
MARIA

or

The Wrongs of Woman

by MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Is it then surprising, that so many forlorn women, with human passions and feelings, take refuge in infamy? Alone in large mansions, I say alone, because they had no companions with whom they could converse on equal terms, or from whom they could expect the endearments of affection, they grew melancholy, and the sound of joy made them sad; and the youngest, having a more delicate frame, fell into a decline. It was with great difficulty that I, who now almost supported the house by loans from my uncle, could prevail on the _master_ of it, to allow her a room to die in.

I watched her sick bed for some months, and then closed her eyes, gentle spirit! for ever. She was pretty, with very engaging manners;

yet had never an opportunity to marry, excepting to a very old man.

She had abilities sufficient to have shone in any profession, had

there been any professions for women, though she shrunk at the name

of milliner or mantua-maker as degrading to a gentlewoman. I would

not term this feeling false pride to any one but you, my child,

whom I fondly hope to see (yes; I will indulge the hope for a

moment!) possessed of that energy of character which gives dignity

to any station; and with that clear, firm spirit that will enable

you to choose a situation for yourself, or submit to be classed in

the lowest, if it be the only one in which you can be the mistress

of your own actions.

"Soon after the death of my sister, an incident occurred, to prove to me that the heart of a libertine is dead to natural affection; and to convince me, that the being who has appeared all tenderness, to gratify a selfish passion, is as regardless of the innocent fruit of it, as of the object, when the fit is over.

I had casually observed an old, meanlooking woman, who called on my husband every two or three months to receive some money. One day entering the passage of his little counting-house, as she was going out, I heard her say, "The child is very weak; she cannot live long, she will soon die out of your way, so you need not grudge

her a little physic.'

"So much the better,' he replied,' and pray mind your own
business, good woman.'

"I was struck by his unfeeling, inhuman tone of voice, and
drew back, determined when the woman came again, to try to speak
to her, not out of curiosity, I had heard enough, but with the hope
of being useful to a poor, outcast girl.

"A month or two elapsed before I saw this woman again; and

then she had a child in her hand that tottered along, scarcely able to sustain her own weight. They were going away, to return at the hour Mr. Venables was expected; he was now from home. I desired the woman to walk into the parlour. She hesitated, yet obeyed. I assured her that I should not mention to my husband (the word seemed to weigh on my respiration), that I had seen her, or his child. The woman stared at me with astonishment; and I turned my eyes on the squalid object [that accompanied her.] She could hardly support herself, her complexion was sallow, and her eyes inflamed, with an indescribable look of cunning, mixed with the wrinkles produced by the peevishness of pain.

"Poor child!" I exclaimed. 'Ah! you may well say poor child,'
replied the woman. 'I brought her here to see whether he would
have the heart to look at her, and not get some advice. I do not
know what they deserve who nursed her. Why, her legs bent under
her like a bow when she came to me, and she has never been well
since; but, if they were no better paid than I am, it is not to be
wondered at, sure enough.'

"On further enquiry I was informed, that this miserable
spectacle was the daughter of a servant, a country girl, who caught

Mr. Venables' eye, and whom he seduced. On his marriage he sent

her away, her situation being too visible. After her delivery, she

was thrown on the town; and died in an hospital within the year.

The babe was sent to a parish-nurse, and afterwards to this woman,

who did not seem much better; but what was to be expected from such

a close bargain? She was only paid three shillings a week

for board and washing.

"The woman begged me to give her some old clothes for the

child, assuring me, that she was almost afraid to ask master for

money to buy even a pair of shoes.

"I grew sick at heart. And, fearing Mr. Venables might enter, and oblige me to express my abhorrence, I hastily enquired where she lived, promised to pay her two shillings a week more, and to call on her in a day or two; putting a trifle into her hand as a proof of my good intention.

"If the state of this child affected me, what were my feelings at a discovery I made respecting Peggy--?*

* The manuscript is imperfect here. An episode seems

to have been intended, which was never committed to paper.

EDITOR. [Godwin's note]

CHAPTER 10

"MY FATHER'S situation was now so distressing, that I prevailed on my uncle to accompany me to visit him; and to lend me his assistance, to prevent the whole property of the family from becoming the prey of my brother's rapacity; for, to extricate himself out of present difficulties, my father was totally regardless of futurity. I took down with me some presents for my step-mother; it did not require an effort for me to treat her with civility, or to forget the past.

"This was the first time I had visited my native village, since my marriage. But with what different emotions did I return from the busy world, with a heavy weight of experience benumbing

my imagination, to scenes, that whispered recollections of joy and
hope most eloquently to my heart! The first scent of the wild
flowers from the heath, thrilled through my veins, awakening every
sense to pleasure. The icy hand of despair seemed to be removed
from my bosom; and--forgetting my husband--the nurtured visions of
a romantic mind, bursting on me with all their original wildness
and gay exuberance, were again hailed as sweet realities. I forgot,
with equal facility, that I ever felt sorrow, or knew care in the
country; while a transient rainbow stole athwart the cloudy sky of
despondency. The picturesque form of several favourite trees, and
the porches of rude cottages, with their smiling hedges, were

recognized with the gladsome playfulness of childish vivacity.

I could have kissed the chickens that pecked on the common;

and longed to pat the cows, and frolic with the dogs that sported

on it. I gazed with delight on the windmill, and thought it lucky

that it should be in motion, at the moment I passed by; and entering

the dear green lane, which led directly to the village, the sound of

the well-known rookery gave that sentimental tinge to the varying

sensations of my active soul, which only served to heighten the

lustre of the luxuriant scenery. But, spying, as I advanced, the

spire, peeping over the withered tops of the aged elms that composed

the rookery, my thoughts flew immediately to the churchyard, and

tears of affection, such was the effect of my imagination, bedewed

my mother's grave! Sorrow gave place to devotional feelings.

I wandered through the church in fancy, as I used sometimes to do on

a Saturday evening. I recollected with what fervour I addressed

the God of my youth: and once more with rapturous love looked above

my sorrows to the Father of nature. I pause--feeling forcibly all

the emotions I am describing; and (reminded, as I register my

sorrows, of the sublime calm I have felt, when in some tremendous

solitude, my soul rested on itself, and seemed to fill the universe)

I insensibly breathe soft, hushing every wayward emotion, as if

fearing to sully with a sigh, a contentment so extatic.

"Having settled my father's affairs, and, by my exertions in his favour, made my brother my sworn foe, I returned to London. My husband's conduct was now changed; I had during my absence, received several affectionate, penitential letters from him; and he seemed on my arrival, to wish by his behaviour to prove his sincerity. I could not then conceive why he acted thus; and, when the suspicion darted into my head, that it might arise from observing my increasing influence with my uncle, I almost despised myself for imagining that such a degree of debasing selfishness could exist.

"He became, unaccountable as was the change, tender and attentive; and, attacking my weak side, made a confession of his follies, and lamented the embarrassments in which I, who merited a far different fate, might be involved. He besought me to aid him with my counsel, praised my understanding, and appealed to the tenderness of my heart.

"This conduct only inspired me with compassion. I wished to be his friend; but love had spread his rosy pinions and fled far, far away; and had not (like some exquisite perfumes, the fine spirit

of which is continually mingling with the air) left a fragrance

behind, to mark where he had shook his wings. My husband's renewed

caresses then became hateful to me; his brutality was tolerable,

compared to his distasteful fondness. Still, compassion, and the

fear of insulting his supposed feelings, by a want of sympathy,

made me dissemble, and do violence to my delicacy. What a task!

"Those who support a system of what I term false refinement,

and will not allow great part of love in the female, as well as

male breast, to spring in some respects involuntarily, may not

admit that charms are as necessary to feed the passion, as virtues

to convert the mellowing spirit into friendship. To such observers

I have nothing to say, any more than to the moralists, who insist

that women ought to, and can love their husbands, because it is

their duty. To you, my child, I may add, with a heart tremblingly

alive to your future conduct, some observations, dictated by my

present feelings, on calmly reviewing this period of my life. When

novelists or moralists praise as a virtue, a woman's coldness of

constitution, and want of passion; and make her yield to the ardour

of her lover out of sheer compassion, or to promote a frigid plan

of future comfort, I am disgusted. They may be good women, in the

ordinary acceptance of the phrase, and do no harm; but they appear

to me not to have those 'finely fashioned nerves,' which render
the senses exquisite. They may possess tenderness; but they want
that fire of the imagination, which produces _active_ sensibility,
and _positive_ _virtue_. How does the woman deserve to be
characterized, who marries one man, with a heart and imagination
devoted to another? Is she not an object of pity or contempt, when
thus sacrilegiously violating the purity of her own feelings? Nay,
it is as indelicate, when she is indifferent, unless she be
constitutionally insensible; then indeed it is a mere affair of
barter; and I have nothing to do with the secrets of trade. Yes;
eagerly as I wish you to possess true rectitude of mind, and purity

of affection, I must insist that a heartless conduct is the contrary
of virtuous. Truth is the only basis of virtue; and we cannot,
without depraving our minds, endeavour to please a lover or husband,
but in proportion as he pleases us. Men, more effectually to
enslave us, may inculcate this partial morality, and lose sight of
virtue in subdividing it into the duties of particular stations;
but let us not blush for nature without a cause!

"After these remarks, I am ashamed to own, that I was pregnant.

The greatest sacrifice of my principles in my whole life, was the

allowing my husband again to be familiar with my person, though to

this cruel act of self-denial, when I wished the earth to open and swallow me, you owe your birth; and I the unutterable pleasure of being a mother. There was something of delicacy in my husband's bridal attentions; but now his tainted breath, pimpled face, and blood-shot eyes, were not more repugnant to my senses, than his gross manners, and loveless familiarity to my taste.

"A man would only be expected to maintain; yes, barely grant a subsistence, to a woman rendered odious by habitual intoxication; but who would expect him, or think it possible to love her? And unless 'youth, and genial years were flown,' it would be thought

equally unreasonable to insist, [under penalty of] forfeiting almost every thing reckoned valuable in life, that he should not love another: whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate. He may even spend in dissipation, and intemperance, the very intemperance which renders him so hateful, her property, and by stinting her expences, not permit her to beguile in society, a wearisome, joyless life; for over their mutual fortune she has no power, it must all pass through his hand. And if she be a mother, and in the present state of women, it is a great misfortune to be prevented from discharging

the duties, and cultivating the affections of one, what has she

not to endure?--But I have suffered the tenderness of one to lead

me into reflections that I did not think of making, to interrupt

my narrative--yet the full heart will overflow.

"Mr. Venables' embarrassments did not now endear him to me;

still, anxious to befriend him, I endeavoured to prevail on him to

retrench his expences; but he had always some plausible excuse to

give, to justify his not following my advice. Humanity, compassion,

and the interest produced by a habit of living together, made me

try to relieve, and sympathize with him; but, when I recollected

that I was bound to live with such a being for ever--my heart died
within me; my desire of improvement became languid, and baleful,
corroding melancholy took possession of my soul. Marriage had
bastilled me for life. I discovered in myself a capacity for the
enjoyment of the various pleasures existence affords; yet, fettered
by the partial laws of society, this fair globe was to me
an universal blank.

"When I exhorted my husband to economy, I referred to himself.

I was obliged to practise the most rigid, or contract debts, which

I had too much reason to fear would never be paid. I despised this

paltry privilege of a wife, which can only be of use to the vicious or inconsiderate, and determined not to increase the torrent that was bearing him down. I was then ignorant of the extent of his fraudulent speculations, whom I was bound to honour and obey.

"A woman neglected by her husband, or whose manners form a striking contrast with his, will always have men on the watch to soothe and flatter her. Besides, the forlorn state of a neglected woman, not destitute of personal charms, is particularly interesting, and rouses that species of pity, which is so near akin, it easily slides into love. A man of feeling thinks not of seducing, he is

himself seduced by all the noblest emotions of his soul. He figures
to himself all the sacrifices a woman of sensibility must make,
and every situation in which his imagination places her, touches
his heart, and fires his passions. Longing to take to his bosom
the shorn lamb, and bid the drooping buds of hope revive, benevolence
changes into passion: and should he then discover that he is beloved,
honour binds him fast, though foreseeing that he may afterwards be
obliged to pay severe damages to the man, who never appeared to
value his wife's society, till he found that there was a chance of
his being indemnified for the loss of it.

"Such are the partial laws enacted by men; for, only to lay a stress on the dependent state of a woman in the grand question of the comforts arising from the possession of property, she is [even in this article] much more injured by the loss of the husband's affection, than he by that of his wife; yet where is she, condemned to the solitude of a deserted home, to look for a compensation from the woman, who seduces him from her? She cannot drive an unfaithful husband from his house, nor separate, or tear, his children from him, however culpable he may be; and he, still the master of his own fate, enjoys the smiles of a world, that would brand her with infamy, did she, seeking consolation, venture to retaliate.

"These remarks are not dictated by experience; but merely by the compassion I feel for many amiable women, the outlaws of the world. For myself, never encouraging any of the advances that were made to me, my lovers dropped off like the untimely shoots of spring. I did not even coquet with them; because I found, on examining myself, I could not coquet with a man without loving him a little; and I perceived that I should not be able to stop at the line of what are termed innocent freedoms, did I suffer any.

My reserve was then the consequence of delicacy. Freedom of conduct has emancipated many women's minds; but my conduct has most rigidly

been governed by my principles, till the improvement of my

understanding has enabled me to discern the fallacy of prejudices

at war with nature and reason.

"Shortly after the change I have mentioned in my husband's conduct, my uncle was compelled by his declining health, to seek the succour of a milder climate, and embark for Lisbon. He left his will in the hands of a friend, an eminent solicitor; he had previously questioned me relative to my situation and state of mind, and declared very freely, that he could place no reliance on the stability of my husband's professions. He had been deceived

in the unfolding of his character; he now thought it fixed in a

train of actions that would inevitably lead to ruin and disgrace.

"The evening before his departure, which we spent alone

together, he folded me to his heart, uttering the endearing

appellation of 'child.'--My more than father! why was I not permitted

to perform the last duties of one, and smooth the pillow of death?

He seemed by his manner to be convinced that he should never see

me more; yet requested me, most earnestly, to come to him, should

I be obliged to leave my husband. He had before expressed his

sorrow at hearing of my pregnancy, having determined to prevail on

me to accompany him, till I informed him of that circumstance. He expressed himself unfeignedly sorry that any new tie should bind me to a man whom he thought so incapable of estimating my value; such was the kind language of affection.

"I must repeat his own words; they made an indelible impression on my mind:

"The marriage state is certainly that in which women, generally speaking, can be most useful; but I am far from thinking that a woman, once married, ought to consider the engagement as indissoluble

(especially if there be no children to reward her for sacrificing

her feelings) in case her husband merits neither her love, nor

esteem. Esteem will often supply the place of love; and prevent

a woman from being wretched, though it may not make her happy.

The magnitude of a sacrifice ought always to bear some proportion

to the utility in view; and for a woman to live with a man, for

whom she can cherish neither affection nor esteem, or even be of

any use to him, excepting in the light of a house-keeper, is an

abjectness of condition, the enduring of which no concurrence of

circumstances can ever make a duty in the sight of God or just men.

If indeed she submits to it merely to be maintained in idleness,

she has no right to complain bitterly of her fate; or to act,

as a person of independent character might, as if she had

a title to disregard general rules.

"But the misfortune is, that many women only submit in appearance, and forfeit their own respect to secure their reputation in the world. The situation of a woman separated from her husband, is undoubtedly very different from that of a man who has left his wife. He, with lordly dignity, has shaken of a clog; and the allowing her food and raiment, is thought sufficient to secure his reputation from taint. And, should she have been inconsiderate,

he will be celebrated for his generosity and forbearance. Such is the respect paid to the master-key of property! A woman, on the contrary, resigning what is termed her natural protector (though he never was so, but in name) is despised and shunned, for asserting the independence of mind distinctive of a rational being, and spurning at slavery.'

"During the remainder of the evening, my uncle's tenderness led him frequently to revert to the subject, and utter, with increasing warmth, sentiments to the same purport. At length it was necessary to say 'Farewell!'--and we parted--gracious God! to

meet no more.

CHAPTER 11

"A GENTLEMAN of large fortune and of polished manners, had lately

visited very frequently at our house, and treated me, if possible,

with more respect than Mr. Venables paid him; my pregnancy was not yet visible, his society was a great relief to me, as I had for some time past, to avoid expence, confined myself very much at home. I ever disdained unnecessary, perhaps even prudent concealments; and my husband, with great ease, discovered the amount of my uncle's parting present. A copy of a writ was the stale pretext to extort it from me; and I had soon reason to believe that it was fabricated for the purpose. I acknowledge my folly in thus suffering myself to be continually imposed on. I had adhered to my resolution not to apply to my uncle, on the part of my husband, any more; yet, when I had received a sum sufficient to supply my

own wants, and to enable me to pursue a plan I had in view, to

settle my younger brother in a respectable employment, I allowed

myself to be duped by Mr. Venables' shallow pretences, and

hypocritical professions.

"Thus did he pillage me and my family, thus frustrate all my

plans of usefulness. Yet this was the man I was bound to respect

and esteem: as if respect and esteem depended on an arbitrary will

of our own! But a wife being as much a man's property as his horse,

or his ass, she has nothing she can call her own. He may use any

means to get at what the law considers as his, the moment his wife

is in possession of it, even to the forcing of a lock, as Mr.

Venables did, to search for notes in my writing-desk--and all this

is done with a show of equity, because, forsooth, he is responsible

for her maintenance.

"The tender mother cannot lawfully snatch from the gripe of the gambling spendthrift, or beastly drunkard, unmindful of his offspring, the fortune which falls to her by chance; or (so flagrant is the injustice) what she earns by her own exertions. No; he can rob her with impunity, even to waste publicly on a courtesan; and the laws of her country--if women have a country--afford her no

protection or redress from the oppressor, unless she have the plea
of bodily fear; yet how many ways are there of goading the soul
almost to madness, equally unmanly, though not so mean? When such
laws were framed, should not impartial lawgivers have first decreed,
in the style of a great assembly, who recognized the existence of
an _etre_ _supreme_, to fix the national belief, that the husband
should always be wiser and more virtuous than his wife, in order
to entitle him, with a show of justice, to keep this idiot, or
perpetual minor, for ever in bondage. But I must have done--
on this subject, my indignation continually runs away with me.

"The company of the gentleman I have already mentioned, who had a general acquaintance with literature and subjects of taste, was grateful to me; my countenance brightened up as he approached, and I unaffectedly expressed the pleasure I felt. The amusement his conversation afforded me, made it easy to comply with my husband's request, to endeavour to render our house agreeable to him.

"His attentions became more pointed; but, as I was not of the number of women, whose virtue, as it is termed, immediately takes alarm, I endeavoured, rather by raillery than serious expostulation,

to give a different turn to his conversation. He assumed a new mode of attack, and I was, for a while, the dupe of his pretended friendship.

"I had, merely in the style of *_badinage_*, boasted of my conquest, and repeated his lover-like compliments to my husband.

But he begged me, for God's sake, not to affront his friend, or I

should destroy all his projects, and be his ruin. Had I had more

affection for my husband, I should have expressed my contempt of

this time-serving politeness: now I imagined that I only felt pity;

yet it would have puzzled a casuist to point out in what the exact

difference consisted.

"This friend began now, in confidence, to discover to me the real state of my husband's affairs. 'Necessity,' said Mr. S----; why should I reveal his name? for he affected to palliate the conduct he could not excuse, 'had led him to take such steps, by accommodation bills, buying goods on credit, to sell them for ready money, and similar transactions, that his character in the commercial world was gone. He was considered,' he added, lowering his voice, 'on 'Change as a swindler.'

"I felt at that moment the first maternal pang. Aware of the

evils my sex have to struggle with, I still wished, for my own
consolation, to be the mother of a daughter; and I could not bear
to think, that the _sins_ of her father's entailed disgrace, should
be added to the ills to which woman is heir.

"So completely was I deceived by these shows of friendship
(nay, I believe, according to his interpretation, Mr. S---- really
was my friend) that I began to consult him respecting the best mode
of retrieving my husband's character: it is the good name of a
woman only that sets to rise no more. I knew not that he had been
drawn into a whirlpool, out of which he had not the energy to

attempt to escape. He seemed indeed destitute of the power of
employing his faculties in any regular pursuit. His principles of
action were so loose, and his mind so uncultivated, that every
thing like order appeared to him in the shape of restraint; and,
like men in the savage state, he required the strong stimulus of
hope or fear, produced by wild speculations, in which the interests
of others went for nothing, to keep his spirits awake. He one time
professed patriotism, but he knew not what it was to feel honest
indignation; and pretended to be an advocate for liberty, when,
with as little affection for the human race as for individuals, he
thought of nothing but his own gratification. He was just such a

citizen, as a father. The sums he adroitly obtained by a violation of the laws of his country, as well as those of humanity, he would allow a mistress to squander; though she was, with the same _sang_ _froid_, consigned, as were his children, to poverty, when another proved more attractive.

"On various pretences, his friend continued to visit me; and, observing my want of money, he tried to induce me to accept of pecuniary aid; but this offer I absolutely rejected, though it was made with such delicacy, I could not be displeased.

"One day he came, as I thought accidentally, to dinner. My husband was very much engaged in business, and quitted the room soon after the cloth was removed. We conversed as usual, till confidential advice led again to love. I was extremely mortified. I had a sincere regard for him, and hoped that he had an equal friendship for me. I therefore began mildly to expostulate with him. This gentleness he mistook for coy encouragement; and he would not be diverted from the subject. Perceiving his mistake, I seriously asked him how, using such language to me, he could profess to be my husband's friend? A significant sneer excited my curiosity, and he, supposing this to be my only scruple, took a letter

deliberately out of his pocket, saying, 'Your husband's honour is

not inflexible. How could you, with your discernment, think it so?

Why, he left the room this very day on purpose to give me an

opportunity to explain myself; _he_ thought me too timid--too tardy.

"I snatched the letter with indescribable emotion. The purport of it was to invite him to dinner, and to ridicule his chivalrous respect for me. He assured him, 'that every woman had her price, and, with gross indecency, hinted, that he should be glad to have the duty of a husband taken off his hands. These he termed _liberal_ _sentiments_. He advised him not to shock my romantic notions,

but to attack my credulous generosity, and weak pity; and concluded with requesting him to lend him five hundred pounds for a month or six weeks.' I read this letter twice over; and the firm purpose it inspired, calmed the rising tumult of my soul. I rose deliberately, requested Mr. S---- to wait a moment, and instantly going into the counting-house, desired Mr. Venables to return with me to the dining-parlour.

"He laid down his pen, and entered with me, without observing any change in my countenance. I shut the door, and, giving him the letter, simply asked, 'whether he wrote it, or was it a forgery?'

"Nothing could equal his confusion. His friend's eye met his,
and he muttered something about a joke--But I interrupted him--
'It is sufficient--We part for ever.'

"I continued, with solemnity, 'I have borne with your tyranny
and infidelities. I disdain to utter what I have borne with.
I thought you unprincipled, but not so decidedly vicious. I formed
a tie, in the sight of heaven--I have held it sacred; even when
men, more conformable to my taste, have made me feel--I despise
all subterfuge!--that I was not dead to love. Neglected by you,

I have resolutely stifled the enticing emotions, and respected the plighted faith you outraged. And you dare now to insult me, by selling me to prostitution!--Yes--equally lost to delicacy and principle--you dared sacrilegiously to barter the honour of the mother of your child.'

"Then, turning to Mr. S----, I added, 'I call on you, Sir, to witness,' and I lifted my hands and eyes to heaven, 'that, as solemnly as I took his name, I now abjure it,' I pulled off my ring, and put it on the table; 'and that I mean immediately to quit his house, never to enter it more. I will provide for myself and

child. I leave him as free as I am determined to be myself--

he shall be answerable for no debts of mine.'

"Astonishment closed their lips, till Mr. Venables, gently pushing his friend, with a forced smile, out of the room, nature for a moment prevailed, and, appearing like himself, he turned round, burning with rage, to me: but there was no terror in the frown, excepting when contrasted with the malignant smile which preceded it. He bade me 'leave the house at my peril; told me he despised my threats; I had no resource; I could not swear the peace against him!--I was not afraid of my life!--

he had never struck me!

"He threw the letter in the fire, which I had incautiously left in his hands; and, quitting the room, locked the door on me.

"When left alone, I was a moment or two before I could recollect myself--One scene had succeeded another with such rapidity, I almost doubted whether I was reflecting on a real event. 'Was it possible? Was I, indeed, free?'--Yes; free I termed myself, when I decidedly perceived the conduct I ought to adopt. How had I panted for liberty--liberty, that I would have purchased at any price, but

that of my own esteem! I rose, and shook myself; opened the window,
and methought the air never smelled so sweet. The face of heaven
grew fairer as I viewed it, and the clouds seemed to flit away
obedient to my wishes, to give my soul room to expand. I was all
soul, and (wild as it may appear) felt as if I could have dissolved
in the soft balmy gale that kissed my cheek, or have glided below
the horizon on the glowing, descending beams. A seraphic satisfaction
animated, without agitating my spirits; and my imagination collected,
in visions sublimely terrible, or soothingly beautiful, an immense
variety of the endless images, which nature affords, and fancy
combines, of the grand and fair. The lustre of these bright

picturesque sketches faded with the setting sun; but I was still

alive to the calm delight they had diffused through my heart.

"There may be advocates for matrimonial obedience, who, making a distinction between the duty of a wife and of a human being, may blame my conduct.--To them I write not--my feelings are not for them to analyze; and may you, my child, never be able to ascertain, by heart-rending experience, what your mother felt before the present emancipation of her mind!

"I began to write a letter to my father, after closing one to

my uncle; not to ask advice, but to signify my determination; when

I was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Venables. His manner was

changed. His views on my uncle's fortune made him averse to my

quitting his house, or he would, I am convinced, have been glad to

have shaken off even the slight restraint my presence imposed on

him; the restraint of showing me some respect. So far from having

an affection for me, he really hated me, because he was convinced

that I must despise him.

"He told me, that 'As I now had had time to cool and reflect,

he did not doubt but that my prudence, and nice sense of propriety,

would lead me to overlook what was passed.'

"'Reflection,' I replied, 'had only confirmed my purpose, and
no power on earth could divert me from it.'

"'Endeavouring to assume a soothing voice and look, when he
would willingly have tortured me, to force me to feel his power,
his countenance had an infernal expression, when he desired me,
'Not to expose myself to the servants, by obliging him to confine
me in my apartment; if then I would give my promise not to quit
the house precipitately, I should be free--and--.' I declared,

interrupting him, 'that I would promise nothing. I had

no measures to keep with him--I was resolved, and would not

condescend to subterfuge.'

"He muttered, 'that I should soon repent of these preposterous
airs;' and, ordering tea to be carried into my little study, which
had a communication with my bed-chamber, he once more locked the
door upon me, and left me to my own meditations. I had passively
followed him up stairs, not wishing to fatigue myself with
unavailing exertion.

"Nothing calms the mind like a fixed purpose. I felt as if

I had heaved a thousand weight from my heart; the atmosphere seemed

lightened; and, if I execrated the institutions of society, which

thus enable men to tyrannize over women, it was almost a disinterested

sentiment. I disregarded present inconveniences, when my mind had

done struggling with itself,--when reason and inclination had shaken

hands and were at peace. I had no longer the cruel task before

me, in endless perspective, aye, during the tedious for ever of

life, of labouring to overcome my repugnance--of labouring to

extinguish the hopes, the maybes of a lively imagination. Death

I had hailed as my only chance for deliverance; but, while existence

had still so many charms, and life promised happiness, I shrunk
from the icy arms of an unknown tyrant, though far more inviting
than those of the man, to whom I supposed myself bound without any
other alternative; and was content to linger a little longer,
waiting for I knew not what, rather than leave 'the warm precincts
of the cheerful day,' and all the unenjoyed affection of my nature.

"My present situation gave a new turn to my reflection; and
I wondered (now the film seemed to be withdrawn, that obscured the
piercing sight of reason) how I could, previously to the deciding
outrage, have considered myself as everlastingly united to vice

and folly! 'Had an evil genius cast a spell at my birth; or a demon stalked out of chaos, to perplex my understanding, and enchain my will, with delusive prejudices?'

"I pursued this train of thinking; it led me out of myself, to expatiate on the misery peculiar to my sex. 'Are not,' I thought, 'the despots for ever stigmatized, who, in the wantonness of power, commanded even the most atrocious criminals to be chained to dead bodies? though surely those laws are much more inhuman, which forge adamantine fetters to bind minds together, that never can mingle in social communion! What indeed can equal the wretchedness of that

state, in which there is no alternative, but to extinguish the

affections, or encounter infamy?

CHAPTER 12

"TOWARDS midnight Mr. Venables entered my chamber; and, with
calm

audacity preparing to go to bed, he bade me make haste, 'for that

was the best place for husbands and wives to end their differences.

He had been drinking plentifully to aid his courage.

"I did not at first deign to reply. But perceiving that he affected to take my silence for consent, I told him that, 'If he would not go to another bed, or allow me, I should sit up in my study all night.' He attempted to pull me into the chamber, half joking. But I resisted; and, as he had determined not to give me any reason for saying that he used violence, after a few more efforts, he retired, cursing my obstinacy, to bed.

"I sat musing some time longer; then, throwing my cloak around me, prepared for sleep on a sofa. And, so fortunate seemed my deliverance, so sacred the pleasure of being thus wrapped up in myself, that I slept profoundly, and woke with a mind composed to encounter the struggles of the day. Mr. Venables did not wake till some hours after; and then he came to me half-dressed, yawning and stretching, with haggard eyes, as if he scarcely recollected what had passed the preceding evening. He fixed his eyes on me for a moment, then, calling me a fool, asked 'How long I intended to continue this pretty farce?' For his part, he was devilish sick of

it; but this was the plague of marrying women who pretended to know something.'

"I made no other reply to this harangue, than to say, 'That he ought to be glad to get rid of a woman so unfit to be his companion--and that any change in my conduct would be mean dissimulation; for maturer reflection only gave the sacred seal of reason to my first resolution.'

"He looked as if he could have stamped with impatience, at being obliged to stifle his rage; but, conquering his anger (for

weak people, whose passions seem the most ungovernable, restrain them with the greatest ease, when they have a sufficient motive), he exclaimed, 'Very pretty, upon my soul! very pretty, theatrical flourishes! Pray, fair Roxana, stoop from your altitudes, and remember that you are acting a part in real life.'

"He uttered this speech with a self-satisfied air, and went down stairs to dress.

"In about an hour he came to me again; and in the same tone said, 'That he came as my gentleman-usher to hand me down to

breakfast.

"Of the black rod?" asked I.

"This question, and the tone in which I asked it, a little disconcerted him. To say the truth, I now felt no resentment; my firm resolution to free myself from my ignoble thralldom, had absorbed the various emotions which, during six years, had racked my soul.

The duty pointed out by my principles seemed clear; and not one tender feeling intruded to make me swerve: The dislike which my husband had inspired was strong; but it only led me to wish to

avoid, to wish to let him drop out of my memory; there was no misery, no torture that I would not deliberately have chosen, rather than renew my lease of servitude.

"During the breakfast, he attempted to reason with me on the folly of romantic sentiments; for this was the indiscriminate epithet he gave to every mode of conduct or thinking superior to his own. He asserted, 'that all the world were governed by their own interest; those who pretended to be actuated by different motives, were only deeper knaves, or fools crazed by books, who took for gospel all the rodomantade nonsense written by men who

knew nothing of the world. For his part, he thanked God, he was no hypocrite; and, if he stretched a point sometimes, it was always with an intention of paying every man his own.'

"He then artfully insinuated, 'that he daily expected a vessel to arrive, a successful speculation, that would make him easy for the present, and that he had several other schemes actually depending, that could not fail. He had no doubt of becoming rich in a few years, though he had been thrown back by some unlucky adventures at the setting out.'

"I mildly replied, 'That I wished he might not involve himself
still deeper.'

"He had no notion that I was governed by a decision of judgment,
not to be compared with a mere spurt of resentment. He knew not
what it was to feel indignation against vice, and often boasted of
his placable temper, and readiness to forgive injuries. True; for
he only considered the being deceived, as an effort of skill he
had not guarded against; and then, with a cant of candour, would
observe, 'that he did not know how he might himself have been
tempted to act in the same circumstances.' And, as his heart never

opened to friendship, it never was wounded by disappointment.

Every new acquaintance he protested, it is true, was 'the cleverest

fellow in the world; and he really thought so; till the novelty of

his conversation or manners ceased to have any effect on his sluggish

spirits. His respect for rank or fortune was more permanent, though

he chanced to have no design of availing himself of the influence

of either to promote his own views.

"After a prefatory conversation,--my blood (I thought it had been cooler) flushed over my whole countenance as he spoke--he alluded to my situation. He desired me to reflect--'and act like

a prudent woman, as the best proof of my superior understanding;

for he must own I had sense, did I know how to use it. I was not,'

he laid a stress on his words, 'without my passions; and a husband

was a convenient cloke.--He was liberal in his way of thinking;

and why might not we, like many other married people, who were

above vulgar prejudices, tacitly consent to let each other follow

their own inclination?--He meant nothing more, in the letter I made

the ground of complaint; and the pleasure which I seemed to take

in Mr. S.'s company, led him to conclude, that he was not

disagreeable to me.'

"A clerk brought in the letters of the day, and I, as I often did, while he was discussing subjects of business, went to the _piano_ _forte_, and began to play a favourite air to restore myself, as it were, to nature, and drive the sophisticated sentiments I had just been obliged to listen to, out of my soul.

"They had excited sensations similar to those I have felt, in viewing the squalid inhabitants of some of the lanes and back streets of the metropolis, mortified at being compelled to consider them as my fellow-creatures, as if an ape had claimed kindred with me. Or, as when surrounded by a mephitical fog, I have wished to

have a volley of cannon fired, to clear the incumbered atmosphere,
and give me room to breathe and move.

"My spirits were all in arms, and I played a kind of
extemporary prelude. The cadence was probably wild and impassioned,
while, lost in thought, I made the sounds a kind of echo to
my train of thinking.

"Pausing for a moment, I met Mr. Venables' eyes. He was
observing me with an air of conceited satisfaction, as much as to
say--'My last insinuation has done the business--she begins to know

her own interest.' Then gathering up his letters, he said, 'That he hoped he should hear no more romantic stuff, well enough in a miss just come from boarding school;' and went, as was his custom, to the counting-house. I still continued playing; and, turning to a sprightly lesson, I executed it with uncommon vivacity. I heard footsteps approach the door, and was soon convinced that Mr. Venables was listening; the consciousness only gave more animation to my fingers. He went down into the kitchen, and the cook, probably by his desire, came to me, to know what I would please to order for dinner. Mr. Venables came into the parlour again, with apparent carelessness. I perceived that the cunning man was overreaching

himself; and I gave my directions as usual, and left the room.

"While I was making some alteration in my dress, Mr. Venables peeped in, and, begging my pardon for interrupting me, disappeared.

I took up some work (I could not read), and two or three messages were sent to me, probably for no other purpose, but to enable Mr. Venables to ascertain what I was about.

"I listened whenever I heard the street-door open; at last I imagined I could distinguish Mr. Venables' step, going out. I laid aside my work; my heart palpitated; still I was afraid hastily to

enquire; and I waited a long half hour, before I ventured to ask
the boy whether his master was in the counting-house?

"Being answered in the negative, I bade him call me a coach,
and collecting a few necessaries hastily together, with a little
parcel of letters and papers which I had collected the preceding
evening, I hurried into it, desiring the coachman to drive to a
distant part of the town.

"I almost feared that the coach would break down before I got
out of the street; and, when I turned the corner, I seemed to

breathe a freer air. I was ready to imagine that I was rising

above the thick atmosphere of earth; or I felt, as wearied souls

might be supposed to feel on entering another state of existence.

"I stopped at one or two stands of coaches to elude pursuit,

and then drove round the skirts of the town to seek for an obscure

lodging, where I wished to remain concealed, till I could avail

myself of my uncle's protection. I had resolved to assume my own

name immediately, and openly to avow my determination, without any

formal vindication, the moment I had found a home, in which I could

rest free from the daily alarm of expecting to see Mr. Venables enter.

"I looked at several lodgings; but finding that I could not, without a reference to some acquaintance, who might inform my tyrant, get admittance into a decent apartment--men have not all this trouble--I thought of a woman whom I had assisted to furnish a little haberdasher's shop, and who I knew had a first floor to let.

"I went to her, and though I could not persuade her, that the quarrel between me and Mr. Venables would never be made up, still she agreed to conceal me for the present; yet assuring me at the same time, shaking her head, that, when a woman was once married,

she must bear every thing. Her pale face, on which appeared a thousand haggard lines and delving wrinkles, produced by what is emphatically termed fretting, inforced her remark; and I had afterwards an opportunity of observing the treatment she had to endure, which grizzled her into patience. She toiled from morning till night; yet her husband would rob the till, and take away the money reserved for paying bills; and, returning home drunk, he would beat her if she chanced to offend him, though she had a child at the breast.

I heard her, as usual, talk to her dear Johnny--he, forsooth,

was her master; no slave in the West Indies had one more despotic;

but fortunately she was of the true Russian breed of wives.

"My mind, during the few past days, seemed, as it were,

disengaged from my body; but, now the struggle was over, I felt

very forcibly the effect which perturbation of spirits produces

on a woman in my situation.

"The apprehension of a miscarriage, obliged me to confine

myself to my apartment near a fortnight; but I wrote to my uncle's

friend for money, promising 'to call on him, and explain my situation,
when I was well enough to go out; mean time I earnestly intreated
him, not to mention my place of abode to any one, lest my
husband--such the law considered him--should disturb the mind he
could not conquer. I mentioned my intention of setting out for
Lisbon, to claim my uncle's protection, the moment my health
would permit.'

"The tranquillity however, which I was recovering, was soon
interrupted. My landlady came up to me one day, with eyes swollen
with weeping, unable to utter what she was commanded to say. She

declared, 'That she was never so miserable in her life; that she must appear an ungrateful monster; and that she would readily go down on her knees to me, to intreat me to forgive her, as she had done to her husband to spare her the cruel task.' Sobs prevented her from proceeding, or answering my impatient enquiries, to know what she meant.

"When she became a little more composed, she took a newspaper out of her pocket, declaring, 'that her heart smote her, but what could she do?--she must obey her husband.' I snatched the paper from her. An advertisement quickly met my eye, purporting, that

'Maria Venables had, without any assignable cause, absconded from her husband; and any person harbouring her, was menaced with the utmost severity of the law.'

"Perfectly acquainted with Mr. Venables' meanness of soul, this step did not excite my surprise, and scarcely my contempt.

Resentment in my breast, never survived love. I bade the poor woman, in a kind tone, wipe her eyes, and request her husband to come up, and speak to me himself.

"My manner awed him. He respected a lady, though not a woman;

and began to mutter out an apology.

"Mr. Venables was a rich gentleman; he wished to oblige me, but he had suffered enough by the law already, to tremble at the thought; besides, for certain, we should come together again, and then even I should not thank him for being accessory to keeping us asunder.--A husband and wife were, God knows, just as one,--and all would come round at last.' He uttered a drawling 'Hem!' and then with an arch look, added--'Master might have had his little frolics--but--Lord bless your heart!--men would be men while the

world stands.'

"To argue with this privileged first-born of reason, I perceived, would be vain. I therefore only requested him to let me remain another day at his house, while I sought for a lodging; and not to inform Mr. Venables that I had ever been sheltered there.

"He consented, because he had not the courage to refuse a person for whom he had an habitual respect; but I heard the pent-up choler burst forth in curses, when he met his wife, who was waiting impatiently at the foot of the stairs, to know what effect my

expostulations would have on him.

"Without wasting any time in the fruitless indulgence of vexation, I once more set out in search of an abode in which I could hide myself for a few weeks.

"Agreeing to pay an exorbitant price, I hired an apartment, without any reference being required relative to my character: indeed, a glance at my shape seemed to say, that my motive for concealment was sufficiently obvious. Thus was I obliged to shroud my head in infamy.

"To avoid all danger of detection--I use the appropriate word, my child, for I was hunted out like a felon--I determined to take possession of my new lodgings that very evening.

"I did not inform my landlady where I was going. I knew that she had a sincere affection for me, and would willingly have run any risk to show her gratitude; yet I was fully convinced, that a few kind words from Johnny would have found the woman in her, and her dear benefactress, as she termed me in an agony of tears, would have been sacrificed, to recompense her tyrant for condescending

to treat her like an equal. He could be kind-hearted, as she expressed it, when he pleased. And this thawed sternness, contrasted with his habitual brutality, was the more acceptable, and could not be purchased at too dear a rate.

"The sight of the advertisement made me desirous of taking refuge with my uncle, let what would be the consequence; and I repaired in a hackney coach (afraid of meeting some person who might chance to know me, had I walked) to the chambers of my uncle's friend.

"He received me with great politeness (my uncle had already prepossessed him in my favour), and listened, with interest, to my explanation of the motives which had induced me to fly from home, and skulk in obscurity, with all the timidity of fear that ought only to be the companion of guilt. He lamented, with rather more gallantry than, in my situation, I thought delicate, that such a woman should be thrown away on a man insensible to the charms of beauty or grace. He seemed at a loss what to advise me to do, to evade my husband's search, without hastening to my uncle, whom, he hesitating said, I might not find alive. He uttered this intelligence with visible regret; requested me, at least, to wait for the arrival

of the next packet; offered me what money I wanted, and promised
to visit me.

"He kept his word; still no letter arrived to put an end to
my painful state of suspense. I procured some books and music, to
beguile the tedious solitary days.

'Come, ever smiling Liberty,

'And with thee bring thy jocund train:'

I sung--and sung till, saddened by the strain of joy, I bitterly

lamented the fate that deprived me of all social pleasure. Comparative

liberty indeed I had possessed myself of; but the jocund train

lagged far behind!

CHAPTER 13

"BY WATCHING my only visitor, my uncle's friend, or by some other means, Mr. Venables discovered my residence, and came to enquire for me. The maid-servant assured him there was no such person in the house. A bustle ensued--I caught the alarm--listened--distinguished his voice, and immediately locked the door. They suddenly grew still; and I waited near a quarter of an hour, before I heard him open the parlour door, and mount the stairs with the mistress of the house, who obsequiously declared that she knew nothing of me.

prepare to go home with my husband, poor gentleman! to whom I had already occasioned sufficient vexation.' I made no reply.

Mr. Venables then, in an assumed tone of softness, intreated me,

'to consider what he suffered, and my own reputation, and get the

better of childish resentment.' He ran on in the same strain,

pretending to address me, but evidently adapting his discourse

to the capacity of the landlady; who, at every pause, uttered

an exclamation of pity; or 'Yes, to be sure--Very true, sir.'

"Sick of the farce, and perceiving that I could not avoid the

hated interview, I opened the door, and he entered. Advancing with

easy assurance to take my hand, I shrunk from his touch, with an involuntary start, as I should have done from a noisome reptile, with more disgust than terror. His conductress was retiring, to give us, as she said, an opportunity to accommodate matters. But I bade her come in, or I would go out; and curiosity impelled her to obey me.

"Mr. Venables began to expostulate; and this woman, proud of his confidence, to second him. But I calmly silenced her, in the midst of a vulgar harangue, and turning to him, asked, 'Why he vainly tormented me? declaring that no power on earth should force

me back to his house.'

"After a long altercation, the particulars of which, it would be to no purpose to repeat, he left the room. Some time was spent in loud conversation in the parlour below, and I discovered that he had brought his friend, an attorney, with him.*

* In the original edition the paragraph following is

preceded by three lines of asterisks [Publisher's note].

had recently taken apartments in the house; he enquired why I was thus assailed?*

The voluble attorney instantly repeated the trite tale. The stranger turned to me, observing, with the most soothing politeness and manly interest, that 'my countenance told a very different story.' He added, 'that I should not be insulted, or forced out of the house, by any body.'

* The introduction of Darnford as the deliverer of Maria, in an early stage of the history, is already stated (Chap. III.) to have been an after-thought of the author.

in the above passage; though, at the same time, it must be

acknowledged to be somewhat uncertain, whether Darnford is

the stranger intended in this place. It appears from

Chap. XVII, that an interference of a more decisive nature

was designed to be attributed to him. EDITOR. [Godwin's note]

"Not by her husband?" asked the attorney.

"No, sir, not by her husband.' Mr. Venables advanced towards
him--

But there was a decision in his attitude, that so well seconded

that of his voice, * They left the house: at the same time protesting,

that any one that should dare to protect me, should be prosecuted

with the utmost rigour.

* Two and a half lines of asterisks appear here in the

original [Publisher's note].

"They were scarcely out of the house, when my landlady came
up to me again, and begged my pardon, in a very different tone.

For, though Mr. Venables had bid her, at her peril, harbour me, he

had not attended, I found, to her broad hints, to discharge the

lodging. I instantly promised to pay her, and make her a present
to compensate for my abrupt departure, if she would procure me
another lodging, at a sufficient distance; and she, in return,
repeating Mr. Venables' plausible tale, I raised her indignation,
and excited her sympathy, by telling her briefly the truth.

"She expressed her commiseration with such honest warmth, that
I felt soothed; for I have none of that fastidious sensitiveness,
which a vulgar accent or gesture can alarm to the disregard of real
kindness. I was ever glad to perceive in others the humane feelings
I delighted to exercise; and the recollection of some ridiculous

characteristic circumstances, which have occurred in a moment of
emotion, has convulsed me with laughter, though at the instant I
should have thought it sacrilegious to have smiled. Your improvement,
my dearest girl, being ever present to me while I write, I note
these feelings, because women, more accustomed to observe manners
than actions, are too much alive to ridicule. So much so, that
their boasted sensibility is often stifled by false delicacy. True
sensibility, the sensibility which is the auxiliary of virtue, and
the soul of genius, is in society so occupied with the feelings of
others, as scarcely to regard its own sensations. With what reverence
have I looked up at my uncle, the dear parent of my mind! when I

have seen the sense of his own sufferings, of mind and body, absorbed
in a desire to comfort those, whose misfortunes were comparatively
trivial. He would have been ashamed of being as indulgent to
himself, as he was to others. 'Genuine fortitude,' he would assert,
'consisted in governing our own emotions, and making allowance for
the weaknesses in our friends, that we would not tolerate in
ourselves.' But where is my fond regret leading me!

"'Women must be submissive,' said my landlady. 'Indeed what
could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their
husbands? Every woman, and especially a lady, could not go through

rough and smooth, as she had done, to earn a little bread.'

"She was in a talking mood, and proceeded to inform me how she had been used in the world. 'She knew what it was to have a bad husband, or she did not know who should.' I perceived that she would be very much mortified, were I not to attend to her tale, and I did not attempt to interrupt her, though I wished her, as soon as possible, to go out in search of a new abode for me, where I could once more hide my head.

"She began by telling me, 'That she had saved a little money

in service; and was over-persuaded (we must all be in love once in our lives) to marry a likely man, a footman in the family, not worth a groat. My plan,' she continued, 'was to take a house, and let out lodgings; and all went on well, till my husband got acquainted with an impudent slut, who chose to live on other people's means--and then all went to rack and ruin. He ran in debt to buy her fine clothes, such clothes as I never thought of wearing myself, and--would you believe it?--he signed an execution on my very goods, bought with the money I worked so hard to get; and they came and took my bed from under me, before I heard a word of the matter. Aye, madam, these are misfortunes that you gentlefolks know nothing of,--but

sorrow is sorrow, let it come which way it will.

"I sought for a service again--very hard, after having a house of my own!--but he used to follow me, and kick up such a riot when he was drunk, that I could not keep a place; nay, he even stole my clothes, and pawned them; and when I went to the pawnbroker's, and offered to take my oath that they were not bought with a farthing of his money, they said, 'It was all as one, my husband had a right to whatever I had.'

"At last he listed for a soldier, and I took a house, making

an agreement to pay for the furniture by degrees; and I almost

starved myself, till I once more got before-hand in the world.

"After an absence of six years (God forgive me! I thought he was dead) my husband returned; found me out, and came with such a penitent face, I forgave him, and clothed him from head to foot.

But he had not been a week in the house, before some of his creditors arrested him; and, he selling my goods, I found myself once more reduced to beggary; for I was not as well able to work, go to bed late, and rise early, as when I quitted service; and then I thought it hard enough. He was soon tired of me, when there was nothing

more to be had, and left me again.

"I will not tell you how I was buffeted about, till, hearing for certain that he had died in an hospital abroad, I once more returned to my old occupation; but have not yet been able to get my head above water: so, madam, you must not be angry if I am afraid to run any risk, when I know so well, that women have always the worst of it, when law is to decide.'

"After uttering a few more complaints, I prevailed on my landlady to go out in quest of a lodging; and, to be more secure,

I condescended to the mean shift of changing my name.

"But why should I dwell on similar incidents!--I was hunted, like an infected beast, from three different apartments, and should not have been allowed to rest in any, had not Mr. Venables, informed of my uncle's dangerous state of health, been inspired with the fear of hurrying me out of the world as I advanced in my pregnancy, by thus tormenting and obliging me to take sudden journeys to avoid him; and then his speculations on my uncle's fortune must prove abortive.

"One day, when he had pursued me to an inn, I fainted, hurrying from him; and, falling down, the sight of my blood alarmed him, and obtained a respite for me. It is strange that he should have retained any hope, after observing my unwavering determination; but, from the mildness of my behaviour, when I found all my endeavours to change his disposition unavailing, he formed an erroneous opinion of my character, imagining that, were we once more together, I should part with the money he could not legally force from me, with the same facility as formerly. My forbearance and occasional sympathy he had mistaken for weakness of character; and, because he perceived that I disliked resistance, he thought my indulgence

and compassion mere selfishness, and never discovered that the fear of being unjust, or of unnecessarily wounding the feelings of another, was much more painful to me, than any thing I could have to endure myself. Perhaps it was pride which made me imagine, that I could bear what I dreaded to inflict; and that it was often easier to suffer, than to see the sufferings of others.

"I forgot to mention that, during this persecution, I received a letter from my uncle, informing me, 'that he only found relief from continual change of air; and that he intended to return when the spring was a little more advanced (it was now the middle of

February), and then we would plan a journey to Italy, leaving the fogs and cares of England far behind.' He approved of my conduct, promised to adopt my child, and seemed to have no doubt of obliging Mr. Venables to hear reason. He wrote to his friend, by the same post, desiring him to call on Mr. Venables in his name; and, in consequence of the remonstrances he dictated, I was permitted to lie-in tranquilly.

"The two or three weeks previous, I had been allowed to rest in peace; but, so accustomed was I to pursuit and alarm, that I seldom closed my eyes without being haunted by Mr. Venables' image,

who seemed to assume terrific or hateful forms to torment me,

wherever I turned.--Sometimes a wild cat, a roaring bull, or hideous

assassin, whom I vainly attempted to fly; at others he was a demon,

hurrying me to the brink of a precipice, plunging me into dark

waves, or horrid gulfs; and I woke, in violent fits of trembling

anxiety, to assure myself that it was all a dream, and to endeavour

to lure my waking thoughts to wander to the delightful Italian

vales, I hoped soon to visit; or to picture some august ruins,

where I reclined in fancy on a mouldering column, and escaped, in

the contemplation of the heart-enlarging virtues of antiquity, from

the turmoil of cares that had depressed all the daring purposes of

my soul. But I was not long allowed to calm my mind by the exercise

of my imagination; for the third day after your birth, my child,

I was surprised by a visit from my elder brother; who came in the

most abrupt manner, to inform me of the death of my uncle. He had

left the greater part of his fortune to my child, appointing me

its guardian; in short, every step was taken to enable me to be

mistress of his fortune, without putting any part of it in Mr.

Venables' power. My brother came to vent his rage on me, for having,

as he expressed himself, 'deprived him, my uncle's eldest nephew,

of his inheritance;' though my uncle's property, the fruit of his

own exertion, being all in the funds, or on landed securities,

there was not a shadow of justice in the charge.

"As I sincerely loved my uncle, this intelligence brought on a fever, which I struggled to conquer with all the energy of my mind; for, in my desolate state, I had it very much at heart to suckle you, my poor babe. You seemed my only tie to life, a cherub, to whom I wished to be a father, as well as a mother; and the double duty appeared to me to produce a proportionate increase of affection. But the pleasure I felt, while sustaining you, snatched from the wreck of hope, was cruelly damped by melancholy reflections on my widowed state--widowed by the death of my uncle. Of Mr. Venables

I thought not, even when I thought of the felicity of loving your
father, and how a mother's pleasure might be exalted, and her care
softened by a husband's tenderness.--'Ought to be!' I exclaimed;
and I endeavoured to drive away the tenderness that suffocated me;
but my spirits were weak, and the unbidden tears would flow. 'Why
was I,' I would ask thee, but thou didst not heed me,--'cut off
from the participation of the sweetest pleasure of life?' I imagined
with what extacy, after the pains of child-bed, I should have
presented my little stranger, whom I had so long wished to view,
to a respectable father, and with what maternal fondness I should
have pressed them both to my heart!--Now I kissed her with less

delight, though with the most endearing compassion, poor helpless
one! when I perceived a slight resemblance of him, to whom she owed
her existence; or, if any gesture reminded me of him, even in his
best days, my heart heaved, and I pressed the innocent to my bosom,
as if to purify it--yes, I blushed to think that its purity had
been sullied, by allowing such a man to be its father.

"After my recovery, I began to think of taking a house in the
country, or of making an excursion on the continent, to avoid Mr.
Venables; and to open my heart to new pleasures and affection.

The spring was melting into summer, and you, my little companion,

began to smile--that smile made hope bud out afresh, assuring me

the world was not a desert. Your gestures were ever present to my

fancy; and I dwelt on the joy I should feel when you would begin

to walk and lisp. Watching your wakening mind, and shielding from

every rude blast my tender blossom, I recovered my spirits--I

dreamed not of the frost--'the killing frost,' to which you were

destined to be exposed.--But I lose all patience--and execrate the

injustice of the world--folly! ignorance!--I should rather call

it; but, shut up from a free circulation of thought, and always

pondering on the same griefs, I writhe under the torturing

apprehensions, which ought to excite only honest indignation, or

active compassion; and would, could I view them as the natural
consequence of things. But, born a woman--and born to suffer, in
endeavouring to repress my own emotions, I feel more acutely the
various ills my sex are fated to bear--I feel that the evils they
are subject to endure, degrade them so far below their oppressors,
as almost to justify their tyranny; leading at the same time
superficial reasoners to term that weakness the cause, which is
only the consequence of short-sighted despotism.

CHAPTER 14

"AS MY MIND grew calmer, the visions of Italy again returned with their former glow of colouring; and I resolved on quitting the kingdom for a time, in search of the cheerfulness, that naturally results from a change of scene, unless we carry the barbed arrow with us, and only see what we feel.

"During the period necessary to prepare for a long absence, I sent a supply to pay my father's debts, and settled my brothers in eligible situations; but my attention was not wholly engrossed by my family, though I do not think it necessary to enumerate the common exertions of humanity. The manner in which my uncle's property was settled, prevented me from making the addition to the fortune of my surviving sister, that I could have wished; but I had prevailed on him to bequeath her two thousand pounds, and she determined to marry a lover, to whom she had been some time attached. Had it not been for this engagement, I should have invited her to accompany me in my tour; and I might have escaped the pit, so

artfully dug in my path, when I was the least aware of danger.

"I had thought of remaining in England, till I weaned my child;

but this state of freedom was too peaceful to last, and I had soon

reason to wish to hasten my departure. A friend of Mr. Venables,

the same attorney who had accompanied him in several excursions to

hunt me from my hiding places, waited on me to propose a

reconciliation. On my refusal, he indirectly advised me to make

over to my husband--for husband he would term him--the greater part

of the property I had at command, menacing me with continual

persecution unless I complied, and that, as a last resort, he would

claim the child. I did not, though intimidated by the last
insinuation, scruple to declare, that I would not allow him to
squander the money left to me for far different purposes, but
offered him five hundred pounds, if he would sign a bond not to
torment me any more. My maternal anxiety made me thus appear to
waver from my first determination, and probably suggested to him,
or his diabolical agent, the infernal plot, which has succeeded
but too well.

"The bond was executed; still I was impatient to leave England.

Mischief hung in the air when we breathed the same; I wanted seas

to divide us, and waters to roll between, till he had forgotten

that I had the means of helping him through a new scheme. Disturbed

by the late occurrences, I instantly prepared for my departure.

My only delay was waiting for a maid-servant, who spoke French

fluently, and had been warmly recommended to me. A valet I was

advised to hire, when I fixed on my place of residence for any time.

"My God, with what a light heart did I set out for Dover!--

It was not my country, but my cares, that I was leaving behind.

My heart seemed to bound with the wheels, or rather appeared the

centre on which they twirled. I clasped you to my bosom, exclaiming

'And you will be safe--quite safe--when--we are once on board the
packet.--Would we were there!' I smiled at my idle fears, as the
natural effect of continual alarm; and I scarcely owned to myself
that I dreaded Mr. Venables's cunning, or was conscious of the
horrid delight he would feel, at forming stratagem after stratagem
to circumvent me. I was already in the snare--I never reached the
packet--I never saw thee more.--I grow breathless. I have scarcely
patience to write down the details. The maid--the plausible woman
I had hired--put, doubtless, some stupefying potion in what I ate
or drank, the morning I left town. All I know is, that she must
have quitted the chaise, shameless wretch! and taken (from my

breast) my babe with her. How could a creature in a female form

see me caress thee, and steal thee from my arms! I must stop, stop

to repress a mother's anguish; lest, in bitterness of soul,

I imprecate the wrath of heaven on this tiger, who tore my only

comfort from me.

"How long I slept I know not; certainly many hours, for I woke

at the close of day, in a strange confusion of thought. I was

probably roused to recollection by some one thundering at a huge,

unwieldy gate. Attempting to ask where I was, my voice died away,

and I tried to raise it in vain, as I have done in a dream.

I looked for my babe with affright; feared that it had fallen out of my lap, while I had so strangely forgotten her; and, such was the vague intoxication, I can give it no other name, in which I was plunged, I could not recollect when or where I last saw you; but I sighed, as if my heart wanted room to clear my head.

"The gates opened heavily, and the sullen sound of many locks and bolts drawn back, grated on my very soul, before I was appalled by the creaking of the dismal hinges, as they closed after me.

The gloomy pile was before me, half in ruins; some of the aged trees of the avenue were cut down, and left to rot where they fell;

and as we approached some mouldering steps, a monstrous dog darted forwards to the length of his chain, and barked and growled infernally.

"The door was opened slowly, and a murderous visage peeped out, with a lantern. 'Hush!' he uttered, in a threatening tone, and the affrighted animal stole back to his kennel. The door of the chaise flew back, the stranger put down the lantern, and clasped his dreadful arms around me. It was certainly the effect of the soporific draught, for, instead of exerting my strength, I sunk without motion, though not without sense, on his shoulder, my limbs refusing to obey my will. I was carried up the steps into a

close-shut hall. A candle flaring in the socket, scarcely dispersed the darkness, though it displayed to me the ferocious countenance of the wretch who held me.

"He mounted a wide staircase. Large figures painted on the walls seemed to start on me, and glaring eyes to meet me at every turn. Entering a long gallery, a dismal shriek made me spring out of my conductor's arms, with I know not what mysterious emotion of terror; but I fell on the floor, unable to sustain myself.

"A strange-looking female started out of one of the recesses,

and observed me with more curiosity than interest; till, sternly

bid retire, she flitted back like a shadow. Other faces, strongly

marked, or distorted, peeped through the half-opened doors, and I

heard some incoherent sounds. I had no distinct idea where I could

be--I looked on all sides, and almost doubted whether I was alive

or dead.

"Thrown on a bed, I immediately sunk into insensibility again;

and next day, gradually recovering the use of reason, I began,

starting affrighted from the conviction, to discover where I was

confined--I insisted on seeing the master of the mansion--I saw

him--and perceived that I was buried alive.--

"Such, my child, are the events of thy mother's life to this
dreadful moment--Should she ever escape from the fangs of her
enemies, she will add the secrets of her prison-house--and--"

Some lines were here crossed out, and the memoirs broke off
abruptly with the names of Jemima and Darnford.

APPENDIX

ADVERTISEMENT*

THE performance, with a fragment of which the reader has now been presented, was designed to consist of three parts. The preceding sheets were considered as constituting one of those parts. Those

persons who in the perusal of the chapters, already written and in some degree finished by the author, have felt their hearts awakened, and their curiosity excited as to the sequel of the story, will, of course, gladly accept even of the broken paragraphs and half-finished sentences, which have been found committed to paper, as materials for the remainder. The fastidious and cold-hearted critic may perhaps feel himself repelled by the incoherent form in which they are presented. But an inquisitive temper willingly accepts the most imperfect and mutilated information, where better is not to be had: and readers, who in any degree resemble the author in her quick apprehension of sentiment, and of the pleasures and

pains of imagination, will, I believe, find gratification, in

contemplating sketches, which were designed in a short time to have

received the finishing touches of her genius; but which must now

for ever remain a mark to record the triumphs of mortality, over

schemes of usefulness, and projects of public interest.

* Presumed to have been written by Godwin [Publisher's note].

CHAPTER 15

DARNFORD returned the memoirs to Maria, with a most affectionate letter, in which he reasoned on "the absurdity of the laws respecting matrimony, which, till divorces could be more easily obtained, was," he declared, "the most insufferable bondage. Ties of this nature could not bind minds governed by superior principles; and such beings were privileged to act above the dictates of laws they had no voice in framing, if they had sufficient strength of mind

to endure the natural consequence. In her case, to talk of duty, was a farce, excepting what was due to herself. Delicacy, as well as reason, forbade her ever to think of returning to her husband: was she then to restrain her charming sensibility through mere prejudice? These arguments were not absolutely impartial, for he disdained to conceal, that, when he appealed to her reason, he felt that he had some interest in her heart.--The conviction was not more transporting, than sacred--a thousand times a day, he asked himself how he had merited such happiness?--and as often he determined to purify the heart she deigned to inhabit--He intreated to be again admitted to her presence.

He was; and the tear which glistened in his eye, when he respectfully pressed her to his bosom, rendered him peculiarly dear to the unfortunate mother. Grief had stilled the transports of love, only to render their mutual tenderness more touching. In former interviews, Darnford had contrived, by a hundred little pretexts, to sit near her, to take her hand, or to meet her eyes-- now it was all soothing affection, and esteem seemed to have rivalled love. He adverted to her narrative, and spoke with warmth of the oppression she had endured.--His eyes, glowing with a lambent flame, told her how much he wished to restore her to liberty and love;

but he kissed her hand, as if it had been that of a saint; and

spoke of the loss of her child, as if it had been his own.--

What could have been more flattering to Maria?--Every instance of

self-denial was registered in her heart, and she loved him, for

loving her too well to give way to the transports of passion.

They met again and again; and Darnford declared, while passion

suffused his cheeks, that he never before knew what it was to

love.--

One morning Jemima informed Maria, that her master intended

to wait on her, and speak to her without witnesses. He came, and brought a letter with him, pretending that he was ignorant of its contents, though he insisted on having it returned to him. It was from the attorney already mentioned, who informed her of the death of her child, and hinted, "that she could not now have a legitimate heir, and that, would she make over the half of her fortune during life, she should be conveyed to Dover, and permitted to pursue her plan of travelling."

 Maria answered with warmth, "That she had no terms to make with the murderer of her babe, nor would she purchase liberty at

the price of her own respect."

She began to expostulate with her jailor; but he sternly bade her "Be silent--he had not gone so far, not to go further."

Darnford came in the evening. Jemima was obliged to be absent, and she, as usual, locked the door on them, to prevent interruption or discovery.--The lovers were, at first, embarrassed; but fell insensibly into confidential discourse. Darnford represented, "that they might soon be parted," and wished her "to put it out of the power of fate to separate them."

As her husband she now received him, and he solemnly pledged himself as her protector--and eternal friend.--

There was one peculiarity in Maria's mind: she was more anxious not to deceive, than to guard against deception; and had rather trust without sufficient reason, than be for ever the prey of doubt.

Besides, what are we, when the mind has, from reflection, a certain kind of elevation, which exalts the contemplation above the little concerns of prudence! We see what we wish, and make a world of our own--and, though reality may sometimes open a door to misery, yet

the moments of happiness procured by the imagination, may, without
a paradox, be reckoned among the solid comforts of life. Maria now,
imagining that she had found a being of celestial mould--was
happy,--nor was she deceived.--He was then plastic in her impassioned
hand--and reflected all the sentiments which animated and warmed
her.*

* Two and a half lines of dashes follow here in the original

[Publisher's note].

CHAPTER 16

ONE morning confusion seemed to reign in the house, and Jemima came in terror, to inform Maria, "that her master had left it, with a determination, she was assured (and too many circumstances corroborated the opinion, to leave a doubt of its truth) of never

returning. I am prepared then," said Jemima, "to accompany you in your flight."

Maria started up, her eyes darting towards the door, as if afraid that some one should fasten it on her for ever.

Jemima continued, "I have perhaps no right now to expect the performance of your promise; but on you it depends to reconcile me with the human race."

"But Darnford!"--exclaimed Maria, mournfully--sitting down

again, and crossing her arms--"I have no child to go to, and liberty
has lost its sweets."

"I am much mistaken, if Darnford is not the cause of my master's
flight--his keepers assure me, that they have promised to confine
him two days longer, and then he will be free--you cannot see him;
but they will give a letter to him the moment he is free.--In that
inform him where he may find you in London; fix on some hotel.
Give me your clothes; I will send them out of the house with mine,
and we will slip out at the garden-gate. Write your letter while
I make these arrangements, but lose no time!"

In an agitation of spirit, not to be calmed, Maria began to write to Darnford. She called him by the sacred name of "husband," and bade him "hasten to her, to share her fortune, or she would return to him."--An hotel in the Adelphi was the place of rendezvous.

The letter was sealed and given in charge; and with light footsteps, yet terrified at the sound of them, she descended, scarcely breathing, and with an indistinct fear that she should never get out at the garden gate. Jemima went first.

A being, with a visage that would have suited one possessed
by a devil, crossed the path, and seized Maria by the arm. Maria
had no fear but of being detained--"Who are you? what are you?"
for the form was scarcely human. "If you are made of flesh and
blood," his ghastly eyes glared on her, "do not stop me!"

"Woman," interrupted a sepulchral voice, "what have I to do
with thee?"--Still he grasped her hand, muttering a curse.

"No, no; you have nothing to do with me," she exclaimed, "this
is a moment of life and death!"--

With supernatural force she broke from him, and, throwing her arms round Jemima, cried, "Save me!" The being, from whose grasp she had loosed herself, took up a stone as they opened the door, and with a kind of hellish sport threw it after them. They were out of his reach.

When Maria arrived in town, she drove to the hotel already fixed on. But she could not sit still--her child was ever before her; and all that had passed during her confinement, appeared to be a dream. She went to the house in the suburbs, where, as she

now discovered, her babe had been sent. The moment she entered,

her heart grew sick; but she wondered not that it had proved its

grave. She made the necessary enquiries, and the church-yard was

pointed out, in which it rested under a turf. A little frock which

the nurse's child wore (Maria had made it herself) caught her eye.

The nurse was glad to sell it for half-a-guinea, and Maria hastened

away with the relic, and, reentering the hackney-coach which waited

for her, gazed on it, till she reached her hotel.

She then waited on the attorney who had made her uncle's will,

and explained to him her situation. He readily advanced her some

of the money which still remained in his hands, and promised to take the whole of the case into consideration. Maria only wished to be permitted to remain in quiet--She found that several bills, apparently with her signature, had been presented to her agent, nor was she for a moment at a loss to guess by whom they had been forged; yet, equally averse to threaten or intreat, she requested her friend [the solicitor] to call on Mr. Venables. He was not to be found at home; but at length his agent, the attorney, offered a conditional promise to Maria, to leave her in peace, as long as she behaved with propriety, if she would give up the notes. Maria inconsiderately consented--Darnford was arrived, and she wished to

be only alive to love; she wished to forget the anguish she felt

whenever she thought of her child.

They took a ready furnished lodging together, for she was above disguise; Jemima insisting on being considered as her house-keeper, and to receive the customary stipend. On no other terms would she remain with her friend.

Darnford was indefatigable in tracing the mysterious circumstances of his confinement. The cause was simply, that a relation, a very distant one, to whom he was heir, had died intestate,

leaving a considerable fortune. On the news of Darnford's arrival

[in England, a person, intrusted with the management of the property,

and who had the writings in his possession, determining, by one

bold stroke, to strip Darnford of the succession,] had planned his

confinement; and [as soon as he had taken the measures he judged

most conducive to his object, this ruffian, together with his

instrument,] the keeper of the private mad-house, left the kingdom.

Darnford, who still pursued his enquiries, at last discovered that

they had fixed their place of refuge at Paris.

Maria and he determined therefore, with the faithful Jemima,

to visit that metropolis, and accordingly were preparing for the journey, when they were informed that Mr. Venables had commenced an action against Darnford for seduction and adultery. The indignation Maria felt cannot be explained; she repented of the forbearance she had exercised in giving up the notes. Darnford could not put off his journey, without risking the loss of his property: Maria therefore furnished him with money for his expedition; and determined to remain in London till the termination of this affair.

She visited some ladies with whom she had formerly been intimate, but was refused admittance; and at the opera, or Ranelagh,

they could not recollect her. Among these ladies there were some, not her most intimate acquaintance, who were generally supposed to avail themselves of the cloke of marriage, to conceal a mode of conduct, that would for ever have damned their fame, had they been innocent, seduced girls. These particularly stood aloof.--Had she remained with her husband, practicing insincerity, and neglecting her child to manage an intrigue, she would still have been visited and respected. If, instead of openly living with her lover, she could have condescended to call into play a thousand arts, which, degrading her own mind, might have allowed the people who were not deceived, to pretend to be so, she would have been caressed and

treated like an honourable woman. "And Brutus* is an honourable man!" said Mark-Antony with equal sincerity.

* The name in the manuscript is by mistake written Caesar.

EDITOR. [Godwin's note]

With Darnford she did not taste uninterrupted felicity; there was a volatility in his manner which often distressed her; but love gladdened the scene; besides, he was the most tender, sympathizing creature in the world. A fondness for the sex often gives an appearance of humanity to the behaviour of men, who have small

pretensions to the reality; and they seem to love others, when they are only pursuing their own gratification. Darnford appeared ever willing to avail himself of her taste and acquirements, while she endeavoured to profit by his decision of character, and to eradicate some of the romantic notions, which had taken root in her mind, while in adversity she had brooded over visions of unattainable bliss.

The real affections of life, when they are allowed to burst forth, are buds pregnant with joy and all the sweet emotions of the soul; yet they branch out with wild ease, unlike the artificial forms of felicity, sketched by an imagination painful alive. The

substantial happiness, which enlarges and civilizes the mind,

may be compared to the pleasure experienced in roving

through nature at large, inhaling the sweet gale natural to the

clime; while the reveries of a feverish imagination continually

sport themselves in gardens full of aromatic shrubs, which cloy

while they delight, and weaken the sense of pleasure they gratify.

The heaven of fancy, below or beyond the stars, in this life, or

in those ever-smiling regions surrounded by the unmarked ocean of

futurity, have an insipid uniformity which palls. Poets have

imagined scenes of bliss; but, sensing out sorrow, all the extatic

emotions of the Soul, and even its grandeur, seem to be equally

excluded. We dose over the unruffled lake, and long to scale the
rocks which fence the happy valley of contentment, though serpents
hiss in the pathless desert, and danger lurks in the unexplored
wiles. Maria found herself more indulgent as she was happier, and
discovered virtues, in characters she had before disregarded, while
chasing the phantoms of elegance and excellence, which sported in
the meteors that exhale in the marshes of misfortune. The heart
is often shut by romance against social pleasure; and, fostering
a sickly sensibility, grows callous to the soft touches of humanity.

To part with Darnford was indeed cruel.--It was to feel most

painfully alone; but she rejoiced to think, that she should spare
him the care and perplexity of the suit, and meet him again, all
his own. Marriage, as at present constituted, she considered as
leading to immorality--yet, as the odium of society impedes
usefulness, she wished to avow her affection to Darnford, by becoming
his wife according to established rules; not to be confounded with
women who act from very different motives, though her conduct would
be just the same without the ceremony as with it, and her expectations
from him not less firm. The being summoned to defend herself from
a charge which she was determined to plead guilty to, was still
galling, as it roused bitter reflections on the situation of women

in society.

CHAPTER 17

SUCH was her state of mind when the dogs of law were let loose on

her. Maria took the task of conducting Darnford's defence upon

herself. She instructed his counsel to plead guilty to the charge

of adultery; but to deny that of seduction.

The counsel for the plaintiff opened the cause, by observing,
"that his client had ever been an indulgent husband, and had borne
with several defects of temper, while he had nothing criminal to
lay to the charge of his wife. But that she left his house without
assigning any cause. He could not assert that she was then acquainted
with the defendant; yet, when he was once endeavouring to bring
her back to her home, this man put the peace-officers to flight,
and took her he knew not whither. After the birth of her child,

her conduct was so strange, and a melancholy malady having afflicted one of the family, which delicacy forbade the dwelling on, it was necessary to confine her. By some means the defendant enabled her to make her escape, and they had lived together, in despite of all sense of order and decorum. The adultery was allowed, it was not necessary to bring any witnesses to prove it; but the seduction, though highly probable from the circumstances which he had the honour to state, could not be so clearly proved.--It was of the most atrocious kind, as decency was set at defiance, and respect for reputation, which shows internal compunction, utterly disregarded."

A strong sense of injustice had silenced every motion, which a mixture of true and false delicacy might otherwise have excited in Maria's bosom. She only felt in earnest to insist on the privilege of her nature. The sarcasms of society, and the condemnations of a mistaken world, were nothing to her, compared with acting contrary to those feelings which were the foundation of her principles. [She therefore eagerly put herself forward, instead of desiring to be absent, on this memorable occasion.]

Convinced that the subterfuges of the law were disgraceful, she wrote a paper, which she expressly desired might be read in

court:

"Married when scarcely able to distinguish the nature of the engagement, I yet submitted to the rigid laws which enslave women, and obeyed the man whom I could no longer love. Whether the duties of the state are reciprocal, I mean not to discuss; but I can prove repeated infidelities which I overlooked or pardoned. Witnesses are not wanting to establish these facts. I at present maintain the child of a maid servant, sworn to him, and born after our marriage. I am ready to allow, that education and circumstances lead men to think and act with less delicacy, than the preservation

of order in society demands from women; but surely I may without
assumption declare, that, though I could excuse the birth, I could
not the desertion of this unfortunate babe:--and, while I despised
the man, it was not easy to venerate the husband. With proper
restrictions however, I revere the institution which fraternizes
the world. I exclaim against the laws which throw the whole weight
of the yoke on the weaker shoulders, and force women, when they
claim protectorship as mothers, to sign a contract, which renders
them dependent on the caprice of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity
has appointed to reign over them. Various are the cases, in which
a woman ought to separate herself from her husband; and mine,

I may be allowed emphatically to insist, comes under the description
of the most aggravated.

"I will not enlarge on those provocations which only the
individual can estimate; but will bring forward such charges only,
the truth of which is an insult upon humanity. In order to promote
certain destructive speculations, Mr. Venables prevailed on me to
borrow certain sums of a wealthy relation; and, when I refused
further compliance, he thought of bartering my person; and not only
allowed opportunities to, but urged, a friend from whom he borrowed
money, to seduce me. On the discovery of this act of atrocity,

I determined to leave him, and in the most decided manner, for ever.

I consider all obligations as made void by his conduct; and hold,

that schisms which proceed from want of principles, can never be healed.

"He received a fortune with me to the amount of five thousand pounds. On the death of my uncle, convinced that I could provide for my child, I destroyed the settlement of that fortune. I required none of my property to be returned to me, nor shall enumerate the sums extorted from me during six years that we lived together.

"After leaving, what the law considers as my home, I was hunted

like a criminal from place to place, though I contracted no debts,
and demanded no maintenance--yet, as the laws sanction such
proceeding, and make women the property of their husbands, I forbear
to animadvert. After the birth of my daughter, and the death of
my uncle, who left a very considerable property to myself and child,
I was exposed to new persecution; and, because I had, before arriving
at what is termed years of discretion, pledged my faith, I was
treated by the world, as bound for ever to a man whose vices were
notorious. Yet what are the vices generally known, to the various
misereries that a woman may be subject to, which, though deeply felt,
eating into the soul, elude description, and may be glossed over!

A false morality is even established, which makes all

the virtue of women consist in chastity, submission,

and the forgiveness of injuries.

"I pardon my oppressor--bitterly as I lament the loss of my
child, torn from me in the most violent manner. But nature revolts,
and my soul sickens at the bare supposition, that it could ever be
a duty to pretend affection, when a separation is necessary to
prevent my feeling hourly aversion.

"To force me to give my fortune, I was imprisoned--yes; in a

private mad-house.--There, in the heart of misery, I met the man
charged with seducing me. We became attached--I deemed, and ever
shall deem, myself free. The death of my babe dissolved the only
tie which subsisted between me and my, what is termed, lawful husband.

"To this person, thus encountered, I voluntarily gave myself,
never considering myself as any more bound to transgress the laws
of moral purity, because the will of my husband might be pleaded
in my excuse, than to transgress those laws to which [the policy
of artificial society has] annexed [positive] punishments.--While
no command of a husband can prevent a woman from suffering for

certain crimes, she must be allowed to consult her conscience, and

regulate her conduct, in some degree, by her own sense of right.

The respect I owe to myself, demanded my strict adherence to my

determination of never viewing Mr. Venables in the light of a

husband, nor could it forbid me from encouraging another. If I am

unfortunately united to an unprincipled man, am I for ever to be

shut out from fulfilling the duties of a wife and mother?--I wish

my country to approve of my conduct; but, if laws exist, made by

the strong to oppress the weak, I appeal to my own sense of justice,

and declare that I will not live with the individual, who has

violated every moral obligation which binds man to man.

"I protest equally against any charge being brought to criminate the man, whom I consider as my husband. I was six-and-twenty when I left Mr. Venables' roof; if ever I am to be supposed to arrive at an age to direct my own actions, I must by that time have arrived at it.--I acted with deliberation.--Mr. Darnford found me a forlorn and oppressed woman, and promised the protection women in the present state of society want.--But the man who now claims me--was he deprived of my society by this conduct? The question is an insult to common sense, considering where Mr. Darnford met me.--Mr. Venables' door was indeed open to me--nay, threats and intreaties

were used to induce me to return; but why? Was affection or honour
the motive?--I cannot, it is true, dive into the recesses of the
human heart--yet I presume to assert, [borne out as I am by a
variety of circumstances,] that he was merely influenced by the
most rapacious avarice.

"I claim then a divorce, and the liberty of enjoying, free
from molestation, the fortune left to me by a relation, who was
well aware of the character of the man with whom I had to contend.--I
appeal to the justice and humanity of the jury--a body of men,
whose private judgment must be allowed to modify laws, that must

be unjust, because definite rules can never apply to indefinite

circumstances--and I deprecate punishment upon the man of my choice,

freeing him, as I solemnly do, from the charge of seduction.]

"I did not put myself into a situation to justify a charge of

adultery, till I had, from conviction, shaken off the fetters which

bound me to Mr. Venables.--While I lived with him, I defy the voice

of calumny to sully what is termed the fair fame of woman.--

Neglected by my husband, I never encouraged a lover; and preserved

with scrupulous care, what is termed my honour, at the expence of

my peace, till he, who should have been its guardian, laid traps

to ensnare me. From that moment I believed myself, in the sight
of heaven, free--and no power on earth shall force me to renounce
my resolution."

The judge, in summing up the evidence, alluded to "the fallacy
of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation
of the marriage-vow. For his part, he had always determined to
oppose all innovation, and the newfangled notions which incroached
on the good old rules of conduct. We did not want French principles
in public or private life--and, if women were allowed to plead
their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity, it was

opening a flood-gate for immorality. What virtuous woman thought

of her feelings?--It was her duty to love and obey the man chosen

by her parents and relations, who were qualified by their experience

to judge better for her, than she could for herself. As to the

charges brought against the husband, they were vague, supported by

no witnesses, excepting that of imprisonment in a private madhouse.

The proofs of an insanity in the family, might render that however

a prudent measure; and indeed the conduct of the lady did not appear

that of a person of sane mind. Still such a mode of proceeding

could not be justified, and might perhaps entitle the lady [in

another court] to a sentence of separation from bed and board,

during the joint lives of the parties; but he hoped that no Englishman would legalize adultery, by enabling the adulteress to enrich her seducer. Too many restrictions could not be thrown in the way of divorces, if we wished to maintain the sanctity of marriage; and, though they might bear a little hard on a few, very few individuals, it was evidently for the good of the whole."

CONCLUSION

BY THE EDITOR *

* i.e., Godwin [Publisher's note].

VERY FEW hints exist respecting the plan of the remainder of the work. I find only two detached sentences, and some scattered heads for the continuation of the story. I transcribe the whole.

I.

"Darnford's letters were affectionate; but circumstances

occasioned delays, and the miscarriage of some letters rendered the reception of wished-for answers doubtful: his return was necessary to calm Maria's mind."

II.

"As Darnford had informed her that his business was settled, his delaying to return seemed extraordinary; but love to excess, excludes fear or suspicion."

The scattered heads for the continuation of the story, are as follow. *

* To understand these minutes, it is necessary the reader should consider each of them as setting out from the same point in the story, viz. the point to which it is brought down in the preceding chapter. [Godwin's note]

I.

"Trial for adultery--Maria defends herself--A separation from bed and board is the consequence--Her fortune is thrown into chancery--Darnford obtains a part of his property--Maria goes into the country."

II.

"A prosecution for adultery commenced--Trial--Darnford sets out for France--Letters--Once more pregnant--He returns--Mysterious behaviour--Visit--Expectation--Discovery--Interview--Consequence.

III.

"Sued by her husband--Damages awarded to him--Separation from bed and board--Darnford goes abroad--Maria into the country--Provides for her father--Is shunned--Returns to London--Expects to see her lover--The rack of expectation--Finds herself again with child--

Delighted--A discovery--A visit--A miscarriage--Conclusion."

IV.

"Divorced by her husband--Her lover unfaithful--Pregnancy--
Miscarriage--Suicide."

[The following passage appears in some respects to deviate
from the preceding hints. It is superscribed]

"THE END.

"She swallowed the laudanum; her soul was calm--the tempest
had subsided--and nothing remained but an eager longing to forget
herself--to fly from the anguish she endured to escape from
thought--from this hell of disappointment.

"Still her eyes closed not--one remembrance with frightful
velocity followed another--All the incidents of her life were in
arms, embodied to assail her, and prevent her sinking into the
sleep of death.--Her murdered child again appeared to her, mourning
for the babe of which she was the tomb.--'And could it have a

nobler?--Surely it is better to die with me, than to enter on life

without a mother's care!--I cannot live!--but could I have deserted

my child the moment it was born?--thrown it on the troubled wave

of life, without a hand to support it?--She looked up: 'What have

I not suffered!--may I find a father where I am going!--Her head

turned; a stupor ensued; a faintness--'Have a little patience,'

said Maria, holding her swimming head (she thought of her mother),

'this cannot last long; and what is a little bodily pain to the

pangs I have endured?'

"A new vision swam before her. Jemima seemed to enter--

leading a little creature, that, with tottering footsteps, approached

the bed. The voice of Jemima sounding as at a distance, called

her--she tried to listen, to speak, to look!

"Behold your child!" exclaimed Jemima. Maria started off

the bed, and fainted.--Violent vomiting followed.

"When she was restored to life, Jemima addressed her with

great solemnity: '----- led me to suspect, that your husband

and brother had deceived you, and secreted the child. I would not

torment you with doubtful hopes, and I left you (at a fatal moment)

to search for the child!--I snatched her from misery--and (now she is alive again) would you leave her alone in the world, to endure what I have endured?'

"Maria gazed wildly at her, her whole frame was convulsed with emotion; when the child, whom Jemima had been tutoring all the journey, uttered the word 'Mamma!' She caught her to her bosom, and burst into a passion of tears--then, resting the child gently on the bed, as if afraid of killing it,--she put her hand to her eyes, to conceal as it were the agonizing struggle of her soul.

She remained silent for five minutes, crossing her arms over her

bosom, and reclining her head,--then exclaimed: "The conflict is over!--I will live for my child!"

A few readers perhaps, in looking over these hints, will wonder how it could have been practicable, without tediousness, or remitting in any degree the interest of the story, to have filled, from these slight sketches, a number of pages, more considerable than those which have been already presented. But, in reality, these hints, simple as they are, are pregnant with passion and distress. It is the refuge of barren authors only, to crowd their fictions with so

great a number of events, as to suffer no one of them to sink into the reader's mind. It is the province of true genius to develop events, to discover their capabilities, to ascertain the different passions and sentiments with which they are fraught, and to diversify them with incidents, that give reality to the picture, and take a hold upon the mind of a reader of taste, from which they can never be loosened. It was particularly the design of the author, in the present instance, to make her story subordinate to a great moral purpose, that "of exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society.--This view restrained her fancy."* It was necessary for

her, to place in a striking point of view, evils that are too frequently overlooked, and to drag into light those details of oppression, of which the grosser and more insensible part of mankind make little account.

* See author's preface. [Godwin's note]

THE END.

THE PUBLIC are here presented with the last literary attempt of an author, whose fame has been uncommonly extensive, and whose talents have probably been most admired, by the persons by whom talents are estimated with the greatest accuracy and discrimination. There are few, to whom her writings could in any case have given pleasure, that would have wished that this fragment should have been suppressed, because it is a fragment. There is a sentiment, very dear to minds of taste and imagination, that