sacrifice availed nothing; one, too, who had permitted me to fold her to my heart in the full confidence of undivided affection, while her own was occupied by a passion whose violence had deprived me of my child, and herself of intellect and health.

"Such were the arguments by which I strove to blind myself to my rising passion for another, and to smother the self-reproaches which assailed me when I first conceived the fatal project of imposing upon the world by the supposed death of my wife, and of seeking your hand in marriage. How often did the better feelings of my nature recoil from such an act of villainy--how often was my project abandoned, how often resumed at the alternate bidding of passion and of virtue! I will not repeat the idle sophistry which served to complete my wilful blindness; nor dare I degrade myself in your eyes by a confession of the tissue of contemptible fraud and hypocrisy into which I was necessarily betrayed by the execution of my dark designs. Oh! Helen--this heart of mine was once honest, once good and true as thine own; but now there crawls not on this earth a wretch whose lying lips have uttered falsehoods more villainous than mine! and honour, the characteristic of the ancient house I have disgraced, the best attribute of the high calling I have polluted, is now a watchword of dismay to my ear.

"In Alice Wishart and her husband I found ready instruments for the completion of my purpose; and indeed the difficulties which awaited me were even fewer than I had first anticipated. The ravings of Lady Greville, and her distracted addresses to the name of her lover had inspired her attendants with a belief of her guiltiness, which in the beginning of her illness I had vainly attempted to combat. It was not therefore to be expected that these faithful adherents of my family, who loved me with an almost parental devotion, and whose regret for the extinction of the name of Greville was the ruling passion of their breasts, should consider her an object worthy the sacrifice of my entire happiness. The few scruples they exhibited were those rather of expediency than of conscience were easily overcome. By their own desire they removed to Greville Cross for the more ready furtherance of our guilty plan; under pretence that the health of the unfortunate Theresa required change of air. On their arrival they found it easy to impress the servants of the establishment with a belief of her precarious state, and the nature of her malady afforded them a plausible pretext for secluding her from their observation and attendance. Accustomed to receive from Alice a daily account of her declining condition, the announcement of her death excited no surprise. In a few weeks after her journey, a fictitious funeral completed our system of deception.

"The moment when, according to our concerted plan, the death and interment of Lady Greville were formally announced to me, I repented of the detestable scheme which had been successfully executed. My soul revolted from the part of 'excellent dissembling' I had yet to act; and refused to sloop to a public exhibition of feigned affliction. I shuddered, too, when I contemplated the shame which awaited me, should some future event, yet hidden in the lap of time, reveal to the world the secret villainy of the man who had borne himself so proudly among his fellows. Yet even these regrets, even the apprehension of fresh difficulties in the concealment of my crime, were insufficient to deter me from the prosecution of my original intention; and blinded by the intemperance of misguided affection, heedless of the shame and misery into which I was about to plunge the woman I adored, I sought and obtained your hand.

"Helen, from that moment I have not known one happy hour, and the first punishment dealt upon my sin was an incapability to enjoy that affection for which I have forfeited all claim to mercy, here and hereafter. The remembrance of Theresa, not in her present state of self-abstraction, but captivating as when she first received my vows before God, to 'love and honour her, in sickness and in health,' haunted me through every scene of domestic endearment, and pursued me even to the hearth whose household deities I had blasphemed. I trembled when I heard my Helen addressed as Lady Greville, when I saw her usurping the rights, and occupying the place of one, who now appeared a nameless 'link between the living and the dead.' I could not gaze upon the woman whose affections had been so partially, so disinterestedly bestowed upon me, and whose existence I had in return polluted by a pretended marriage.--I could not behold of my boy, the descendant of two of the noblest houses in Britain, yet upon whom the stain of illegitimacy might hereafter rest, without feelings of self-accusation which filled the cup of life with the waters of bitterness. Alas! its very springs were poisoned--and Helen, however strong, however just thine indignation against thy betrayer, believe, oh! believe that even in this life I have endured no trifling

measure of punishment for my deep offences against thee and thine!

"But such is the frailty of human nature that it was upon these very victims I suffered the effects of my remorse and mental agony to all. The ill-suppressed violence of my temper, irritated by the dangers of my situation, has already caused you many a sorrowful moment; and the increase of gloom you must have lately perceived, has originated in the fresh difficulties arising to me from the death of the husband of Alice; and the dread of her own approaching dissolution. From these causes my present visit to this dreary abode was determined, and to them I am indebted for the premature disclosure which has made her life as wretched as my own. The sickness of her surviving attendant has latterly allowed more liberty to the unhappy Theresa than her condition renders safe either to her or me. I could not on my arrival here collect sufficient resolution to look upon her; and to adopt those measures of security which the weakness of Alice has left disregarded. To this infirmity of purpose on my part must be ascribed the dreadful shock you sustained by the sudden appearance of the unfortunate maniac, who I conclude was attracted to your apartment by the long-forgotten sound of music. On that fatal evening your fall awoke me from my sleep; and I then perceived my Helen lying insensible on the floor; and Theresa--yes--the altered and to me terrible figure of Theresa, bending over her. For one dreadful moment I believed that you had fallen a victim to her insanity.

"And now Helen--my injured, but fondly beloved Helen, now that my tale of evil is fully disclosed, resolve at once the doom of my future being. Yet in mercy be prompt in your decision; and whether you determine to unfold to the whole world the measure of my guilt, or, since nothing can now extricate us from the web of sin and shame in which we are involved, to assist in shielding me from a discovery which would be fatal to the interests of our innocent child, let me briefly hear the result of your judgment. Of this alone it remains for me to assure you--that I will not one single hour survive the publication of my dishonour."

For several hours succeeding the perusal of the forgoing history, Lady Greville remained chained as it were to her seat by the bewildering perplexities of her mind. The blow, in itself so sudden, so fraught with mischiefs, involving a thousand interests, and affording no hope to lessen its infliction, appeared to stupify her faculties. Lost in the contemplation of evils from which no worldly resource availed to save herself or her child, indignation, compassion, and despair, by turns obtained possession of her bosom. Her first impulse, worthy of her gentle nature, was to rush to the bed-side of her sleeping boy, and there, on her knees, to implore divine aid to shelter his unoffending innocence, and grace to enlighten her mind in the choice of her future destiny. And He, who in dealing the wound of affliction, refuseth not, to those who seek it, the balm that softens its endurance, imparted to her soul a fortitude to bear, and a wisdom to extricate herself from the perils by which she was assailed. The following letter acquainted Lord Greville with her final determination:

"Greville,--I was about, in the inadvertence of my bewildered mind, to address you once more by the title of husband; but that holy name

must hereafter perish on my lips, and be banished like a withering curse from my heart. Yet it was that alone which, holding a sacred charter over my bosom, bound me to the cheerful endurance of many a bitter hour, ere I knew that through him who bore it, a descendant of the house of Percy would be banded as an adulteress; and her child as the nameless offspring of shame. Rich as I was in worldly gifts, my birth, my character, the fair fortunes which you have blighted, and the parental care from which you have withdrawn me, alike appeared to shelter me from the evils which have befallen me--but wo is me! Even these were an insufficient protection against the craftiness of mine enemy!

"But reproaches avail me not. Henceforth I will shut up my sorrow and my complaining within the solitude of my own wounded heart--and thou, 'my companion, my counsellor, mine own familiar friend,' the beloved of my early youth, the father of my child, must be from this hour be as nothing unto me!

"Hear my decision. Since one who has already trampled upon every tie, divine and human, at the instigation of his won evil passions, would scarcely be deterred from further wickedness by any argument of mine, I dare not tempt the mischief contemplated by your ungovernable feelings against your life. I will, therefore, solemnly engage to assist you by every means in my power in the preservation of the secret on which your very existence appears to depend. As the first measure towards this object, I will myself undertake that attendance of Lady Greville, which cannot be otherwise procured without peril of disclosure. Towards this unfortunate being, my noble brother's betrothed wife, whose interests have been sacrificed to mine, no sisterly care, no affectionate watchfulness shall be wanting on my part, to lessen the measure of her afflictions. I will remain with her at Greville Cross; sharing the duties of Alice so long as she shall live, and supplying her place when she shall be no more. I feel that God has doomed my proud spirit to the humiliation of this trial; and I trust in his goodness that I may have strength cheerfully and worthily to fulfil my part. From you I have one condition to exact in return.

"Henceforward we must meet no more in this world. I can pity you--I can even forgive you,--but I cannot yet school my heart to that forgetfulness of the past, that indifference, with which I ought to regard the husband of another. Greville! we must not meet no more!

"And since my son will shortly attain an age when seclusion in this remote spot would be prejudicial to his interests and to the formation of his character, I pray you to take him from me at once, that I may have no further sacrifice to contemplate. Let him reside with you at Silsea, under the tuition of proper instructors--breed him up in nobleness and truth--and let not his early nurture, and the care with which I have sought to instil into his mind principles of honour and virtue, be utterly lost. Let his happiness be the pledge of my dutiful fulfilment of the task I have undertaken; and may God desert me and him, when I fail through negligence or hardness of heart.

"And if at times the stigma of his birth should present itself to irritate your mind against his helpless innocence, as alas! I have latterly witnessed, smite him not, Greville, in your guilty wrath--remember he is come of gentle blood, even on his mother's side--and

ask yourself to _whom_ we owe our degradation, and from whose quiver the arrow was launched against us? And now farewell--may the Almighty enlighten and forgive you--and if in this address there appears a trace of bitterness, do not ascribe it to any uncharitable feelings, but look back upon the past, and think on what I was--on what I am. Consider whether ever woman loved or trusted as I have done, or was ever more cruelly betrayed? Oh! Greville, Greville!--did I not regard you with an affection too intense for my happiness! did I not confide in you with a reverence, a veneration unmeet to be lavished on a creature of clay? But you have broken the fragile idol of my worship before my eyes--and the after-path of my life is dark with fear and loneliness. But be it so; my soul was proud of its good gifts--and now that I am stricken to the dust, its vanity is laid bare to my sight--haply, 'it is good for me that I have been afflicted.'--Farewell for ever."

The conditions of this letter were mutually and strictly fulfilled; but the mental struggle sustained by Lord Greville, his humiliation on witnessing the saintlike self-devotion of Helen Percy, combined with the necessity which rendered it expedient to accept her proffered sacrifice, were too much for his frame. In less than a year after his return to Silsea, he died--a prey to remorse.

Previous to his decease, in contemplation of the nobleness of mind which would probably induce the nominal Lady Greville to renounce his succession, he framed two testamentary acts. By one of these, he acknowledged the nullity of his second marriage, but bequeathed to Helen and her child all that the law of the land enabled him to bestow; by the other he referred to Helen only as his lawful wife, and to her son as his representative and successor; adding to their legal inheritance all his unentailed property. Both were enclosed in a letter to Lady Greville, written on his death-bed, which left it entirely at her own disposal, _which_ to publish, _which_ to destroy.

It is not to be supposed that the selection cost her one moment's hesitation. Having resigned into the hands of the lawful inheritor all that the strictest probity could require, and much that his admiration of her magnanimity would have prevailed on her to retain, she retired peaceably to a mansion in the South bequeathed by Lord Greville to her son, and occupied herself solely with his education. In the commencement of the ensuing reign he obtained the royal sanction to use the name and arms of Percy; and in his grateful affection and the virtuous distinctions he early attained, his mother met with her reward.

Theresa, the helpless Theresa, the guardian-ship of whose person had been bequeathed to Helen, as a mournful legacy, by Lord Greville, was removed with her from her dreary imprisonment at the Cross, and to the latest moment of her existence partook of her affectionate and watchful attention.

It was a touching sight to behold these two unfortunate beings, linked together by ties of so painful a nature, and dwelling together in companionship. The one, richly gifted with youthful loveliness, clad in a deep mourning habit, and bearing on her countenance an air of fixed dejection. The other, though far her elder in years, still beautiful,--with her long silver hair, blanched by sorrow, not by time, hanging over her shoulders; and wearing, as if in mockery of

her unconscious widowhood, the gaudy and embroidered raiment to which a glimmering remembrance of happier times appeared to attach her-- that vacant smile and wandering glance of insanity lending at times a terrible brilliancy to her features. But for the most part her malady assumed a cast of settled melancholy, and patient as

"The female dove ere yet her golden couplets are disclosed,
Her silence would sit drooping."

Her gentleness and submission would have endeared her to a guardian even less tenderly interested in her fate than Helen Percy; towards whom, from her first interview, she had evinced the most gratifying partiality. "I know you," she said on beholding her. "You have the look and voice of Percy; you are a ministering angel whom he has sent to defend his poor Theresa from the King; now that she is sad and friendless. You will never abandon me, will you?" continued she, taking her hand and pressing it to her bosom.

"Never--never--so help me heaven!" answered the agitated Helen; and that sacred promise remained unbroken.

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