Jane Talbot

by Charles Brockden Brown

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Title: Jane Talbot

Author: Charles Brockden Brown

Release date: July 1, 2005 [eBook #8404] Most recently updated: February 10, 2015

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/8404

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Charles Brockden Brown.

Letter I

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Monday Evening, October 3.

I am very far from being a wise girl. So conscience whispers me, and, though vanity is eager to refute the charge, I must acknowledge that she is seldom successful. Conscience tells me it is folly, it is guilt, to wrap up my existence in one frail mortal; to employ all my thoughts, to lavish all my affections, upon one object; to dote upon a human being, who, as such, must be the heir of many frailties, and whom I know to be not without his faults; to enjoy no peace but in his presence, to be grateful for his permission to sacrifice fortune, ease, life itself, for his sake.

From the humiliation produced by these charges, vanity endeavours to relieve me by insinuating that all happiness springs from affection; that nature ordains no tie so strong as that between the sexes; that to love without bounds is to confer bliss not only on ourselves but on another; that conjugal affection is the genuine sphere not only of happiness but duty.

Besides, my heart will not be persuaded but that its fondness for you is nothing more than simple justice. Ought I not to love excellence, and does my poor imagination figure to itself any thing in human shape more excellent than thou?

But yet there are bounds beyond which passion cannot go without counteracting its own purposes. I am afraid mine goes beyond those bounds. So far as it produces rapture, it deserves to be cherished; but when productive of impatience, repining, agony, on occasions too that are slight, trivial, or unavoidable, 'tis surely culpable.

Methinks, my friend, I would not have had thee for a witness of the bitterness, the tumult of my feelings, during this day; ever since you left me. You cannot conceive any thing more forlorn, more vacant, more anxious, than this weak heart has been and still is. I was terrified at my own sensations, and, with my usual folly, began to construe them into omens of evils; so inadequate, so disproportioned was my distress to the cause that produced it.

Ah! my friend! a weak--very weak--creature is thy Jane. From excess of love arises that weakness; that must be its apology with thee, for, in thy mind, my fondness, I know, needs an apology.

Shall I scold you a little? I have held in the rein a long time, but my overflowing heart must have relief, and I shall find a sort of comfort in chiding you. Let me chide you, then, for coldness, for insensibility: but no; I will not. Let me enjoy the rewards of self-denial and forbearance, and seal up my accusing lips. Let me forget the coldness of your last salute, your ill-concealed effort to disengage yourself from my foolishly-fond arms. You have got at your journey's end, I hope. Farewell.

J. TALBOT.

Letter II

To Henry Colden

Tuesday Morning, October 4.

I must write to you, you said, frequently and copiously: you did not mean, I suppose, that I should always be scribbling, but I cannot help it. I can do nothing but converse with you. When present, my prate is incessant; when absent, I can prate to you with as little intermission; for the pen, used so carelessly and thoughtlessly as I use it, does but prate.

Besides, I have not forgotten my promise. 'Tis true the story you wished me to give you is more easily communicated by the pen than by the lips. I admit your claim to be acquainted with all the incidents of my life, be they momentous or trivial. I have often told you that the retrospect is very mournful; but that ought not to prevent me from making it, when so useful a purpose as that of thoroughly disclosing to you the character of one, on whom your future happiness is to depend, will be affected by it. I am not surprised that calumny has been busy with my life, and am very little anxious to clear myself from unjust charges, except to such as you.

At this moment, I may add, my mood is not unfriendly to the undertaking. I can do nothing in your absence but write to you. To write what I have ten thousand times spoken, and which can be perfectly understood only when accompanied by looks and accents, seems absurd. Especially while there is a subject on which my tongue can never expatiate, but on which it is necessary that you should know all that I can tell you.

The prospect of filling up this interval with the relation of the most affecting parts of my life somewhat reconciled me to your necessary absence, yet I know my heart will droop. Even this preparation to look back makes me shudder already. Some reluctance to recall tragical or humiliating scenes, and, by thus recalling to endure them, in some sense, a second time, I must expect to feel.

But let me lay down the pen for the present. Let me take my favourite and lonely path, and, by a deliberate review of the past, refresh my memory and methodize my recollections. Adieu till I return. J. T.

Letter III

To Henry Colden

Tuesday Morning, 11 o'clock.

I am glad I left not word how soon I meant to return, for here has been, it seems, during my short absence, a pair of gossips. They have just gone, lamenting the disappointment, and leaving me a world of complimentary condolences.

I shall take care to prevent future interruption by shutting up the house and retiring to my chamber, where I am resolved to remain till I have fully disburdened my heart. Disburden it, said I? I shall load it, I fear, with sadness, but I will not regret an undertaking which my duty to you makes indispensable.

One of the earliest incidents that I remember is an expostulation with my father. I

saw several strange people enter the chamber where my mother was. Somewhat suggested to my childish fancy that these strangers meant to take her away, and that I should never see her again. My terror was violent, and I thought of nothing but seizing her gown or hand, and holding her back from the rude assailants. My father detained me in his arms, and endeavoured to soothe my fears, but I would not be appeased. I struggled and shrieked, and, hearing some movements in my mother's room, that seemed to betoken the violence I so much dreaded, I leaped, with a sudden effort, from my father's arms, but fainted before I reached the door of the room.

This may serve as a specimen of the impetuosity of my temper. It was always fervent and unruly, unacquainted with moderation in its attachments, violent in its indignation and its enmity, but easily persuaded to pity and forgiveness.

When I recovered from my swoon, I ran to my mother's room; but she was gone. I rent the air with my cries, and shocked all about me with importunities to know whither they had carried her. They had carried her to the grave, and nothing would content me but to visit the spot three or four times a day, and to sit in the room in which she died, in stupid and mopeful silence, all night long.

At this time I was only five years old,--an age at which, in general, a deceased parent is quickly forgotten; but, in my attachment to my mother, I showed none of the volatility of childhood. While she lived, I was never at ease but when seated at her knee, or with my arms round her neck. When dead, I cherished her remembrance for years, and have paid, hundreds of times, the tribute of my tears at the foot of her grave.

My brother, who was three years older than myself, behaved in a very different manner. I used to think the difference between us was merely that of sex; that every boy was boisterous, ungrateful, imperious, and inhuman, as every girl was soft, pliant, affectionate. Time has cured me of that mistake, and, as it has shown me

females unfeeling and perverse, so it has introduced me to men full of gentleness and sensibility. My brother's subsequent conduct convinced me that he was at all times selfish and irascible beyond most other men, and that his ingratitude and insolence to his mother were only congenial parts of the character he afterwards displayed at large.

My brother and I passed our infancy in one unintermitted quarrel. We were never together but he played some cruel and mischievous prank, which I never failed to resent to the utmost of my little power. I soon found that my tears only increased his exultation, and my complaints only grieved my mother. I, therefore, gave word for word and blow for blow; but, being always worsted in such conflicts, I shunned him whenever it was possible, and whatever his malice made me suffer I endeavoured to conceal from her.

My mother, on her death-bed, was anxious to see him, but he had strolled away after some boyish amusement, with companions as thoughtless as himself. The news of her death scarcely produced an hour's seriousness. He made my affliction a topic of sarcasm and contempt.

To soften my grief, my father consented to my living under the care of her whom I now call my mother. Mrs. Fielder was merely the intimate from childhood of my own mother, with whom, however, since her marriage, contracted against Mrs. Fielder's inclination and remonstrances, she had maintained but little intercourse. My mother's sudden death and my helpless age awakened all her early tenderness, and induced her to offer an asylum to me. Having a considerable fortune and no family, her offer, notwithstanding ancient jealousies, was readily accepted by my father.

My new residence was, in many respects, the reverse of my former one. The treatment I received from my new parent, without erasing the memory of the old one, quickly excited emotions as filial and tender as I had ever experienced. Comfort

and quiet, peace and harmony, obsequious and affectionate attendants and companions, I had never been accustomed to under the paternal roof.

From this period till I was nearly sixteen years of age, I merely paid occasional visits to my father. He loved me with as much warmth as his nature was capable of feeling, which I repaid him in gratitude and reverence. I never remitted my attention to his affairs, and studied his security and comfort as far as these were within my power.

My brother was not deficient in talents, but he wanted application. Very early he showed strong propensities to active amusement and sensual pleasures. The school and college were little attended to, and the time that ought to have been appropriated to books and study was wasted in frolics and carousals. As soon as he was able to manage a gun and a horse, they were procured; and these, and the company to which they introduced him, afforded employment for all his attention and time.

My father had devoted his early years to the indefatigable pursuit of gain. He was frugal and abstemious, though not covetous, and amassed a large property. This property he intended to divide between his two children, and to secure my portion to his nephew, whom his parents had left an orphan in his infancy, and whom my father had taken and treated as his own child by marrying him to me. This nephew passed his childhood among us. His temper being more generous than my brother's, and being taught mutually to regard each other as destined to a future union, our intercourse was cordial and affectionate.

We parted at an age at which nothing like passion could be felt. He went to Europe, in circumstances very favourable to his improvement, leaving behind him the expectation of his returning in a few years. Meanwhile, my father was anxious that we should regard each other and maintain a correspondence as persons betrothed. In persons at our age, this scheme was chimerical. As soon as I acquired the power of reflection, I perceived the folly of such premature bonds, and, though I did not

openly oppose my father's wishes, held myself entirely free to obey any new impulse which circumstances might produce. My mother (so let me still call Mrs. Fielder) fully concurred in my views.

You are acquainted, my friend, with many events of my early life. Most of those not connected with my father and his nephew, I have often related. At present, therefore, I shall omit all collateral and contemporary incidents, and confine myself entirely to those connected with these two persons.

My father, on the death of his wife, retired from business, and took a house in an airy and secluded situation. His household consisted of a housekeeper and two or three servants, and apartments were always open for his son.

My brother's temper grew more unmanageable as he increased in years. My father's views with regard to him were such as parental foresight and discretion commonly dictate. He wished him to acquire all possible advantages of education, and then to betake himself to some liberal profession, in which he might obtain honour as well as riches. This sober scheme by no means suited the restless temper of the youth. It was his maxim that all restraints were unworthy of a lad of spirit, and that it was far more wise to spend freely what his father had painfully acquired, than, by the same plodding and toilsome arts, to add to the heap.

I scarcely know how to describe my feelings in relation to this young man. My affection for him was certainly without that tenderness which a good brother is sure to excite. I do not remember a single direct kindness that I ever received from him; but I remember innumerable ill offices and contempts. Still, there was some inexplicable charm in the mere tie of kindred, which made me more deplore his errors, exult in his talents, rejoice in his success, and take a deeper interest in his concerns than in those of any other person.

As he advanced in age, I had new cause for my zeal in his behalf. My father's temper was easy and flexible; my brother was at once vehement and artful. Frank's

arguments and upbraidings created in his father an unnatural awe, an apprehension and diffidence in thwarting his wishes and giving advice, which usually distinguish the filial character. The youth perceived his advantages, and employed them in carrying every point on which his inclination was set.

For a long time this absurd indulgence was shown in allowing his son to employ his time as he pleased, in refraining from all animadversions on his idleness and dissipation, and supplying him with a generous allowance of pocket-money. This allowance required now and then to be increased. Every year and every month, by adding new sources of expense, added something to the stipend.

My father's revenue was adequate to a very splendid establishment; but he was accustomed to live frugally, and thought it wise to add his savings to the principal of his estate. These savings gradually grew less and less, till at length my brother's numerous excursions, a French girl whom he maintained in expensive lodgings, his horses, dogs, and friends, consumed the whole of it.

I never met my brother but by accident. These interviews were, for the most part, momentary, either in the street or at my father's house; but I was too much interested in all that befell him, not to make myself, by various means, thoroughly acquainted with his situation.

I had no power to remedy the evil: as my elder brother, and as a man, he thought himself entitled to govern and despise me. He always treated me as a frivolous girl, with whom it was waste of time to converse, and never spoke to me at all except to direct or admonish. Hence I could do nothing but regret his habits. Their consequences to himself it was beyond my power to prevent.

For a long time I was totally unaware of the tendencies of this mode of life. I did not suspect that a brother's passions would carry him beyond the bound of vulgar prudence, or induce him to encroach on those funds from which his present enjoyments were derived. I knew him to be endowed with an acute understanding,

and imagined that this would point out, with sufficient clearness, the wisdom of limiting his expenses to his income.

In my daily conversations with my father, I never voluntarily introduced Frank as our topic, unless by the harmless and trite questions of "When was he here?" "Where has he gone?" and the like. We met only by accident, at his lodgings; when I entered the room where he was, he never thought of bestowing more than a transient look on me, just to know who it was that approached. Circumstances at length, however, occurred, which put an end to this state of neutrality.

I heard, twice or thrice a year, from my cousin Risberg. One day a letter arrived in which he obscurely intimated that the failure of remittances from my father, for more than half a year, had reduced him to great distress. My father had always taught him to regard himself as entitled to all the privileges of a son; had sent him to Europe under express conditions of supplying him with a reasonable stipend, till he should come of age, at which period it was concerted that Risberg should return and receive a portion with me, enabling him to enter advantageously on the profession of the law, to which he was now training. This stipend was far from being extravagant, or more than sufficient for the decent maintenance of a student at the Temple; and Risberg's conduct had always been represented, by those under whose eye he had been placed, as regular and exemplary.

This intimation surprised me a good deal. I could easily imagine the embarrassments to which a failure of this kind must subject a generous spirit, and thought it my duty to remove them as soon as possible. I supposed that some miscarriage or delay had happened to the money, and that my father would instantly rectify any error, or supply any deficiency. I hastened, therefore, to his house, with the opened letter. I found him alone, and immediately showed him that page of the letter which related to this affair. I anxiously watched his looks while he read it.

I observed marks of great surprise in his countenance, and, as soon as he laid down

the letter, I began to expatiate on the inconveniences which Risberg had suffered. He listened to me in gloomy silence, and, when I had done, made no answer but by a deep sigh and downcast look.

"Pray, dear sir," continued I, "what could have happened to the money which you sent? You had not heard, I suppose, of its miscarriage."

"No, I had not heard of it before. I will look into it, and see what can be done." Here further conversation was suspended by a visitant. I waited with impatience till the guest had retired; but he had scarcely left the room when my brother entered. I supposed my father would have immediately introduced this subject, and, as my brother usually represented him in every affair of business, and could of course throw some light upon the present mystery, I saw no reason why I should be excluded from a conference in which I had some interest, and was therefore somewhat surprised when my father told me he had no need of my company for the rest of the day, and wished to be alone with Francis. I rose instantly to depart, but said, "Pray, sir, tell my brother what has happened. Perhaps he can explain the mystery."

"What!" cried my brother, with a laugh, "has thy silly brain engendered a mystery which I am to solve? Thou mayest save thyself the trouble of telling me, for, really, I have no time to throw away on thee or thy mysteries."

There was always something in my brother's raillery which my infirm soul could never support. I ought always to have listened and replied without emotion, but a fluttering indignation usually deprived me of utterance. I found my best expedient was flight, when I could fly, and silence when obliged to remain: I therefore made no answer to this speech, but hastily withdrew.

Next morning, earlier than usual, I went to my father. He was thoughtful and melancholy. I introduced the subject that was nearest my heart; but he answered me reluctantly, and in general terms, that he had examined the affair, and would take the

necessary measures.

"But, dear sir," said I, "how did it happen? How did the money miscarry?"

"Never mind," said he, a little peevishly: "we shall see things put to rights, I tell you; and let that satisfy you."

"I am glad of it. Poor fellow! Young, generous, disdaining obligation, never knowing the want of money, how must he have felt on being left quite destitute, penniless, running in arrear for absolute necessaries; in debt to a good woman who lived by letting lodgings, and who dunned him, after so long a delay, in so indirect and delicate a manner!--What must he have suffered, accustomed to regard you as a father, and knowing you had no personal calls for your large revenue, and being so solemnly enjoined by you not to stir himself in any rational pleasure! for you would be always ready to exceed your stated remittances, when there should be just occasion. Poor fellow! my heart bleeds for him. But how long will it be before he hears from you? His letter is dated seven weeks ago. It will be another six or eight weeks before he receives an answer,--at least three months in all; and during all this time he will be without money. But perhaps he will receive it sooner."

My father frequently changed countenance, and showed great solicitude. I did not wonder at this, as Risberg had always been loved as a son. A little consideration, therefore, ought to have shown me the impropriety of thus descanting on an evil without remedy; yet I still persisted. At length, I asked to what causes I might ascribe his former disappointments, in the letter to Risberg, which I proposed writing immediately.

This question threw him into much confusion. At last he said, peevishly, "I wish, Jane, you would leave these matters to me: I don't like your interference."

This rebuke astonished me. I had sufficient discernment to suspect something extraordinary, but was for a few minutes quite puzzled and confounded. He had generally treated me with tenderness and even deference, and I saw nothing

peculiarly petulant or improper in what I had said.

"Dear sir, forgive me: you know I write to my cousin, and, as he stated his complaints to me it will be natural to allude to them in my answer to his letter; but I will only tell him that all difficulties are removed, and refer him to your letter for further satisfaction; for you will no doubt write to him."

"I wish you would drop the subject. If you write, you may tell him--but tell him what you please, or rather it would be best to say nothing on the subject; but drop the subject, I beseech you."

"Certainly, if the subject displeases you, I will drop it." Here a pause of mutual embarrassment succeeded, which was, at length, broken by my father:--

"I will speak to you to-morrow, Jane, on this subject. I grant your curiosity is natural, and will then gratify it. To-morrow, I may possibly explain why Risberg has not received what, I must own, he had a right to expect. We'll think no more of it at present, but play a game at draughts."

I was impatient, you may be sure, to have a second meeting. Next day my father's embarrassment and perplexity was very evident. It was plain that he had not forgotten the promised explanation, but that something made it a very irksome task. I did not suffer matters to remain long in suspense, but asked him, in direct terms, what had caused the failure of which my cousin complained, and whether he was hereafter to receive the stipulated allowance?

He answered, hesitatingly, and with downcast eyes,--why--he did not know. He was sorry. It had not been his fault. To say truth, Francis had received the usual sums to purchase the bills. Till yesterday, he imagined they had actually been purchased and sent. He always understood them to have been so from Francis. He had mentioned, after seeing Risberg's complaining letter, he had mentioned the affair to Francis. Francis had confessed that he had never sent the bills. His own necessities compelled him to apply the money given him for this purpose to his own use.

To-be-sure, Risberg was his nephew,--had always depended on him for his maintenance; but somehow or another the wants of Francis had increased very much of late years, and swallowed up all that he could rap and rend without encroaching on his principal. Risberg was but his nephew; Frank was his own and only son. To-be-sure, he once thought that he had enough for his three children; but times, it seems, were altered. He did not spend on his own wants more than he used to do; but Frank's expenses were very great, and swallowed up every thing. To-be-sure, he pitied the young man, but he was enterprising and industrious, and could, no doubt, shift for himself; yet he would be quite willing to assist him, were it in his power; but really it was no longer in his power.

I was, for a time, at a loss for words to express my surprise and indignation at my brother's unfeeling selfishness. I could no longer maintain my usual silence on his conduct, but inveighed against it, as soon as I could find breath, with the utmost acrimony.

My father was embarrassed, confounded, grieved. He sighed, and even wept.--"Francis," said he, at last, "to-be-sure, has not acted quite right. Bat what can be done? Is he not my child? and, if he has faults, is he altogether without virtue? No; if he did not find a lenient and forgiving judge in me, his father, in whom could he look for one? Besides, the thing is done, and therefore without remedy. This year's income is nearly exhausted, and I really fear, before another quarter comes round, I shall want myself."

I again described, in as strong and affecting terms as I could, Risberg's expectations and disappointment, and insinuated to him, that, in a case like this, there could be no impropriety in selling a few shares of his bank-stock.

This hint was extremely displeasing, but I urged him so vehemently that he said, "Francis will perhaps consent to it; I will try him this evening."

"Alas!" said I, "my brother will never consent to such a measure. If he has found

occasion for the money you had designed for my poor cousin, and of all your current income, his necessities will not fail to lay hold of this."

"Very true;" (glad, it seemed, of an excuse for not thwarting his son's will;) "Frank will never consent. So, you see, it will be impossible to do any thing."

I was going to propose that he should execute this business without my brother's knowledge, but instantly perceived the impossibility of that. My father had for some years devolved on his son the management of all his affairs, and habit had made him no longer qualified to act for himself. Frank's opinion of what was proper to be done was infallible, and absolute in all cases.

I returned home with a very sad heart. I was deeply afflicted with this new instance of my brother's selfishness and of my father's infatuation. "Poor Risberg!" said I; "what will become of thee? I love thee as my brother. I feel for thy distresses. Would to Heaven I could remove them! And cannot I remove them? As to contending with my brother's haughtiness in thy favour, that is a hopeless task. As to my father, he will never submit to my guidance."

After much fruitless meditation, it occurred to me that I might supply Risberg's wants from my own purse. My mother's indulgence to me was without bounds. She openly considered and represented me as the heiress of her fortunes, and confided fully in my discretion. The chief uses I had hitherto found for money were charitable ones. I was her almoner. To stand in the place of my father with respect to Risberg, and supply his customary stipend from my own purse, was an adventurous undertaking for a young creature like me. It was impossible to do this clandestinely; at least, without the knowledge and consent of Mrs. Fielder. I therefore resolved to declare what had happened, and request her counsel. An opportunity suitable to this did not immediately offer.

Next morning, as I was sitting alone in the parlour, at work, my brother came in. Never before had I received a visit from him. My surprise, therefore, was not small.

I started up with the confusion of a stranger, and requested him, very formally, to be seated.

I instantly saw in his looks marks of displeasure, and, though unconscious of meriting it, my trepidation increased. He took a seat without speaking, and after some pause addressed me thus:--

"So, girl, I hear that you have been meddling with things that do not concern you,--sowing dissension between the old man and me; presuming to dictate to us how we are to manage our own property. He retailed to me, last night, a parcel of impertinence with which you had been teasing him, about this traveller Risberg, assuming, long before your time, the province of his care-taker. Why, do you think," continued he, contemptuously, "he'll ever return to marry you? Take my word for't, he's no such fool. I know that he never will."

The infirmity of my temper has been a subject of eternal regret to me; yet it never displayed itself with much force, except under the lash of my brother's sarcasms. My indignation on those occasions had a strange mixture of fear in it, and both together suffocated my speech. I made no answer to this boisterous arrogance.

"But come,' continued he, "pray, let us hear your very wise objections to a man's applying his own property to his own use. To rob himself and spend the spoil upon another is thy sage maxim, it seems, for which thou deservest to be dubbed a she Solomon. But let's see if thou art as cunning in defending as in coining maxims. Come; there is a chair: lay it on the floor, and suppose it a bar or rostrum, which thou wilt, and stand behind it, and plead the cause of foolish prodigality against common sense."

I endeavoured to muster up a little spirit, and replied, "I could not plead before a more favourable judge. An appeal to my brother on behalf of foolish prodigality could hardly fail of success. Poor common sense must look for justice at some other tribunal."

His eyes darted fire. "Come, girl; none of your insolence. I did not come here to be insulted."

"No; you rather came to commit than to receive an insult."

"Paltry distinguisher! to jest with you, and not chide you for your folly, is to insult you, is it? Leave off romance, and stick to common sense, and you will never receive any thing but kindness from me. But come; if I must humour you, let me hear how you have found yourself out to be wiser than your father and brother."

"I do not imagine, brother, that any good will result from our discussing this subject. Education, or sex, if you please, has made a difference in our judgments, which argument will never reconcile."

"With all my heart. A truce everlasting let there be; but, in truth, I merely came to caution you against inter-meddling in my affairs, to tell you to beware of sowing jealousy and ill-will between the old man and me. Prate away on other subjects as much as you please; but on this affair of Risberg's hold your tongue for the future."

"I thank you for your brotherly advice, but I am afraid I never shall bring myself to part with the liberty of prating on every subject that pleases me; at least, my forbearance will flow from my own discretion, and not from the imperious prohibition of another."

He laughed. "Well said, oddity. I am not displeased to see you act with some spirit: but I repeat my charge; be quiet. Your interference will do no good."

"Indeed, I firmly believe that it will not; and that will be a motive for my silence that shall always have its due weight with me. Risberg, I see, must look elsewhere for a father and a brother."

"Poor thing! do; put its finger in its eye and weep. Ha! ha! ha! poor Risberg! how would he laugh to see these compassionate tears! It seem she has written in a very doleful strain to thee,--talked very pathetically about his debts to his laundress and his landlady. I have a good mind to leave thee in this amiable ignorance; but I'll

prove for once a kind brother, by telling you that Risberg is a profligate and prodigal; that he neglects every study but that of dice; that this is the true reason why I have stood in the way of the old man's bounty to him. I have unquestionable proof of his worthlessness, and see no reason to throw away money upon London prostitutes and gamblers. I never mentioned this to the old man, because I would not needlessly distress him, for I know he loves Jack at least as well as his own children. I tell it you to justify my conduct, and hope that I may for once trust to your good sense not to disclose it to your father."

My heart could not restrain its indignation at these words.

"'Tis false!" I exclaimed; "'tis a horrid calumny against one who cannot defend himself! I will never believe the depravity of my absent brother, till I have as good proof of it as my present brother has given me of his."

"Bravo, my girl! who could have thought you could give the lie with such a grace? Why don't you spit in the face of the vile calumniator? But I am not angry with you, Jane; I only pity you; yet I'll not leave you before I tell you my mind. I have no doubt Risberg means to return. He knows on what footing you are with Mrs. Fielder, and will take care to return; but, mind me, Jane, you shall never throw yourself and your fortune away upon Risberg, while I have a voice or an arm to prevent it. And now--good-by to you."

So ended this conversation. He left me in a hurry and confusion of spirits not to be described. For a time I felt nothing but indignation and abhorrence for what I thought a wicked and cruel calumny; but in proportion as I regained my tranquillity, my reflections changed. Did not my brother speak truth? Was there not something in his manner very different from that of an impostor? How unmoved was he by the doubts which I ventured to insinuate of his truth! Alas! I fear 'tis too true.

I told you before that we parted at an age when love could not be supposed to exist between us. If I know myself, I felt no more for him than for a mere brother; but

then I felt all the solicitude and tenderness of a sister. I knew not scarcely how to act in my present situation; but at length determined to disclose the whole affair to my mother. With her approbation I enclosed an order on a London merchant in a letter to this effect:--

"I read your letter, my friend, with the sentiments of one who is anxious for your happiness. The difficulties you describe will, I am afraid, be hereafter prevented only by your own industry. My father's and brother's expenses consume the whole of that income in which you have hitherto had a share, and I am obliged to apprize you that the usual remittances will no longer be made. You are now advancing to manhood, and, I hope, will soon be able to subsist upon the fruits of your own learning and industry.

"I have something more to say to you, which I scarcely know how to communicate. Somebody here has loaded your character with very heavy imputations. You are said to be addicted to gaming, sensuality, and the lowest vices. How much grief this intelligence has given to all who love you, you will easily imagine. To find you innocent of these charges would free my heart from the keenest solicitude it has hitherto felt. I leave to you the proper means of doing this, if you can do it without violation of truth.

"I am very imperfectly acquainted with your present views. You originally designed, after having completed your academical and legal education, to return to America. If this should still be your intention, the enclosed will obviate some of your pecuniary embarrassments, and my mother enjoins me to tell you that, as you may need a few months longer to make the necessary preparations for returning, you may draw on her for an additional sum of five hundred dollars. Adieu."

My relation to Risberg was peculiarly delicate. His more lively imagination had deceived him already into a belief that he was in love. At least, in all his letters, he seemed fond of recognising that engagement which my father had established

between us, and exaggerated the importance, to his happiness, of my regard. Experience had already taught me to set their just value on such professions. I knew that men are sanguine and confident, and that the imaginary gracefulness of passion naturally prompts them to make their words outstrip their feelings. Though eager in their present course, it is easy to divert them from it; and most men of an ardent temper can be dying of love for half a dozen different women in the course of a year.

Women feel deeply, but boast not. The supposed indecency of forwardness makes their words generally fall short of their sentiments, and passion, when once thoroughly imbibed, is as hard to be escaped from as it was difficultly acquired. I felt no passion, and endeavoured not to feel any, for Risberg, till circumstances should make it proper and discreet. My attachment was to his interest, his happiness, and not to his person, and to convince him of this was extremely difficult. To persuade him that his freedom was absolute and entire, that no tie of honour or compassion bound him to me, but that, on the contrary, to dispose of his affections elsewhere would probably be most conducive to the interests of both.

These cautious proceedings were extremely unpleasing to my cousin, who pretended to be deeply mortified at any thing betokening indifference, and terribly alarmed at the possibility of losing me. On the whole, I confess to you, that I thought my cousin and I were destined for each other, and felt myself, if I may so speak, not in love with him, but prepared, at the bidding of discretion, to love him.

My brother's report, therefore, greatly distressed me. Should my cousin prove a reprobate, no power on earth should compel me to be his. If his character should prove blameless, and my heart raise no obstacles, at a proper time I should act with absolute independence of my brother's inclinations. The menace that while he had voice or arm he would hinder my choice of Risberg made the less impression as it related to an event necessarily distant, and which probably might never happen.

The next letter from Risberg put an end to all further intercourse between us. It

informed us of his being on the eve of marriage into an opulent family. It expressed much indignation at the calumny which had prevailed with my father to withdraw his protection; declared that he deemed himself by no means equitably or respectfully treated by him; expressed gratitude to my mother for the supply she had remitted, which had arrived very seasonably and prevented him from stooping to humiliations which might have injured his present happy prospects; and promised to repay the sum as soon as possible. This promise was punctually performed, and Risberg assured me that he was as happy as a lovely and rich wife could make him.

I was satisfied with this result, and bestowed no further thought on that subject. From morn to midnight have I written, and have got but little way in my story. Adieu.

Letter IV

To Henry Colden

Wednesday Morning, October 5.

I continued my visits to my father as usual. Affairs proceeded nearly in their old channel. Frank and I never met but by accident, and our interviews began and ended merely with a good-morrow. I never mentioned Risberg's name to my father, and observed that he as studiously avoided lighting on the same topic.

One day a friend chanced to mention the greatness of my fortune, and congratulated me on my title to two such large patrimonies as those of Mrs. Fielder and my father. I was far from viewing my condition in the same light with my friend. My mother's fortune was indeed large and permanent, but my claim to it was merely through her voluntary favour, of which a thousand accidents might bereave me. As to my father's property, Frank had taken care very early to suggest to him that I was amply provided for in Mrs. Fielder's good graces, and that it was equitable to bequeath the whole inheritance to him. This disposition, indeed, was not made without my

knowledge; but though I was sensible that I held of my maternal friend but a very precarious tenure, that my character and education were likely to secure a much wiser and more useful application of money than my brother's habits, it was impossible for me openly to object to this arrangement; so that, as things stood, though the world, in estimating my merits, never forgot that my father was rich, and that Frank and I were his only children, I had in reality no prospect of inheriting a farthing from him.

Indeed, I always entertained a presentiment that I should one day be poor, and have to rely for subsistence on my own labour. With this persuasion, I frequently busied my thoughts in imagining the most lucrative and decent means of employing my ingenuity, and directed my inquiries to many things of little or no use but on the irksome supposition that I should one day live by my own labour. But this is a digression.

In answer to my friend's remarks, I observed that my father's property was much less considerable than some people imagined; that time made no accession to it; and that my brother's well-known habits were likely to reduce it much below its present standard, long before it would come to a division.

"There, Jane, you are mistaken," said my friend, "or rather you are willing to mislead me; for you must know that, though your father appears to be idle, yet your brother is speculating with his money at an enormous rate."

"And pray," said I, (for I did not wish to betray all the surprise that this intelligence gave me,) "in what speculations is he engaged?"

"How should I tell you, who scarcely know the meaning of the word? I only heard my father say that young Talbot, though seemingly swallowed up in pleasure, knew how to turn a penny as well as another, and was employing his father's wealth in speculation; that, I remember, was his word, but I never, for my part, took the trouble to inquire what speculation meant. I know only that it is some hazardous or

complicated way of getting money."

These hints, though the conversation passed immediately to other subjects, made a deep impression on my mind. My brother's character I knew to be incompatible with any sort of industry, and had various reasons for believing my father's property to be locked up in bank-stock. If my friend's story were true, there was a new instance of the influence which Frank had acquired over his father. I had very indistinct ideas of speculation, but was used to regard it as something very hazardous, and almost criminal.

I told my mother all my uneasiness. She thought it worth while to take some means of getting at the truth, in conversation with my father. Agreeably to her advice, on my next visit I opened the subject, by repeating exactly what I heard, I concluded by asking if it were true.

"Why, yes," said he; "it is partly true, I must confess. Some time ago Frank laid his projects before me, and they appeared so promising and certain of success, that I ventured to give him possession of a large sum."

"And what scheme, sir, was it, if I may venture to ask?"

"Why, child, these are subjects so much out of thy way, that thou wouldst hardly comprehend any explanation that I could give."

"Perhaps so; but what success, dear sir, have you met with?"

"Why, I can't but say that affairs have not been quite as expeditious in their progress as I had reason, at first, to expect. Unlooked-for delays and impediments will occur in the prosecution of the best schemes; and these, I must own, have been well enough accounted for."

"But, dear sir, the scheme, I doubt not, was very beneficial that induced you to hazard your whole fortune. I thought you had absolutely withdrawn yourself from all the hazards and solicitudes of business."

"Why, indeed, I had so, and should never have engaged again in them of my own accord. Indeed, I trouble not myself with any details at present. I am just as much at my ease as I used to be. I leave every thing to Frank."

"But, sir, the hazard, the uncertainty, of all projects! Would you expose yourself at this time of life to the possibility of being reduced to distress? And had you not enough already?"

"Why, what you say, Jane, is very true: these things did occur to me, and they strongly disinclined me, at first, from your brother's proposals; but, I don't know how it was, he made out the thing to be so very advantageous; the success of it so infallible; and his own wants were so numerous that my whole income was insufficient to supply them; the Lord knows how it has happened. In my time, I could live upon a little. Even with a wife and family, my needs did not require a fourth of the sum that Frank, without wife or child, contrives to spend; yet I can't object neither. He makes it out that he spends no more than his rank in life, as he calls it, indispensably requires. Rather than encroach upon my funds, and the prospects of success being so very flattering, and Frank so very urgent and so very sanguine, whose own interest it is to be sure of his footing, I even, at last, consented."

"But I hope, dear sir, your prudence provided in some degree against the possibility of failure. No doubt you reserved something which might serve as a stay to your old age in case this hopeful project miscarried. Absolutely to hazard all on the faith of any project whatever was unworthy of one of your experience and discretion."

My father, Henry, was a good man,--humane, affectionate, kind, and of strict integrity; but I scarcely need to add, after what I have already related, that his understanding was far from being vigorous, or his temper firm. His foibles, indeed, acquired strength as he advanced in years, while his kindness and benevolence remained undiminished.

His acquiescence in my brother's schemes can hardly be ranked with follies: you, who know what scheme it was, who know the intoxicating influence of a specious project, and, especially, the wonderful address and plausibility of Catling, the adventurer who was my brother's prime minister and chief agent in that ruinous transaction, will not consider their adopting the phantom as any proof of the folly of either father or son. But let me return. To my compliment to his experience and discretion, my father replied, "Why, truly, I hardly know how it may turn out in the long run. At first, indeed, I only consented to come down with a few thousands, the total loss of which would not break my heart; but this, it seems, though it was all they at first demanded, did not prove quite sufficient. Some debts they were obliged to contract,--to no great amount, indeed,--and these must be paid or the scheme relinquished. Having gone so far into the scheme, it was absurd to let a trifle stop me. I must own, had I foreseen all the demands that have been made from time to time, I should never have engaged in it; but I have been led on from one step to another, till I fear it would avail me nothing to hesitate or hold back; and Frank's representations are so very plausible!"

"Does your whole subsistence, then, my dear sir, depend on the success of this scheme? Suppose it should utterly fail: what will be the consequences to yourself?"

"Fail! That is impossible. It cannot fail but through want of money, and I am solemnly assured that no more will be necessary."

"But how often, sir, has this assurance been given? No doubt with as much solemnity the first time as the last."

My father began to grow impatient:--"It is useless, Jane, to start difficulties and objections now. It is too late to go. back, even if I were disinclined to go forward; and I have no doubt of ultimate success. Be a good girl, and you shall come in for a share of the profit. Mrs. Fielder and I, between us, will make you the richest heiress in America. Let that consideration reconcile you to the scheme."

I could not but smile at this argument. I well knew that my brother's rapacity was not to be satisfied with millions. To sit down and say, "I have enough,' was utterly incompatible with his character. I dropped the conversation for the present.

My thoughts were full of uneasiness. The mere sound of the word "project" alarmed me. I had little desire of knowing the exact nature of the scheme, being nowise qualified to judge of its practicability; but a scheme in which my brother was the agent, in which my father's whole property was hazarded, and which appeared, from the account I had just heard, at least not to have fulfilled the first expectations, could not be regarded with tranquillity.

I took occasion to renew the subject with my father, some time after this. I could only deal in general observations on the imprudence of putting independence and subsistence to hazard: though the past was not to be recalled, yet the future was his own, and it would not be unworthy of him to act with caution. I was obliged to mingle this advice with much foreign matter, and convey it in the most indirect and gentle terms. His pride was easily offended at being thought to want the counsel of a girl.

He replied to my remarks with confidence, that no further demand would be made upon him. The last sum was given with extreme reluctance, and nothing but the positive assurance that it would absolutely be the last had prevailed with him.

"Suppose, sir," said I, "what you have already given should prove insufficient. Suppose some new demand should be made upon you."

"I cannot suppose that, after so many solemn and positive assurances."

"But were not assurances as positive and solemn on every former occasion as the last?"

"Why, yes, I must own they were; but new circumstances arose that could not be foreseen?"

"And, dear sir, may not new circumstances arise hereafter that could not be

foreseen?"

"Nay, nay," (with some impatience;) "I tell you there cannot be any."

I said no more on this subject at this time; but my father, notwithstanding the confidence he expressed, was far from being at ease.

One day I found him in great perturbation. I met my brother, who was going out as I entered, and suspected the cause of his disquiet. He spoke less than usual, and sighed deeply. I endeavoured, by various means, to prevail on him to communicate his thoughts, and at last succeeded. My brother, it seems, had made a new demand upon his purse, and he had been brought reluctantly to consent to raise the necessary sum by a mortgage on his house, the only real property he possessed. My brother had gone to procure a lender and prepare the deeds.

I was less surprised at this intelligence than grieved. I thought I saw my father's ruin was inevitable, and knew not how to prevent or procrastinate it. After a long pause, I ventured to insinuate that, as the thing was yet to be done, as there was still time for deliberation----

"No, no," interrupted he; "I must go on. It is too late to repent. Unless new funds are supplied, all that we have hitherto done will go for nothing; and Frank assures me that one more sacrifice and all will be well."

"Alas, sir, are you still deceived by that language? Can you still listen to assurances which experience has so often shown to be fallacious? I know nothing of this fine project; but I can see too clearly that unless you hold your hand you will be undone. Would to Heaven you would hesitate a moment!" I said a great deal more to the same purpose, and was at length interrupted by a message from my brother, who desired to see me a few minutes in the parlour below. Though at a loss as to what could occasion such an unusual summons, I hastened down.

I found my brother with a strange mixture of pride, perplexity, and solicitude in his looks. His "how d'ye?" was delivered in a graver tone than common, and he betrayed

a disposition to conciliate my good-will, far beyond what I had ever witnessed before. I waited with impatience to hear what he had to communicate.

At last, with many pauses and much hesitation, he said, "Jane, I suppose your legacy is untouched. Was it two or three thousand Mrs. Matthews put you down for in her will?"

"The sum was three thousand dollars. You know that, though it was left entirely at my own disposal, yet the bequest was accompanied with advice to keep it unimpaired till I should want it for my own proper subsistence. On that condition I received, and on that condition shall keep it."

"I am glad of it with all my heart," replied he, with affected vivacity. "I was afraid you had spent it by this time on dolls, trinkets, and baby-things. The sum is entire, you say? In your drawer? I am surprised you could resist the temptation to spend it. I wonder nobody thought of robbing you."

"You cannot suppose, brother, I would keep that sum in my possession? You know it was in bank at my aunt's death, and there it has remained."

"At what bank, pr'ythee?"

I told him.

"Well, I am extremely glad thou hadst wit enough to keep it snug, for now the time has come to put it to some use. My father and I have a scheme on foot by which we shall realize immense profit. The more engines we set to work, the greater and more speedy will be the ultimate advantage. It occurred to me that you had some money, and that, unless it were better employed, it would be but justice to allow you to throw it into stock. If, therefore, you are willing, it shall be done. What say you, Jane?"

This proposal was totally unexpected. I harboured not a moment's doubt as to the conduct it became me to pursue; but how to declare my resolutions, or state my reasons for declining his offer, I knew not.

At last I stammered out that my aunt had bequeathed me this money with views as to the future disposition of it from which I did not think myself at liberty to swerve.

"And pray," said he, with some heat, "what were these profound views?"

"They were simple and obvious views. She knew my sex and education laid me under peculiar difficulties as to subsistence. As affairs then stood, there was little danger of my ever being reduced to want or dependence; but still there was a possibility of this. To insure me against this possible evil, she left me this sum, to be used only for subsistence, and when I should be deprived of all other means."

"Go on," said my brother. "Repeat the clause in which she forbids you, if at any time the opportunity should be offered of doubling or trebling your money and thereby effectually securing that independence which she wished to bequeath to you, to profit by the offer. Pray, repeat that clause."

"Indeed," said I, innocently, "there is no such clause."

"I am glad to hear it. I was afraid that she was silly enough to insert some such prohibition. On the contrary, the scheme I propose to you will merely execute your aunt's great purpose. Instead of forbidding, she would have earnestly exhorted you, had she been a prophetess as well as a saint, to close with such an offer as I now make you, in which, I can assure you, I have your own good as well as my own in view."

Observing my silent and perplexed air, "Why, Jane," said he, "surely you cannot hesitate? What is your objection? Perhaps you are one of those provident animals who look before they leap, and, having gained a monopoly of wisdom, will take no scheme upon trust. You must examine with your own eyes. I will explain the affair to you, if you choose, and convince you beyond controversy that your money may be trebled in a twelvemonth."

"You know, brother, I can be no judge of any scheme that is at all intricate."

"There is no intricacy here. All is perfectly simple and obvious. I can make the case

as plain to you, in three minutes, as that you have two thumbs. In the English cottons, in the first place, there is----"

"Nay, brother, it is entirely unnecessary to explain the scheme. My determinations will not be influenced by a statement which no mortal eloquence will make intelligible to me."

"Well, then, you consent to my proposal?"

"I would rather you would look elsewhere for a partner in your undertaking."

"The girl's a fool!--Why, what do you fear? suspect? You surely cannot doubt my being faithful to your interest? You will not insult me so much as to suppose that I would defraud you of your money? If you do,--for I know I do not stand very high in your opinion,--if you doubt my honesty, I will give you the common proofs of having received your money. Nay, so certain am I of success, that I will give you my note, bond, what you please, for thrice the amount, payable in one year."

"My brother's bond will be of no use to me; I shall never go to law with my brother."

"Well, then, what will satisfy you?"

"I am easily satisfied, brother. I am contented with things just as they are. The sum, indeed, is a trifle, but it will answer all my humble purposes."

"Then you will," replied he, struggling with his rage, "you will not agree?"

My silence was an unequivocal answer.

"You turn out to be what I always thought you,--a little, perverse, stupid, obstinate--But take time;" (softening his tone a little;) "take time to consider of it.

"Some unaccountable oddity, some freak, must have taken hold of you just now and turned your wits out of door. 'Tis impossible you should deliberately reject such an offer. Why, girl, three thousand dollars has a great sound, perhaps, to your ears, but you'll find it a most wretched pittance if you should ever be obliged to live upon it. The interest would hardly buy you garters and topknots. You live, at this moment, at

the rate of six times the sum. You are now a wretched and precarious dependant on Mrs. Fielder: her marriage (a very likely thing for one of her habits, fortune, and age) will set you afloat in the world; and then where will be your port? Your legacy, in any way you can employ it, will not find you bread. Three times the sum might answer, perhaps; and that, if you will fall on my advice, you may now attain in a single twelvemonth. Consider these things, and I will call on you in the evening for your final answer."

He was going, but I mustered resolution enough to call him back:--"Brother, one word. All deliberation in this case is superfluous. You may think my decision against so plausible a scheme perverse and absurd; but, in this instance, I am fully sensible that I have a right to do as I please, and shall exert that right, whatever censure I may incur."

"So, then, you are determined not to part with your paltry legacy?"

"I am determined not to part with it."

His eyes sparkled with rage, and, stamping on the floor, he exclaimed, "Why, then, let me tell you, miss, you are a damned idiot. I knew you were a fool, but could not believe that your folly would ever carry you to these lengths!"--Much more in this style did poor Frank utter on this occasion. I listened trembling, confounded, vexed, and, as soon as I could recover presence of mind, hastened out of his presence.

This dialogue occupied all my thoughts during that day and the following. I was sitting, next evening, at twilight, pensively, in my own apartment, when, to my infinite surprise, my brother was announced. At parting with him the day before, he swore vehemently that he would never see my face again if he could help it. I supposed this resolution had given way to his anxiety to gain my concurrence with his schemes, and would fain have shunned a second interview. This, however, was impossible. I therefore composed my tremors as well as I was able, and directed him to be admitted. The angry emotions of yesterday had disappeared from his

countenance, and he addressed me with his customary carelessness. After a few trifling preliminaries, he asked me if I had considered the subject of our yesterday's conversation. I answered that I had supposed that subject to have been dismissed forever. It was not possible for time or argument to bring us to the same way of thinking on it. I hoped, therefore, that he would not compel me to discuss it a second time.

Instead of flying into rage, as I expected, he fixed his eyes thoughtfully on the floor, and, after a melancholy pause, said, "I expected to find you invincible on that head. To say truth, I came not to discuss that subject with you anew. I came merely to ask a trifling favour." Here he stopped. He was evidently at a loss how to proceed. His features became more grave, and he actually sighed.

My heart, I believe thou knowest, Harry, is the sport, the mere plaything, of gratitude and pity. Kindness will melt my firmest resolutions in a moment. Entreaty will lead me to the world's end. Gentle accents, mournful looks, in my brother, was a claim altogether irresistible. The mildness, the condescension which I now witnessed thrilled to my heart. A grateful tear rushed to my eye, and I almost articulated, "Dear, dear brother, be always thus kind and thus good, and I will lay down my life for you."

It was well for us both that my brother had too much pride or too little cunning to profit by the peculiarities of my temper. Had he put a brotherly arm around me, and said, in an affectionate tone, "Dear sister, oblige me," I am afraid I should have instantly complied with the most indiscreet and extravagant of his requests.

Far otherwise, however, was his deportment. This condescension was momentary. The words had scarcely escaped him before he seemed to recollect them as having been unworthy of his dignity. He resumed his arrogant and careless air, half whistled "ça ira," and glanced at the garden, with, "A tall poplar that. How old?"

"Not very old, for I planted it."

"Very likely. Just such another giddy head and slender body as the planter's. But, now I think of it, Jane, since your money is idle, suppose you lend me five hundred dollars of it till to-morrow. Upon my honour, I'll repay it then. My calls just now are particularly urgent. See here; I have brought a check ready filled. It only wants your signature."

I felt instant and invincible repugnance to this request. I had so long regarded my brother as void of all discretion, and as habitually misapplying money to vicious purposes, that I deemed it a crime of no inconsiderable degree to supply the means of his prodigality. Occasions were daily occurring in which much good was effected by a few dollars, as well as much evil produced by the want of them. My imagination pondered on the evils of poverty much oftener than perhaps was useful, and had thence contracted a terror--of it not easily controlled. My legacy I had always regarded as a sacred deposit,--an asylum in distress which nothing but the most egregious folly would rob or dissipate. Yet now I was called upon to transfer, by one stroke of the pen, to one who appeared to me to be engaged in ruinous vices or chimerical projects, so large a portion as five hundred dollars.

I was no niggardly hoarder of the allowance made me by my mother; but so diffident was I of my own discernment, that I never laid out twenty dollars without her knowledge and concurrence. Could I then give away five hundred of this sacred treasure, bestowed on me for very different purposes, without her knowledge? It was useless to acquaint her with my brother's request and solicit her permission. She would never grant it.

My brother, observing me hesitate, said, "Come, Jane; make haste. Surely this is no such mighty favour, that you should stand a moment. 'Twill be all the same to you, since I return it to-morrow. May I perish if I don't!"

I still declined the offered pen:--"For what purpose, brother, surely I may ask?--so large a sum?"

He laughed:--"A mere trifle, girl;'tis a bare nothing. But, much or little, you shall have it again, I tell you, to-morrow. Come; time flies. Take the pen, I say, and make no more words about the matter."

"Impossible, till I know the purpose. Do not urge me to a wrong thing."

His face reddened with indignation. "A wrong thing! you are fool enough to tire the patience of a saint. What do I ask, but the loan of a few dollars for a single day? Money that is absolutely idle; for which you have no use. You know that my father's property is mine, and that my possessions are twenty times greater than your own; yet you refuse to lend this paltry sum for one day. Come, Jane, sister; you have carried your infatuation far enough. Where a raw girl should gain all these scruples and punctilios I can't imagine. Pray, what is your objection?"

In these contests with my brother, I was never mistress of my thoughts. His boisterous, negligent, contemptuous manners awed, irritated, embarrassed me. To say any thing which implied censure of his morals or his prudence would be only raising a storm which my womanish spirit could not withstand. In answer to his expostulations, I only repeated, "Impossible! I cannot."

Finding me inflexible, he once more gave way to indignation:--"What a damned oaf! to be thus creeping and cringing to an idiot--a child--an ape! Nothing but necessity, cruel necessity, would have put me on this task." Then turning to me, he said, in a tone half supplicating, half threatening, "Let me ask you once more: will you sign this check? Do not answer hastily; for much, very much, depends on it. By all that is sacred, I will return it to you to-morrow. Do it, and save me and your father from infamy; from ruin; from a prison; from death. He may have cowardice enough to live and endure his infamy, but I have spirit enough to die and escape it."

This was uttered with an impetuosity that startled me. The words ruin, prison, death, rung in my ears, and, almost out of breath, I exclaimed, "What do you mean? my father go to prison? my father ruined? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Your signing this check may save me from irretrievable ruin. This trifling supply, which I can nowhere else procure, if it comes to-night, may place us out of danger. If delayed till to-morrow morning, there will be no remedy. I shall receive an adequate sum to-morrow afternoon, and with that I will replace this."

"My father ruined! In danger of a jail! Good Heaven! Let me fly to him. Let me know from himself the full extent of the evil." I left my seat with this purpose, but he stopped me:--"Are you mad, girl? He does not know the full extent of the evil. Indeed, the evil will be perfectly removed by this trifling loan. He need not know it." "Ah! my poor father," said I, "I see thy ruin indeed. Too fatally secure hast thou been; too doting in thy confidence in others." These words, half articulated, did not escape my brother. He was at once astonished and enraged by them, and even in these circumstances could not suppress his resentment.

He had, however, conjured up a spirit in me which made me deaf to his invective. I made towards the door.

"Where are you going? You shall not leave the room till you have signed this paper."

"'Nothing but force shall keep me from my father. I will know his true situation this instant, from his own lips. Let me go. I will go."

I attempted to rush by him, but he shut the door and swore I should not leave the room till I had complied with his request.

Perceiving me thoroughly in earnest, and indignant in my turn at his treatment, he attempted to soothe me, by saying that I had misunderstood him in relation to my father; that he had uttered words at random; that he was really out of cash at this moment; I should inexpressibly oblige him by lending him this trifling sum till to-morrow evening.

"Brother, I will deal candidly with you. You think me childish, ignorant, and giddy.

Perhaps I am so; but I have sense enough to resolve, and firmness enough to adhere to my resolution, never to give money without thoroughly knowing and fully approving of the purposes to which it is to be applied. You tell me you are in extreme want of an immediate supply. Of what nature is your necessity? What has occasioned your necessity? I will not withhold what will really do you good,--what I am thoroughly convinced will do you good; but I must first be convinced."

"What would you have more than my word? I tell you it will save your-I tell you it will serve me essentially. It is surely needless to enter into long and intricate details, which, ten to one, you will not understand."

"As you please," said L "I have told you that I will not act in the dark."

"Well, then, I will explain my situation to you as clearly as possible."

He then proceeded to state transactions of which I understood nothing. All was specious and plausible; but I easily perceived the advantages under which he spoke, and the gross folly of suffering my conduct to be influenced by representations of whose integrity I had no means of judging.

I will not detain you longer by this conversation. Suffice it to say, that I positively refused to comply with his wishes. The altercation that ensued was fortunately interrupted by the entrance of two or three visitants, and, after lingering a few minutes, he left the house gloomy and dissatisfied.

I have gone into these incidents with a minuteness that I fear has tired you; but I will be more concise for the future. These incidents are chiefly introductory to others of a more affecting nature, and to those I must now hasten. Meanwhile, I will give some little respite to my fingers.

Letter VI

[Editorial note: The observant reader will have noted there is no Letter V. The

original text did not contain one, and we have chosen to let the letters retain their original numbers, rather than renumber them.]

To Henry Colden

Thursday Morning, October 6.

As soon as my visitants had gone, I hastened to my father. I immediately introduced the subject of which my heart was full. I related the particulars of my late interview with my brother; entreated him with the utmost earnestness to make the proper inquiries into the state of my brother's affairs, with whose fate it was too plain that his own were inextricably involved.

He was seized with extreme solicitude on hearing my intelligence. He could not keep his chair one moment at a time, but walked about the floor trembling. He called his servant, and directed him, in a faltering voice, to go to my brother's house and request him to come immediately.

I was sensible that what I had done was violently adverse to my brother's wishes. Nevertheless, I urged my father to an immediate explanation, and determined to be present at the conference.

The messenger returned. My brother was not at home. We waited a little while, and then despatched the messenger again, with directions to wait till his return. We waited, in vain, till nine; ten; eleven o'clock. The messenger then came back, informing us that Prank was still abroad. I was obliged to dismiss the hope of a conference this night, and returned in an anxious and melancholy mood to Mrs. Fielder's.

On my way, while ruminating on these events, I began to fear that I had exerted an unjustifiable degree of caution. I knew that those who embark in pecuniary schemes are often reduced to temporary straits and difficulties; that ruin and prosperity frequently hang on the decision of the moment; that a gap may be filled up by a small effort seasonably made, which, if neglected, rapidly widens and irrevocably

swallows up the ill-fated adventurer.

It was possible that all my brother had said was literally true; that he merited my confidence in this instance, and that the supply he demanded would save both him and my father from the ruin that impended over them. The more I pondered on the subject, the more dissatisfied I became with my own scruples. In this state of mind I reached home. The servant, while opening the door, expressed her surprise at my staying out so late, telling me that my brother had been waiting my return for several hours, with marks of the utmost impatience. I shuddered at this intelligence, though just before I had almost formed the resolution of going to his house and offering him the money he wanted.

I found him in my apartment. "Good God!" cried he; "where have you been till this time of night?"

I told him frankly where I had been, and what had detained me. He was thunder-struck. Instead of that storm of rage and invective which I expected, he grew pale with consternation, and said, in a faint voice,--

"Jane, you have ruined me beyond redemption. Fatal, fatal rashness! It was enough to have refused me a loan which, though useless to you, is as indispensable to my existence as my heart's blood. Had you quietly lent me the trifling pittance I asked, all might yet have been well,--my father's peace have been saved and my own affairs been completely re-established."

All arrogance and indignation were now laid aside. His tone and looks betokened the deepest distress. All the firmness, reluctance, and wariness of my temper vanished in a moment. My heart was seized with an agony of compunction. I came close to him, and, taking his hand involuntarily, said, "Dear brother, forgive me."

Strange what influence calamity possesses in softening the character! He made no answer, but, putting his arms around me, pressed me to his breast, while tears stole down his cheek.

Now was I thoroughly subdued. I am quite an April girl, thou knowest, Harry, and the most opposite emotions fill, with equal certainty, my eyes. I could scarcely articulate, "Oh, my dear brother, forgive me. Take what you ask. If it can be of any service to you, take all I have."

"But how shall I see my father? Infinite pains have I taken to conceal from him a storm which I thought could be easily averted, which his knowledge of it would only render more difficult to resist; but my cursed folly, by saying more than I intended to you, has blasted my designs."

I again expressed my regret for the rashness of my conduct, and entreated him to think better of my father than to imagine him invincible to argument. I promised to go to him in the morning, and counteract, as much as I could, the effects of my evening conversation. At length he departed, with somewhat renovated spirits, and left me to muse upon the strange events of this day.

I could not free myself from the secret apprehension of having done mischief rather than good by my compliance. I had acted without consulting my mother, in a case where my youth and inexperience stood in the utmost need of advice. On the most trivial occasions I had hitherto held it a sacred duty to make her the arbitress and judge of my whole conduct; and now shame for my own precipitance and regard for my brother's feelings seemed to join in forbidding me to disclose what had passed. A most restless and unquiet night did I pass.

Next morning was I to go to my father, to repair as much as possible the breach I had thoughtlessly made in his happiness. I knew not what means to employ for this purpose. What could I say? I was far from being satisfied, myself, with my brother's representations. I hoped, but had very little confidence that any thing in my power to do would be of permanent advantage.

These doubts did not make me defer my visit. I was greatly surprised to find my father as cheerful and serene as usual, which he quickly accounted for by telling me

that he had just had a long conversation with Frank, who had convinced him that there was no ground for the terrors I had inspired him with the night before. He could not forbear a little acrimony on the impropriety of my interference, and I tacitly acquiesced in the censure. I found that he knew nothing of the sum I had lent, and I thought not proper to mention it.

That day, notwithstanding his promises of payment, passed away without hearing from my brother. I had never laid any stress upon the promise, but drew a bad omen from this failure.

A few days elapsed without any material incident. The next occasion on which my brother was introduced into conversation with Mrs. Fielder took place one evening after my friend had returned from spending the day abroad. After a pause, in which there was more significance than usual,--"Pray, have you seen Frank lately?"

I made some vague answer.

"He has been talked about this afternoon, very little, as usual, to his advantage."

I trembled from head to foot.

"I fear," continued she, "he is going to ruin, and will drag your father down the same precipice."

"Dearest madam! what new circumstance?"

"Nothing very new. It seems Mr. Frazer--his wife told the story--sold him, a twelvemonth ago, a curricle and pair of horses. Part of the money, after some delay, was paid. The rest was dunned for unavailingly a long time. At length curricle and horses scoured the roads under the management of Monsieur Petitgrave, brother to Frank's housekeeper, the handsome mustec. This gave Frazer uneasiness, and some importunity extorted from Frank a note, which, being due last Tuesday, was, at Frank's importunity, withdrawn from bank to prevent protest. Next day, however, it was paid."

I ventured to ask if Mrs. Frazer had mentioned any sum. "Yes; a round sum,--five hundred dollars."

Fortunately the dark prevented my mother from perceiving my confusion. It was Tuesday evening on which I had lent the money to Frank. He had given me reason to believe that his embarrassments arose from his cotton-weaving scheme, and that the sum demanded from me was to pay the wages of craving but worthy labourers.

While in the first tumult of these reflections, some one brought a letter. It was from my brother. This was the tenor:--

"I fear, Jane, I have gained but little credit with you for punctuality. I ought to have fulfilled my promise, you will say. I will not excuse my breach of it by saying (though I might say so, perhaps, with truth) that you have no use for the money; that I have pressing use for it, and that a small delay, without being of any importance to you, will be particularly convenient to me. No; the true and all-sufficient reason why I did not return the money was--because I had it not. To convince you that I am really in need, I enclose you a check for another five hundred, which you'll much oblige me by signing. I can repay you both sums together by Saturday,--if you needs must have it so soon. The bearer waits."

In any state of my thoughts, there was little likelihood of my complying with a request made in these terms. With my present feelings, it was difficult to forbear returning an angry and reproachful answer. I sent him back these lines:--

"I am thoroughly convinced that it is not in my power to afford you any effectual aid in your present difficulties. It will be very easy to injure myself. The request you make can have no other tendency. I must therefore decline complying."

The facility with which I had yielded up my first resolutions probably encouraged him to this second application, and I formed very solemn resolutions not to be seduced a second time.

In a few minutes after despatching my answer, he appeared. I need not repeat our

conversation. He extorted from me, without much difficulty, what I had heard through my mother, and--methinks I am ashamed to confess it--by exchanging his boisterous airs for pathetic ones, by appealing to my sisterly affection and calling me his angel and saviour, and especially by solemnly affirming that Frazer's story was a calumny, I at length did as he would have me: yet only for three hundred; I would not go beyond that sum.

The moment he left me, I perceived the weakness and folly of my conduct in the strongest light, I renewed all my prudent determinations; yet, strange to tell, within less than a week, the same scene of earnest importunity on his side, and of foolish flexibility on mine, was reacted.

With every new instance of folly, my shame and selfcondemnation increased, and the more difficult I found it to disclose the truth to my mother.

In the course of a very few days, one-half of my little property was gone. A sum sufficient, according to my system of economy, to give me decent independence of the world for at least three years, had been dissipated by the prodigality of a profligate woman. At the time, indeed, I was ignorant of this. It was impossible not to pay some regard to the plausible statements and vehement asseverations of my brother, and to suffer them to weigh something against charges which might possibly be untrue. As soon as accident had put me in full possession of the truth on this head, I was no longer thus foolishly obsequious.

The next morning after our last interview I set out, as usual, to bid good-morrow to my father. My uneasy thoughts led me unaware to extend my walk, till I reached the door of a watchmaker with whom my servant had, some time before, left a watch to be repaired. It occurred to me that, since I was now on the spot, I might as well stop and make some inquiry about it. On entering the shop I almost repented of my purpose, as two persons were within the bar, if I may call it so, seated in a lounging posture, by a small stove, smoking cigars and gazing at me with an air of indolent

impertinence. I determined to make my stay as short as possible, and hurried over a few questions to the artist, who knew me only as the owner of the watch. My attention was quickly roused by one of the loungers, who, having satisfied his curiosity by gazing at me, turned to the other and said, "Well, you have hardly been to Frank's this morning, I suppose?"

"Indeed, but I have," was the reply.

"Why, damn it, you pinch too hard. Well, and what success?"

"Why, what do you think?"

"Another put-off; another call-again, to-be-sure."

"I would not go till he downed with the stuff."

"No!" (with a broad stare;) "it a'n't possible."

"Seeing is believing, I hope;" (producing a piece of paper.)

"Why, so it is. A check!--but--what's that name?--let's see," (stooping to examine the signature:)--"Jane Talbot. Who the devil is she?"

"Don't you know her? She's his sister. A devilish rich girl."

"But how? does she lend him money?"

"Yes, to-be-sure. She's his sister, you know."

"But how does she get money? Is she a widow?"

"No. She is a girl, I've heard, not eighteen. 'Tis not my look-out how she gets money, so as her check's good; and that I'll fix as soon as the door's open."

"Why, damn it if I don't think it a forgery. How should such a girl as that get so much money?"

"Can't conceive. Coax or rob her aunt of it, I suppose. If she's such another as Frank, she is able to outwit the devil. I hope it may be good. If it isn't, he sha'n't be his own man one day longer."

"But how did you succeed so well?"

"He asked me yesterday to call once more. So I called, you see, betimes, and, finding that he had a check for a little more than my debt, I teased him out of it, promising to give him the balance. I pity the fellow from my soul. It was all for trinkets and furniture bought by that prodigal jade, Mademoiselle Couteau. She would ruin a prince, if she had him as much at her command as she has Frank. Little does the sister know for what purpose she gives her money: however, that, as I said before, be her look-out."

During this dialogue, my eye was fixed upon the artist, who, with the watch open in one hand, and a piece of wire in the other, was describing, with great formality, the exact nature of the defect and the whole process of the cure; but, though I looked steadfastly at him, I heard not a syllable of his dissertation. I broke away when his first pause allowed me.

The strongest emotion in my heart was resentment. That my name should be prostituted by the foul mouths of such wretches, and my money be squandered for the gratification of a meretricious vagabond, were indignities not to be endured. I was carried involuntarily towards my brother's house. I had lost all that awe in his presence and trepidation at his scorn which had formerly been so troublesome. His sarcasms or revilings had become indifferent to me, as every day's experience had of late convinced me that in no valuable attribute was he anywise superior to his sister. The consciousness of having been deceived and wronged by him set me above both his anger and his flattery. I was hastening to his house to give vent to my feelings, when a little consideration turned my steps another way. I recollected that I should probably meet his companion, and that was an encounter which I had hitherto carefully avoided. I went, according to my first design, to my father's; I was in hopes of meeting Frank there some time in the day, or of being visited by him at Mrs. Fielder's.

My soul was in a tumult that unfitted me for conversation. I felt hourly-increasing remorse at having concealed my proceedings from my mother. I imagined that, had I treated her from the first with the confidence due to her, I should have avoided all my present difficulties. Now the obstacles to confidence appeared insurmountable, and my only consolation was, that by inflexible resolution I might shun any new cause for humiliation and regret.

I had purposed to spend the greater part of the day at my father's, chiefly in the hope of a meeting with my brother; but, after dinner, my mother sent for me home. Something, methought, very extraordinary, must have happened, as my mother was well: as, according to the messenger's account, she had just parted with a gentleman who seemed to have visited her on private business, my heart misgave me.

As soon as I got home, my mother took me into her chamber, and told me, after an affecting preface, that a gentleman in office at ---- Bank had called on her and informed her that checks of my signing to a very large amount had lately been offered, and that the last made its appearance to-day, and was presented by a man with whom it was highly disreputable for one in my condition to be thought to have any sort of intercourse.

You may suppose that, after this introduction, I made haste to explain every particular. My mother was surprised and grieved. She rebuked me, with some asperity, for my reserves. Had I acquainted her with my brother's demands, she could have apprized me of all that I had since discovered. My brother, she asserted, was involved beyond any one's power to extricate him, and his temper, his credulity, were such that he was forever doomed to poverty.

I had scarcely parted with my mother on this occasion, to whom I had promised to refer every future application, when my brother made his appearance. I was prepared to overwhelm him with upbraidings for his past conduct, but found my tongue tied in his presence. I could not bear to inflict so much shame and mortification; and

besides, the past being irrevocable, it would only aggravate the disappointment which I was determined every future application should meet with. After some vague apology for non-payment, he applied for a new loan. He had borrowed, he said, of a deserving man, a small sum, which he was now unable to repay. The poor fellow was in narrow circumstances; was saddled with a numerous family; had been prevailed upon to lend, after extreme urgency on my brother's part; was now driven to the utmost need, and by a prompt repayment would probably be saved from ruin. A minute and plausible account of the way in which the debt originated, and his inability to repay it shown to have proceeded from no fault of his.

I repeatedly endeavoured to break off the conversation, by abruptly leaving the room; but he detained me by importunity, by holding my hand, by standing against the door.

How irresistible is supplication! The glossings and plausibilities of eloquence are inexhaustible. I found my courage wavering. After a few ineffectual struggles, I ceased to contend. He saw that little remained to complete his conquest; and, to effect that little, by convincing me that his tale was true, he stepped out a moment, to bring in his creditor, whose anxiety had caused him to accompany Frank to the door.

This momentary respite gave me time to reflect. I ran through the door, now no longer guarded; up-stairs I flew into my mother's chamber, and told her from what kind of persecution I had escaped.

While I was speaking, some one knocked at the door. It was a servant, despatched by my brother to summon me back. My mother went in my stead. I was left, for some minutes, alone.

So persuasive had been my brother's rhetoric, that I began to regret my flight.

I felt something like compunction at having deprived him of an opportunity to prove his assertions. Every gentle look and insinuating accent reappeared to my memory,

and I more than half repented my inflexibility.

While buried in these thoughts, my mother returned. She told me that my brother was gone, after repeatedly requesting an interview with me, and refusing to explain his business to any other person.

"Was there anybody with him, madam?"

"Yes. One Clarges,--a jeweller,--an ill-looking, suspicious person."

"Do you know any thing of this Clarges?"

"Nothing but what I am sorry to know. He is a dissolute fellow, who has broken the hearts of two wives, and thrown his children for maintenance on their maternal relations. 'Tis the same who carried your last check to the bank."

I just then faintly recollected the name of Clarges, as having occurred in the conversation at the watchmaker's, and as being the name of him who had produced the paper. This, then, was the person who was to have been introduced to me as the friend in need, the meritorious father of a numerous family, whom the payment of a just debt was to relieve from imminent ruin! How loathsome, how detestable, how insecure, are fraud and treachery! Had he been confronted with me, no doubt he would have recognised the person whom he stared at at the watch-maker's.

Next morning I received a note, dated on the preceding evening. These were the terms of it:--

"I am sorry to say, Jane, that the ruin of a father and brother may justly be laid at your door. Not to save them, when the means were in your power, and when entreated to use the means, makes you the author of their ruin. The crisis has come. Had you shown a little mercy, the crisis might have terminated favourably. As it is, we are undone. You do not deserve to know the place of my retreat. Your unsisterly heart will prompt you to intercept rather than to aid or connive at my flight. Fly I must; whither, it is pretty certain, will never come to your knowledge. Farewell."

My brother's disappearance, the immediate ruin of my father, whose whole fortune was absorbed by debts contracted in his name, and for the most part without his knowledge, the sudden affluence of the adventurer who had suggested his projects to my brother, were the immediate consequences of this event. To a man of my father's habits and views, no calamity can be conceived greater than this. Never did I witness a more sincere grief, a more thorough despair. Every thing he once possessed was taken away from him and sold. My mother, however, prevented all the most opprobrious effects of poverty, and all in my power to alleviate his solitude, and console him in his distress, was done.

Would you have thought, after this simple relation, that there was any room for malice and detraction to build up their inventions?

My brother was enraged that I refused to comply with any of his demands; not grateful for the instances in which I did comply. Clarges resented the disappointment of his scheme as much as if honour and integrity had given him a title to success.

How many times has the story been told, and with what variety of exaggeration, that the sister refused to lend her brother money, when she had plenty at command, and when a seasonable loan would have prevented the ruin of her family, while, at the same time, she had such an appetite for toys and baubles, that ere yet she was eighteen years old she ran in debt to Clarges the jeweller for upwards of five hundred dollars'-worth!

You are the only person to whom I have thought myself bound to tell the whole truth. I do not think my reluctance to draw the follies of my brother from oblivion a culpable one. I am willing to rely, for my justification from malicious charges, on the general tenor of my actions, and am scarcely averse to buy my brother's reputation at the cost of my own. The censure of the undistinguishing and undistinguished multitude gives me little uneasiness. Indeed, the disapprobation of

those who have no particular connection with us is a very faint, dubious, and momentary feeling. We are thought of, now and then, by chance, and immediately forgotten. Their happiness is unaffected by the sentence casually pronounced on us, and we suffer nothing, since it scarcely reaches our ears, and the interval between the judge and the culprit hinders it from having any influence on their actions. Not so when the censure reaches those who love us. The charge engrosses their attention, influences their happiness, and regulates their deportment towards us. My self-regard, and my regard for you, equally lead me to vindicate myself to you from any charge, however chimerical or obsolete it may be.

My brother went to France. He seemed disposed to forget that he ever had kindred or country; never informed us of his situation and views. All our tidings of him came to us indirectly. In this way we heard that he procured a commission in the republican troops, had made some fortunate campaigns, and had enriched himself by lucky speculations in the forfeited estates.

My mother was informed, by some one lately returned from Paris, that Frank had attained possession of the whole property of an emigrant Compte de Puysegur, who was far from being the poorest of the ancient nobles; that he lived? with princely luxury, in the count's hotel; that he had married, according to the new mode, the compte's sister, and was probably, for the remainder of his life, a Frenchman. He is attentive to his countrymen, and this reporter partook of several entertainments at his house.

Methinks the memory of past incidents must sometimes intrude upon his thoughts. Can he have utterly forgotten the father whom he reduced to indigence, whom he sent to a premature grave? Amidst his present opulence, one would think it would occur to him to inquire into the effects of his misconduct, not only to his own family, but on others.

What a strange diversity there is among human characters! Frank is, I question not,

gay, volatile, impetuous as ever. The jovial carousal and the sound sleep are never molested, I dare say, by the remembrance of the incidents I have related to you.

Methinks, had I the same heavy charges to make against my conscience, I should find no refuge but death from the goadings of remorse. To have abandoned a father to the jail or the hospital, or to the charity of strangers,--a father too who had yielded him an affection and a trust without limits; to have wronged a sister out of the little property on which she relied for support to her unprotected youth or helpless age,--a sister who was virtually an orphan, who had no natural claim upon her present patroness, but might be dismissed penniless from the house that sheltered her, without exposing the self-constituted mother to any reproach.

And has not this event taken place already? What can I expect but that, at least, it will take place as soon as she hears of my resolution with regard to thee? She ought to know it immediately. I myself ought to tell it, and this was one of the tasks which I designed to perform in your absence: yet, alas! I know not how to set about it.

My fingers are for once thoroughly weary. I must lay down the pen. But first; why don't I hear from you? Every day since Sunday, when you left me, have I despatched an enormous packet, and have not received a sentence in answer. 'Tis not well done, my friend, to forget and neglect me thus. You gave me some reason, indeed, to expect no very sudden tidings from you; but there is inexpiable treason in the silence of four long days. If you do not offer substantial excuses for this delay, woe be to thee!

Take this letter, and expect not another syllable from my pen till I hear from you.

Letter VII

To Henry Golden

Thursday Night.

What a little thing subverts my peace,--dissipates my resolutions! Am I not an honest, foolish creature, Hal? I uncover this wayward heart to thy view as promptly as if the disclosure had no tendency to impair thy esteem and forfeit thy love; that is, to devote me to death,--to ruin me beyond redemption.

And yet, if the unveiling of my follies should have this effect, I think I should despise thee for stupidity and hate thee for ingratitude; for whence proceed my irresolution, my vicissitudes of purpose, but from my love? and that man's heart must be made of strange stuff that can abhor or contemn a woman for loving him too much. Of such stuff the heart of my friend, thank Heaven, is not made. Though I love him far--far too much, he will not trample on or scoff at me.

But how my pen rambles!--No wonder; for my intellects are in a strange confusion. There is an acute pain just here. Give me your hand and let me put it on the very spot. Alas! there is no dear hand within my reach. I remember feeling just such a pain but once before. Then you chanced to be seated by my side. I put your hand to the spot, and, strange to tell, a moment after I looked for the pain and 'twas gone,--utterly vanished! Cannot I imagine so strongly as to experience that relief which your hand pressed to my forehead would give? Let me lay down the pen and try.

Ah! my friend! when present, thou'rt an excellent physician; but as thy presence is my cure, so thy absence is my only, my fatal malady.

My desk is, of late, always open; my paper spread; my pen moist. I must talk to you, though you give me no answer, though I have nothing but gloomy forebodings to communicate, or mournful images to call up. I must talk to you, even when you cannot hear; when invisible; when distant many a mile. It is some relief even to corporal agonies. Even the pain which I just now complained of is lessened since I took up the pen. Oh, Hal! Hal! if you ever prove ungrateful or a traitor to me, and there be a state retributive hereafter, terrible will be thy punishment.

But why do I talk to thee thus wildly? Why deal I in such rueful prognostics? I want to tell you why, for I have a reason for my present alarms: they all spring from one source,--my doubts of thy fidelity. Yes, Henry, since your arrival at Wilmington you have been a frequent visitant of Miss Secker, and have kept a profound silence towards me.

Nothing can be weaker and more silly than these disquiets. Cannot my friend visit a deserving woman a few times but my terrors must impertinently intrude?--Cannot he forget the pen, and fail to write to me, for half a week together, but my rash resentments must conjure up the phantoms of ingratitude and perfidy?

Pity the weakness of a fond heart, Henry, and let me hear from you, and be your precious and long-withheld letter my relief from every disquiet. I believe, and do not believe, what I have heard, and what I have heard teems with a thousand mischiefs, or is fair and innocent, according to my reigning temper.--Adieu; but let me hear from you immediately.

Letter VIII

To Jane Talbot

Wilmington, Saturday, October 9.

I thought I had convinced my friend that a letter from me ought not to be expected earlier than Monday. I left her to gratify no fickle humour, nor because my chief pleasure lay anywhere but in her company. She knew of my design to make some stay at this place, and that the business that occasioned my stay would leave me no leisure to write.

Is it possible that my visits to Miss Secker have given you any concern? Why must the source of your anxiety be always so mortifying and opprobrious to me? That the absence of a few days, and the company of another woman, should be thought to change my sentiments, and make me secretly recant those vows which I offered to

you, is an imputation on my common sense which--I suppose I deserve. You judge of me from what you know of me. How can you do otherwise? If my past conduct naturally creates such suspicions, who am I to blame but myself? Reformation should precede respect; and how should I gain confidence in my integrity but as the fruit of perseverance in well-doing?

Alas! how much has he lost who has forfeited his own esteem!

As to Miss Secker, your ignorance of her, and, I may add, of yourself, has given her the preference. You think her your superior, no doubt, in every estimable and attractive quality, and therefore suspect her influence on a being so sensual and volatile as poor Hal. Were she really more lovely, the faithless and giddy wretch might possibly forget you; but Miss Secker is a woman whose mind and person are not only inferior to yours, but wholly unfitted to inspire love. If it were possible to smile in my present mood, I think I should indulge one smile at the thought of falling in love with a woman who has scarcely had education enough to enable her to write her name, who has been confined to her bed about eighteen months by a rheumatism contracted by too assiduous application to the wash-tub, and who often boasts that she was born, not above forty-five years ago, in an upper story of the mansion at Mount Vernon.

You do not tell me who it was that betrayed me to you. I suspect, however, it was Miss Jessup. She was passing through this town, in her uncle's carriage, on Wednesday, on her way home. Seeing me come out of the poor woman's lodgings, she stopped the coach, prated for five minutes, and left me with ironical menaces of telling you of my frequent visits to a single lady, of whom it appeared that she had some knowledge. Thus you see that your disquiets have had no foundation but in the sportive malice of your talkative neighbour.

Hannah Secker chanced to be talked of at Mr. Henshaw's as a poor creature, who was sick and destitute, and lay, almost deserted, in a neighbouring hovel. She

existed on charity, which was the more scanty and reluctant as she bore but an indifferent character either for honesty or gratitude.

The name, when first mentioned, struck my ear as something that had once been familiar, and, in my solitary evening walk, I stopped at her cottage. The sight of her, though withered by age and disease, called her fully to mind. Three years ago, she lived in the city, and had been very serviceable to me in the way of her calling. I had dismissed her, however, after receiving several proofs that a pair of silk stockings and a muslin cravat offered too mighty a temptation for her virtue. You know I have but little money to spare from my own necessities, and all the service I could render her was to be her petitioner and advocate with some opulent families in this place. But enough--and too much--of Hannah Secker.

Need I say that I have read your narrative, and that I fully acquit you of the guilt laid to your charge? That was done, indeed, before I heard your defence, and I was anxious to hear your story, merely because all that relates to you is in the highest degree interesting to me.

This letter, notwithstanding my engagements, should be longer, if I were not in danger, by writing on, of losing the post. So, dearest love, farewell, and tell me in your next (which I shall expect on Tuesday) that every pain has vanished from your head and from your heart. You may as well delay writing to your mother till I return. I hope it will be permitted me to do so very shortly. Again, my only friend, farewell.

HENRY COLDEN.

Letter IX

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Monday, October 11.

I am ashamed of myself, Henry. What an inconsistent creature am I! I have just

placed this dear letter of yours next my heart. The sensation it affords, at this moment, is delicious; almost as much so as I once experienced from a certain somebody's hand placed on the same spot. But that somebody's hand was never (if I recollect aright) so highly honoured as this paper. Have I not told you that your letter is deposited next my heart?

And with all these proofs of the pleasure your letter affords me, could you guess at the cause of those tears which, even now, have not ceased flowing? Your letter has so little tenderness--is so very cold. But let me not be ungrateful for the preference you grant me, merely because it is not so enthusiastic and unlimited as my own.

I suppose, if I had not extorted from you some account of this poor woman, I should never have heard a syllable of your meeting with her. It is surely possible for people to be their own calumniators, to place their own actions in the worst light, to exaggerate their faults and conceal their virtues. If the fictions and artifices of vanity be detestable, the concealment of our good actions is surely not without guilt. The conviction of our guilt is painful to those that love us: wantonly and needlessly to give this pain is very perverse and unjustifiable. If a contrary deportment argue vanity, self-detraction seems to be the offspring of pride.

Thou art the strangest of men, Henry. Thy whole conduct with regard to me has been a tissue of self-upbraidings. You have disclosed not only a thousand misdeeds (as you have thought them) which could not possibly have come to my knowledge by any other means, but have laboured to ascribe even your commendable actions to evil or ambiguous motives. Motives are impenetrable, and a thousand cases have occurred in which every rational observer would have supposed you to be influenced by the best motives, but where, if credit be due to your own representations, your motives were far from being laudable.

Why is my esteem rather heightened than depressed by this deportment? In truth, there is no crime which remorse will not expiate, and no more shining virtue in the

whole catalogue than sincerity. Besides, your own account of yourself, with all the exaggerations of humility, proved you, on the whole, and with the allowances necessarily made by every candid person, to be a very excellent man.

Your deportment to me ought chiefly to govern my opinion of you; and have you not been uniformly generous, sincere, and upright?--not quite passionate enough, perhaps; no blind and precipitate enthusiast. Love has not banished discretion, or blindfolded your sagacity; and, as I should forgive a thousand errors on the score of love, I cannot fervently applaud that wisdom which tramples upon love. Thou hast a thousand excellent qualities, Henry; that is certain: yet a little more impetuosity and fervour in thy tenderness would compensate for the want of the whole thousand. There is a frank confession for thee! I am confounded at my own temerity in making it. Will it not injure me in thy esteem? and, of all evils which it is possible for me to suffer, the loss of that esteem would soonest drive me to desperation.

The world has been liberal of its censure, but surely a thorough knowledge of my conduct could not condemn me. When my father and mother united their entreaties to those of Talbot, my heart had never known a preference. The man of their choice was perfectly indifferent to me, but every individual of his sex was regarded with no less indifference. I did not conceal from him the state of my feelings, but was always perfectly ingenuous and explicit. Talbot acted like every man in love. He was eager to secure me on these terms, and fondly trusted to his tenderness and perseverance to gain those affections which I truly acknowledged to be free. He would not leave me for his European voyage till he had extorted a solemn promise.

During his absence I met you. The nature of those throbs, which a glance of your very shadow was sure to produce, even previous to the exchange of a single word between us, was entirely unknown to me. I had no experience to guide me. The effects of that intercourse which I took such pains to procure could not be foreseen. My heart was too pure to admit even such a guest as apprehension, and the only

information I possessed respecting you impressed me with the notion that your heart already belonged to another.

I sought nothing but your society and your esteem. If the fetters of my promise to Talbot became irksome after my knowledge of you, I was unconscious of the true cause. This promise never for a moment lost its obligation with me. I deemed myself as much the wife of Talbot as if I had stood with him at the altar.

At the prospect of his return, my melancholy was excruciating, but the cause was unknown to me. I had nothing to wish, with regard to you, but to see you occasionally, to hear your voice, and to be told that you were happy. It never occurred to me that Talbot's return would occasion any difference in this respect. Conscious of nothing but rectitude in my regard for you, always frank and ingenuous in disclosing my feelings, I imagined that Talbot would adopt you as warmly for his friend as I had done.

I must grant that I erred in this particular, but my error sprung from ignorance unavoidable. I judged of others by my own heart, and very sillily imagined that Talbot would continue to be satisfied with that cold and friendly regard for which only my vows made me answerable. Yet my husband's jealousies and discontents were not unreasonable. He loved me with passion; and, if that sentiment can endure to be unrequited, it will never tolerate the preference of another, even if that preference be less than love.

In compliance with my husband's wishes--Ah! my friend! why cannot I say that I did comply with them? what a fatal act is that of plighting hands when the heart is estranged! Never, never let the placable and compassionate spirit be seduced into a union to which the affections are averse. Let it not confide in the afterbirth of love. Such a union is the direst cruelty even to the object who is intended to be benefited.

I have not yet thoroughly forgiven you for deserting me. My heart swells with anguish at the thought of your setting more lightly by my resentment than by that of

another; of your willingness to purchase any one's happiness at the cost of mine. You are too wise, too dispassionate, by far. Don't despise me for this accusation, Henry; you know my unbiassed judgment has always been with you. Repeated proofs have convinced me that my dignity and happiness are safer in your keeping than in my own.

You guess right, my friend. Miss Jessup told me of your visits to this poor sick woman. There is something mysterious in the character of this Polly Jessup. She is particularly solicitous about every thing which relates to you. It has occurred to me, since reading your letter, that she is not entirely without design in her prattle. Something more, methinks, than the mere tattling, gossiping, inquisitive propensity in the way in which she introduces you into conversation.

She had not alighted ten minutes before she ran into my apartment, with a face full of intelligence. The truth respecting the washwoman was very artfully disguised, and yet so managed as to allow her to elude the imputation of direct falsehood. She will, no doubt, in this as in former cases, cover up all under the appearance of a good-natured jest; yet, if she be in jest, there is more of malice, I suspect, than of good nature in her merriment.

Make haste back, my dear Hal. I cannot bear to keep my mother in ignorance of our resolutions, and I am utterly at a loss in what manner to communicate them so as to awaken the least reluctance. Oh, what would be wanting to my felicity if my mother could be won over to my side? And is so inestimable a good utterly hopeless? Come, my friend, and dictate such a letter as may subdue those prejudices which, while they continue to exist, will permit me to choose only among deplorable evils.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter X

To Jane Talbot

New York, October 13.

I have just heard something which has made me very uneasy. I am afraid of seeming to you impertinent. You have declared your resolution to persist in conduct which my judgment disapproved. I have argued with you and admonished you, hitherto, in vain, and you have (tacitly indeed) rejected my interference; yet I cannot forbear offering you my counsel once more.

To say truth, it is not so much with a view to change your resolution, that I now write, as to be informed what your resolution is. I have heard what I cannot believe; yet, considering your former conduct, I have misgivings that I cannot subdue. Strangely as you have acted of late, I am willing to think you incapable of what is laid to your charge. In few words, Jane, they tell me that you mean to be actually married to Colden.

You know what I think of that young man. You know my objections to the conduct you thought proper to pursue in relation to Colden in your husband's lifetime. You will judge, then, with what emotions such intelligence was received.

Indiscreet as you have been, there are, I hope, bounds which your education will not permit you to pass. Some regard, I hope, you will have for your own reputation. If your conscience object not to this proceeding, the dread of infamy, at least, will check your career.

You may think that I speak harshly, and that I ought to wait, at least, till I knew your resolution, before I spoke of it in such terms; but, if this report be groundless, my censures cannot affect you. If it be true, they may serve, I hope, to deter you from persisting in your scheme.

What more can I say? You are my nearest relation; not my daughter, it is true; but, since I have not any other kindred, you are more than a daughter to me. That love, which a numerous family or kindred would divide among themselves, is all collected and centred in you. The ties between us have long ceased to be artificial

ones, and I feel, in all respects, as if you actually owed your being to me.

You have hitherto consulted my pleasure but little. I have all the rights, in regard to you, of a mother, but these have been hitherto despised or unacknowledged. I once regarded you as the natural successor to my property; and, though your conduct has forfeited these claims, I now tell you (and you know that my word is sacred) that all I have shall be yours, on condition that Colden is dismissed.

More than this I will do. Every assurance possible I will give, that all shall be yours at my death, and all I have I will share with you equally while I live. Only give me your word that, as soon as the transfer is made, Colden shall be thought of and conversed with, either personally or by letter, no more. I want only your promise; on that I will absolutely rely.

Mere lucre ought not, perhaps, to influence you in such a case; and if you comply through regard to my peace or your own reputation, I shall certainly esteem you more highly than if you are determined by the present offer; yet such is my aversion to this alliance, that the hour in which I hear of your consent to the conditions which I now propose to you will be esteemed one of the happiest of my life.

Think of it, my dear Jane, my friend, my child; think of it. Take time to reflect, and let me have a deliberate answer, such as will remove the fears that at present afflict, beyond my power of expression, your

H. FIELDER.

Letter XI

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, October 15.

I have several times taken up the pen, but my distress has compelled me to lay it down again. Heaven is my witness that the happiness of my revered mamma is

dearer to me than my own; no struggle was ever greater between my duty to you and the claims of another.

Will you not permit me to explain my conduct? will you not acquaint me with the reasons of your aversion to my friend?--let me call him by that name. Such, indeed, has he been to me,--the friend of my understanding and my virtue. My soul's friend; since, to suffer, without guilt, in this world, entitles us to peace in another, and since to him I owe that I have not been a guilty as well as an unfortunate creature.

Whatever conduct I pursue with regard to him, I must always consider him in this light; at least, till your proofs against him are heard. Let me hear them, I beseech you. Have compassion on the anguish of your poor girl, and reconcile, if possible, my duty to your inclination, by stating what you know to his disadvantage. You must have causes for your enmity, which you hide from me. Indeed, you tell me that you have; you say that if I knew them they would determine me. Let then every motive be set aside through regard to my happiness, and disclose to me this secret.

While I am ignorant of these charges, while all that I know of Colden tends to endear his happiness to me, and while his happiness depends upon my acceptance of his vows, can I, ought I, to reject him?

Place yourself in my situation. You once loved and was once beloved. I am, indeed, your child. I glory in the name which you have had the goodness to bestow upon me. Think and feel for your child, in her present unhappy circumstances; in which she does not balance between happiness and misery,--that alternative, alas! is not permitted,--but is anxious to discover which path has fewest thorns, and in which her duty will allow her to walk.

How greatly do you humble me, and how strongly evince your aversion to Colden, by offering, as the price of his rejection, half your property! How low am I fallen in your esteem, since you think it possible for such a bribe to prevail! and what calamities must this alliance seem to threaten, since the base selfishness of accepting

this offer is better, in your eyes, than my marriage!

Sure I never was unhappy till now. Pity me, my mother. Condescend to write to me again, and, by disclosing all your objections to Colden, reconcile, I earnestly entreat you, my duty to your inclination.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XII

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, October 17.

You will not write to me. Your messenger assures me that you have cast me from your thoughts forever; you will speak to me and see me no more.

That must not be. I am preparing, inclement as the season is, to pay you a visit. Unless you shut your door against me I will see you. You will not turn me out of doors, I hope.

I will see you and compel you to answer me, and to tell me why you will not admit my friend to your good opinion.

J. TALBOT.

Letter XIII

To Jane Talbot

New York, October 19.

You need not come to see me, Jane. I will not see you. Lay me not under the cruel necessity of shutting my door against you, for that must be the consequence of your attempt.

After reading your letter, and seeing full proof of your infatuation, I resolved to

throw away my care no longer upon you; to think no more of you; to act just as if you never had existence; whenever it was possible, to shun you; when I met you, by chance, or perforce, to treat you merely as a stranger. I write this letter to acquaint you with my resolution. Your future letters cannot change it, for they shall all be returned to you unopened.

I know you better than to trust to the appearance of half-yielding reluctance which your letter contains. Thus it has always been, and as often as this duteous strain flattered me with hopes of winning you to reason, have I been deceived and disappointed.

I trust to your discernment, your seeming humility, no longer. No child are you of mine. You have, henceforth, no part in my blood; and may I very soon forget that so lost and betrayed a wretch ever belonged to it!

I charge you, write not to me again. H.F.

Letter XIV

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, October 24.

Impossible! Are you not my mother?--more to me than any mother? Did I not receive your protection and instruction in my infancy and my childhood? When left an orphan by my own mother, your bosom was open to receive me. There was the helpless babe cherished, and there was it taught all that virtue which it has since endeavoured to preserve unimpaired in every trial.

You must not cast me off. You must not hate me. You must not call me ungrateful and a wretch. Not to have merited these names is all that enables me to endure your displeasure. As long as that belief consoles me, my heart will not break.

Yet that, even that, will not much avail me. The distress that I now feel, that I have

felt ever since the receipt of your letter, cannot be increased.

You forbid me to write to you; but I cannot forbear as long as there is hope of extorting from you the cause of your aversion to my friend. I solicit not this disclosure with a view or even in the hope of repelling your objections. I want, I had almost said, I want to share your antipathies. I want only to be justified in obeying you. When known, they will, perhaps, be found sufficient. I conjure you once more, tell me your objections to this marriage.

As well as I can, I have examined myself. Passion may influence me, but I am unconscious of its influence. I think I act with no exclusive regard to my own pleasure, but as it flows from and is dependent on the happiness of others.

If I am mistaken in my notions of duty, God forbid that I should shut my ears against good counsel. Instead of loathing or shunning it, I am anxious to hear it. I know my own short-sighted folly, my slight experience. I know how apt I am to go astray, how often my own heart deceives me; and hence I always am in search of better knowledge; hence I listen to admonition, not only with docility, but gratitude. My inclination ought, perhaps, to be absolutely neuter; but, if I know myself, it is with reluctance that I withhold my assent from the expostulator. I am delighted to receive conviction from the arguments of those that love me.

In this case, I am prepared to hear and weigh, and be convinced by, any thing you think proper to urge.

I ask not pardon for my faults, nor compassion on my frailty. That I love Colden I will not deny, but I love his worth; his merits, real or imaginary, enrapture my soul. Ideal his virtues may be, but to me they are real, and the moment they cease to be so, that the illusion disappears, I cease to love him, or, at least, I will do all that is in my power to do. I will forbear all intercourse or correspondence with him,--for his as well as my own sake.

Tell me then, my mother, what you know of him. What heinous offence has he

committed, that makes him unworthy of my regard?

You have raised, without knowing it perhaps, or designing to effect it in this way, a bar to this detested alliance. While you declare that Colden has been guilty of base actions, it is impossible to grant him my esteem as fully as a husband should claim. Till I know what the actions are which you impute to him, I never will bind myself to him by indissoluble bands.

I have told him this, and he joins with me to entreat you to communicate your charges to me. He believes that you are misled by some misapprehension,--some slander. He is conscious that many of his actions have been, in some respects, ambiguous, capable of being mistaken by careless, or distant, or prejudiced observers. He believes that you have been betrayed into some fatal error in relation to one action of his life.

If this be so, he wishes only to be told his fault, and will spare no time and no pains to remove your mistake, if you should appear to be mistaken.

How easily, my good mamma, may the most discerning and impartial be misled! The ignorant and envious have no choice between truth and error. Their tale must want something to complete it, or must possess more than the truth demands. Something you have heard of my friend injurious to his good name, and you condemn him unheard.

Yet this displeases me not. I am not anxious for his justification, but only to know so much as will authorize me to conform to your wishes.

You warn me against this marriage for my own sake. You think it will be disastrous to me.--The reasons of this apprehension would, you think, appear just in my eyes should they be disclosed, yet you will not disclose them. Without disclosure I cannot--as a rational creature, I cannot--change my resolution. If then I marry and the evil come that is threatened, whom have I to blame? at whose door must my misfortunes be laid if not at hers who had it in her power to prevent the evil and

would not?

Your treatment of me can proceed only from your love; and yet all the fruits of the direst enmity may grow out of it. By untimely concealments may my peace be forfeited forever. Judge then between your obligations to me, and those of secrecy, into which you seem to have entered with another.

My happiness, my future conduct, are in your hand. Mould them, govern them, as you think proper. I have pointed out the means, and once more conjure you, by the love which you once bore, which you still bear, to me, to use them.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XV

To Jane Talbot

New York, October 27.

Insolent creature that thou art, Jane, and cunning as insolent! To elude my just determination by such an artifice! To counterfeit a strange hand in the direction of thy letter, that I might thereby be induced to open it!

Thou wilt not rest, I see, till thou hast torn from my heart every root, every fibre of my once-cherished tenderness; till thou hast laid my head low in the grave. To number the tears and the pangs which thy depravity has already cost me----but thy last act is destined to surpass all former ones.

Thy perseverance in wickedness, thy inflexible imposture, amazes me beyond all utterance. Thy effrontery in boasting of thy innocence, in calling this wretch thy friend, thy soul's friend, the means of securing the favour of a pure and all-seeing Judge, exceeds all that I supposed possible in human nature. And that thou, Jane, the darling of my heart, and the object of all my care and my pride, should be this profligate, this obdurate creature!

When very young, you were ill of a fever. The physician gave up, for some hours, all hope of your life. I shall never forget the grief which his gloomy silence gave me. All that I held dear in the world, I then thought, I would cheerfully surrender to save your life.

Poor, short-sighted wretch that I was! That event which, had it then happened, would perhaps have bereaved me of reason, would have saved me from a portion far more bitter. I should have never lived to witness the depravity of one whom my whole life had been employed in training to virtue.

Having opened your letter, and somewhat debated with myself, I consented to read. I will do more than read; I will answer it minutely. I will unfold that secret by which, you truly think, my aversion to your present scheme has been chiefly caused.

I have hitherto been silent through compassion to you; through the hope that all might yet be well; that you might be influenced by my persuasions to forbear an action that will insure forever your ruin. I now perceive the folly of this compassion and these hopes. I need not be assiduous to spare you the shame and mortification of hearing the truth. Shame is as much a stranger to your heart as remorse. Say what I will, disclose what I will, your conduct will be just the same. A show of much reluctance and humility will, no doubt, be made, and the tongue will be busy in imploring favour which the heart disdains.

In the foresight of this, I was going to forbid your writing; but you care not for my forbidding. As long as you think it possible to reconcile me to your views and make me a partaker in your infamy, you will harass me with importunity, with feigned penitence and preposterous arguments. But one thing at least is in my power. I can shun you, and I can throw your unopened letters into the fire; and that, believe me, Jane, I shall do.

But I am wasting time. My indignation carries me away from my purpose. Let me return to it, and, having told you all my mind, let me dismiss the hateful subject

forever.

I knew the motives that induced you to marry Lewis Talbot. They were good ones. Your compliance with mine and your father's wishes in that respect showed that force of understanding which I always ascribed to you. Your previous reluctance, your scruples, were indeed unworthy of you, but you conquered them, and that was better; perhaps it evinced more magnanimity than never to have had them.

You were happy, I long thought, in your union with a man of probity and good sense. You may be sure I thought of you often, but only with pleasure. Certain indications I early saw in you of a sensibility that required strict government; an inattention to any thing but feeling; a proneness to romantic friendship, and a pining after good not consistent with our nature. I imagined that I had kept at a distance all such books and companions as tend to produce this fantastic character; and whence you imbibed this perverse spirit, at so early an age, is, to me, inconceivable. It cost me many a gloomy foreboding.

My disquiets increased as you grew up, and that age arrived when the heart comes to be entangled with what is called love. I was anxious to find for you a man of merit, to whose keeping your happiness might safely be intrusted. Talbot was such a one, but the wayward heart refused to love him. He was not all your fancy had conceived of excellent and lovely. He was a mere man, with the tastes and habits suitable and common to his education and age. He was addicted to industry, was regular and frugal in his manner and economy. He had nothing of that specious and glossy texture which captivates inexperience and youth, and serves as a substitute for every other virtue. While others talked about their duty, he was contented with performing it; and he was satisfied with ignorance of theories as long as his practice was faultless.

He was just such a one as I wished for the darling of my heart; but you thought not so. You did not object to his age, though almost double your own; to his person or

aspect, though they were by no means worthy of his mind; to his profession or condition; but your heart sighed after one who could divide with you your sympathies; who saw every thing just as you saw it; who could emulate your enthusiasm, and echo back every exclamation which chance should dictate to you.

You even pleaded religion as one of your objections. Talbot, it seems, had nothing that deserved to be called religion. He had never reasoned on the subject. He had read no books and had never looked into his Bible since he was fifteen years old. He seldom went to church but because it was the fashion, and, when there, seldom spared a thought from his own temporal concerns, to a future state and a governing Deity. All those expansions of soul produced by meditation on the power and goodness of our Maker, and those raptures that flow from accommodating all our actions to his will, and from consciousness of his approbation and presence, you discovered to be strangers to his breast, and therefore you scrupled to unite your fate with his.

It was not enough that this man had never been seduced into disbelief; that his faith was steadfast and rational without producing those fervours, and reveries, and rhapsodies, which unfit us for the mixed scenes of human life, and breed in us absurd and fantastic notions of our duty or our happiness; that his religion had produced all its practical effects, in honest, regular, sober, and consistent conduct.

You wanted a zealot; a sectary; one that should enter into all the trifling distinctions and minute subtleties that make one Christian the mortal foe of another, while, in their social conduct, there is no difference to be found between them.

I do not repeat these things to upbraid you for what you then were, but merely to remind you of the inconsistency of these notions with your subsequent conduct. You then, at the instance of your father and at my instance, gave them up; and that compliance, supposing your scruples to have been undissembled, gave you a still greater interest in our affections.

You never gave me reason to suppose that you repented of this compliance. I never saw you after your engagement, but you wore a cheerful countenance; at least till your unfortunate connection with Colden. To that connection must be traced every misfortune and depravity that has attended you since.

When I heard, from Patty Sinclair, of his frequent visits to you during your retirement at Burlington, I thought of it but little. He was, indeed, a new acquaintance. You were unacquainted with his character and history, except so far as you could collect them from his conversation; and no confidence could, of course, be placed in that. It was therefore, perhaps, somewhat indiscreet to permit such very frequent visits, such very long walks. To neglect the friends whom you lived with, for the sake of exclusive conversations and lonely rambles, noon and night, with a mere stranger,--one not regularly introduced to you,--whose name you were obliged to inquire of himself,--you, too, already a betrothed woman; your lover absent; yourself from home, and merely on terms of hospitality! all this did not look well.

But the mischief, it was evident, was to be known by the event. Colden might have probity and circumspection. He might prove an agreeable friend to your future husband and a useful companion to yourself. Kept within due limits, your complacency for this stranger, your attachment to his company, might occasion no inconvenience. How little did I then suspect to what extremes you were capable of going, and even then had actually gone!

The subject was of sufficient importance to induce me to write to you. Your answer was not quite satisfactory, yet, on the whole, laid my apprehensions at rest. I was deceived by the confidence you expressed in your own caution, and the seeming readiness there was to be governed by my advice.

Afterwards, I heard, through various channels, without any efforts on my part, intelligence of Colden. At first I was not much alarmed. Colden, it is true, was not a faultless or steadfast character. No gross or enormous vices were ascribed to him.

His habits, as far as appearances enabled one to judge, were temperate and chaste. He was contemplative and bookish, and was vaguely described as being somewhat visionary and romantic.

In all this there was nothing formidable. Such a man might surely be a harmless companion. Those with whom he was said to associate most intimately were highly estimable. Their esteem was a test of merit not to be disposed or hastily rejected.

Things, however, quickly took a new face. I was informed that, after your return to the city, Colden continued to be a very constant visitant. Your husband's voyage left you soon after at liberty, and your intercourse with this person only became more intimate and confidential.

Reflecting closely on this circumstance, I began to suspect some danger lurking in your path. I now remembered that impetuosity of feeling which distinguished your early age; those notions of kindred among souls, of friendship and harmony of feelings which, in your juvenile age, you loved to indulge.

I reflected that the victory over these chimeras, which you gained by marriage with Talbot, might be merely temporary; and that, in order to call these dormant feelings into action, it was only requisite to meet with one contemplative, bookish, and romantic as yourself.

Such a one, it was greatly to be feared, you had now found in this young man; just such qualities he was reported to possess, as would render him dangerous to you and you dangerous to him. A poet, not in theory only, but in practice; accustomed to intoxicate the women with melodious flattery; fond of being intimate; avowedly devoted to the sex; eloquent in his encomiums upon female charms; and affecting to select his friends only from that sex.

What effect might such a character have upon your peace, even without imputing any ill intention to him? Both of you might work your own ruin, while you designed nothing but good; and even supposing that your intercourse should be harmless, or

even beneficial with respect to yourselves, what was to be feared for Talbot? An intimacy of this kind could hardly escape his observation on his return. It would be criminal, indeed, to conceal it from him.

These apprehensions were raised to the highest pitch by more accurate information of Colden's character, which I afterwards received. I found, on inquiring of those who had the best means of knowing, that Colden had imbibed that pernicious philosophy which is now so much in vogue. One who knew him perfectly, who had long been in habits of the closest intimacy with him, who was still a familiar correspondent of his, gave me this account.

I met this friend of Colden's (Thomson his name is, of whom I suppose you have heard something) in this city. His being mentioned as the intimate companion of Colden made me wish to see him, and fortunately, I prevailed upon him to be very communicative.

Thomson is an excellent young man: he loves Colden much, and describes the progress of his friend's opinions with every mark of regret. He even showed me letters that had passed between them, and in which every horrid and immoral tenet was defended by one and denied by the other. These letters showed Colden as the advocate of suicide; a scoffer at promises; the despiser of revelation, of Providence and a future state; an opponent of marriage, and as one who denied (shocking!) that any thing but mere habit and positive law stood in the way of marriage, nay, of intercourse without marriage, between brother and sister, parent and child!

You may readily believe that I did not credit such things on slight evidence. I did not rely on Thomson's mere words, solemn and unaffected as these were; nothing but Colden's handwriting could in such a case, be credited.

To say truth, I should not be much surprised had I heard of Colden, as of a youth whose notions on moral and religious topics were, in some degree, unsettled; that, in the fervour and giddiness incident to his age, he had not tamed his mind to

investigation; had not subdued his heart to regular and devout thoughts; that his passions or his indolence had made the truths of religion somewhat obscure, and shut them out, not properly from his conviction, but only from his attention.

I expected to find, united with this vague and dubious state of mind, tokens of the influence of a pious education; a reverence,--at least, for those sacred precepts on which the happiness of men rests, and at least a practical observance of that which, if not fully admitted by his understanding, was yet very far from having been rejected by it.

But widely and deplorably different was Colden's case. A most fascinating book [Footnote: Godwin's Political Justice.] fell at length into his hands, which changed, in a moment, the whole course of his ideas. What he had before regarded with reluctance and terror, this book taught him to admire and love. The writer has the art of the grand deceiver; the fatal art of carrying the worst poison under the name and appearance of wholesome food; of disguising all that is impious, or blasphemous, or licentious, under the guise and sanctions of virtue.

Colden had lived before this without examination or inquiry. His heart, his inclination, was perhaps on the side of religion and true virtue; but this book carried all his inclination, his zeal, and his enthusiasm, over to the adversary; and so strangely had he been perverted, that he held himself bound, he conceived it to be his duty, to vindicate in private and public, to preach with vehemence, his new faith. The rage for making converts seized him; and that Thomson was not won over to the same cause proceeded from no want of industry in Colden.

Such was the man whom you had admitted to your confidence; whom you had adopted for your bosom friend. I knew your pretensions to religion, the stress which you laid upon piety as the basis of morals. I remembered your objections to Talbot on this score, not only as a husband, but as a friend. I could, therefore, only suppose that Colden had joined dissimulation to his other errors, and had gained and kept

your good opinion by avowing sentiments which his heart secretly abhorred.

I cannot describe to you, Jane, my alarms upon this discovery. That your cook had intended to poison you, the next meat which you should eat in your own house, would have alarmed me, I assure you, much less. The preservation of your virtue was unspeakably of more importance in my eyes than of your life.

I wrote to you: and what was your reply? I could scarcely believe my senses. Every horrid foreboding realized! already such an adept in this accursed sophistry! the very cant of that detestable sect adopted!

I had plumed myself upon your ignorance. He had taken advantage of that, I supposed, and had won your esteem by counterfeiting a moral and pious strain. To make you put him forever at a distance, it was needed only to tear off his mask. This was done, but, alas, too late for your safety. The poison was already swallowed.

I had no patience with you, to listen to your trifling and insidious distinctions,--such as, though you could audaciously urge them to me, possessed no weight, could possess no weight, in your understanding. What was it to me whether he was ruffian or madman? whether, in destroying you, he meant to destroy or to save? Is it proper to expose your breast to a sword, because the wretch that wields it supposes madly that it is a straw which he holds in his hand?

But I will not renew the subject. The same motives that induced me to attempt to reason with you then no longer exist. The anguish, the astonishment, which your letters, as they gradually unfolded your character, produced in me, I endeavoured to show you at the time. Now I pass them over to come to a more important circumstance.

Yet how shall I tell it thee, Jane? I am afraid to intrust it to paper. Thy fame is still dear to me. I would not be the means of irretrievably blasting thy fame. Yet what may come of relating some incidents on paper?

Faint is my hope, but I am not without some hope, that thou canst yet be saved, be

snatched from perdition. Thy life I value not, in comparison with something higher. And if, through an erring sensibility, the sacrifice of Colden cost thee thy life, I shall yet rejoice. As the wife of Colden thou wilt be worse than dead to me.

What has come to me, I wonder? I began this letter with a firm, and, as I thought, inflexible, soul. Despair had made me serene; yet now thy image rises before me with all those bewitching graces which adorned thee when thou wast innocent and a child. All the mother seizes my heart, and my tears suffocate me.

Shall I shock, shall I wound thee, my child, by lifting the veil from thy misconduct, behind which thou thinkest thou art screened from every human eye? How little dost thou imagine that I know so much!

Now will thy expostulations and reasonings have an end. Surely they will have an end. Shame at last, shame at last, will overwhelm thee and make thee dumb.

Yet my heart sorely misgives me. I shudder at the extremes to which thy accursed seducer may have urged thee. What thou hast failed in concealing thou mayest be so obdurately wicked as to attempt to justify.

Was it not the unavoidable result of confiding in a man avowedly irreligious and immoral; of exposing thy understanding and thy heart to such stratagems as his philosophy made laudable and necessary? But I know not what I would say. I must lay down the pen till I can reason myself into some composure. I will write again to-morrow.

H. FIELDER.

Letter XVI

To the same

O my lost child! In thy humiliations at this moment I can sympathize. The shame that must follow the detection of it is more within my thoughts at present than the

negligence or infatuation that occasioned thy faults.

I know all. Thy intended husband knew it all. It was from him that the horrible tidings of thy unfaithfulness to marriage-vows first came.

He visited this city on purpose to obtain an interview with me. He entered my apartment with every mark of distress. He knew well the effect of such tidings on my heart. Most eagerly would I have laid down my life to preserve thy purity spotless.

He demeaned himself as one who loved thee with a rational affection, and who, however deeply he deplored the loss of thy love, accounted thy defection from virtue of infinitely greater moment.

I was willing to discredit even his assertion. Far better it was that the husband should prove the defamer of his wife, than that my darling child should prove a profligate. But he left me no room to doubt, by showing me a letter.

He showed it me on condition of my being everlastingly silent to you in regard to its contents. He yielded to a jealousy which would not be conquered, and had gotten this letter by surreptitious means. He was ashamed of an action which his judgment condemned as ignoble and deceitful.

Far more wise and considerate was this excellent and injured man than I. He was afraid, by disclosing to you the knowledge he had thus gained, of rendering you desperate and hardened. As long as reputation was not gone, he thought your errors were retrievable. He distrusted the success of his own efforts, and besought me to be your guardian. As to himself, he resigned the hope of ever gaining your love, and entreated me to exert myself for dissolving your connection with Colden, merely for your own sake.

To show me the necessity of my exertions, he had communicated this letter, believing that my maternal interest in your happiness would prevent me from making any but a salutary use of it. Yet he had not put your safety into my hands

without a surety. He was so fully persuaded of the ill consequences of your knowing how much was known, that he had given me the proofs of your guilt only on my solemn promise to conceal them from you.

I saw the generosity and force of his representations, and, while I endeavoured by the most earnest remonstrances to break your union with Colden, I suffered no particle of the truth to escape me. But you were hard as a rock. You would not forbid his visits, nor reject his letters.

I need not repeat to you what followed; by what means I endeavoured to effect that end which your obstinate folly refused.

When I gave this promise to Talbot, I foresaw not his speedy death and the consequences to Colden and yourself. I have been affrighted at the rumour of your marriage; and, to justify the conduct I mean to pursue, I have revealed to you what I promised to conceal merely because I foresaw not the present state of your affairs.

You will not be surprised that, on your marriage with this man, I should withdraw from you what you now hold from my bounty. No faultiness in you shall induce me to leave you without the means of decent subsistence; but I owe no benevolence to Colden. My duty will not permit me to give any thing to your paramour. When you change your name you must change your habitation and leave behind you whatever you found.

Think not, Jane, that I cease to love thee. I am not so inhuman as to refuse my forgiveness to a penitent; yet I ask not thy penitence to insure thee my affection. I have told thee my conditions, and adhere to them still.

To preclude all bickerings and cavils, I enclose the letter which attests your fall.

H. FIELDER.

Letter XVII

(ENCLOSED LETTER.)

To Henry Colden

Tuesday Morning.

You went away this morning before I was awake. I think you might have stayed to breakfast; yet, on second thoughts, your early departure was best. Perhaps it was so. You have made me very thoughtful to-day. What passed last night has left my mind at no liberty to read and to scribble as I used to do. How your omens made me shudder!

I want to see you. Can't you come again this evening? but no; you must not. I must not be an encroacher. I must judge of others, and of their claims upon your company, by myself and my own claims. Yet I should be glad to see that creature who would dare to enter into competition with me.

But I may as well hold my peace. My rights will not be admitted by others. Indeed, no soul but yourself can know them in all their extent, and, what is all I care for, you are far from being strictly just to me!

Don't be angry, Hal. Skip the last couple of sentences, or think of them as not mine: I disown them. To-morrow, at six, the fire shall be stirred, the candles lighted, and the sofa placed in order due. I shall be at home to nobody; mind that.

I am loath to mention one thing, however, but I must. Though nothing be due to the absent man, somewhat is due to myself. I have been excessively uneasy the whole day. I am terrified at certain consequences. What may not happen if--No; the last night's scene must not be repeated; at least for a month to come. The sweet oblivion of the future and past lasted only for the night. Now I have leisure to look forward, and am resolved (don't laugh at my resolves; I am quite in earnest) to keep thee at a distance for at least a fortnight to come. It shall be a whole month if thou dost not submit with a good grace.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XVIII

To Mr. Henry Colden

New York, October 22.

SIR:--

I address myself to you as the mother of an unhappy girl who has put herself into your power. But I write not to upbraid you or indulge my own indignation, but merely to beseech your compassion for her whom you profess to love.

I cannot apologize for the manner in which I have acted in regard to your connection with Jane Talbot. In that respect, I must take to myself all the blame you may choose to impute to me.

I call not into question the disinterestedness of your intentions in proposing marriage to this woman; nor, if the information which I am going to give you should possess any influence, shall I ascribe that influence to any thing but a commendable attention to your true interest, and a generous regard to the welfare of my daughter.

Be it known to you then, sir, that Mrs. Talbot possesses no fortune in her own right. Her present dwelling, and her chief means of subsistence, are derived from me: she holds them at my option; and they will be instantly and entirely withdrawn, on her marriage with you.

You cannot be unacquainted with the habits and views in which my daughter has been educated. Her life has passed in ease and luxury, and you cannot but perceive the effect of any material change in her way of life.

It would be a wretched artifice to pretend to any particular esteem for you, or to attempt to persuade you that any part of this letter is dictated by any regard to your interest, except as that is subservient to the interest of one whom I can never cease to love.

Yet I ardently hope that this circumstance may not hinder you from accepting bills

upon London to the amount of three hundred pounds sterling. They shall be put into your hands the moment I am properly assured that you have engaged your passage to Europe and are determined to be nothing more than a distant well-wisher to my daughter.

I am anxious that you should draw, from the terms of this offer, proof of that confidence in your word which you might not perhaps have expected from my conduct towards you in other respects. Indeed, my conscience acquits me of any design to injure you. On the contrary, it would give me sincere pleasure to hear of your success in every laudable pursuit.

I know your talents and the direction which they have hitherto received. I know that London is a theatre best adapted to the lucrative display of those talents, and that the sum I offer will be an ample fund, till your own exertions may be turned to account.

If this offer be accepted, I shall not only hold myself everlastingly obliged to you, but I shall grant you a higher place in my esteem. Yet, through deference to scruples which you may possibly possess, I most cheerfully plight to you my honour, that this transaction shall be concealed from Mrs. Talbot and from all the world.

Though property is necessary to our happiness, and my daughter's habits render the continuance of former indulgences necessary to her content, I will not be so unjust to her as to imagine that this is all which she regards. Respect from the world, and the attachment of her ancient friends, are, also, of some value in her eyes. Reflect, sir, I beseech you, whether you are qualified to compensate her for the loss of property, of good name,--my own justification, in case she marries you, will require me to be nothing more than just to her,--and of all her ancient friends, who will abhor in her the faithless wife and the ungrateful child. I need not inform you that your family will never receive into their bosom one whom her own kindred have rejected. I am, &c.

H. FIELDER.

Letter XIX

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, October 28.

I need not hesitate a moment to answer this letter. I will be all that my revered mamma wishes me to be. I have vowed an eternal separation from Colden; and, to enable me to keep this vow, I entreat you to permit me to come to you.

I will leave this house in anybody's care you direct. My Molly and the boy Tom I shall find it no easy task to part with; but I will, nevertheless, send the former to her mother, who is thrifty and well to live. I beg you to permit me to bring the boy with me. I wait your answer.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XX

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, October 28.

O my friend! Where are you at this trying moment? Why did you desert me? Now, if ever, does my feeble heart stand in need of your counsel and courage.

Did I ever lean these throbbing brows against your arm and pour my tears into your bosom, that I was not comforted? Never did that adored voice fail to whisper sweet peace to my soul. In every storm, thy calmer and more strenuous spirit has provided me the means of safety. But now I look around for my stay, my monitor, my encourager, in vain.

You will make haste to despatch the business that detains you. You will return, and fly, on the wings of love, to thy Jane. Alas! she will not be found. She will have fled far away, and in her stead will she leave this sullen messenger to tell thee that thy

Jane has parted from thee forever!

Do not upbraid me, Hal. Do not call me ungrateful or rash. Indeed, I shall not be able to bear thy reproaches. I know they will kill me quite.

And don't expostulate with me. Confirm me rather in my new resolution. Even if you think it cruel or absurd, aver that it is just. Persuade me that I have done my duty to my mother, and assure me of your cheerful acquiescence.

Too late is it now, even if I would, to recall my promise.

I have promised to part with you. In the first tumult of my soul, on receiving the enclosed letters, I wrote an answer, assuring Mrs. Fielder of my absolute concurrence with her will.

Already does my heart, calling up thy beloved image; reflecting on the immense debt which I owe to your generosity, on the disappointment which the tidings of my journey will give you; already do I repent of my precipitation.

I have sought repose, but I find it not. My pillow is moist with the bitterest tears that I ever shed. To give vent to my swelling heart, I write to you; but I must now stop. All my former self is coming back upon me, and, while I think of you as of my true and only friend, I shall be unable to persist. I will not part with thee, my friend. I cannot do it. Has not my life been solemnly devoted to compensate thee for thy unmerited love? For the crosses and vexations thou hast endured for my sake?

Why shall I forsake thee? To gratify a wayward and groundless prejudice. To purchase the short-lived and dubious affection of one who loves me in proportion as I am blind to thy merit; as I forget thy benefits; as I countenance the envy and slander that pursue thee.

Yet what shall I bring to thy arms? A blasted reputation, poverty, contempt, the indignation of mine and of thy friends. For thou art poor, and so am I. Thy kindred have antipathies for me as strong as those that are fostered against thyself----

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XXI

To Henry Colden

October 28, Evening.

I will struggle for sufficient composure to finish this letter. I have spent the day in reflection, and am now, I hope, calm enough to review this most horrid and inexplicable charge.

Look, my friend, at the letter she has sent me. It is my handwriting,--the very same which I have so often mentioned to you as having been, after so unaccountable a manner, mislaid.

I wrote some part of it, alone, in my own parlour. You recollect the time;--the day after that night which a heavy storm of rain and my fatal importunity prevailed on you to spend under this roof.

Mark the deplorable consequences of an act which the coldest charity would not have declined. On such a night I would have opened my doors to my worst enemy. Yet because I turned not forth my best friend on such a night, see to what a foul accusation I have exposed myself.

I had not finished, but it came into my mind that something in that which I had a little before received from you might be seasonably noticed before I shut up my billet. So I left my paper on the table, open, while I ran up-stairs to get your letter, which I had left in a drawer in my chamber.

While turning over clothes and papers, I heard the street-door open and some one enter. This did not hinder me from continuing my search. I thought it was my gossiping neighbour, Miss Jessup, and had some hopes that, finding no one in the parlour, she would withdraw with as little ceremony as she entered.

My search was longer than I expected; but, finding it at last, down I went, fully expecting to find a visitant, not having heard any steps returning to the door.

But no visitant was there, and the paper was gone! I was surprised, and a little alarmed. You know my childish apprehensions of robbers.

I called up Molly, who was singing at her work in the kitchen. She had heard the street-door open and shut, and footsteps overhead, but she imagined them to be mine. A little heavier, too, she recollected them to be, than mine. She likewise heard a sound as if the door had been opened and shut softly. It thus appeared that my unknown visitant had hastily and secretly withdrawn, and my paper had disappeared.

I was confounded at this incident. Who it was that could thus purloin an unfinished letter and retire in order to conceal the theft, I could not imagine. Nothing else had been displaced. It was no ordinary thief,--no sordid villain.

For a time, I thought perhaps it might be some facetious body, who expected to find amusement in puzzling or alarming me. Yet I was not alarmed: for what had I to fear or to conceal? The contents were perfectly harmless; and, being fully satisfied with the purity of my own thoughts, I never dreamed of any construction being put on them, injurious to me.

I soon ceased to think of this occurrence. I had no cause, as I then thought, to be anxious about consequences. The place of the lost letter was easily supplied by my loquacious pen, and I came at last to conjecture that I had carelessly whisked it into the fire, and that the visitant had been induced to withdraw, by finding the apartment empty. Yet I never discovered any one who had come in and gone out in this manner. Miss Jessup, whom I questioned afterwards, had spent that day elsewhere. And now, when the letter and its contents were almost forgotten, does it appear before me, and is offered in proof of this dreadful charge.

After reading my mother's letter, I opened with trembling hand that which was

enclosed. I instantly recognised the long-lost billet. All of it appeared, on the first perusal, to be mine. Even the last mysterious paragraph was acknowledged by my senses. In the first confusion of my mind, I knew not what to believe or reject; my thoughts were wandering, and my repeated efforts had no influence in restoring them to order.

Methinks I then felt as I should have felt if the charge had been true. I shuddered as if to look back would only furnish me with proofs of a guilt of which I had not hitherto been conscious,--proofs that had merely escaped remembrance, or had failed to produce their due effect, from some infatuation of mind.

When the first horror and amazement were passed, and I took up the letter and pondered on it once more, I caught a glimpse suddenly; suspicion darted all at once into my mind; I strove to recollect the circumstances attending the writing of this billet.

Yes; it was clear. As distinctly as if it were the work of yesterday, did I now remember that I stopped at the words nobody; mind that. The following sentences are strange to me. The character is similar to what precedes, but the words were never penned by me.

And could Talbot--Yet what end? a fraud so--Ah! let me not suspect my husband of such a fraud. Let me not have reason to abhor his memory.

I fondly imagined that with his life my causes of disquiet were at an end; yet now are my eyes open to an endless series of calamities and humiliations which his decease had made sure.

I cannot escape from them. There is no help for me. I cannot disprove. What testimony can I bring to establish my innocence,--to prove that another hand has added these detestable confessions?

True it is, you passed that night under my roof. Where was my caution? You, Henry, knew mankind better than I: why did you not repel my importunities, and leave me

in spite of my urgencies for your stay?

Poor, thoughtless wretch that I was, not to be aware of the indecorum of allowing one of your sex, not allied to me by kindred,--I, too, alone, without any companion but a servant,--to pass the night in the same habitation!

What is genuine of this note acknowledges your having lodged here. Thus much I cannot and need not deny: yet how shall I make those distinctions visible to Mrs. Fielder? how shall I point out that spot in my billet where the forgery begins? and at whose expense must I vindicate myself? Better incur the last degree of infamy myself, since it will not be deserved, than to load him that has gone with reproach. Talbot sleeps, I hope, in peace; and let me not, for any selfish or transitory good, molest his ashes. Shall I not be contented with the approbation of a pure and all-seeing Judge?

But, if I would vindicate myself, I have not the power; I have forfeited my credit with my mother. With her my word will be of no weight; surely it ought to weigh nothing. Against evidence of this kind, communicated by a husband, shall the wild and improbable assertion of the criminal be suffered to prevail? I have only my assertion to offer.

Yet, my good God! in what a maze hast thou permitted my unhappy feet to be entangled! With intentions void of blame, have I been pursued by all the consequences of the most atrocious guilt.

In an evil hour, Henry, was it that I saw thee first. What endless perplexities have beset me since that disastrous moment! I cannot pray for their termination, for prayer implies hope.

For thy sake, (God is my witness,) more than for my own, have I determined to be no longer thine. I hereby solemnly absolve you from all engagements to me. I command you, I beseech you, not to cast away a thought on the ill-fated Jane. Seek a more worthy companion, and be happy.

Perhaps you will feel, not pity, but displeasure, in receiving this letter. You will not deign to answer me, perhaps, or will answer me with sharp rebuke. I have only lived to trouble your peace, and have no claim to your forbearance; yet methinks I would be spared the misery of hearing your reproaches, re-echoed as they will be by my own conscience. I fear they will but the more unfit me for the part that I wish henceforth to act.

I would carry, if possible, to Mrs. Fielder's presence a cheerful aspect. I would be to her that companion which I was in my brighter days. To study her happiness shall be henceforth my only office; but this, unless I can conceal from her an aching heart, I shall be unable to do. Let me not carry with me the insupportable weight of your reproaches. JANE TALBOT.

Letter XXII

To Jane Talbot

Baltimore, October 31.

You had reason to fear my reproaches; yet you have strangely erred in imagining the cause for which I should blame you. You are never tired, my good friend, of humbling me by injurious suppositions.

I do, indeed, reproach you for conduct that is rash; unjust; hurtful to yourself, to your mother, to me, to the memory of him who, whatever were his faults, has done nothing to forfeit your reverence.

You are charged with the blackest guilt that can be imputed to woman. To know you guilty produces more anguish in the mind of your accuser than any other evil could produce, and to be convinced of your innocence would be to remove the chief cause of her sorrow; yet you are contented to admit the charge; to countenance her error by your silence. By stating the simple truth, circumstantially and fully; by adding earnest and pathetic assurances of your innocence; by showing all the letters that

have passed between us, the contents of which will show that such guilt was impossible; by making your girl bear witness to the precaution you used on that night to preclude misconstructions, surely you may hope to disarm her suspicions.

But this proceeding has not occurred to you. You have mistrusted the power of truth, and even are willing to perpetuate the error. And why? Because you will not blast the memory of the dead. The loss of your own reputation, the misery of your mother, whom your imaginary guilt makes miserable, are of less moment in your eyes than--what? Let not him, my girl, who knows thee best, have most reason to blush for thee.

Talbot, you imagine, forged this calumny. It was a wrong thing, and much unhappiness has flowed from it. This calumny you have it, at length, in your power to refute. Its past effects cannot be recalled; but here the evil may end, the mistake may be cleared up, and be hindered from destroying the future peace of your mother.

Yet you forbear from tenderness to his memory, who, if you are consistent with yourself, you must believe to look back on that transaction with remorse, to lament every evil which it has hitherto occasioned, and to rejoice in the means of stopping the disastrous series.

My happiness is just of as little value. Your mother's wishes, though allowed to be irrational and groundless, are to be gratified by the disappointment of mine, which appear to be just and reasonable; and, since one must be sacrificed, that affection with which you have inspired me and those benefits you confess to owe to me, those sufferings believed by you to have been incurred by me for your sake, do not, it seems, entitle me to preference.

On this score, however, my good girl, set your heart at ease. I never assumed the merits you attributed to me. I never urged the claims you were once so eager to admit. I desire not the preference. If, by abjuring me, your happiness could be secured; if it were possible for you to be that cheerful companion of your mother

which you seem so greatly to wish; if, in her society, you could stifle every regret, and prevent your tranquillity from being invaded by self-reproach, most gladly would I persuade you to go to her and dismiss me from your thoughts forever.

But I know, Jane, that this cannot be. You never will enjoy peace under your mother's roof. The sighing heart and the saddened features will forever upbraid her, and bickering and repining will mar every domestic scene. Your mother's aversion to me is far from irreconcilable, but that which will hasten reconcilement will be marriage. You cannot forfeit her love as long as you preserve your integrity; and those scruples which no argument will dissipate will yield to reflection on an evil (as she will regard it) that cannot be remedied.

Admitting me, in this respect, to be mistaken, your mother's resentment will ever give you disquiet. True; but will your union with me console you nothing? in pressing the hoped-for fruit of that union to your breast, in that tenderness which you will hourly receive from me, will there be nothing to compensate you for sorrows in which there is no remorse, and which, indeed, will owe their poignancy to the generosity of your spirit?

You cannot unite yourself to me but with some view to my happiness. Will your contributing to that happiness be nothing?

Yet I cannot separate my felicity from yours. I can enjoy nothing at the cost of your peace. In whatever way you decide, may the fruit be content!

I ask you not for proofs of love, for the sacrifice of others to me. My happiness demands it not. It only requires you to seek your own good. Nothing but ceaseless repinings can follow your compliance with your mother's wishes; but there is something in your power to do. You can hide these repinings from her, by living at a distance from her. She may know you only through the medium of your letters, and these may exhibit the brightest side of things. She wants nothing but your divorce from me, and that may take place without living under her roof.

You need not stay here. The world is wide, and she will eagerly consent to the breaking of your shackles by change of residence. Much and the best part of your country you have never seen. Variety of objects will amuse you, and new faces and new minds erase the deep impressions of the past. Colden and his merits may sink into forgetfulness, or be thought of with no other emotion than regret that a being so worthless was ever beloved. But I wander from the true point. I meant not to introduce myself into this letter,--self!--that vile debaser whom I detest as my worst enemy, and who assumes a thousand shapes and practises a thousand wiles to entice me from the right path.

Ah, Jane, could thy sagacity discover no other cause of thy mother's error than Talbot's fraud? Could thy heart so readily impute to him so black a treachery? Such a prompt and undoubting conclusion it grieves me to find thee capable of.

How much more likely that Talbot was himself deceived! For it was not by him that thy unfinished letter was purloined. At that moment he was probably some thousands of miles distant. It was five weeks before his return from his Hamburg voyage, when that mysterious incident happened.

Be of good cheer, my sweet girl. I doubt not all will be well. We shall find the means of detecting and defeating this conspiracy, and of re-establishing thee in thy mother's good opinion. At present, I own, I do not see the means; but, to say truth, my mind is clouded by anxieties, enfeebled by watching and fatigue.

You know why I came hither. I found my friend in a very bad way, and have no hope but that his pangs, which must end within a few days, may, for his sake, terminate very soon. He will not part with me, and I have seldom left his chamber since I came.

Your letter has disturbed me much, and I seize this interval, when the sick man has gained a respite from his pain, to tell you my thoughts upon it. I fear I have not reasoned very clearly. Some peevishness, I doubt not, has crept into my style. I rely

upon your wonted goodness to excuse it.

I have much to say upon this affecting subject, but must take a future opportunity.

I also have received a letter from Mrs. Fielder, of which I will say no more, since I send you enclosed that, and my answer. I wish it had come at a time when my mind was more at ease, as an immediate reply seemed to be necessary. Adieu.

HENRY GOLDEN.

Letter XXIII

To Mrs. Fielder

Baltimore, November 2.

MADAM:--

It would indeed be needless to apologize for your behaviour to me. I not only acquit you of any enmity to me, but beg leave to return you my warmest thanks for the generous offers which you have made me in this letter.

I should be grossly wanting in that love for Mrs. Talbot which you believe me to possess, if I did not partake in that gratitude and reverence which she feels for one who has performed for her every parental duty. The esteem of the good is only of less value in my eyes than the approbation of my own conscience. There is no price which I would not pay for your good opinion, consistent with a just regard to that of others and to my own.

I cannot be pleased with the information which you give me. For the sake of my friend, I am grieved that you are determined to make her marriage with me the forfeiture of that provision which your bounty has hitherto supplied her.

Forgive me if I say that, in exacting this forfeiture, you will not be consistent with yourself. On her marriage with me, she will stand in much more need of your bounty than at present, and her merits, however slender you may deem them, will then be, at

least, not less than they now are.

If there were any methods by which I might be prevented from sharing in gifts bestowed upon my wife, I would eagerly concur in them.

I fully believe that your motive in giving me this timely warning was a generous one. Yet, in justice to myself and your daughter, I must observe that the warning was superfluous, since Jane never concealed from me the true state of her affairs, and since I never imagined you would honour with your gifts a marriage contracted against your will.

Well do I know the influence of early indulgences. Your daughter is a strong example of that influence; nor will her union with me, if by that union she forfeit your favour, be any thing more than a choice among evils all of which are heavy.

My own education and experience sufficiently testify the importance of riches, and I should be the last to despise or depreciate their value. Still, much as habit has endeared to me the goods of fortune, I am far from setting them above all other goods.

You offer me madam, a large alms. Valuable to me as that sum is, and eagerly as I would accept it in any other circumstances, yet at present I must, however reluctantly, decline it. A voyage to Europe and such a sum, if your daughter's happiness were not in question, would be the utmost bound of my wishes.

Shall I be able to compensate her? you ask.

No, indeed, madam; I am far from deeming myself qualified to compensate her for the loss of property, reputation, and friends. I aspire to nothing but to console her under that loss, and to husband as frugally as I can those few meagre remnants of happiness which shall be left to us.

I have seen your late letter to her. I should be less than man if I were not greatly grieved at the contents; yet, madam, I am not cast down below the hope of convincing you that the charge made against your daughter is false. You could not

do otherwise than believe it. It is for us to show you by what means you, and probably Talbot himself, have been deceived.

To suffer your charge to pass for a moment uncontradicted would be unjust not more to ourselves than to you. The mere denial will not and ought not to change your opinion. It may even tend to raise higher the acrimony of your aversion to me. It must ever be irksome to a generous spirit to deny, without the power of disproving; but a tacit admission of the charge would be unworthy of those who know themselves innocent.

Beseeching your favourable thoughts, and grateful for the good which, but for the interference of higher duties, your heart would prompt you to give and mine would not scruple to accept, I am, &c.

HENRY COLDEN.

Letter XXIV

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Nov. 2.

Ah, my friend, how mortifying are those proofs of thy excellence? How deep is that debasement into which I am sunk, when I compare myself with thee!

It cannot be want of love that makes thee so easily give me up. My feeble and jealous heart is ever prone to suspect; yet I ought at length to be above these ungenerous surmises.

My own demerits, my fickleness, my precipitation, are so great, and so unlike thy inflexible spirit, that I am ever ready to impute to thee that contempt for me which I know I so richly deserve. I am astonished that so poor a thing as I am, thus continually betraying her weakness, should retain thy affection; yet at any proof of coldness or indifference in thee do I grow impatient, melancholy; a strange mixture

of upbraiding for myself, and resentment for thee, occupies my feelings.

I have read thy letter. I shuddered when I painted to myself thy unhappiness on receiving tidings of my resolution to join my mother. I felt that thy reluctance to part with me would form the strongest obstacle to going; and yet, being convinced that I must go, I wanted thee to counterfeit indifference, to feign compliance.

And such a wayward heart is mine that, now these assurances of thy compliance have come to hand, I am not satisfied! The poor contriver wished to find in thee an affectation of indifference. Her humanity would be satisfied with that appearance; but her pride demanded that it should be no more than a veil, behind which the inconsolable, the bleeding heart should be distinctly seen.

You are too much in earnest in your equanimity. You study my exclusive happiness with too unimpassioned a soul. You are pleased when I am pleased; but not, it seems, the more so from any relation which my pleasure bears to you: no matter what it is that pleases me, so I am but pleased, you are content.

I don't like this oblivion of self. I want to be essential to your happiness. I want to act with a view to your interests and wishes,--these wishes requiring my love and my company for your own sake.

But I have got into a maze again,--puzzling myself with intricate distinctions. I can't be satisfied with telling you that I am not well, but I must be inspecting with these careful eyes into causes, and labouring to tell you of what nature my malady is.

It has always been so. I have always found an unaccountable pleasure in dissecting, as it were, my heart; uncovering, one by one, its many folds, and laying it before you, as a country is shown in a map. This voluble tongue and this prompt, pen! what volumes have I talked to you on that bewitching theme,--myself!

And yet, loquacious as I am, I never interrupted you when you were talking. It was always such a favour when these rigid fibres of yours relaxed; and yet I praise myself for more forbearance than belongs to me. The little impertinent has often

stopped your mouth,--at times too when your talk charmed her most; but then it was not with words.

But have I not said this a score of times before? and why do I indulge this prate now?

To say truth, I am perplexed and unhappy. Your letter has made me so. My heart flutters too much to allow me to attend to the subject of your letter. I follow this rambling leader merely to escape from more arduous paths, and I send you this scribble because I must write to you. Adieu.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XXV

To the Same

Nov. 3.

What is it, my friend, that makes thy influence over me so absolute? No resolution of mine can stand against your remonstrances. A single word, a look, approving or condemning, transforms me into a new creature. The dread of having offended you gives me the most pungent distress. Your "well done" lifts me above all reproach. It is only when you are distant, when your verdict is uncertain, that I shrink from contumely,--that the scorn of the world, though unmerited, is a load too heavy for my strength.

Methinks I should be a strange creature if left to myself. A very different creature, doubtless, I should have been, if placed under any other guidance. So easily swayed am I by one that is lord of my affections. No will, no reason, have I of my own.

Such sudden and total transitions! In solitude I ruminate and form my schemes. They seem to me unalterable: yet a word from you scatters all my laboured edifices, and I look back upon my former state of mind as on something that passed when I

was a lunatic or dreaming.

It is but a day since I determined to part with you,--since a thousand tormenting images engrossed my imagination: yet now am I quite changed; I am bound to you by links stronger than ever. No, I will not part with you.

Yet how shall I excuse my non-compliance to my mother? I have told her that I would come to her, that I waited only for her directions as to the disposal of her property. What will be her disappointment when I tell her that I will not come!--when she finds me, in spite of her remonstrances, still faithful to my engagements to thee!

Is there no method of removing this aversion? of outrooting this deadly prejudice? And must I, in giving myself to thee, forfeit her affection?

And now--this dreadful charge! no wonder that her affectionate heart was sorely wounded by such seeming proofs of my wickedness.

I thought at first--shame upon my inconsistent character, my incurable blindness! I should never have doubted the truth of my first thoughts, if you had not helped me to a more candid conjecture. I was unjust enough to load him with the guilt of this plot against me, and imagined there was duty in forbearing to detect it.

Now, by thy means, do I judge otherwise. Yet how, my friend, shall I unravel this mystery? My heart is truly sad. How easily is my woman's courage lowered, and how prone am I to despond!

Lend me thy aid, thy helping hand, my beloved. Decide and act for me, and be my weakness fortified, my hope restored, by thee. Let me lose all separate feelings, all separate existence, and let me know no principle of action but the decision of your judgment, no motive or desire but to please, to gratify you.

Our marriage, you say, will facilitate reconcilement with my mother. Do you think so? Then let it take place, my dear Hal. Heaven permit that marriage may tend to reconcile! but, let it reconcile or not, if the wish be yours it shall occupy the chief

place in my heart. The time, the manner, be it yours to prescribe. My happiness, on that event, will surely want but little to complete it; and, if you bid me not despair of my mother's acquiescence, I will not despair.

I am to send your letter, after reading, to my mother, I suppose. I have read it, Hal, more than once. And for my sake thou declinest her offers! When you thus refuse no sacrifice on my account, shall I hesitate when it becomes my turn? Shall I ever want gratitude, thinkest thou? Shall I ever imagine that I have done enough to evince my gratitude?

But how do I forget thy present situation! Thy dying friend has scarcely occurred to me. Thy afflictions, thy fatigues, are absorbed in my own selfish cares.

I am very often on the brink of hating myself. So much thoughtlessness of others; such callousness to sorrows not my own: my hard heart has often reproached thee for sparing a sigh or a wish from me; that every gloom has not been dispelled by my presence, was treason, forsooth, against my majesty, and the murmurs that delighted love should breathe, to welcome thy return, were changed into half-vindictive reluctance,--not quite a frown,--and upbraidings, in which tenderness was almost turned out of door by anger.

In the present case, for instance, I have scarcely thought of thy dying friend once. How much thy disquiets would be augmented by the letters which I sent thee, never entered my thoughts. To hide our sorrows from those who love us seems to be no more than generous. Yet I never hid any thing from thee. All was uttered that was felt. I considered not attending circumstances. The bird, as soon as it was scared, flew into the bosom that was nearest, and, merely occupied with dangers of its own, was satisfied to find a refuge there.

And yet--See now, Vanity, the cunning advocate, entering with his And yet. Would I listen to him, what a world of palliations and apologies would he furnish! How would he remind me of cases in which my sympathy was always awakened with

attention! How often--But I will not listen to the flatterer.

And, now I think of it, Hal, you differ from me very much in that respect. Every mournful secret must be wrung from you. You hoard up all your evil thoughts, and brood over them alone. Nothing but earnest importunity ever got from you any of your griefs.

Now, this is cruel to yourself and unjust to me. It is denying my claim to confidence. It is holding back from me a part of yourself. It is setting light by my sympathy.

And yet--the prater Vanity once more, you see: but I will let him speak out this time. Here his apology is yours, and myself am only flattered indirectly.

And yet, when I have extorted from you any secret sorrow, you have afterwards acknowledged that the disclosure was of use:--that my sympathizing love was grateful to you, and my counsel of some value; that you drew from my conduct on those occasions new proofs of my strength of mind, and of my right--a right which my affection for you gave me--to share with you all your thoughts.

Yet, on the next occasion that offers, you are sure to relapse into your habitual taciturnity, and my labours to subdue it are again to be repeated. I have sometimes been tempted to retaliate, and convince you, by the effects of my concealments upon you, of the error of your own scheme.

But I never could persist in silence for five minutes together. Shut up as the temple of my heart is to the rest of mankind, all its doors fly open of their own accord when you approach.

Now am I got into my usual strain; in which I could persevere forever.--No wonder it charms me so much, since, while thus pursuing it, I lose all my cares in a sweet oblivion; but I must stop at last, and recall my thoughts to a less welcome subject.

Painful as it is, I must write to my mother. I will do it now, and send you my letter. I will endeavour, hereafter, to keep alive a salutary distrust of myself, and do nothing without your approbation and direction. Such submission becomes thy

JANE.

Letter XXVI

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, November 4.

I tremble thus to approach my honoured mother once more, since I cannot bring into her presence the heart that she wishes to find. Instead of acknowledgment of faults, and penitence suitable to their heinous nature, I must bring with me a bosom free from self-reproach, and a confidence, which innocence only can give, that I shall be some time able to disprove the charge brought against me.

Ah, my mother! could such guilt as this ever stain a heart fashioned by your tenderest care? Did it never occur to you that possibly some mistake might have misled the witness against me?

The letter which you sent me is partly mine. All that is honest and laudable is mine, but that which confesses dishonour has been added by another hand. By whom my handwriting was counterfeited, and for what end, I know not. I cannot name any one who deserves to be suspected.

I might proceed to explain the circumstances attending the writing and the loss of this letter, so fatal to me; but I forbear to attempt to justify myself by means which, I know beforehand, will effect nothing, unless it be to aggravate, in your eyes, my imaginary guilt.

If it were possible for you to suspend your judgment; if the most open, and earnest, and positive averments of my innocence could induce you, not to reverse, but merely to postpone, your sentence, you would afford me unspeakable happiness.

You tell me that the loss of your present bounty will be the consequence of my marriage. My claims on you are long ago at an end. Indeed, I never had any claims.

Your treatment of me has flown from your unconstrained benevolence. For what you have given, for the tenderness which you continually bestowed on me, you have received only disappointment and affliction.

For all your favours I seem to you ungrateful; yet long after that conduct was known which, to you, proves my unworthiness, your protection has continued, and you are so good as to assure me that it shall not be withdrawn as long as I have no protector but you.

Dear as my education has made the indulgences of competence to me, I hope I shall relinquish them without a sigh. Had you done nothing more than screen my infancy and youth from hardship and poverty, than supply the mere needs of nature, my debt to you could never be paid.

But how much more than this have you done for me! You have given me, by your instructions and example, an understanding and a heart. You have taught me to value a fair fame beyond every thing but the peace of virtue; you have made me capable of a generous affection for a benefactor equal to yourself; capable of acting so as at once to deserve and to lose your esteem; and enabled me to relinquish cheerfully those comforts and luxuries which cannot be retained but at the price of my integrity.

I look forward to poverty without dismay. Perhaps I make light of its evils because I have never tried them. I am indeed a weak and undiscerning creature. Yet nothing but experience will correct my error, if it be an error.

So sanguine am I that I even cherish the belief that the privation of much of that ease which I have hitherto enjoyed will strengthen my mind, and somewhat qualify me for enduring those evils which I cannot expect always to escape.

You know, my mother, that the loss of my present provision will not leave me destitute. If it did, I know your generosity too well to imagine that you would withdraw from me all the means of support.

Indeed, my own fund, slender as it is in comparison with what your bounty supplies me, is adequate to all my personal wants: I am sure it would prove so on the trial. So that I part with your gifts with less reluctance, though with no diminution of my gratitude.

If I could bring to you my faith unbroken, and were allowed to present to you my friend, I would instantly fly to your presence; but that is a felicity too great for my hope. The alternative, however painful, must be adopted by

Your ever-grateful

JANE.

Letter XXVII

To Mrs. Talbot

Baltimore, November 5.

I highly approve of your letter. It far exceeded the expectations I had formed of you. You are indeed a surprising creature.

One cannot fail to be astonished at the differences of human characters; at the opposite principles by which the judgments of men are influenced.

Experience, however, is the antidote of wonder. There was a time when I should have reflected on the sentiments of your mother with a firm belief that no human being could be practically influenced by them.

She offers, and surely with sincerity, to divide her large property with you; to give away half her estate during her own life, and while, indeed, she is yet in her prime: and to whom give it? To one who has no natural relation to her; who is merely an adopted child; who has acted for several years in direct repugnance to her will, in a manner she regards as not only indiscreet, but flagrantly criminal. Whom one guilty act has (so it must appear to your mamma) involved in a continued series of

falsehoods and frauds.

She offers this immense gift to you, on no condition but a mere verbal promise to break off intercourse with the man you love? and with whom you have been actually criminal.

She seems not aware how easily promises are made that are not designed to be performed; how absurd it would be to rely upon your integrity in this respect, when you have shown yourself (so it must appear to her) grossly defective in others of infinitely greater moment. How easily might a heart like yours be persuaded to recall its promises, or violate this condition, as soon as the performance of her contract has made you independent of her and of the world!

You promise--it is done in half a dozen syllables--that you will see the hated Colden no more. All that you promise, you intend. To-morrow she enriches you with half her fortune. Next day the seducer comes, and may surely expect to prevail on you to forget this promise, since he has conquered your firmness in a case of unspeakably greater importance.

This offer of hers surely indicates not only love for you, but reverence for your good faith inconsistent with the horrid imputation she has urged against you.

As to me, what a portrait does her letter exhibit! And yet this scoffer at the obligation of a promise is offered four or five thousand dollars on condition that he plights his word to embark for England and to give up all his hopes of you.

Villain as he is; a villain not by habit or by passion, but by principle; a cool-blooded, systematic villain; yet she will give him affluence and the means of depraving thousands by his example and his rhetoric, on condition that he refuses to marry the woman whom he has made an adulteress; who has imbibed, from the contagion of his discourse, all the practical and speculative turpitude which he has to impart.

This conduct might be considered only as proving her aversion to me. So strong is it as to impel her to indiscreet and self-destructive expedients; and so I should likewise

reason if these very expedients did not argue a confidence in my integrity somewhat inconsistent with the censure passed on my morals.

After all, is there not reason to question the sincerity of her hatred? Is not thy mother a dissembler, Jane? Does she really credit the charge she makes against thee? Does she really suppose me that insane philosopher which her letter describes?

Yet this is only leaping from a ditch into a quicksand. It is quite as hard to account for her dissimulation as for her sincerity. Why should she pretend to suspect you of so black a deed, or me of such abominable tenets?

And yet, an observer might say, it is one thing to promise and another to perform, in her case as well as in ours. She tells us what she will do, provided we enter into such engagements; but, if we should embrace her offers, is it certain that she would not hesitate, repent, and retract?

Passion may dictate large and vehement offers upon paper, which deliberating prudence would never allow to be literally adhered to.

Besides, may not these magnificent proposals be dictated by a knowledge of our characters, which assured her that they would never be accepted? But, with this belief, why should the offers be made?

The answer is easy. These offers, by the kindness and respect for us which they manifest, engage our esteem and gratitude, and, by their magnitude, show how deeply she abhors this connection, and hence dispose us to do that, for pity's sake, which mere lucre would never recommend.

And here is a string of guesses to amuse thee, Jane. Their truth or falsehood is of little moment to us, since these offers ought not to influence our conduct.

One thing is sure; that is, thy mother's aversion to me. And yet I ought not to blame her. That I am an atheist in morals, the seducer of her daughter, she fully believes; and these are surely sufficient objections to me. Would she be a discerning friend or virtuous mother if she did not, with this belief, remonstrate against your alliance

with one so wicked?

The fault lies not with her. With whom, then, does it lie? Or, what only is important, where is the remedy? Expostulation and remonstrance will avail nothing. I cannot be a hypocrite: I cannot dissemble that I have once been criminal, and that I am, at present, conscious of a thousand weaknesses and self-distrusts. There is but one meagre and equivocal merit that belongs to me. I stick to the truth; yet this is a virtue of late growth. It has not yet acquired firmness to resist the undermining waves of habit, or to be motionless amidst the hurricane of passions.

You offer me yourself. I love you. Shall I not then accept your offer? Shall my high conception of your merits, and my extreme contempt and distrust of myself, hinder me from receiving so precious a boon? Shall I not make happy by being happy? Since you value me so much beyond my merits; since my faults, though fully disclosed to you, do not abate your esteem, do not change your views in my favour, shall I withhold my hand?

I am not obdurate. I am not ungrateful. With you I never was a hypocrite. With the rest of the world I have ceased to be so. If I look forward without confidence, I look back with humiliation and remorse. I have always wished to be good, but, till I knew you, I despaired of ever being so, and even now my hopes are perpetually drooping.

I sometimes question, especially since your actual condition is known, whether I should accept your offered hand; but mistake me not, my beloved creature. My distrust does not arise from any doubts of my own constancy. That I shall grow indifferent or forgetful or ungrateful to you, can never be.

All my doubts are connected with you. Can I compensate you for those losses which will follow your marriage?--the loss of your mother's affection,--the exchange of all that splendour and abundance you have hitherto enjoyed for obscurity and indigence?

You say I can. The image of myself in my own mind is a sorry compound of hateful

or despicable qualities. I am even out of humour with my person, my face. So absurd am I in my estimates of merit, that my homely features and my scanty form had their part in restraining me from aspiring to one supreme in loveliness, and in causing the surprise that followed the discovery of your passion.

In your eyes, however, this mind and this person are venerable and attractive. My affection, my company, are chief goods with you. The possession of all other goods cannot save you from misery, if this be wanting. The loss of all others will not bereave you of happiness if this be possessed.

Fain would I believe you. You decide but reasonably. Fortune's goods ought not to be so highly prized as the reason of many prizes them, and as my habits, in spite of reason's dissent and remonstrances, compel me to prize them. They contribute less to your happiness, and that industry and frugality which supplies their place, you look upon without disgust; with even some degree of satisfaction.

Not so I: I cannot labour for bread; I cannot work to live. In that respect I have no parallel. The world does not contain my likeness. My very nature unfits me for any profitable business. My dependence must ever be on others or on fortune.

As to the influence of some stronger motive to industry than has yet occurred, I am without hope. There can be no stronger ones to a generous mind, than have long been urgent with me: being proof against these, none will ever conquer my reluctance.

I am not indolent, but my activity is vague, profitless, capricious. No lucrative or noble purpose impels me. I aim at nothing but selfish gratification. I have no relish, indeed, for sensual indulgences. It is the intellectual taste that calls for such banquets as imagination and science can furnish; but, though less sordid than the epicure, the voluptuary, or the sportsman, the principle that governs them and me is the same; equally limited to self; equally void of any basis in morals or religion.

Should you give yourself to me, and rely upon my labour for shelter and food,

deplorable and complete would be your disappointment. I know myself too well to trust myself with such an office. My love for you would not strengthen my heart or my hands. No; it would only sink me with more speed into despair. Quickly, and by some fatal deed, should I abandon you, my children and the world.

Possibly I err. Possibly I underrate my strength of mind and the influence of habit, which makes easy to us every path; but I will not trust to the possible.

Hence it is that, if by marriage you should become wholly dependent on me, it could never take place. Some freak of fortune may indeed place me above want, but my own efforts never will. Indeed, in this forbearance, in this self-denial, there is no merit. While admitted to the privileges of a betrothed man, your company, your confidence, every warrantable proof of love mine, I may surely dispense with the privileges of wedlock. Secretly repine I might; occasionally I might murmur. But my days would glide along with fewer obstacles, at least, than if I were that infirm and disconsolate wretch, your husband.

But this unhappy alternative is not ours. Thou hast something which thy mother cannot take away; sufficient for thy maintenance, thy frugal support. Meaner and more limited indeed than thy present and former affluence; such as I, of my own motion, would never reduce thee to; such as I can object to only on thy own account.

How has the night run away! My friend's sister arrived here yesterday. They joined in beseeching me to go to a separate chamber and strive for some refreshment. I have slept a couple of hours, and that has sufficed. My mind, on waking, was thronged with so many images connected with my Jane, that I started up at last and betook myself to the pen.

Yet how versatile and fleeting is thought! In this long letter I have not put down one thing that I intended. I meant not to repeat what has been so often said before, and especially I meant not to revolve, if I could help it, any gloomy ideas.

Thy letters gave me exquisite pleasure. They displayed all thy charming self to my

view. I pressed every precious line to my lips with nearly as much rapture as I would have done the prattler herself, had she been talking to me all this tenderness instead of writing it.

I took up the pen that I might tell thee my thanks, yet rambled almost instantly into mournful repetitions. I have half a mind to burn the scribble, but I cannot write more just now, and this will show you, at least, that I am not unmindful of you. Adieu.

COLDEN.

Letter XXVIII

To Mrs. Talbot

Baltimore, November 6.

Let me see! this is the beginning of November. Yes; it was just a twelvemonth ago that I was sitting, at this silent hour, at a country-fire just like this. My elbow then as now was leaning on a table, supplied with books and writing-tools.

"What shall I do," thought I, "then, to pass away the time till ten? Can't think of going to bed till that hour, and if I sit here, idly basking in the beams of this cheerful blaze, I shall fall into a listless, uneasy doze, that, without refreshing me, as sleep would do, will unfit me for sleep.

"Shall I read? Nothing here that is new. Enough that is of value, if I could but make myself inquisitive; treasures which, in a curious mood, I would eagerly rifle; but now the tedious page only adds new weight to my eyelids.

"Shall I write? What? to whom? there are Sam and Tom, and brother Dick, and sister Sue: they all have epistolary claims upon me still unsatisfied. Twenty letters that I ought to answer. Come, let me briskly set about the task----

"Not now; some other time. To-morrow. What can I write about? Haven't two ideas that hang together intelligibly. 'Twill be commonplace trite stuff. Besides, writing

always plants a thorn in my breast.

"Let me try my hand at a reverie; a meditation,--on that hearth-brush. Hair--what sort of hair? of a hog; and the wooden handle--of poplar or cedar or white oak. At one time a troop of swine munching mast in a grove of oaks, transformed by those magicians, carpenters and butchers, into hearth-brushes. A whimsical metamorphosis, upon my faith!

"Pish! what stupid musing! I see I must betake myself to bed at last, and throw away upon oblivion one more hour than is common."

So it once was. But how is it now? no wavering and deliberating what I shall do,--to lash the drowsy moments into speed. In my haste to set the table and its gear in order for scribble, I overturn the inkhorn, spill the ink, and stain the floor.

The damage is easily repaired, and I sit down, with unspeakable alacrity, to a business that tires my muscles, sets a gnawer at work upon my lungs, fatigues my brain, and leaves me listless and spiritless.

How you have made yourself so absolute a mistress of the goose-quill, I can't imagine; how you can maintain the writing posture and pursue the writing movement for ten hours together, without benumbed brain or aching fingers, is beyond my comprehension.

But you see what zeal will do for me. It has enabled me to keep drowsiness, fatigue, and languor at bay during a long night. Converse with thee, heavenly maid, is an antidote even to sleep, the most general and inveterate of all maladies.

By-and-by I shall have as voluble a pen as thy own. And yet to that, my crazy constitution says, Nay. 'Twill never be to me other than an irksome, ache-producing implement. It need give pleasure to others, not a little, to compensate for the pain it gives myself.

But this, thou'lt say, is beside the purpose. It is; and I will lay aside the quill a moment to consider. I left off my last letter, with a head full of affecting images,

which I have waited impatiently for the present opportunity of putting upon paper. Adieu, then, for a moment, says thy

COLDEN.

Letter XXIX

To the Same

10 o'clock at night.

Now let us take a view of what is to come. Too often I endeavour to escape from foresight when it presents to me nothing but evils, but now I must, for thy sake, be less a coward.

In six weeks Jane becomes mine. Till then, thy mother will not cast thee out of her protection. And will she then? will she not allow of thy continuance in thy present dwelling? and, though so much displeased as to refuse thee her countenance and correspondence, will she indeed turn thee out of doors? She threatens it, we see; but I suspect it will never be more than a threat, employed, perhaps, only to intimidate and deter; not designed to be enforced. Or, if made in earnest, yet, when the irrevocable deed is done, will she not hesitate to inflict the penalty? Will not her ancient affection; thy humility, thy sorrow, thy merits,--such as, in spite of this instance of contumacy, she cannot deny thee,--will not these effectually plead for thee?

More than ever will she see that thou needest her bounty; and, since she cannot recall what is past, will she not relent and be willing to lessen the irremediable evil all she can?

There is one difficulty that I know not how to surmount. Giving to the wife will be only giving to the husband. Shall one whom she so much abhors be luxuriously supplied from her bounty?

The wedded pair must live together, she will think; and shall this hated encroacher find refuge from beggary and vileness under her roof,--be lodged and banqueted at her expense? That her indignant heart will never suffer.

Would to Heaven she would think of me with less abhorrence! I wish for treatment conformable to her assumed relation to thee, for all our sakes. As to me, I have no pride; no punctilio, that will stand in the way of reconciliation. At least there is no deliberate and steadfast sentiment of that kind. When I reason the matter with myself, I perceive a sort of claim to arise from my poverty and relation to thee on the one hand, and, on the other, from thy merit, thy affinity to her, and her capacity to benefit. Yet I will never supplicate--not meanly supplicate--for an alms. I will not live, nor must thou, when thou art mine, in her house. Whatever she will give thee, money, or furniture, or clothes, receive it promptly and with gratitude; but let thy home be thy own. For lodging and food be thou the payer.

And where shall be thy home? You love the comforts, the ease, the independence of a household. Your own pittance will not suffice for this. All these you must relinquish for my sake. You must go into a family of strangers. You must hire a chamber, and a plate of such food as is going. You must learn to bear the humours and accommodate yourself to the habits of your inmates.

Some frugal family and humble dwelling must content thee. A low roof, a narrow chamber, and an obscure avenue, the reverse of all the specious, glossy, and abundant that surround thee now, will be thy portion,--all that thou must look for as my wife. And how will this do, Jane? Is not the price too great?

And my company will not solace thee under these inconveniences. I must not live with thee; only an occasional visitor; one among a half-dozen at a common fire; with witnesses of all we say. Thy pittance will do no more than support thyself. I must house myself and feed elsewhere. Where, I know not. That will depend upon the species of employment I shall be obliged to pursue for my subsistence. Scanty and

irksome it will be, at best.

Once a day I may see thee. Most of my evenings may possibly be devoted to thy company. A soul harassed by unwelcome toil, eyes dim with straining at tiresome or painful objects, shall I bring to thee. If now and then we are alone, how can I contribute to thy entertainment? The day's task will furnish me with nothing new. Instead of alleviating, by my cheerful talk, thy vexations and discomforts, I shall demand consolation from thee.

And yet imperious necessity may bereave us even of that joy. I may be obliged to encounter the perils of the seas once more. Three-fourths of the year, the ocean may divide us, thou in solitude, the while, pondering on the dangers to which I may be exposed, and I, a prey to discontent, and tempted in some evil hour to forget thee, myself, and the world.

How my heart sinks at this prospect! Does not thine, Jane? Dost thou not fear to take such a wretched chance with me? I that know myself, my own imbecility,--I ought surely to rescue thee from such a fate, by giving thee up.

I can write no more just now. I wonder how I fell into this doleful strain. It was silly in me to indulge it. These images are not my customary inmates. Yet, now that they occur to me, they seem but rational and just. I want, methinks, to know how they appear to thee.

Adieu.

HENRY COLDEN.

Letter XXX

To the same

Wilmington, November 7.

I have purposely avoided dwelling on the incidents that are passing here. They

engross my thoughts at all times but those devoted to the pen, and to write to thee is one expedient for loosening their hold.

An expedient not always successful. My mind wanders, in spite of me, from my own concerns and from thine, to the sick-bed of my friend. A reverie, painful and confused, invades me now and then; my pen stops, and I am obliged to exert myself anew to shake off the spell.

Till now, I knew not how much I loved this young man. Strange beings we are! Separated as we have been for many a year, estranged as much by difference of sentiments as local distance, his image visiting my memory not once a month, and then a transitory, momentary visit; had he died a year ago, and I not known it, the stream of my thoughts would not have been ruffled by a single impediment. Yet, now that I stand over him and witness his decay----

Many affecting conversations we have had. I cannot repeat them now. After he is gone, I will put them all upon paper and muse upon them often.

His closing hour is serene. His piety now stands him in some stead. In calling me hither, he tells me that he designed not his own gratification, but my good. He wished to urge upon me the truths of religion, at a time when his own conduct might visibly attest their value. By their influence in making that gloomy path which leads to the grave joyous and lightsome, he wishes me to judge of their excellence.

His pains are incessant and sharp. He can seldom articulate without an effort that increases his pangs; yet he talks much in cogent terms, and with accurate conceptions, and, in all he says, evinces a pathetic earnestness for my conviction.

I listen to him with a heart as unbiassed as I can prevail on it to be; as free, I mean, from its customary bias; for I strive to call up feelings and ideas similar to his. I know how pure to him would be the satisfaction of leaving the world with the belief of a thorough change in me.

I argue not with him. I say nothing but to persuade him that I am far from being that

contumacious enemy to his faith which he is prone to imagine me to be.

Thy mother's letter has called up more vividly than usual our ancient correspondence, and the effects of that disclosure. Yet I have not mentioned the subject to him. I never mentioned it. I could not trust myself to mention it. There was no need. The letters were written by me. I did not charge him to secrecy, and, if I had, he would not have been bound to compliance. It was his duty to make that use of them which tended to prevent mischief,--which appeared to him to have that tendency; and this he has done. His design, I have no doubt, was benevolent and just.

He saw not all the consequences that have followed, 'tis true; but that ignorance would justify him, even if these consequences were unpleasing to him; but they would not have displeased, had they been foreseen. They would only have made his efforts more vigorous, his disclosures more explicit.

His conduct, indeed, on that occasion, as far as we know it, seems irregular and injudicious. To lay before a stranger private letters from his friend, in which opinions were avowed and defended that he knew would render the writer detestable to her that read.

He imagined himself justified in imputing to me atrocious and infamous errors. He was grieved for my debasement, and endeavoured, by his utmost zeal and eloquence, to rectify these errors. This was generous and just: but needed he to proclaim these errors and blazon this infamy?

Yet ought I to wish to pass upon the world for other than I am? Can I value that respect which is founded in ignorance? Can I be satisfied with caresses from those who, if they knew me fully, would execrate and avoid me?

For past faults and rectified errors, are not remorse and amendment adequate atonements? If any one despise me for what I was, let me not shrink from the penalty. Let me not find pleasure in the praise of those whose approbation is

founded on ignorance of what I am. It is unjust to demand, it is sordid to retain, praise that is not merited either by our present conduct or our past. Why have I declined such praise? Because I value it not.

Thus have I endeavoured to think in relation to Thomson. My endeavour has succeeded. My heart entirely acquits him. It even applauds him for his noble sincerity.

Yet I could never write to him or talk to him on this subject. My tongue, my pen, will be sure to falter. I know that he will boldly justify his conduct, and I feel that he ought to justify; yet the attempt to justify would awaken--indignation, selfishness. In spite of the suggestions of my better reason, I know we should quarrel.

We should not quarrel now, if the topic were mentioned. Of indignation against him, even for a real fault, much less for an imaginary one, I am, at this time, not capable; but it would be useless to mention it. There is nothing to explain; no misapprehensions to remove, no doubts to clear up. All that he did, I, in the same case, ought to have done.

But I told you I wished not to fill my letters with the melancholy scene before me. This is a respite, a solace to me; and thus, and in reading thy letters, I employ all my spare moments.

Write to me, my love. Daily, hourly, and cheerfully, if possible. Borrow not; be not thy letters tinged with the melancholy hue of this.

Write speedily and much, if thou lovest thy

COLDEN.

Letter XXXI

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Nov. 9.

What do you mean, Hal, by such a strain as this? I wanted no additional causes of disquiet. Yet you tell me to write cheerfully. I would have written cheerfully, if these letters, so full of dark forebodings and rueful prognostics, had not come to damp my spirits.

And is the destiny that awaits us so very mournful? Is thy wife necessarily to lose so many comforts and incur so many mortifications? Are my funds so small, that they will not secure to me the privilege of a separate apartment, in which I may pass my time with whom and in what manner I please?

Must I huddle, with a dozen squalling children and their notably-noisy or sluttishly-indolent dam, round a dirty hearth and meagre winter's fire? Must sooty rafters, a sorry truckle-bed, and a mud-encumbered alley, be my nuptial lot?

Out upon thee, thou egregious painter! Well for thee thou art not within my arm's length. I should certainly bestow upon thee a hearty--kiss or two. My blundering pen! I recall the word. I meant cuff; but my saucy pen, pretending to know more of my mind than I did myself, turned (as its mistress, mayhap, would have done, hadst thou been near me, indeed) her cuff into a kiss.

What possessed thee, my beloved, to predict so ruefully? A very good beginning too! more vivacity than common! But I hardly had time to greet the sunny radiance--tis a long time since my cell was gilded by so sweet a beam--when a black usurping mist stole it away, and all was dreary as it is wont to be.

Perhaps thy being in a house of mourning may account for it. Fitful and versatile I know thee to be; changeable with scene and circumstance. Thy views are just what any eloquent companion pleases to make them. She thou lovest is thy deity; her lips thy oracle. And hence my cheerful omens of the future; the confidence I have in the wholesome efficacy of my government. I, that have the will to make thee happy, have the power too. I know I have; and hence my promptitude to give away all for thy sake; to give myself a wife's title to thy company, a conjugal share in thy

concerns, and claim to reign over thee.

Make haste, and atone, by the future brightness of thy epistolary emanations, for the pitchy cloud that overspreads these sick man's dreams.

How must thou have rummaged the cupboard of thy fancy for musty scraps and flinty crusts to feed thy spleen withal,--inattentive to the dainties which a blue-eyed Hebe had culled in the garden of Hope, and had poured from out her basket into thy ungrateful lap.

While thou wast mumbling these refractory and unsavoury bits, I was banqueting on the rosy and delicious products of that Eden which love, when not scared away by evil omens, is always sure (the poet says) to plant around us. I have tasted nectarines of her raising, and I find her, let me tell thee, an admirable horticulturist.

Thou art so far off, there is no sending thee a basketful, or I would do it. They would wilt and wither ere they reached thee; the atmosphere thou breathest would strike a deadly worm into their hearts before thou couldst get them to thy lips.

But to drop the basket and the bough, and take up a plain meaning:--I will tell thee how I was employed when thy letter came; but first I must go back a little.

In the autumn of ninety-seven, and when death had spent his shafts in my own family, I went to see how a family fared, the father and husband of which kept a shop in Front Street, where every thing a lady wanted was sold, and where I had always been served with great despatch and affability.

Being one day (I am going to tell you how our acquaintance began)--being one day detained in the shop by a shower, I was requested to walk into the parlour. I chatted ten minutes with the good woman of the house, and found in her so much gentleness and good sense, that afterwards my shopping visits were always, in part, social ones. My business being finished at the counter, I usually went back, and found on every interview new cause for esteeming the family. The treatment I met with was always cordial and frank; and, though our meetings were thus merely casual, we seemed, in

a short time, to have grown into a perfect knowledge of each other.

This was in the summer you left us, and, the malady breaking out a few months after, and all shopping being at an end, and alarm and grief taking early possession of my heart, I thought but seldom of the Hennings. A few weeks after death had bereaved me of my friend, I called these, and others whose welfare was dear to me, to my remembrance, and determined to pay them a visit and discover how it fared with them. I hoped they had left the city; yet Mrs. Henning had told me that her husband, who was a devout man, held it criminal to fly on such occasions, and that she, having passed safely through the pestilence of former years, had no apprehensions from staying.

Their house was inhabited, but I found the good woman in great affliction. Her husband had lately died, after a tedious illness, and her distress was augmented by the solitude in which the flight of all her neighbours and acquaintances had left her. A friendly visit could at no time have been so acceptable to her, and my sympathy was not more needed to console her than my counsel to assist her in the new state of her affairs.

Laying aside ceremony, I inquired freely into her condition, and offered her my poor services. She made me fully acquainted with her circumstances, and I was highly pleased at finding them so good. Her husband had always been industrious and thrifty, and his death left her enough to support her and her Sally in the way they wished.

Inquiring into their views and wishes, I found them limited to the privacy of a small but neat house in some cleanly and retired corner of the city. Their stock in trade I advised them to convert into money, and, placing it in some public fund, live upon its produce. Mrs. Henning knew nothing of the world. Though an excellent manager within-doors, any thing that might be called business was strange and arduous to her, and without my direct assistance she could do nothing.

Happily, at this time, just such a cheap and humble, but neat, new, and airy dwelling as my friend required, belonging to Mrs. Fielder, was vacant. You know the house. 'Tis that where the Frenchman Catineau lived. Is it not a charming abode?--at a distance from noise, with a green field opposite and a garden behind; of two stories; a couple of good rooms on each floor; with unspoiled water, and a kitchen, below the ground indeed, but light, wholesome, and warm.

Most fortunately, too, that incorrigible Creole had deserted it. He was scared away by the fever, and no other had put in a claim. I made haste to write to my mother, who, though angry with me on my own account, could not reject my application in favour of my good widow.

I even prevailed on her to set the rent forty dollars lower than she might have gotten from another, and to give a lease of it at that rate for five years. You can't imagine my satisfaction in completing this affair, and in seeing my good woman quietly settled in her new abode, with her daughter Sally and her servant Alice, who had come with her from Europe, and had lived with her the dear knows how long.

Mrs. Henning is no common woman, I assure you. Her temper is the sweetest in the world. Not cultivated or enlightened is her understanding, but naturally correct. Her life has always been spent under her own roof; and never saw I a scene of more quiet and order than her little homestead exhibits. Though humbly born, and perhaps meanly brought up, her parlour and chamber add to the purest cleanliness somewhat that approaches to elegance.

The mistress and the maid are nearly of the same age, and, though equally innocent and good-humoured, the former has more sedateness and reserve than the latter. She is devout in her way, which is Methodism, and acquires from this source nothing but new motives of charity to her neighbours and thankfulness to God.

Much--indeed, all--of these comforts she ascribes to me; yet her gratitude is not loquacious. It shows itself less in words than in the pleasure she manifests on my

visits; the confidence with which she treats me; laying before me all her plans and arrangements, and entreating my advice in every thing. Yet she has brought with her, from her native country, notions of her inferiority to the better-born and the better-educated but too soothing to my pride. Hence she is always diffident, and never makes advances to intimacy but when expressly invited and encouraged.

It was a good while before all her new arrangements were completed. When they were, I told her I would spend the day with her, for which she was extremely grateful. She sent me word as soon as she was ready to receive me, and I went.

Artless and unceremonious was the good woman in the midst of all her anxiety to please. Affectionate yet discreet in her behaviour to her Sally and her Alice, and of me as tenderly observant as possible.

She showed me all her rooms, from cellar to garret, and every thing I saw delighted me. Two neat beds in the front-room above belong to her and Sally. The back-room is decked in a more fanciful and costly manner.

"Why, this, my good friend," said I, on entering it, "is quite superb. Here is carpet and coverlet and curtains that might satisfy a prince: you are quite prodigal. And for whose accommodation is all this?"

"Oh, any lady that will favour me with a visit. It is a spare room, and the only one I have, and I thought I would launch out a little for once. One wishes to set the best they have before a guest,--though, indeed, I don't expect many to visit me; but it is some comfort to think one has it in one's power to lodge a friend, when it happens so, in a manner that may not discredit one's intentions. I have no relations in this country, and the only friend I have in the world, besides God, is you, madam. But still, it may sometimes happen, you know, that one may have occasion to entertain somebody. God be thanked, I have enough, and what little I have to spare I have no right to hoard up."

"But might you not accommodate a good quiet kind of body in this room, at so much

a year or week?"

"Why, ma'am, if you think that's best; but I thought one might indulge one's self in living one's own way. I have never been used to strangers, and always have had a small family. It would be a very new thing to me to have an inmate. I am afraid I should not please such a one. And then, ma'am, if this room's occupied, I have no decent place to put any accidental person in. It would go hard with me to be obliged to turn a good body away, that might be here on a visit, and might be caught by a rain or a snow storm."

"Very true; I did not think of that. And yet it seems a pity that so good a room should be unemployed, perhaps for a year together."

"So it does, ma'am; and I can't but say, if a proper person should offer, who wanted to be snug and quiet, I should have no great objection. One that could put up with our humble ways, and be satisfied with what I could do to make them comfortable. I think I should like such a one well enough."

"One," said I, "who would accept such accommodation as a favour. A single person, for example. A woman; a young woman. A stranger in the country, and friendless like yourself."

"Oh, very true, madam," said the good woman, with sparkling benignity; "I should have no objection in the world to such a one. I should like it of all things. And I should not mind to be hard with such a one. I should not stickle about terms. Pray, ma'am, do you know any such? If you do, and will advise me to take her, I would be very glad to do it."

Now, Hal, what thinkest thou? Cannot I light on such a young, single, slenderly-provided woman as this? One whose heart pants for just such a snug retreat as Mrs. Henning's roof would afford her?

This little chamber, set out with perfect neatness; looking out on a very pretty piece of verdure and a cleanly court-yard; with such a good couple to provide for her; with

her privacy unapproachable but at her own pleasure; her quiet undisturbed by a prater, a scolder, a bustler, or a whiner; no dirty children to offend the eye, or squalling ones to wound the ear; with admitted claims to the gratitude, confidence, and affection of her hostess: might not these suffice to make a lowly, unambitious maiden happy?

One who, like Mrs. Henning, had only one friend upon earth. Whom her former associates refused to commune with or look upon. Whose loneliness was uncheered, except by her own thoughts and her books,--perhaps now and then, at times when oceans did not sever her from him, by that one earthly friend.

Might she not afford him as many hours of her society as his engagements would allow him to claim? Might she not, as an extraordinary favour, admit him to partake with her the comforts of her own little fire, if winter it be, or, in summer-time, to join her at her chamber-window and pass away the starlight hour in the unwitnessed community of fond hearts?

Suppose, to obviate unwelcome surmises and too scrupulous objections, the girl makes herself a wife, but, because their poverty will not enable them to live together, the girl merely admits the chosen youth on the footing of a visitor?

Suppose her hours are not embittered by the feelings of dependence? She pays an ample compensation for her entertainment, and by her occasional company, her superior strength of mind and knowledge of the world's ways, she materially contributes to the happiness and safety of her hostess.

Suppose, having only one visitor, and he sometimes wanting in zeal and punctuality, much of her time is spent alone? Happily she is exempt from the humiliating necessity of working to live, and is not obliged to demand a share of the earnings of her husband. Her task, therefore, will be to find amusement. Can she want the means, thinkest thou?

The sweet quiet of her chamber, the wholesome airs from abroad, or the cheerful

blaze of her hearth, will invite her to mental exercise. Perhaps she has a taste for books, and, besides that pure delight which knowledge on its own account affords her, it possesses tenfold attractions in her eyes, by its tendency to heighten the esteem of him whom she lives to please.

Perhaps, rich as she is in books, she is an economist of pleasure, and tears herself away from them, to enjoy the vernal breezes, or the landscape of autumn, in a twilight ramble. Here she communes with bounteous nature, or lifts her soul in devotion to her God, to whose benignity she resigns herself as she used to do to the fond arms of that parent she has lost.

If these do not suffice to fill up her time, she may chance to reflect on the many ways in which she may be useful to herself. She may find delight in supplying her own wants; by maintaining cleanliness and order all about her; by making up her own dresses,--especially as she disdains to be outdone in taste and expertness at the needle by any female in the land.

By limiting in this way, and in every other which her judgment may recommend, her own expenses, she will be able to contribute somewhat to relieve the toils of her beloved. The pleasure will be hers of reflecting, not only that her love adds nothing to his fatigues and cares; not only that her tender solicitudes and seasonable counsel cherish his hopes and strengthen his courage, but that the employment of her hands makes his own separate subsistence an easier task. To work for herself will be no trivial gratification to her honest pride, but to work for her beloved will, indeed, be a cause of exultation.

Twenty things she may do for him which others must be paid for doing, not in caresses, but in money; and this service, though not small, is not perhaps the greatest she is able to perform. She is active and intelligent, perhaps, and may even aspire to the profits of some trade. What is it that makes one calling more lucrative than another? Not superior strength of shoulders or sleight of hand; not the greater

quantity of brute matter that is reduced into form or set into motion. No. The difference lies in the mental powers of the artist, and the direction accidentally given to these powers.

What should hinder a girl like this from growing rich by her diligence and ingenuity? She has, perhaps, acquired many arts with no view but her own amusement. Not a little did her mother pay to those who taught her to draw and to sing. May she not levy the same tributes upon others that were levied on her, and make a business of her sports?

There is, indeed, a calling that may divert her from the thoughts of mere lucre. She may talk and sing for another, and dedicate her best hours to a tutelage for which there is a more precious requital than money can give.

Dost not see her, Hal? I do,--as well as this gushing sensibility will let me,--rocking in her arms and half stifling with her kisses, or delighting with her lullaby, a precious little creature----

Why, my friend, do I hesitate? Do I not write for thy eye, and thine only? and what is there but pure and sacred in the anticipated transports of a mother?

The conscious heart might stifle its throbs in thy presence; but why not indulge them in thy absence, and tell thee its inmost breathings, not without a shame-confessing glow, yet not without drops of the truest delight that were ever shed?

Why, how now, Jane? whence all this interest in the scene thou portrayest? One would fancy that this happy outcast, this self-dependent wife, was no other than thyself.

A shrewd conjecture, truly. I suppose, Hal, thou wilt be fond enough to guess so, too. By what penalty shall I deter thee from so rash a thing? yet thou art not here--I say it to my sorrow-to suffer the penalty which I might choose to inflict.

I will not say what it is, lest the fear of it should keep thee away.

And, now that I have finished the history of Mrs. Henning and her boarder, I will bid thee--good-night.

Good----good-night, my love.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XXXI

[Editorial note: The observant reader will have noticed this is the second letter bearing the number XXXI. The original text contained two Letters XXXI, and we have chosen to let the letters retain their original numbers, rather than renumber them.]

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, November 11.

How shall I tell you the strange--strange incident? Every fibre of my frame still trembles. I have endeavoured, during the last hour, to gain tranquillity enough for writing, but without success. Yet I can forbear no longer: I must begin.

I had just closed my last to you, when somebody knocked. I heard footsteps below, as the girl ushered in the visitant, which were not quite unknown to me. The girl came up:--"A gentleman is waiting."

"A gentleman!" thought I. "An odd hour this" (it was past ten) "for any man but one to visit me. His business must be very urgent." So, indeed, he told the girl it was, for she knew me averse to company at any time, and I had withdrawn to my chamber for the night; but he would not be eluded. He must see me, he said, this night.

A tall and noble figure, in a foreign uniform, arose from the sofa at my entrance. The half-extinct lamp on the mantel could not conceal from me--my brother!

My surprise almost overpowered me. I should have sunk upon the floor, had he not stepped to me and sustained me in his arms.

"I see you are surprised, Jane," said he, in a tone not without affection in it. "You did not expect, I suppose, ever to see me again. It was a mere chance brought me to America. I shall stay here a moment, and then hie me back again. I could not pass through the city without a 'How d'ye' to the little girl for whom I have still some regard."

The violence of my emotions found relief in a flood of tears. He was not unmoved, but, embracing me with tenderness, he seated me by him on the sofa.

When I had leisure to survey his features, I found that time had rather improved his looks. They were less austere, less contemptuous, than they used to be: perhaps, indeed, it was only a momentary remission of his customary feelings.

To my rapid and half-coherent questions, he replied, "I landed--you need not know where. My commission requires secrecy, and you know I have personal reasons for wishing to pass through this city without notice. My business did not bring me farther southward than New London; but I heard your mother resided in New York, and could not leave the country without seeing you. I called on her yesterday; but she looked so grave and talked so obscurely about you, that I could not do less than come hither. She told me you were here. How have been affairs since I left you?"

I answered this question vaguely.

"Pray," (with much earnestness,) "are you married yet?"

The confusion with which I returned an answer to this did not escape him.

"I asked Mrs. Fielder the same question, and she talked as if it were a doubtful point. She could not tell, she said, with a rueful physiognomy. Very probable it might be so. I could not bring her to be more explicit. As I proposed to see you, she said, you were the fittest person to explain your own situation. This made me the more anxious to see you. Pray, Jane, how do matters stand between you and Mrs. Fielder? are you not on as good terms as formerly?"

I answered, that some difference had unhappily occurred between us, that I loved

and revered her as much as ever, and hoped that we should soon be mother and daughter again.

"But the cause?--the cause, Jane? Is a lover the bone of contention between you? That's the rock on which family harmony is sure to be wrecked. But tell me: what have you quarrelled about?"

How could I explain on such a subject, thus abruptly introduced to him? I told him it was equally painful and useless to dwell on my contentions with my mother, or on my own affairs. "Rather let me hear," said I, "how it fares with you; what fortunes you have met with in this long absence."

"Pretty well; pretty well. Many a jade's trick did Fortune play me before I left this spot, but ever since, it has been all smooth and bright with me. But this marriage--Art thou a wife or not? I heard, I think, some talk about a Talbot. What's become of him? They said you were engaged to him."

"It is long since the common destiny has ended all Talbot's engagements."

"Dead, is he? Well, a new aspirer, I suppose, has succeeded, and he is the bone of contention. Who's he?"

I could not bear that a subject of such deep concern to me should be discussed thus lightly, and therefore begged him to change the subject.

"Change the subject? With all my heart, if we can find any more important; but that's impossible. So we must even stick to this a little longer. Come; what's his parentage; fortune; age; character; profession? 'Tis not likely I shall find fault where Mrs. Fielder does. Young men and old women seldom hit upon the same choice in a husband; and, for my part, I am easily pleased."

"This is a subject, brother, on which it is impossible that we should think alike; nor is it necessary. Let us then talk of something in which we have a common concern; something that has a claim to interest you."

"What subject, girl, can have a stronger claim on my attention than the marriage of my sister? I am not so giddy and unprincipled as to be unconcerned on that head, So make no more ado, but tell your brother candidly what are your prospects."

After some hesitation,--"My real brother--one who had the tenderness becoming that relation--would certainly deserve my confidence. But----"

"But what? Come; never mince the matter, I scarcely been half a brother hitherto, I grant you of an enemy, perhaps, than friend; but no reason why I should continue hostile or indifferent. So tell me who the lad is, and what are his pretensions."

I endeavoured to draw him off to some other subject, but he would not be diverted from this. By dint of interrogatories, he at last extorted from me a few hints respecting you. Finding that you were without fortune or profession, and that my regard for you had forfeited all favour with my mother, the inquiry was obvious, how we meant to live. It was impossible to answer this question in any manner satisfactory to him. He has no notion of existence unconnected with luxury and splendour.

"Have you made any acquisitions," continued he, "since I saw you? Has any good old aunt left you another legacy?"--This was said with the utmost vivacity and self-possession. A strange being is my brother. Could he have forgotten by whom I was robbed of my former legacy?

"Come, come; I know thou art a romantic being,--one accustomed to feed on thoughts instead of pudding. Contentment and a cottage are roast beef and a palace to thee; but, take my word for it, this inamorata of thine will need a more substantial diet. By marrying him you will only saddle him with misery. So drop all thoughts of so silly a scheme; write him a 'good-by;' make up your little matters, and come along with me. I will take you to my country, introduce you to a new world, and bring to your feet hundreds of generous souls, the least of whom is richer, wiser, handsomer, than this tame-spirited, droning animal--what's his name? But no matter. I suppose I

know nothing of him."

I was rash enough to tell him your name and abode, but I treated his proposal as a jest. I quickly found that he was serious. He soon became extremely urgent; recounted the advantages of his condition; the charming qualities of his wife; the security and splendour of his new rank. He endeavoured to seduce my vanity by the prospect of the conquest I should make in that army of colonels, philosophers, and commissioners that formed the circle of his friends. "Any man but a brother," said he, "must own that you are a charming creature. So you need only come and see, in order to conquer." His importunities increased as my reluctance became more evident. Thoughtless as I supposed him to be, he said, the wish to find me out, carry me to France, and put me in Fortune's way, was no inconsiderable inducement with him to accept the commission which brought him to America. He insinuated that brothership and eldership gave him something like a title to paternal authority, and insisted on obedience.

The contest became painful. Impatience and reproach on his side awakened the like sentiments in me, and it cost me many efforts to restrain my feelings. Alternately he commanded and persuaded; was willing to be governed by my mother's advice; would carry me forthwith to New York; would lay before her his proposal, and be governed by her decision. The public vessel that brought him lay at Newport, waiting his return. Every possible accommodation and convenience was possessed by the ship. It was nothing but a sailing palace, in which the other passengers were merely his guests, selected by himself.

I was a fool for refusing his offer. A simpleton. The child of caprice, whom no time could render steadfast except in folly; into whom no counsel or example could instil an atom of common sense. He supposed my man was equally obstinate and stupid; but he would soon see of what stuff he was made. He would hurry to Baltimore, and take the boy to task for his presumption and insolence in aspiring to Jane Talbot

without her brother's consent.

He snatched up his hat; but this intimation alarmed me. "Pray, stay one moment, brother. Be more considerate. What right can you possibly have to interfere with Mr. Colden's concerns? Talk to me as much and in what style you please; but, I beseech you, insult not a man who never offended you."

Perceiving my uneasiness on this head, he took advantage of it to renew his solicitations for my company to France,--swore solemnly that no man should have his sister without his consent, and that he would force the boy to give me up.

This distressing altercation ended by his going away, declaring, in spite of my entreaties, that he would see you, and teach your insolence a lesson not easily forgotten.

To sleep after this interview was impossible. I could hardly still my throbbing heart sufficiently to move the pen. You cannot hear from me in time to avoid this madman, or to fortify yourself against an interview. I cannot confute the false or cunning glosses he may make upon my conduct. He may represent me to you as willing to accompany him; as detained only by my obligation to you, from which it is in your power to absolve me.

Till I hear from you I shall have no peace. Would to Heaven there was some speedier conveyance!

JANE TALBOT.

Letter XXXII

To Jane Talbot

Baltimore, November 14.

Let me overlook your last letter [Footnote A: Letter XXX.] for the present, while I mention to you a most unexpected and surprising circumstance. It has just happened.

I have parted with my visitant but this moment.

I had strolled to the bank of the river, and was leaning idly on a branch of an apple-tree that hung pretty low, when I noticed some one coming hastily towards me: there was something striking and noble in the air and figure of the man.

When he came up, he stopped. I was surprised to find myself the object of which he was in search. I found afterwards that he had inquired for me at my lodgings, and had been directed to look for me in this path. A distinct view of his features saved him the trouble of telling me that he was your brother. However, that was information that he thought proper immediately to communicate. He was your brother, he said; I was Colden; I had pretensions to you, which your brother was entitled to know, to discuss, and to pronounce upon. Such, in about as many words, was his introduction to me, and he waited for my answer with much impatience.

I was greatly confused by these sudden and unceremonious intimations. At last I told him that all that he had said respecting my connection with his sister was true. It was a fact that all the world was welcome to know. Of course I had no objection to her brother's knowing it.

But what were my claims? what my merits, my profession, my fortune? On all these heads a brother would naturally require to be thoroughly informed.

"As to my character, sir, you will hardly expect any satisfactory information from my own mouth. However, it may save you the trouble of applying to others, when I tell you that my character has as many slurs and blots in it as any you ever met with. A more versatile, inconsistent, prejudiced, and faulty person than myself, I do not believe the earth to contain. Profession I have none, and am not acquiring any, nor expect ever to acquire. Of fortune I am wholly destitute: not a farthing have I, either in possession or reversion."

"Then, pray, sir, on what are built your pretensions to my sister?"

"Really, sir, they are built on nothing. I am, in every respect, immeasurably her

inferior. I possess not a single merit that entitles me to grace from her."

"I have surely not been misinformed. She tacitly admitted that she was engaged to be your wife."

"'Tis very true. She is so."

"But what, then, is the basis of this engagement?"

"Mutual affection, I believe, is the only basis. Nobody who knows Jane Talbot will need to ask why she is beloved. Why she requites that passion in the present case, is a question which she only can answer."

"Her passion, sir," (contemptuously,) "is the freak of a child; of folly and caprice. By your own confession you are beggarly and worthless, and therefore it becomes you to relinquish your claim."

"I have no claim to relinquish. I have urged no claims. On the contrary, I have fully disclosed to her every folly and vice that cleaves to my character."

"You know, sir, what I mean."

"I am afraid not perfectly. If you mean that I should profess myself unworthy of your sister's favour, 'tis done. It has been done a hundred times."

"My meaning, sir, is simply this: that you, from this moment, give up every expectation of being the husband of Mrs. Talbot. That you return to her every letter and paper that has passed between you; that you drop all intercourse and correspondence."

I was obliged to stifle a laugh which this whimsical proposal excited. I continued, through this whole dialogue, to regard my companion with a steadfast and cheerful gravity.

"These are injunctions," said I, "that will hardly meet with compliance, unless, indeed, they were imposed by the lady herself. I shall always have a supreme regard for her happiness; and whatever path she points out to me, I will walk in it."

"But this is the path in which her true interest requires you to walk."

"I have not yet discovered that to be her opinion; the moment I do, I will walk in it accordingly."

"No matter what her opinion is. She is froward and obstinate. It is my opinion that her true happiness requires all connection between you to cease from this moment."

"After all, sir, though, where judgments differ, one only can be right, yet each person must be permitted to follow his own. You would hardly, I imagine, allow your sister to prescribe to you in your marriage choice, and I fear she will lay claim to the same independence for herself. If you can convert her to your way of thinking, it is well. I solemnly engage to do whatever she directs."

"This is insolence. You trifle with me. You pretend to misconstrue my meaning."

"When you charge me with insolence, I think you afford pretty strong proof that you mistake my meaning. I have not the least intention to offend you."

"Let me be explicit with you. Do you instantly and absolutely resign all pretensions to my sister?"

"I will endeavour to be explicit in my turn. Your sister, notwithstanding my defects and disadvantages, offers me her love, vows to be mine. I accept her love; she is mine; nor need we to discuss the matter any further."

This, however, by no means put an end to altercation. I told him I was willing to hear all that he had to say upon the subject. If truth were on his side, it was possible he might reason me into a concurrence with him. In compliance with this concession, he dwelt on the benefits which his sister would receive from accompanying him to France, and the mutual sorrow, debasement, and perplexity likely to flow from a union between us, unsanctioned by the approbation of our common friends.

"The purpose of all this is to prove," said I, "that affluence and dignity without me

will be more conducive to your sister's happiness than obscurity and indigence with me."

It was.

"Happiness is mere matter of opinion; perhaps Jane thinks already as you do."

He allowed that he had talked with you ineffectually on that subject.

"I think myself bound to believe her in a case where she is the proper judge, and shall eagerly consent to make her happy in her own way. That, sir, is my decision."

I will not repeat the rest of our conversation. Your letters have given me some knowledge of your brother, and I endeavoured by the mildness, sedateness, and firmness of my carriage to elude those extremes to which his domineering passions were likely to carry him. I carefully avoided every thing that tended in the least to exasperate. He was prone enough to rage, but I quietly submitted to all that he could say. I was sincerely rejoiced when the conference came to an end.

Whence came your brother thus abruptly? Have you seen him? Yet he told me that you had. Alas! what must you have suffered from his impetuosity!

I look with impatience for your next letter, in which you will tell what has happened.

Letter XXXIII

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, November 17.

I have just sent you a letter, but my restless spirit can find no relief but in writing.

I torment myself without end in imagining what took place at your meeting with my brother. I rely upon your equanimity; yet to what an insupportable test will my brother's passions subject you! In how many ways have I been the cause of pain and humiliation to you! Heaven, I hope, will some time grant me the power to compensate yon for all that I have culpably or innocently made you suffer.

What's this? A letter from my brother! The superscription is his.

Let me hasten, my friend, to give you a copy of this strange epistle. It has neither date nor signature.

"I have talked with the man whom you have chosen to play the fool with. I find him worthy of his mistress; a tame, coward-hearted, infatuated blockhead.

"It was silly to imagine that any arguments would have weight with you or with him. I have got my journey for my pains. Fain would I have believed that you were worthy of a different situation; but I dismiss that belief, and shall henceforth leave you to pursue your own dirty road, without interruption.

"Had you opened your eyes to your true interest, I think I could have made something of you. My wealth and my influence should not have been spared in placing you in a station worthy of my sister. Every one, however, must take his own way,--though it lead him into a slough or a ditch.

"I intended to have virtually divided my fortune with you; to have raised you to princely grandeur. But no; you are enamoured of the dirt, and may cling to it as closely as you please.

"It is but justice, however, to pay what I owe you. I remember I borrowed several sums of you; the whole amounted to fifteen hundred dollars. There they are, and much good may they do you. That sum and the remnant which I left you may perhaps set the good man up in a village shop,--may purchase an assortment of tapes, porringers, and twelve-to-the-pound candles. The gleanings of the year may find you in skimmed milk and hasty pudding three times a day, and you may enjoy between whiles the delectable amusements of mending your husband's stockings at one time, and serving a neighbour with a pennyworth of snuff at another.

"Fare thee well, Jane. Farewell forever; for it must be a stronger inducement than can possibly happen, that shall ever bring me back to this land. I would see you ere I go, but we shall only scold; so, once more, farewell, simpleton."

What think you of this letter? The enclosed bills were most unexpected and acceptable presents. I am now twice as rich as I was. This visit of my brother I was disposed to regret, but on the whole I ought, I think, to regard it with satisfaction. By thus completely repairing the breach made in my little patrimony, it has placed me in as good a situation as I ever hoped to enjoy; besides, it has removed from my brother's character some of the stains which used to discolour it. Ought I not to believe him sincere in his wishes to do me service? We cannot agree exactly in our notion of duty or happiness, but that difference takes not away from him the merit of a generous intention. He would have done me good in his way.

Methinks I am sorry he is gone. I would fain have parted with him as a sister ought. A few tears and a few blessings were not unworthy such an occasion. Most fervently should I have poured my blessings upon him. I wish he had indulged me with another visit; especially as we were to part, it seems, forever. One more visit and a kind embrace from my only brother would have been kept in melancholy, sweet remembrance.

Perhaps we shall meet again. Perhaps, some day, thou and I shall go to France. We will visit him together, and witness, with our own eyes, his good fortune. Time may make him gentle, kind, considerate, brotherly. Time has effected greater wonders than that; for I will always maintain that my brother has a noble nature: stifled and obscured it may be, but not extinguished.

Letter XXXIV

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, November 18.

How little is the equanimity or patience that nature has allotted me! Thy entrance now would find me quite peevish. Yet I do not fear thy entrance. Always anxious as I am to be amiable in your eyes, I am at no pains to conceal from you that

impatience which now vexes my soul, because it is your absence that occasions it.

I sat alone on the sofa below, for a whole hour. Not once was the bell rung; not once did my fluttering heart answer to footsteps in the passage. I had no need to start up at the opening of the parlour-door, and to greet, as distinctly as the joyous tumult of my bosom would suffer me, the much-loved, long-expected visitant.

Yet, deceived by my fond heart into momentary forgetfulness of the interval of a hundred miles that lies between us, more than once I cast a glance behind me, and started, as if the hoped-for peal had actually been rung.

Tired, at length, of my solitude, where I had enjoyed your company so often, I covered up the coals and withdrew to my chamber. "And here," said I, "though I cannot talk to him, yet I can write."

But first, I read over again this cruel letter of my mother. I weighed all the contents, and especially those heavy charges against you.

How does it fall out that the same object is viewed by two observers with such opposite sensations? That what one hates, the other should dote upon?--two of the same sex; one cherished from infancy, reared, modelled, taught to think, feel, and even to speak, by the other: acting till now, and even now acting in all respects but one, in inviolable harmony; that two such should jar and thwart each other, in a point, too, in respect to which the whole tendency and scope of the daughter's education was to produce a fellow-feeling with the mother. How hard to be accounted for! how deeply to be rued!

I sometimes catch myself trembling with solicitude lest I should have erred. Am I not betrayed by passion? can I claim the respect due to that discernment which I once boasted?

I cannot blame my mother. She acts and determines, as I sometimes believe, without the benefits of my knowledge. Did she know as much as I know, surely she would think as I do.

In general, this conclusion seems to be just; but there are moments when doubts insinuate themselves. I cannot help remembering the time when I reasoned like my mother; when the belief of a Christian seemed essential to every human excellence. All qualities, without that belief, were not to be despised as useless, but to be abhorred as pernicious. There would be no virtue, no merit, divorced from religion. In proportion to the speciousness of his qualities was he to be dreaded. The fruit, whatever form it should assume, was nothing within but bane, and was to be detested and shunned in proportion as the form was fair and its promises delicious.

I seldom trusted myself to inquire how it was my duty to act towards one whom I loved, but who was destitute of this grace; for of such moment was the question to me, that I imagined the decision would necessarily precede all others. I could not love till I had investigated this point, and no force could oblige me to hold communion with a soul whom this defect despoiled of all beauty and devoted to perdition.

But what now is the change that time and passion have wrought! I have found a man without religion. What I supposed impossible has happened. I love the man. I cannot give him up. The mist that is before my eyes does not change what was once vice into virtue. I do not cease to regard unbelief as the blackest stain, as the most deplorable calamity that can befall a human creature; but still I love the man, and that fills me with unconquerable zeal to rescue him from this calamity.

But my mother interferes. She reminds me of the horror which I once entertained for men of your tenets. She enjoins me to hate you, or to abhor myself for loving one worthy of nothing but hatred.

I cannot do either. My heart is still yours, and it is a voluntary captive. I would not free it from its thraldom, if I could. Neither do I think its captivity dishonours it. Time, therefore, has wrought some change. I can now discover some merit, something to revere and to love, even in a man without religion. I find my whole

soul penetrated with zeal for his welfare. There is no scheme which I muse upon with half the constancy or pleasure, as that of curing his errors; and I am confident of curing them.

"Ah, Jane," says my mother; "rash and presumptuous girl, what a signal punishment hangs over thee! Thou wilt trust thyself within the toils of the grand deceiver. Thou wilt enter the list with his subtleties. Vain and arrogant, thou fearest not thy own weakness. Thou wilt stake thy eternal lot upon thy triumph in argument against one who, in spite of all his candour and humility, has his pride and his passions engaged on the side of his opinions.

"Subtle wretch!" does she exclaim; "accomplished villain! How nicely does he select, how adroitly manage, his tools! He will oppose, only to yield more gracefully. He will argue, only that the rash simpleton may the more congratulate herself upon her seeming victory! How easy is the verbal assent,--the equivocating accent,--the hesitating air! These he will assume whenever it is convenient to lull your fears and gratify your vanity; and nothing but the uniformity of his conduct, his continuance in the same ignominious and criminal path, will open your eyes, and show you that only grace from above can reach his obdurate heart, or dart a ray into his benighted faculties."

Will you be surprised that I shudder when my mother urges me in this strain, with her customary energy? Always wont to be obsequious to the very turn of her eye, and to make her will not only the regulator of my actions, but the criterion of my understanding, it is impossible not to hesitate, to review all that has passed between us, and reconsider anew the motives that have made me act as I have acted.

Yet the review always confirms me in my first opinion. You err, but are not obstinate in error. If your opinions be adverse to religion, your affections are not wholly estranged from it. Your understanding dissents, but your heart is not yet persuaded to refuse. You have powers, irresistible in whatever direction they are

bent; capable of giving the highest degree of misery or happiness to yourself and to others. At present they are misdirected or inactive; they are either pernicious or useless.

How can I, who have had ample opportunities of knowing you, stand by with indifference while such is your state? I love you, it is true. All your felicity and all your woe become mine. I have a selfish interest in your welfare. I cannot bear the thought of passing through this world, or of entering any future world, without you. My heart has tried in vain to create a separate interest, to draw consolation from a different source. Hence indifference to your welfare is impossible. But would not indifference, even if no extraordinary tie subsisted between us, be criminal? What becomes of our obligation to do good to others, if we do not exert ourselves, when all the means are in our power, to confer the most valuable of all benefits, to remove the greatest of all ills?

Of what stuff must that heart be made which can behold, unmoved, genius and worth, destitute of the joys and energies of religion; wandering in a maze of passions and doubts; devoured by fantastic repinings and vague regrets; drearily conscious of wanting a foundation whereon to repose, a guide in whom to trust? What heart can gaze at such a spectacle without unspeakable compassion?

Not to have our pity and our zeal awakened seems to me to argue the utmost depravity of heart. No stronger proof can be given that we ourselves are destitute of true religion. The faith or the practice must be totally wanting. We may talk devoutly; we may hie, in due season, to the house of prayer; while there, we may put on solemn visages and mutter holy names. We may abstain from profane amusements or unauthorized words; we may shun, as infections, the company of unbelievers. We may study homilies and creeds; but all this, without rational activity for others' good, is not religion. I see, in all this, nothing that I am accustomed to call by that name.

I see nothing but a narrow selfishness; sentiments of fear degrading to the Deity; a bigotry that contracts the view, that freezes the heart, that shuts up the avenues to benevolent and generous feeling. This buckram stiffness does not suit me. Out upon such monastic parade! I will have none of it.

But then, it seems, there is danger to ourselves from such attempts. In trying to save another from drowning, may we not sometimes be drawn in ourselves? Are we not taught to deprecate, not only evil, but temptation to evil?

What madness, to trust our convictions, in a point of such immense importance, to the contest of argument with one of superior subtlety and knowledge! Is there not presumption in such a trust?

Excellent advice is this to the mass of women; to those to whom habit or childish fear or parental authority has given their faith; who never doubted or inquired or reasoned for themselves. How easily is such a fabric to be overturned! It can only stand by being never blown upon. The least breath disperses it in air; the first tide washes it away.

Now, I entertain no reverence for such a bubble. In some sense, the religion of the timorous and uninquisitive is true. In another sense it is false. Considering the proofs on which it reposes, it is false, since it merely originates in deference to the opinions of others, wrought into belief by means of habit. It is on a level, as to the proof which supports it, with the wildest dreams of savage superstition, or the fumes of a dervise's fanaticism.

As to me, I was once just such a pretty fool in this respect as the rest of my sex. I was easily taught to regard religion not only as the safeguard of every virtue, but even as the test of a good understanding. The name of infidel was never mentioned but with abhorrence or contempt. None but a profligate, a sensualist, a ruffian, could disbelieve. Unbelief was a mere suggestion of the grand deceiver, to palliate or reconcile us to the unlimited indulgence of our appetites and the breach of every

moral duty. Hence it was never steadfast or sincere. An adverse fortune or a death-bed usually put an end to the illusion.

Thus I grew up, never beset by any doubts, never venturing on inquiry. My knowledge of you put an end to this state of superstitious ignorance. In you I found, not one that disbelieved, but one that doubted. In all your demeanour there was simplicity and frankness. You concealed not your sentiments; you obtruded them not upon my hearing. When called upon to state the history of your opinions, it was candidly detailed; with no view of gaining my concurrence, but merely to gratify my curiosity.

From my remonstrances you never averted your ear. Every proof of an unprejudiced attention, and even of a bias favourable to my opinions, was manifest. Your own experience had half converted you already. Your good sense was for a time the sport of a specious theory. You became the ardent and bold champion of what you deemed truth. But a closer and longer view insensibly detected flaws and discords where all had formerly been glossy smoothness and ravishing harmony. Diffidence and caution, worthy of your youth and inexperience, had resumed their place; and those errors of which your own experience of their consequences had furnished the antidote, which your own reflections had partly divested of illusion, had only been propitious to your advancement in true wisdom.

What had I to fear from such an adversary? What might I not hope from perseverance? What expect but new clearness to my own convictions, new and more accurate views of my powers and habits?

In order to benefit you, I was obliged to scrutinize the foundation of my own principles. I found nothing but a void. I was astonished and alarmed; and instantly set myself to the business of inquiry. How could I hope to work on your convictions without a suitable foundation for my own?

And see now, my friend, the blindness of our judgments. I, who am imagined to

incur such formidable perils from intercourse with you, am, in truth, indebted to you alone for all my piety,--all of it that is permanent and rational. Without those apprehensions which your example inspired, without that zeal for your conversion which my attachment to you has produced, what would now have been my claims to religious knowledge?

Had I never extorted from you your doubts, and the occasion of these doubts; had I never known the most powerful objections to religion from your lips, I should have been no less ignorant of the topics and arguments favourable to it.

And I think I may venture to ascribe to myself no less a progress in candour than in knowledge. My belief is stronger than it ever was, but I no longer hold in scorn or abhorrence those who differ from me. I perceive the speciousness of those fallacies by which they are deluded. I find it possible for men to disbelieve and yet retain their claims to our reverence, our affection, and especially our good offices.

Those whom I once thought were only to be hated and shunned, I now find worthy of compassionate efforts for their good. Those whom I once imagined sunk beneath the reach of all succour, and to merit scarcely the tribute of a sigh for their lost estate, now appear to be easily raised to tranquillity and virtue, and to have irresistible claims to our help.

In no respect has your company made me a worse--in every respect it has made me a better--woman. Not only my piety has become more rational and fervent, but a new spring has been imparted to my languishing curiosity. To find a soul to whom my improvement will give delight; eager to direct and assist my inquiries; delicately liberal no less of censure when merited than of praise where praise is due; entering, almost without the help of language from me, into my inmost thoughts; assisting me, if I may so speak, to comprehend myself; and raising to a steadfast and bright flame the spark that my wayward fancy, left to itself, would have instantaneously emitted and lost.--

But why do I again attempt this impossible theme? While reflecting on my debt to thee, my heart becomes too big for its mansion. My hand falters, and the characters it traces run into an illegible scrawl.

My tongue only is fitted for such an office; and Heaven grant that you may speedily return to me, and put an end to a solitude which every hour makes more irksome!

Adieu.

Letter XXXV

To Mrs. Talbot

Baltimore, November 20.

How truly did my angel say, that she whom I love is my deity, and her lips my oracle, and that to her pertains not only the will to make me happy, by giving me steadfastness and virtue, but the power also!

I have read your letter oftener than a dozen times already, and at every reading my heart burns more and more. That weight of humiliation and despondency which, without your arm to sustain me, would assuredly sink me to the grave, becomes light as a feather; and, while I crush your testimonies of love in my hand, I seem to have hold of a stay of which no storm can bereave me.

One of my faults, thou sayest, is a propensity to reason. Not satisfied with looking at that side of the post that chances to be near me, I move round and round it, and pause and scrutinize till those whose ill fate it is to wait upon my motions are out of patience with me.

Every one has ways of his own. A transient glance at the post satisfies the mob of passengers. 'Tis my choice to stand a while and gaze.

The only post, indeed, which I closely examine, is myself, because my station is most convenient for inspecting that. Yet, though I have a fuller view of myself than

any other can have of me, my imperfect sight--that is, my erring judgment--is continually blundering.

If all my knowledge relate to my own character, and that knowledge is egregiously defective, how profound must be my ignorance of others, and especially of her whom I presume to call mine!

No paradox ever puzzled me so much as your conduct. On my first interview with you I loved you; yet what kind of passion was that which knew only your features and the sound of your voice? Every successive interview has produced, not only something new or unexpected, but something in seeming contradiction to my previous knowledge.

"She will act," said I, "in such and such circumstances, as those of her delicate and indulgent education must always act. That wit, that eloquence, that knowledge, must only make her despise such a witless, unendowed, unaccomplished, wavering, and feeble wretch as I am."

To be called your friend; to be your occasional companion; to be a tolerated visitor, was more than I expected. When I found all this anxiously sought and eagerly accepted, I was lost in astonishment. At times--may I venture to confess?--your regard for me brought your judgment into question! It failed to inspire me with more respect for myself; and not to look at me with my own eyes degraded you in my opinion.

How have you laboured to bestow on me that inestimable gift,--self-confidence! And some success has attended your efforts. My deliverance from my chains is less desperate than once it was. I may judge of the future, perhaps, by the past. Since I have already made such progress in exchanging distant veneration for familiar tenderness, and in persuading myself that he must possess some merit whom a soul like thine idolizes, I may venture to anticipate the time when all my humiliation may vanish, and I shall come to be thought worthy of thy love, not only by thee, but by

myself.

What a picture is this thou drawest! Yet such is my weakness, Jane, that I must shudder at the prospect. To tear thee from thy present dwelling and its comforts, to make thee a tenant of thy good widow, and a seamstress for me!

"Yet what" (thou sayest) "is a fine house, and a train of servants, music, and pictures? What silly prejudice, to connect dignity and happiness with high ceilings and damask canopies and golden superfluity!"

Yet so silly am I, when reason deserts the helm and habit assumes it. The change thou hast painted deceives me for a moment, or rather is rightly judged of while I look at nothing but thy colouring; but when I withdraw my eye from that, and the scene rises before me in the hues it is accustomed to derive from my own fancy, my soul droops, and I pray Heaven to avert such a destiny.

I tell thee all my follies, Jane. Art thou not my sweet physician? and how canst thou cure the malady when thou knowest not all its symptoms?

I love to regard myself in this light:--as one owing his virtue, his existence, his happiness, his every thing, to thee, and as proposing no end to himself but thy happiness in turn, but the discharge of an endless debt of gratitude.

On my account, Jane, I cannot bear you should lose any thing. It must not be. Yet what remedy? How is thy mother's aversion to be subdued? how can she be made to reason on my actions as you reason? Yet not so, either. None but she that loves me can make such constructions and allowances as you do.

Why may she not be induced to give up the hope of disuniting us, and, while she hates me, continue her affection for thee? Why rob thee of those bounties hitherto dispensed to thee, merely because I must share in them? My partaking with thee contributes indispensably to thy happiness. Not for my own sake, then, but merely for thine, ought competence to be secured to thee.

But is there no method of excluding me from all participation? She may withhold

from me all power of a landlord, but she cannot prevent me from subsisting on thy bounty.

Yet why does she now allow you to possess what you do? Can she imagine that my happiness is not as dear to you now as it will be in consequence of any change? If I share nothing with you now, it is not from any want of benevolent importunity in you.

There is a strange inconsistency and contradiction in thy mother's conduct.

But something may surely be done to lighten her antipathies. I may surely confute a false charge. I may convince her of my innocence in one respect.

Yet see, my friend, the evils of which one error is the parent. My conduct towards the poor Jessy appears to your mother a more enormous wickedness than this imputed injustice to Talbot. The frantic indiscretion of my correspondence with Thomson has ruined me; for he that will commit the greater crime will not be thought to scruple the less.

And then there is such an irresistible crowd of evidence in favour of the accusation! When I first read Mrs. Fielder's letter, the consciousness of my innocence gave me courage; but the longer I reflect upon the subject, the more deeply I despond. My own errors will always be powerful pleaders against me at the bar of this austere judge.

Would to Heaven I had not yielded to your urgency! The indecorum of compliance stared me in the face at the time. Too easily I yielded to the enchantments of those eyes, and the pleadings of that melting voice.

The charms of your conversation; the midnight hour whose security was heightened by the storm that raged without; so perfectly screened from every interruption; and the subject we had been talking on, so affecting and attractive to me, and so far from being exhausted, and you so pathetically earnest in entreaty, so absolutely forbidding my departure.

And was I such a short-sighted fool as not to insist on your retiring at the usual hour? The only thing that could make the expedient suggested by me effectual was that. Your Molly lying with you could avail you nothing, unless you actually passed the night in your chamber.

As it was, no contrivance could be more unfortunate, since it merely enabled her the more distinctly to remark the hour when you came up. Was it three, or four, when you left the parlour?

The unbosoming of souls which that night witnessed, so sweetly as it dwelt upon my memory, I now regard with horror, since it has involved you in such evil.

But the letter,--that was a most disastrous accident. I had read very frequently this fatal billet. Who is it that could imitate your hand so exactly? The same fashion in the letters, the same colour in the ink, the same style, and the sentiments expressed so fully and accurately coalescing with the preceding and genuine passages!--no wonder that your mother, being so well acquainted with your pen, should have no doubt as to your guilt, after such testimony.

There must be a perpetrator of this iniquity. Talbot it could not be; for where lay the letter in the interval between its disappearance and his return? and what motive could influence him to commit or to countenance such a forgery?

Without doubt there was some deceiver. Some one stole the letter, and by his hand was this vile conclusion added, and by him was it communicated to Talbot. But hast thou such an enemy in the world? Whom have you offended, capable of harbouring such deadly vengeance?

Pray, my friend, sit down to the recollection of your past life, and inquire who it was that possessed your husband's confidence; who were his intimate companions, endeavour to discover; tell me the names and characters of all those who were accustomed to visit your house, either on your account or his. Strange, if among all these there is no foundation for some conjecture, however shadowy.

Thomson is no better, yet grows worse hardly perceptibly. Adieu.

HENRY COLDEN.

Letter XXXVI

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, November 23.

You impose on me a painful task. Persuaded that reflection was useless, I have endeavoured to forget this fatal letter and all its consequences. I see you will not allow me to forget it; but I must own it is weakness to endeavour to shun the scrutiny.

Some one, my friend, must be in fault; and what fault can be more atrocious than this? To defraud, by forgery, your neighbour of a few dollars, is a crime which nothing but a public and ignominious death will expiate; yet how trivial is that offence, compared with a fraud like this, which robs a helpless woman of her reputation,--introduces mortal enmity between her and those whose affection is necessary to render life tolerable!

Whenever I think of this charge, an exquisite pain seizes my heart. There must be the blackest perfidy somewhere. I cannot bear to think that any human creature is capable of such a deed,--a deed which the purest malice must have dictated, since there is none, surely, in the world, whom I have ever intentionally injured.

I cannot deal in conjectures. The subject, I find by my feelings since I began this letter, is too agonizing,--too bewildering. It carries back my thoughts to a time of misery, to which distance, instead of soothing it into apathy, only adds a new sting.

A spotless reputation was once dear to me, but I have now torn the passion from my heart. I am weary of pursuing a phantom. No one has pursued it with more eagerness and perseverance than I; and what has been the fruit of my labour but reiterated

mortification and disappointment?

An upright demeanour, a self-acquitting conscience, are not sufficient for our safety. Calumny and misapprehension have no bounds to their rage and their activity.

How little did my thoughtless heart imagine the horrid images which beset the minds of my mother and my husband! Happy ignorance! Would to Heaven it had continued! Since knowledge puts it not in my power to remove the error, it ought to be avoided as the greatest evil.

While I know my own motives, and am convinced of their purity, let me hold in contempt the opinions of the world respecting me. They can never have a basis in truth. Be they favourable or otherwise, they cannot fail to be built on imperfect knowledge. The praise of others is therefore as little to be sought or prized as their censure to be dreaded or shunned.

Heaven knows how much I value the favour and affection of my mother; but, clear as it is, I must give it up. How can I retain it? I cannot confute the charge. I must not acknowledge a guilt that does not belong to me. Added, therefore, to her belief of my guilt, must be the persuasion of my being a hardened and obdurate criminal.

What will she think of my last two letters? The former tacitly confessing my unworthiness and promising compliance with all her wishes, the next asserting my innocence and refusing her generous offers. My first she will probably ascribe to an honourable compunction, left to operate without your control. In the second she will trace your influence. Left to myself, she will imagine me capable of acting as she wishes; but, guided by you, she will lose all hopes of me, and resign me to my fate.

Indeed, I have given up my mother. There is no other alternative but that of giving up you; and in this case I can hesitate, indeed, but I cannot decide against you.

I am placed in a very painful situation. I feel as if every hour spent under this roof was an encroachment on another's rights. My mother's bounty is not withheld, merely because my rebellion against her will is not completed; but I that feel no

doubt, and whom mere consideration of her pleasure, important as it is, will never make swerve from my purpose,--ought I to enjoy goods to which I have forfeited all title? Ought I to wait for an express command to begone from her doors? Ought I to lay her under the necessity of declaring her will?

Yet if I change my lodgings immediately, without waiting her directions, will she not regard my conduct as contemptuous? Shall I not then be a rebel indeed?--one that scorns her favour, and is eager to get rid of all my obligations?

How painful is such a situation! yet there is no escaping from it, that I can see. I must, perforce, remain as I am. But perhaps her next letter will throw some light upon my destiny. I suppose my positive assertions will show her that a change of purpose cannot be hoped for from me.

The bell rings. Perhaps it is the postman, and the intelligence I wish for has arrived. Adieu.

J. TALBOT.

Letter XXXVII

To the Same

November 26.

What shall I say to thee, my friend? How shall I communicate a resolution fatal, as thy tenderness will deem it, to thy peace, yet a resolution suggested by a heart which has, at length, permitted all selfish regards to be swallowed up by a disinterested consideration of thy good?

Why did you conceal from me your father's treatment of you, and the consequences which your fidelity to me has incurred from his rage? I will never be the cause of plunging you into poverty so hopeless. Did you think I would? and could you imagine it possible to conceal from me forever his aversion to me?

How much misery would your forbearance have laid up in store for my future life! When fate had put it out of my power to absolve you from his curses, some accident would have made me acquainted with the full extent of the sufferings and contumelies with which, for my sake, he had loaded you.

But, thanks to Heaven, I am apprized in time of the truth. Instead of the bearer of a letter from my mother, whose signal at the door put an end to my last letter, it was my mother herself.

Dear and welcome as those features and that voice once were, now would I rather have encountered the eyes of a basilisk and the notes of the ill-boding raven.

She hastened with all this expedition to thank me; to urge me to execute; to assist me in performing the promises of my first letter. The second, in which these promises were recalled, never reached her hand. She left New York, as it now appeared, before its arrival. The interval had been spent on the road, where she had been detained by untoward and dangerous accidents.

Think, my friend, of the embarrassments attending this unlooked-for and inauspicious meeting. Joy at my supposed compliance with her wishes, wishes that imaged to themselves my happiness, and only mine, enabled her to support the hardships of this journey. Fatigue and exposure, likely to be fatal to one of so delicate, so infirm a constitution, so lately and imperfectly recovered from a dangerous malady, could not deter her.

Fondly, rapturously did she fold to her bosom the long-lost and late-recovered child. Tears of joy she shed over me, and thanked me for the tranquil and serene close which my return to virtue, as she called my acquiescence, had secured to her life. That life would at all events be short; but my compliances, if they could not much protract it, would at least render its approaching end peaceful.

All attempts to reason with my mother were fruitless. She fell into alarming agonies when she discovered the full import of that coldness and dejection which my

demeanour betrayed. Fatigued and indisposed as she was, she made preparation to depart; she refused to pass one night under the same roof,--her own roof,--and determined to begone, on her return home, the very next morning.

Will not your heart comprehend the greatness of this trial, and pity and excuse a momentary wavering, a yielding irresolution? Yet it was but momentary. An hour's solitude and deep reflection fortified my heart against the grief and supplication even of my mother.

Next day she was more calm. She condescended to reason, to expostulate. She carefully shunned the mention of atrocious charges. She dwelt only on the proofs which your past life and your own confessions had afforded of unsteady courage and unwarrantable principles; your treatment of the Woodbury girl; your correspondence with Thomson; your ignoble sloth; your dependence upon others; your helplessness.

From these accusations I defended you in silence. My heart was your secret advocate. I did not verbally repel any of these charges. That of inglorious dependence for subsistence upon others I admitted; but I could not forbear urging that this dependence was on a father. A father who was rich; who had no other child than yourself; whose own treatment of you had planted and reared in you this indisposition to labour; to whose property your title, ultimately, could not be denied.

"And has he then," she exclaimed, "deceived you in that particular? Has he concealed from you his father's resolutions? That his engagement with you has already drawn down his father's anger, and even his curses? On his persisting to maintain an inviolable faith to you, he was ignominiously banished from his father's roof. All kindred and succour were disclaimed, and on you depends the continuance of that decree, and whether that protection and subsistence which he has hitherto enjoyed, and of which his character stands in so much need, shall be lost to him forever."

You did not tell me this, my friend. In claiming your love, far was I from imagining

that I tore you from your father's house, and plunged you into that indigence which your character and education so totally unfit you for sustaining or escaping from.

My mother removed all doubt which could not but attend such unwelcome tidings, by showing me her own letter to your father, and his answer to it.

Well do I recollect your behaviour on the evening when my mother's letter was received by your father. At that time, your deep dejection was inexplicable. And did you not--my heart bleeds to think how much my love has cost you--did you not talk of a fall on the ice when I pointed to a bruise on your forehead? That bruise, and every token of dismay, your endeavours at eluding or diverting my attention from your sorrow and solemnity, are now explained.

Good Heaven! And was I indeed the cause of that violence, that contumely,--the rage, and even curses, of a father? And why concealed you these maledictions and this violence from me? Was it not because you well knew that I would never consent to subject you to such a penalty?

Hasten then, I beseech you, to your father; lay this letter before him; let it inform him of my solemn and irrevocable resolution to sever myself from you forever.

But this I will myself do. I will acquaint him with my resignation to his will and that of my mother, and beseech him to restore you to his favour.

Farewell, my friend. By that name, at least, I may continue to call you. Yet no. I must never see you nor hear from you again, unless it be in answer to this letter.

Let your pity stifle the emotions of indignation or grief, and return me such an answer as may tend to reconcile me to the vow which, whether difficult or easy, must not be broken.

J. T.

Letter XXXVIII

To Henry Colden, Senior

November 26.

Sir:--

I was not informed till to-day of the correspondence that has passed between you and my mother, nor of your aversion to the alliance which was designed to take place between your son and me.

It is my duty to inform you that, in my opinion, your approbation was absolutely necessary to such a union; and consequently, since your concurrence is withheld, it will never take place. Every tie or engagement between us is from this moment dissolved, and all intercourse, by letter or otherwise, will here end.

Your son, in opposing your wishes, imagined himself consulting my happiness. In that he was mistaken; and I have now removed his error, by acquainting him with my present determination.

I am deeply grieved that his attachment to me has forfeited your favour. I hope that there is no other obstacle to reconcilement, and that the termination of all intercourse between us may remove that obstacle.

JANE TALBOT.

I join my daughter in assuring you that the alliance, for which a mutual aversion was entertained, cannot take place; and that all her engagements with your son are dissolved. I join her likewise in entreating you to forget his disobedience and restore him to your protection and favour.

M. FIELDER.

Letter XXXIX

To Mrs. Talbot

November 28.

IT becomes me to submit without a murmur to a resolution dictated by a disinterested regard to my happiness.

That you may find in that persuasion, in your mother's tenderness and gratitude, in the affluence and honour which this determination has secured to you, abundant consolation for every evil that may befall yourself or pursue me, are my only wishes.

Far was I from designing to conceal from you entirely my father's aversion to our views. I frequently apprized you of the inferences to be naturally drawn from his known character; but I trusted to his generosity, to the steadiness of my own deportment, to your own merits, when he should become personally acquainted with you, to his good sense, when reflecting on an evil in his power to lessen though not wholly to remove, for a change in his opinions, or, at least, in his conduct.

There was sufficient resemblance in the characters of both our parents to make me rely on the influence of time and reflection in our favour. Your mother could not cease to love you. I could not by any accident be wholly bereaved of my father's affection. No conduct of theirs had robbed them of my esteem. Why then did I persist in thwarting their wishes? Why encourage you in your opposition? Because I imagined that, in thwarting their present views, which were founded in error, I consulted their lasting happiness, and made myself a title to their future gratitude by challenging their present rebukes.

I told you not of my father's passionate violences, disgraceful to himself and productive of unspeakable anguish to me. Why should I revive the scene? why be the historian of my father's dishonour? why needlessly add to my own and to your affliction?

My concealments arose not from the fear that the disclosure would estrange you from me. I supposed you willing to grant me the same independence of a parent's control which you claimed for yourself. I saw no difference between forbearing to consult a parent, in a case where we know that his answer will condemn us, and

slighting his express forbidding.

I say thus much to account for, and, if possible, excuse, that concealment with which you reproach me. Tender and reluctant, indeed, are these reproaches; but,--as I deem it a sacred duty to reveal to you the utmost of my follies, what but injustice to you would be the tacit admission of injurious but groundless charges?

My actual faults are of too deep a dye to allow me to sport with your good opinion, or permit me to be worse thought of by you than I deserve.

You exhort me to seek reconcilement with my father. What mean you? I have not been the injurer. Not an angry word, accusing look, or revengeful thought, has come from me. I have exercised the privilege of a rational and moral being. I have loved, not according to another's estimate of merit, but my own. Of what then am I to repent? Where lies my transgression? If his treatment of me be occasioned by antipathy for you, must I adopt his antipathy and thus creep again into favour? Impossible! If it arise from my refusing to give up an alliance which his heart abhors, your letter to him, which you tell me you mean to write, and which will inform him that every view of that kind is at an end, will remove the evil.

Fear not for me, my friend. Whatever be my lot, be assured that I never can taste pure misery while the thought abides with me that you are not happy.

And what now remains but to leave with you the blessing of a grateful and devoted heart, and to submit, with what humility I can, to the destiny which you have prescribed?

I should not deserve your love, if I did not now relinquish it with an anguish next to despair; neither should I have merit in my own eyes, if I did not end this letter with acquitting you, the author of my loss, of all shadow of blame.

Farewell----forever.

H. COLDEN.

Letter XL

To James Montford

November 28.

I TOLD you of your brother Stephen's talk with me about accompanying him on his northwest voyage. I mentioned to you what were my objections to the scheme. It was a desperate adventure; a sort of forlorn hope; to be pursued in case my wishes in relation to Jane should be crossed. I had not then any, or much, apprehension of change in her resolutions. So many proofs of a fervent and invincible attachment to me had she lately given, that I could not imagine any motive strong enough to change her purpose. Yet now, my friend, have I arranged matters with your brother, and expect to bid an everlasting farewell to my native shore some day within the ensuing fortnight.

I call it an everlasting farewell, for I have, at present, neither expectation nor desire of returning. A three years' wandering among boisterous seas and through various climates, added to that inward care, that spiritless, dejected heart, which I shall ever bear about me, would surely never let me return, even if I had the wish: but I have not the wish. If I live at all, it must be in a scene far different and distant from that in which I have been hitherto reluctantly detained.

And why have I embraced this scheme? There can be but one cause.

Having just returned from following Thomson's remains to the grave, I received a letter from Jane. Her mother had just arrived. She came, it seems, in consequence of her daughter's apparent compliance with her wishes. The letter retracting my friend's precipitate promise had miscarried or had lingered by the way. What I little suspected, my father had acquainted Mrs. Fielder with his conduct towards me; and this, together with her mother's importunities, had prevailed on Jane once more to renounce me.

There never occurred an event in my life which did not, someway, bear testimony to the usefulness and value of sincerity. Had I fully disclosed all that passed between my father and me, should I not easily have diverted Jane from these extremities? Alone, at a distance from me, and with her mother's eloquence at hand to confirm every wayward sentiment and fortify her in every hostile resolution, she is easily driven into paths, and perhaps kept steadily in them, from which proper explanations and pathetic arguments, had they been early and seasonably employed by me, would have led her easily away.

I begin to think it is vain to strive against maternal influence. What but momentary victory can I hope to attain? What but poverty, dependence, ignominy, will she share with me? And if her strenuous spirit set naught by these, (and I know she is capable of rising above them,) how will she support her mother's indignation and grief?

I have now, indeed, no hope of even momentary victory. There are but two persons in the world who command her affections. Either, when present, (the other absent or silent,) has absolute dominion over her. Her mother, no doubt, is apprized of this, and has now pursued the only effectual method of securing submission.

I have already written an answer; I hope such a one as, when the present tumults of passion have subsided, when the eye sedately scrutinizes, and the heart beats in an even tenor, may be read without shame or remorse.

I shall also write to her mother. In doing this I must keep down the swelling bitterness. It may occupy my solitude, torment my feelings; but why should it infect my pen?

I have sometimes given myself credit for impartiality in judging of others. Indeed, I am inclined to think myself no blind or perverse judge even of my own actions. Hence, indeed, the greater part of my unhappiness. If my conduct had always conformed, instead of being adverse, to my principles, I should have moved on tranquilly and self-satisfied, at least; but, in truth, the being that goes by my name

was never more thoroughly contemned by another than by myself.--But this is falling into the old strain,-irksome, tiresome, and useless to you as to me. Yet I cannot write just now in any other; therefore I will stop.

Adieu, my friend. There will be time enough to hear from you ere my departure. Let me hear, then, from you.

Letter XLI

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, December 3.

Sir:--

My daughter informs me that the letter she has just despatched to you contains her resolution of never seeing you more. I likewise discover that she has requested and expects a reply from you, in which, she doubts not, you will confirm her resolution.

You, no doubt, regard me as your worst enemy. No request from me can hope to be complied with; yet I cannot forbear suggesting the propriety of your refraining from making any answer to my daughter's letter.

In my treatment of you, I shall not pretend any direct concern for your happiness. I am governed, whether erroneously or not, merely by views to the true interest of Mrs. Talbot, which, in my opinion, forbids her to unite herself to you. But if that union be calculated to bereave her of happiness, it cannot certainly be conducive to yours. If you consider the matter rightly, therefore, instead of accounting me an enemy, you will rank me among your benefactors.

You have shown yourself, in some instances, not destitute of generosity. It is but justice to acknowledge that your late letter to me avows sentiments such as I by no means expected, and makes me disposed to trust your candour to acquit my intention, at least, of some of the consequences of your father's resentment.

I was far from designing to subject you to violence or ignominy, and meant nothing by my application to him but your genuine and lasting happiness.

I dare not hope that it will ever be in my power to appease that resentment which you feel for me. I cannot expect that you are so far raised above the rest of men, that any action will be recommended to you by its tendency to oblige me; yet I cannot conceal from you that your reconcilement with your father will give me peculiar satisfaction.

I ventured on a former occasion to make you an offer, on condition of your going to Europe, which I now beg leave to repeat. By accepting the enclosed bill, and embarking for a foreign land without any further intercourse, personally or by letter, with my daughter, and after reconciliation with your father, you will confer a very great favour on one who, notwithstanding appearances, has acted in a manner that becomes

Your true friend,

M. FIELDER.

Letter XLII

To Mrs. Fielder

Baltimore, December 5.

Madam:--

I pretend not to be raised above any of the infirmities of human nature; but I am too sensible of the errors of my past conduct, and the defects which will ever cleave to my character, to be either surprised or indignant at the disapprobation of a virtuous mind. So far from harbouring resentment against you, it is with reluctance I decline the acceptance of your bill. I cannot consider it in any other light than as an alms which my situation is far from making necessary, and by receiving which I should

defraud those whose poverty may plead a superior title.

I hasten to give you pleasure by informing you of my intention to leave America immediately. My destiny is far from being certain; but at present I both desire and expect never to revisit my native land.

I design not to solicit another interview with Mrs. Talbot. You dissuade me from making any reply to her letter, from the fear, no doubt, that my influence will be exerted to change her resolution. Dismiss, I entreat you, madam, every apprehension of that kind. Your daughter has deliberately made her election. If no advantage be taken of her tenderness and pity, she will be happy in her new scheme. Shall I, who pretend to love her, subject her to new trials and mortifications? Am I able to reward her, by my affection, for the loss of every other comfort? What can I say in favour of my own attachment to her, which may not be urged in favour of her attachment to her mother? The happiness of the one or the other must be sacrificed; and shall I not rather offer than demand the sacrifice? and how poor and selfish should I be if I did not strive to lessen the difficulties of her choice, and persuade her that in gratifying her mother she inflicts no lasting misery on me!

I regard in its true light what you can say with respect to a reconcilement with my father, and am always ready to comply with your wishes in the only way that a conviction of my own rectitude will permit. I have patiently endured revilings and blows, but I shall not needlessly expose myself to new insults. Though willing to accept apology and grant an oblivion of the past, I will never avow a penitence which I do not feel, or confess that I deserved the treatment I received.

Truly can I affirm that your daughter's happiness is of all earthly things most dear to me. I fervently thank Heaven that I leave her exempt from all the hardships of poverty, and in the bosom of one who will guard her safety with a zeal equal to my own. All that I fear is, that your efforts to console her will fail. I know the heart which, if you thought me worthy of the honour, I should account it my supreme

felicity to call mine. Let it be a precious deposit in your hands.

And now, madam, permit me to conclude with a solemn blessing on your head and on hers, and with an eternal farewell to you both.

H. COLDEN.

Letter XLIII

To James Montford

Philadelphia, December 7.

I hope you will approve of my design to accompany Stephen. The influence of variety and novelty will no doubt be useful. Why should I allow my present feelings, which assure me that I have lost what is indispensable not only to my peace but my life, to supplant the invariable lesson of experience, which teaches that time and absence will dull the edge of every calamity? And have I not found myself peculiarly susceptible of this healing influence?

Time and change of scene will, no doubt, relieve me; but, in the mean time, I have not a name for that wretchedness into which I am sunk. The light of day, the company of mankind, is at this moment insupportable. Of all places in the world, this is the most hateful to my soul. I should not have entered the city, I should not abide in it a moment, were it not for a thought that occurred just before I left Baltimore.

You know the mysterious and inexplicable calumny which has heightened Mrs. Fielder's antipathy against me.

Of late, I have been continually ruminating on it, and especially since Mrs. Talbot's last letter. Methinks it is impossible for me to leave the country till I have cleared her character of this horrid aspersion. Can there be any harmony between mother and child, must not suspicion and mistrust perpetually rankle in their bosoms, while

this imposture is believed?

Yet how to detect the fraud--Some clue must be discernible; perseverance must light on it at last. The agent in this sordid iniquity must be human; must be influenced by the ordinary motives; must be capable of remorse or of error; must have moments of repentance or of negligence.

My mind was particularly full of this subject in a midnight ramble which I took just before I left Baltimore. Something--I know not what--recalled to my mind a conversation which I had with the poor washwoman at Wilmington. Miss Jessup, whom you well know by my report, passed through Wilmington just as I left the sick woman's house, and stopped a moment just to give me a "How d'ye" and to drop some railleries founded on my visits to Miss Secker, a single and solitary lady. On reaching Philadelphia, she amused herself with perplexing Jane by jesting exaggerations on the same subject, in a way that seemed to argue somewhat of malignity; yet I thought nothing of it at the time.

On my next visit to the sick woman, it occurred to me, for want of other topics of conversation, to introduce Miss Jessup. Did she know any thing, I asked, of that lady?

Oh, yes, was the answer. A great deal. She lived a long time in the family. She remembered her well, and was a sufferer by many of her freaks.

It was always disagreeable to me to listen to the slanderous prate of servants; I am careful, whenever it intrudes itself, to discourage and rebuke it; but just at this time I felt some resentment against this lady, and hardly supposed it possible for any slanderer to exaggerate her contemptible qualities. I suffered her therefore to run on in a tedious and minute detail of the capricious, peevish, and captious deportment of Miss Jessup.

After the rhetoric of half an hour, all was wound up, in a kind of satirical apology, with, "No wonder; for the girl was over head and ears in love, and her man would

have nothing to say to her. A hundred times has she begged and prayed him to be kind, but he slighted all her advances; and always, after they had been shut up together, she wreaked her disappointment and ill-humour upon us."

"Pray," said I, "who was this ungrateful person?"

"His name was Talbot. Miss Jessup would not give him up, but teased him with letters and prayers till the man at last got married,--ten to one, for no other reason than to get rid of her."

This intelligence was new. Much as I had heard of Miss Jessup, a story like this had never reached my ears. I quickly ascertained that the Talbot spoken of was the late husband of my friend.

Some incident interrupted the conversation here. The image of Miss Jessup was displaced to give room to more important reveries, and I thought no more of her till this night's ramble. I now likewise recollected that the only person suspected of having entered the apartment where lay Mrs. Talbot's unfinished letter was no other than Miss Jessup herself, who was always gadding at unseasonable hours. How was this suspicion removed? By Miss Jessup herself, who, on being charged with the theft, asserted that she was elsewhere engaged at the time.

It was, indeed, exceedingly improbable that Miss Jessup had any agency in this affair,--a volatile, giddy, thoughtless character, who betrayed her purposes on all occasions, from a natural incapacity to keep a secret. And yet had not this person succeeded in keeping her attachment to Mr. Talbot from the knowledge, and even the suspicion, of his wife? Their intercourse had been very frequent since her marriage, and all her sentiments appeared to be expressed with a rash and fearless confidence. Yet, if Hannah Secker's story deserved credit, she had exerted a wonderful degree of circumspection, and had placed on her lips a guard that had never once slept.

I determined to stop at Wilmington next day, on my journey to you, and glean what

further information Hannah could give. I ran to her lodgings as soon as I alighted at the inn.

I inquired how long and in what years she lived with Miss Jessup; what reason she had for suspecting her mistress of an attachment to Talbot; what proofs Talbot gave of aversion to her wishes.

On each of these heads her story was tediously minute and circumstantial. She lived with Miss Jessup and her mother before Talbot's marriage with my friend, after the marriage, and during his absence on the voyage which occasioned his death.

The proofs of Miss Jessup's passion were continually occurring in her own family, where she suffered the ill-humour occasioned by her disappointment to display itself without control. Hannah's curiosity was not chastened by much reflection, and some things were overheard which verified the old maxim that "walls have ears." In short, it appears that this poor lady doted on Talbot; that she reversed the usual methods of proceeding, and submitted to his mercy; that she met with nothing but scorn and neglect; that even after his marriage with Jane she sought his society, pestered him with invitations and letters, and directed her walks in such a way as to make their meeting in the street occur as if by accident.

While Talbot was absent, she visited his wife very frequently, but the subjects of their conversation and the degree of intimacy between the two ladies were better known to me than to Hannah.

You may think it strange that my friend never suspected or discovered the state of Miss Jessup's feelings. But, in truth, Jane is the least suspicious or inquisitive of mortals. Her neighbour was regarded with no particular affection; her conversation is usually a vein of impertinence or levity; her visits were always unsought, and eluded as often as decorum would permit; her talk was seldom listened to, and she and all belonging to her were dismissed from recollection as soon as politeness gave leave. Miss Jessup's deficiencies in personal and mental graces, and Talbot's

undisguised contempt for her, precluded every sentiment like jealousy.

Jane's life since the commencement of her acquaintance with Miss Jessup was lonely and secluded. Her friends were not of her neighbour's cast, and those tattlers who knew any thing of Miss Jessup's follies were quite unknown to her. No wonder, then, that the troublesome impertinence of this poor woman had never betrayed her to so inattentive an observer as Jane.

After many vague and fruitless inquiries, I asked Hannah if Miss Jessup was much addicted to the pen.

Very much. Was always scribbling. Was never by herself three minutes but the pen was taken up; would write on any pieces of paper that offered; was frequently rebuked by her mother for wasting so much time in this way; the cause of a great many quarrels between them; the old lady spent the whole day knitting; supplied herself in this way with all the stockings she herself used; knit nothing but worsted, which she wore all the year round; all the surplus beyond what she needed for her own use she sold at a good price to a Market Street shopkeeper; Hannah used to be charged with the commission; always executed it grumblingly; the old lady had stipulated with a Mr. H---- to take, at a certain price, all she made; Hannah was despatched with the stockings, but was charged to go beforehand to twenty other dealers and try to get more; used to go directly to Mr. H----, and call on her friends by the way, persuading the old lady that her detention was occasioned by the number and perseverance of her applications to the dealers in hose, till at last she fell under suspicion, was once followed by the old lady, detected in her fraud, and dismissed from the house with ignominy. The quondam mistress endeavoured to injure Hannah's character by reporting that her agent had actually got a higher price for the stockings than she thought proper to account for to her employer; had gained, by this artifice, not less than three farthings a pair on twenty-three pairs; all a base lie as ever was told----

"You say that Miss Jessup was a great scribbler. Did she write well; fast; neatly?"

"They say she did,--very well." For her part, she could not write, and was therefore no judge; but Tom, the waiter and coachman, was very fond of reading and writing, and used to say that Miss Polly would make a good clerk. Tom used to carry all her messages and letters; was a cunning and insinuating fellow; cajoled his mistress by flatteries and assiduities; got many a smile, many a bounty and gratuity, for which the fellow only laughed at her behind her back.

"What has become of this Tom?"

He lived with her still, and was in as high favour as ever. Tom had paid her a visit the day before, being in attendance on his mistress on her late journey. From him she supposed that Miss Polly had gained intelligence of Hannah's situation, and of her being succoured, in her distress, by me.

"Tom, you say, was her letter-carrier. Did you ever hear from him with whom she corresponded? Did she eyer write to Talbot?"

"Oh, yes. Just before Talbot's marriage, she often wrote to him. Tom used to talk very freely in the kitchen about his mistress's attachment, and always told us what reception he met with. Mr. Talbot seldom condescended to write any answer."

"I suppose, Hannah, I need hardly ask whether you have any specimen of Miss Jessup's writing in your possession?"

This question considerably disconcerted the poor woman. She did not answer me till I had repeated the question.

Why--yes; she had--something--she believed.

"I presume it is nothing improper to be disclosed: if so, I should be glad to have a sight of it."

She hesitated; was very much perplexed; denied and confessed alternately that she possessed some of Miss Jessup's writing; at length began to weep very bitterly.

After some solicitation, on my part, to be explicit, she consented to disclose what she acknowledged to be a great fault. The substance of her story was this:--

Miss Jessup, on a certain occasion, locked herself up for several hours in her chamber. At length she came out, and went to the street-door, apparently with an intention of going abroad. Just then a heavy rain began to fall. This incident produced a great deal of impatience, and after waiting some time, in hopes of the shower's ceasing, and frequently looking at her watch, she called for an umbrella. Unhappily, as poor Hannah afterwards thought, no umbrella could be found. Her own had been lent to a friend the preceding evening, and the mother would have held herself most culpably extravagant to uncase hers without a most palpable necessity. Miss Polly was preparing to go out unsheltered, when the officious Tom interfered, and asked her if he could do what she wanted. At first she refused his offer, but, the mother's importunities to stay at home becoming more clamorous, she consented to commission Tom to drop a letter at the post-office. This he was to do with the utmost despatch, and promised that not a moment should be lost. He received the letter, but, instead of running off with it immediately, he slipped into the kitchen, just to arm himself against the storm by a hearty draught of strong beer.

While quaffing his nectar, and chattering with his usual gayety, Hannah, who had long owed a grudge both to mistress and man, was tempted to convey the letter from Tom's pocket, where it was but half deposited, into her own. Her only motive was to vex and disappoint those whose chief pleasure it had always been to vex and disappoint her. The tankard being hastily emptied, he hastened away to the post-office. When he arrived there, he felt for the letter. It was gone; dropped, as he supposed, in the street. In great confusion he returned, examining very carefully the gutters and porches by the way. He entered the kitchen in great perplexity, and inquired of Hannah if a letter had not fallen from his pocket before he went out.

Hannah, according to her own statements, was incapable of inveterate malice. She

was preparing to rid Tom of his uneasiness, when he was summoned to the presence of his lady. He thought proper to extricate himself from all difficulties by boldly affirming that the letter had been left according to direction, and he afterwards endeavoured to persuade Hannah that it had been found in the bottom of his pocket.

Every day increased the difficulty of disclosing the truth. Tom and Miss Jessup talked no more on the subject, and time, and new provocations from her mistress, confirmed Hannah in her resolution of retaining the paper.

She could not read, and was afraid of trusting anybody else with the contents of this epistle. Several times she was about to burn it, but forbore from the persuasion that a day might arrive when the possession would be of some importance to her. It had lain, till almost forgotten, in the bottom of her crazy chest.

I rebuked her, with great severity, for her conduct, and insisted on her making all the atonement in her power, by delivering up the letter to the writer. I consented to take charge of it for that purpose.

You will judge my surprise, when I received a letter, with the seal unbroken, directed to Mrs. Fielder, of New York. Jane and I had often been astonished at the minute intelligence which her mother received of our proceedings; at the dexterity this secret informant had displayed in misrepresenting and falsely construing our actions. The informer was anonymous, and one of the letters had been extorted from her mother by Jane's urgent solicitations. This I had frequently perused, and the penmanship was still familiar to my recollection. It bore a striking resemblance to the superscription of this letter, and was equally remote from Miss Jessup's ordinary handwriting. Was it rash to infer from these circumstances that the secret enemy, whose malice had been so active and successful, was at length discovered?

What was I to do? Should I present myself before Miss Jessup with this letter in my hand, and lay before her my suspicions, or should I carry it to Mrs. Fielder, to whom it was directed? My curiosity was defeated by the careful manner in which it was

folded; and this was not a case in which I deemed myself authorized to break a seal.

After much reflection, I determined to call upon Miss Jessup. I meant not to restore her the letter, unless the course our conversation should take made it proper. I have already been at her house. She was not at home. I am to call again at eight o'clock in the evening.

In my way thither I passed Mrs. Talbot's house. There were scarcely any tokens of its being inhabited. No doubt the mother and child have returned together to New York. On approaching the house, my heart, too heavy before, became a burden almost insupportable. I hastened my pace, and averted my eyes.

I am now shut up in my chamber at an inn. I feel as if in a wilderness of savages, where all my safety consisted in solitude. I was glad not to meet with a human being whom I knew.

What I shall say to Miss Jessup when I see her, I know not. I have reason to believe her the author of many slanders, but look for no relief from the mischiefs they have occasioned, in accusing or upbraiding the slanderer. She has likewise disclosed many instances of guilty conduct, which I supposed impossible to be discovered. I never concealed them from Mrs. Talbot, to whom a thorough knowledge of my character was indispensable; but I was unwilling to make any other my confessor. In this I cannot suppose her motives to have been very benevolent; but, since she adhered to the truth, it is not for me to arraign her motives.

May I not suspect that she had some hand in the forgery lately come to light? A mind like hers must hate a successful rival. To persuade Talbot of his wife's perfidy was at least to dissolve his alliance with another; and since she took so much pains to gain his favour, even after his marriage, is it not allowable to question the delicacy and punctiliousness, at least, of her virtue?

Mrs. Fielder's aversion to me is chiefly founded on a knowledge of my past errors. She thinks them too flagrant to be atoned for, and too inveterate to be cured. I can

never hope to subdue perfectly that aversion, and, though Jane can never be happy without me, I alone cannot make her happy. On my own account, therefore, it is of little moment what she believes. But her own happiness is deeply concerned in clearing her daughter's character of this blackest of all stains.

Here is some one coming up the stairs towards my apartment. Surely it cannot be to me that this visit is intended.

Good Heaven! What shall I do?

It was Molly that has just left me.

My heart sunk at her appearance. I had made up my mind to separate my evil destiny from that of Jane, and could only portend new trials and difficulties from the appearance of one whom I supposed her messenger.

The poor girl, as soon as she saw me, began to sob bitterly, and could only exclaim, "Oh, sir! Oh, Mr. Colden!"

This behaviour was enough to terrify me. I trembled in every joint while I faltered out, "I hope your mistress is well?"

After many efforts, I prevailed in gaining a distinct account of my friend's situation. This good girl, by the sympathy she always expressed in her mistress's fortunes, by her silent assiduities and constant proofs of discretion and affection, had gained Mrs. Talbot's confidence; yet no further than to indulge her feelings with less restraint in Molly's presence than in that of any other person.

I learned that the night after Mrs. Fielder's arrival was spent by my friend in sighs and restlessness. Molly lay in the same chamber, and her affectionate heart was as much a stranger to repose as that of her mistress. She frequently endeavoured to comfort Mrs. Talbot, but in vain.

Next day she did not rise as early as usual. Her mother came to her bedside, and inquired affectionately after her health. The visit was received with smiling and

affectionate complacency. Her indisposition was disguised, and she studied to persuade Mrs. Fielder that she enjoyed her usual tranquillity. She rose, and attempted to eat, but quickly desisted, and after a little while retired and locked herself up in her chamber. Even Molly was not allowed to follow her.

In this way that and the ensuing day passed. She wore an air of constrained cheerfulness in her mother's presence; affected interest in common topics; and retired at every convenient interval to her chamber, where she wept incessantly.

Mrs. Fielder's eye was watchful and anxious. She addressed Mrs. Talbot in a tender and maternal accent; seemed solicitous to divert her attention by anecdotes of New York friends; and carefully eluded every subject likely to recall images which were already too intimately present. The daughter seemed grateful for these solicitudes, and appeared to fight with her feelings the more resolutely because they gave pain to her mother.

All this was I compelled to hear from the communicative Molly.

My heart bled at this recital. Too well did I predict what effect her compliance would have on her peace.

I asked if Jane had not received a letter from me.

Yes; two letters had come to the door at once, this morning,--one for Mrs. Fielder and the other for her daughter. Jane expected its arrival, and showed the utmost impatience when the hour approached. She walked about her chamber, listened, with a start, to every sound, continually glanced from her window at the passengers.

She did not conceal from Molly the object of her solicitude. The good girl endeavoured to soothe her, but she checked her with vehemence:--"Talk not to me, Molly. On this hour depends my happiness,--my life. The sacrifice my mother asks is too much or too little. In bereaving me of my love, she must be content to take my existence also. They never shall be separated."

The weeping girl timorously suggested that she had already given me up.

"True, Molly, in a rash moment I told him that we meet no more; but two days of misery have convinced me that it cannot be. His answer will decide my fate as to this world. If he accept my dismissal, I am thenceforth undone. I will die. Blessing my mother, and wishing her a less stubborn child, I will die."

These last words were uttered with an air the most desperate, and an emphasis the most solemn. They chilled me to the heart, and I was unable longer to keep my seat. Molly, unbidden, went on.

"Your letter at last came. I ran down to receive it. Mrs. Fielder was at the street-door before me, but she suffered me to carry my mistress's letter to her. Poor lady! She met me at the stair-head, snatched the paper eagerly, but trembled so she could not open it. At last she threw herself on the bed, and ordered me to read it to her. I did so. At every sentence she poured forth fresh tears, and exclaimed, wringing her hands, 'Oh, what--what a heart have I madly cast away!'"

The girl told me much more, which I am unable to repeat. Her visit was self-prompted. She had caught a glimpse of me as I passed the door, and, without mentioning her purpose to her mistress, set out as soon as it was dusk.

"Cannot you do something, Mr. Colden, for my mistress?" continued the girl. "She will surely die if she has not her own way; and, to judge from your appearance, it is as great a cross to you as to her."

Heaven knows, that, with me, it is nothing but the choice of dreadful evils. Jane is the mistress of her own destiny. It is not I that have renounced her, but she that has banished me. She has only to recall the sentence, which she confesses to have been hastily and thoughtlessly pronounced, and no power on earth shall sever me from her side.

Molly asked my permission to inform her mistress of my being in the city, and conjured me not to leave it, during the next day at least. I readily consented, and requested her to bring me word in the morning in what state things were.

She offered to conduct me to her then. It was easy to effect an interview without Mrs. Fielder's knowledge; but I was sick of all clandestine proceedings, and had promised Mrs. Fielder not to seek another meeting with her daughter. I was likewise anxious to visit Miss Jessup, and ascertain what was to be done by means of the letter in my pocket.

Can I, my friend,--can I, without unappeasable remorse, pursue this scheme of a distant voyage? Suppose some fatal despair should seize my friend. Suppose--it is impossible. I will not stir till she has had time to deliberate; till resignation to her mother's will shall prove a task that is practicable.

Should I not be the most fragrant of villains if I deserted one that loved me? My own happiness is not a question. I cannot be a selfish being and a true lover. Happiness, without her, is indeed a chimerical thought; but my exile would be far from miserable, while assured of her tranquillity, and possession would confer no peace, if she whom I possessed were not happier than a different destiny would make her.

Why have all these thoughts been suspended for the last two days? I had wrought myself up to a firm persuasion that marriage was the only remedy for all evils; that our efforts to regain the favour of her mother would be most likely to succeed when that which she endeavoured to prevent was irretrievable. Yet that persuasion was dissipated by her last letter. That convinced me that her lot would only be made miserable by being united to mine. Yet now, is it not evident that our fates must be inseparable?

What a fantastic impediment is this aversion of her mother! And yet, can I safely and deliberately call it fantastic? Let me sever myself from myself, and judge impartially. Be my heart called upon to urge its claims to such affluence, such love, such treasures of personal and mental excellence, as Jane has to bestow. Would it not be dumb? It is not so absurd as to plead its devotion to her as an atonement for every past guilt, and as affording security for future uprightness.

On my own merit I am, and ever have been, mute. I have plead with Mrs. Fielder, not for myself, but for Jane. It is her happiness that forms the object of my supreme regard. I am eager to become hers, because her, not because my happiness, though my happiness certainly does, demand it.

I am then resolved. Jane's decision shall be deliberate. I will not bias her by prayers or blandishments. Her resolution shall spring from her own judgment, and shall absolutely govern me. I will rivet myself to her side, or vanish forever, according to her pleasure.

I wish I had written a few words to her by Molly, assuring her of my devotion to her will. And yet, stands she in need of any new assurances? She has banished me. I am preparing to fly. She recalls me, and it is impossible to depart.

I must go to Miss Jessup's. I will take up the pen ('tis my sole amusement) when I return.

I went to Miss Jessup's; her still sealed letter in my pocket; my mind confused, perplexed, sorrowful; wholly undetermined as to the manner of addressing her, or the use to be made of this important paper. I designedly prolonged my walk, in hopes of forming some distinct conception of the purpose for which I was going, but only found myself each moment sinking into new perplexities. Once I had taken the resolution of opening her letter, and turned my steps towards the fields, that I might examine it at leisure; but there was something disgraceful in the violation of a seal, which scared me away from this scheme.

At length, reproaching myself for this indecision, and leaving my conduct to be determined by circumstances, I went directly to her house.

Miss Jessup was unwell; was unfit to see company; desired me to send up my name. I did not mention my name to the servant, but replied I had urgent business, which a few minutes' conversation would despatch. I was admitted.

I found the lady in a careless garb, reclining on a sofa, wan, pale, and of a sickly

aspect On recognising me, she assumed a languidly-smiling air, and received me with much civility. I took my seat near her. She began to talk:--

"I am very unwell; got a terrible cold, coming from Dover; been laid up ever since; a teasing cough, no appetite, and worse spirits than I ever suffered. Glad you've come to relieve my solitude; not a single soul to see me; Mrs. Talbot never favours a body with a visit. Pray, how's the dear girl? Hear her mother's come; heard, it seems, of your intimacy with Miss Secker; determined to revenge your treason to her goddess; vows she shall henceforth have no more to say to you."

While waiting for admission, I formed hastily the resolution in what manner to conduct this interview. My deportment was so solemn, that the chatterer, glancing at my face in the course of her introductory harangue, felt herself suddenly chilled and restrained:--

"Why, what now, Colden? You are mighty grave, methinks. Do you repent already of your new attachment? Has the atmosphere of Philadelphia reinstated Jane in all her original rights?"

"Proceed, madam. When you are tired of raillery, I shall beg your attention to a subject in which your honour is deeply concerned; to a subject which allows not of a jest."

"Nay," said she, in some little trepidation, "if you have any thing to communicate, I am already prepared to receive it."

"Indeed, Miss Jessup, I have something to communicate. A man of more refinement and address than I can pretend to would make this communication in a more circuitous and artful manner; and a man less deeply interested in the establishment of truth would act with more caution and forbearance. I have no excuse to plead, no forgiveness to ask, for what I am now going to disclose. I demand nothing from you but your patient attention while I lay before you the motives of my present visit.

"You are no stranger to my attachment to Mrs. Talbot. That my passion is requited is

likewise known to you. That her mother objects to her union with me, and raises her objections on certain improprieties in my character and conduct, I suppose, has already come to your knowledge.

"You may naturally suppose that I am desirous of gaming her favour; but it is not by the practice of fraud and iniquity, and therefore I have not begun with denying or concealing my faults. Very faulty, very criminal, have I been; to deny that would be adding to the number of my transgressions: but I assure you, Miss Jessup, there have been limits to my follies; there is a boundary beyond which I have never gone. Mrs. Fielder imagines me much more criminal than I really am, and her opinion of me--which, if limited in the strictest manner by my merits, would amply justify her aversion to my marriage with her daughter--is, however, carried further than justice allows.

"Mrs. Fielder has been somewhat deceived with regard to me. She thinks me capable of a guilt of which, vicious as I am, I am yet incapable. Nay, she imagines I have actually committed a crime of which I am wholly innocent.

"What think you, madam," (taking her hand, and eyeing her with steadfastness;) "she thinks me at once so artful and so wicked that I have made the wife unfaithful to the husband; that I have persuaded Mrs. Talbot to forget what was due to herself, her fame, and to trample on her marriage-vow.

"This opinion is not a vague conjecture on suspicion. It is founded in what seems to be the most infallible of all evidence; the written confession of her daughter. The paper appears to be a letter which was addressed to the seducer soon after the guilty interview. This paper came indirectly into Mrs. Fielder's hands. To justify her charge against us, she has shown it to, us. Now, madam, the guilt imputed to us is a stranger to our hearts. The crime which this letter confesses never was committed, and the letter which contains the confession never was written by Jane. It is a forgery.

"Mrs. Fielder's misapprehension, so far as it relates to me, is of very little moment. I

can hope for nothing from the removal of this error while so many instances of real misconduct continue to plead against me, but her daughter's happiness is materially affected by it, and for her sake I am anxious to vindicate her fame from this reproach.

"No doubt, Miss Jessup, you have often asked me in your heart, since I began to speak, why I have stated this transaction to you. What interest have you in our concerns? What proofs of affection or esteem have you received from us, that should make you zealous in our behalf? Or what relation has your interest in any respect to our weal or woe? Why should you be called upon as a counsellor or umpire in the little family dissensions of Mrs. Talbot and her mother?

"And do indeed these questions rise in your heart, Miss Jessup? Does not memory enable you to account for conduct which, to the distant and casual observer, to those who know not what you know, would appear strange and absurd?

"Recollect yourself. I will give you a moment to recall the past. Think over all that has occurred since your original acquaintance with Mrs. Talbot or her husband, and tell me, solemnly and truly, whether you discern not the cause of his mistake. Tell me whether you know not the unhappy person whom some delusive prospect of advantage, some fatal passion, has tempted to belie the innocent."

I am no reader of faces, my friend. I drew no inferences from the confusion sufficiently visible in Miss Jessup. She made no attempt to interrupt me, but quickly withdrew her eye from my gaze; hung her head upon her bosom; a hectic flush now and then shot across her check. But these would have been produced by a similar address, delivered with much solemnity and emphasis, in any one, however innocent.

I believe there was no anger in my looks. Supposing her to have been the author of this stratagem, it awakened in me not resentment, but pity. I paused; but she made no answer to my expostulation. At length I resumed, with augmented earnestness,

grasping her hand:--

"Tell me, I conjure you, what you know. Be not deterred by any self-regard; but, indeed, how can your interest be affected by clearing up a mistake so fatal to the happiness of one for whom you have always professed a friendly regard?

"Will your own integrity or reputation be brought into question? In order to exculpate your friend, will it be necessary to accuse yourself? Have you been guilty in withholding the discovery? Have you been guilty in contriving the fraud? Did your own hand pen the fatal letter which is now brought in evidence against my friend? Were you yourself guilty of counterfeiting hands, in order to drive the husband into a belief of his wife's perfidy?"

A deadly paleness overspread her countenance at these words. I pitied her distress and confusion, and waited not for an answer which she was unable to give.

"Yes, Miss Jessup, I well know your concern in this transaction. I mean not to distress you; I mean not to put you to unnecessary shame; I have no indignation or enmity against you. I came hither not to injure or disgrace you, but to confer on you a great and real benefit; to enable you to repair the evil which your infatuation has occasioned. I want to relieve your conscience from the sense of having wronged one that never wronged you.

"Do not imagine that in all this I am aiming at my own selfish advantage. This is not the mother's only objection to me, or only proof of that frailty she justly ascribes to me. To prove me innocent of this charge will not reconcile her to her daughter's marriage. It will only remove one insuperable impediment to her reconciliation with her daughter.

"Mrs. Fielder is, at this moment, not many steps from this spot. Permit me to attend you to her. I will introduce the subject. I will tell her that you come to clear her daughter from an unmerited charge, to confess that the unfinished letter was taken by you, and that, by additions in a feigned hand, you succeeded in making that an

avowal of abandoned wickedness, which was originally innocent, at least, though perhaps indiscreet."

All this was uttered in a very rapid but solemn accent. I gave her no time to recollect herself; no leisure for denial or evasion. I talked as if her agency was already ascertained; and the feelings she betrayed at this abrupt and unaware attack confirmed my suspicions.

After a long pause, and a struggle, as it were, for utterance, she faltered out, "Mr. Colden, you see I am very sick: this conduct has been very strange. Nothing,--I know nothing of what you have been saying. I wonder at your talking to me in this manner: you might as well address yourself in this style to one you never saw. What grounds can you have for suspecting me of any concern in this transaction?"

"Ah, madam," replied I, "I see you have not strength of mind to confess a fault. Why will you compel me to produce the proof that you have taken an unauthorized part in Mrs. Talbot's concerns? Do you imagine that the love you bore her husband, even after his marriage, the efforts you used to gain his favour, his contemptuous rejection of your advances,--can you imagine that these things are not known?

"Why you should endeavour to defraud the wife of her husband's esteem, is a question which your own heart only can answer. Why you should watch Mrs. Talbot's conduct, and communicate your discoveries, in anonymous letters and a hand disguised, to her mother, I pretend not to say. I came not to inveigh against the folly or malignity of such conduct. I came not even to censure it. I am not entitled to sit in judgment over you. My regard for mother and daughter makes me anxious to rectify an error fatal to their peace. There is but one way of doing this effectually, with the least injury to your character. I would not be driven to the necessity of employing public means to convince the mother that the charge is false, and that you were the calumniator; means that will humble and disgrace you infinitely more than a secret interview and frank confession from your own lips.

"To deny and to prevaricate in a case like this is to be expected from one capable of acting as you have acted; but it will avail you nothing. It will merely compel me to have recourse to means less favourable to you. My reluctance to employ them arises from regard to you, for I repeat that I have no enmity for you, and propose, in reality, not only Mrs. Talbot's advantage, but your own."

I cannot paint the alarm and embarrassment which these words occasioned. Tears afforded her some relief, but shame had deprived her of all utterance.

"Let me conjure you," resumed I, "to go with me this moment to Mrs. Fielder. In ten minutes all may be over. I will save you the pain of speaking. Only be present while I explain the matter. Your silent acquiescence will be all that I shall demand."

"Impossible!" she exclaimed, in a kind of agony; "I am already sick to death! I cannot move a step on such a purpose. I don't know Mrs. Fielder, and can never look her in the face."

"A letter, then," replied I, "will do, perhaps, as well. Here are pen and paper. Send to her, by me, a few lines. Defer all circumstance and comment, and merely inform her who the author of this forgery was. Here," continued I, producing the letter which Talbot had shown to Mrs. Fielder,--" here is the letter in which my friend's hand is counterfeited, and she is made to confess a guilt to the very thought of which she has ever been a stranger. Enclose it in a paper, acknowledging the stratagem to be yours. It is done in a few words, and in half a minute."

My impetuosity overpowered all opposition and remonstrance. The paper was before her, the pen in her reluctant fingers; but that was all.

"There may never be a future opportunity of repairing your misconduct. You are sick, you say; and, indeed, your countenance bespeaks some deeply-rooted malady. You cannot be certain but that this is the last opportunity you may ever enjoy. When sunk upon the bed of death, and unable to articulate your sentiments, you may unavailingly regret the delay of this confession. You may die with the excruciating

thought of having blasted the fame of an innocent woman, and of having sown eternal discord between mother and child."

I said a good deal more in this strain, by which she was deeply affected; but she demanded time to reflect. She would do nothing then; she would do all I wished to-morrow. She was too unwell to see anybody, to hold a pen, at present.

"All I want," said I, "are but few words. You cannot be at a loss for these. I will hold, I will guide your hand; I will write what you dictate. Will you put your hand to something which I will write this moment in your presence and subject to your revision?"

I did not stay for her consent, but, seizing the pen, put down hastily these words:--

"Madam: the enclosed letter has led you into mistake. It has persuaded you that your daughter was unfaithful to her vows; but know, madam, that the concluding paragraph was written by me. I found the letter unfinished on Mrs. Talbot's desk. I took it thence without her knowledge, and added the concluding paragraph, in a hand as much resembling hers as possible, and conveyed it to the hands of her husband."

This hasty scribble I read to her, and urged her, by every consideration my invention could suggest, to sign it. But no; she did not deny the truth of the statement it contained, but she must have time to recollect herself. Her head was rent to pieces by pain. She was in too much confusion to allow her to do any thing just now deliberately.

I now produced the letter I received from Hannah Seeker, and said, "I see, madam, you will compel me to preserve no measures with you. There is a letter which you wrote to Mrs. Fielder. Its contents were so important that you would not at first trust a servant with the delivery of it at the office. This, however, you were finally compelled to do. A fellow-servant, however, stole it from your messenger, and, instead of being delivered according to its address, it has lately come into my hands.

"No doubt," (showing the superscription, but not permitting her to see that the seal was unbroken,) "no doubt you recognise the hand; the hand of that anonymous detractor who had previously taken so much pains to convince the husband that his wife was an adulteress and a prostitute."

Had I foreseen the effect which this disclosure would have had, I should have hesitated. After a few convulsive breathings, she fainted. I was greatly alarmed, and, calling in a female servant, I stayed till she revived. I thought it but mercy to leave her alone, and, giving directions to the servant where I might be found, and requesting her to tell her mistress that I would call again early in the morning, I left the house.

I returned hither, and am once more shut up in my solitary chamber. I am in want of sleep, but my thoughts must be less tumultuous before that blessing can be hoped for. All is still in the house and in the city, and the "cloudy morning" of the watchman tells me that midnight is past. I have already written much, but must write on.

What, my friend, can this letter contain? The belief that the contents are known and the true writer discovered produced strange effects. I am afraid there was some duplicity in my conduct. But the concealment of the unbroken seal was little more than chance. Had she inquired whether the letter was opened, I should not have deceived her.

Perhaps, however, I ascribe too much to this discovery. Miss Jessup was evidently very ill. The previous conversation had put her fortitude to a severe test. The tide was already so high, that the smallest increase sufficed to overwhelm her. Methinks I might have gained my purpose with less injury to her.

But what purpose have I gained? I have effected nothing; I am as far, perhaps further than ever from vanquishing her reluctance. A night's reflection may fortify her pride, may furnish some expedient for eluding my request. Nay, she may refuse to see me

when I call on the morrow, arid I cannot force myself into her presence.

If all this should happen, what will be left for me to do? That deserves some consideration. This letter of Miss Jessup's may possibly contain the remedy for many evils. What use shall I make of it? How shall I get at its contents?

There is but one way. I must carry it to Mrs. Fielder, and deliver it to her, to whom it is addressed. Carry it myself? Venture into her presence by whom I am so much detested? She will tremble with mingled indignation and terror at the sight of me. I cannot hope a patient audience. And can I, in such circumstances, rely on my own equanimity? How can I endure the looks of one to whom I am a viper, a demon; who, not content with hating me for that which really merits hatred, imputes to me a thousand imaginary crimes?

Such is the lot of one that has forfeited his reputation. Having once been guilty, the returning path to rectitude is forever barred against him. His conduct will almost always be liable to a double construction; and who will suppose the influence of good motives, when experience has proved the influence, in former cases, of evil ones?

Jane Talbot is young, lovely, and the heiress, provided she retain the favour of her adopted mother, of a splendid fortune. I am poor, indolent, devoted, not to sensual, but to visionary and to costly, luxuries. How shall such a man escape the imputation of sordid and selfish motives?

How shall he prove that he counterfeits no passion, employs no clandestine or illicit means, to retain the affections of such a woman. Will his averments of disinterested motives be believed? Why should they be believed? How easily are assertions made, and how silly to credit declarations contradicted by the tenor of a man's whole conduct!

But I can truly aver that my motives are disinterested. Does not my character make a plentiful and independent provision, of more value to me, more necessary to my

happiness than to that of most other men? Can I place my hand upon my heart, and affirm that her fortune has no part in the zeal with which I have cultivated Jane's affections? There are few tenants of this globe to whom wealth is wholly undesirable, and very few whose actual poverty, whose indolent habits, and whose relish for expensive pleasure, make it more desirable than to me.

Mrs. Fielder is averse to her daughter's wishes. While this aversion endures, marriage, instead of enriching me, will merely reduce my wife to my own destitute condition. How are impartial observers, how is Mrs. Fielder, to construe my endeavours to subdue this aversion, and my declining marriage till this obstacle is overcome? Will they ascribe it merely to reluctance to bereave the object of my love of that affluence and those comforts without which, in my opinion, she would not be happy? Yet this is true. My own experience has taught me in what degree a luxurious education endears to us the means of an easy and elegant subsistence. Shall I be deaf to this lesson? Shall I rather listen to the splendid visions of my friend, who thinks my love will sufficiently compensate her for every suffering,--who seems to hold these enjoyments in contempt, and describes an humble and industrious life as teeming with happiness and dignity?

These are charming visions. My heart is frequently credulous, and is almost raised, by her bewitching eloquence, to the belief that, by bereaving her of friends and property, I confer on her a benefit. I place her in a sphere where all the resources of her fortitude and ingenuity will be brought into use.

But this, with me, is only a momentary elevation. More sober views are sure to succeed. Yet why have I deliberately exhorted Jane to become mine? Because I trust to the tenderness of her mother. That tenderness will not allow her wholly to abandon her beloved child, who has hitherto had no rival, and is likely to have no successor in her love. The evil, she will think, cannot be repaired; but some of its consequences may be obviated or lightened. Intercession and submission shall not

be wanting. Jane will never suffer her heart to be estranged from her mother. Reverence and gratitude will always maintain their place. And yet, confidence is sometimes shaken; doubts insinuate themselves. Is not Mrs. Fielder's temper ardent and inflexible? Will her anger be so easily appeased? In a contest like this, will she allow herself to be vanquished? And shall I, indeed, sever hearts so excellent? Shall I be the author of such exquisite and lasting misery to a woman like Mrs. Fielder? and shall I find that misery compensated by the happiness of her daughter? What pure and unmingled joy will the daughter taste, while conscious of having destroyed the peace, and perhaps hastened the end, of one who, with regard to her, has always deserved and always possessed a gratitude and veneration without bounds? And for whom is the tranquillity and affection of the mother to be sacrificed? For me,--a poor, unworthy wretch; deservedly despised by every strenuous and upright mind; a fickle, inconsiderate, frail mortal, whose perverse habits no magic can dissolve.

No. My whole heart implores Jane to forget and abandon me; to adhere to her mother; since no earthly power and no length of time will change Mrs. Fielder's feelings with regard to me; since I shall never obtain, as I shall never deserve, her regard, and since her mother's happiness is, and ought to be, dearer to Jane than her own personal and exclusive gratification. God grant that she may be able to perform, and cheerfully perform, her duty!

But how often, my friend, have I harped on this string! Yet I must write, and I must put down my present thoughts, and these are the sentiments eternally present.

Letter XLIV

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, December 1.

I said I would not write to you again; I would encourage, I would allow of, no intercourse between us. This was my solemn resolution and my voluntary and no

less solemn promise; yet I sit down to abjure this vow, to break this promise.

What a wretch am I! Feeble and selfish beyond all example among women! Why, why was I born, or why received I breath in a world and at a period, with whose inhabitants I can have no sympathy, whose notions of rectitude and decency find no answering chord in my heart?

Never was a creature so bereft of all dignity, all steadfastness. The slave of every impulse; blown about by the predominant gale; a scene of eternal fluctuation.

Yesterday my mother pleaded. Her tears dropped fast into my bosom, and I vowed to be all she wished; not merely to discard you from my presence, but to banish even your image from my thoughts. To act agreeably to her wishes was not sufficient. I must feel as she would have me feel. My actions must flow, not merely from a sense of duty, but from fervent inclination.

I promised every thing. My whole soul was in the promise. I retired to pen a last letter to you, and to say something to your father. My heart was firm; my hand steady. My mother read and approved:--"Dearest Jane! Now, indeed, are you my child. After this I will not doubt your constancy. Make me happy, by finding happiness in this resolution."

"Oh," thought I, as I paced my chamber alone, "what an ample recompense for every self-denial, for every sacrifice, are thy smiles, my maternal friend! I will live smilingly for thy sake, while thou livest. I will live only to close thy eyes, and then, as every earthly good has been sacrificed at thy bidding, will I take the pillow that sustained thee when dead, and quickly breathe out upon it my last sigh."

My thoughts were all lightsome and serene. I had laid down, methought, no life, no joy, but my own. My mother's peace, and your peace, for the safety of either of whom I would cheerfully die, had been purchased by the same act.

How did I delight to view you restored to your father's house! I was still your friend, though invisible. I watched over you, in quality of guardian angel. I etherealized

myself from all corporeal passions. I even set spiritual ministers to work to find one worthy of succeeding me in the sacred task of making you happy. I was determined to raise you to affluence, by employing, in a way unseen and unsuspected by you, those superfluities which a blind and erring destiny had heaped upon me.

And whither have these visions flown? Am I once more sunk to a level with my former self? Once I thought that religion was a substance with me,--not a shadow, to flit, to mock, and to vanish when its succour was most needed; yet now does my heart sink.

Oh, comfort me, my friend! plead against yourself; against me. Be my mother's advocate. Fly away from these arms that clasp you, and escape from me, even if your flight be my death. Think not of me, but of my mother, and secure to her the consolation of following my unwedded corpse to the grave, by disclaiming, by hating, by forgetting, the unfortunate

JANE.

Letter XLV

To Henry Colden

December 4.

Ah, my friend! in what school have you acquired such fatal skill in tearing the heart of an offender? Why, under an appearance of self-reproach, do you convey the bitterest maledictions? Why, with looks of idolatry and accents of compassion., do you aim the deadliest contempts and hurl the keenest censures against me?

"You acquit me of all shadow of blame." What! in proving me fickle, inconsistent, insensible to all your merit, ungrateful for your generosity, your love? How have I rewarded your reluctance to give me pain, your readiness to sacrifice every personal good for my sake? By reproaching you with dissimulation. By violating all those

vows, which no legal ceremony could make more solemn or binding, and which the highest, earliest, and most sacred voice of Heaven has ordained shall supersede all other bonds. By dooming you to feel "an anguish next to despair." Thus have I requited your unsullied truth, your unlimited devotion to me!

By what degrading standard do you measure my enjoyments! "In my mother's tenderness and gratitude; in the affluence and honour which her regard will secure to me," am I to find consolation for unfaithfulness to my engagements; for every evil that may befall you. You, whom every hallowed obligation, every principle of human nature, has placed next to myself; whom it has become not a fickle inclination, but a sacred duty, to prefer to all others; whose happiness ought to be my first and chief care, and from whose side I cannot sever myself without a guilt inexpiable!

Ah, cruel friend! You ascribe my resolution to a disinterested regard to your good. You wish me to find happiness in that persuasion. Yet you leave me not that phantom for a comforter. You convict me, in every line of your letter, of selfishness and folly. The only consideration that has irresistible weight with me--the restoration of your father's kindness--you prove to be a mere delusion, and destroy it without mercy!

Can you forgive me, Henry? Best of men! Will you be soothed by my penitence for one more rash and inconsiderate act? But, alas! my penitence is rapid and sincere; but where is the merit of compunction that affords no security against the repetition of the fault? And where is my safety?

Fly to me. Save me from my mother's irresistible expostulations. I cannot--cannot withstand her tears. Let me find in your arms a refuge from them. Let me no more trust a resolution which is sure to fail. By making the tie between us such as even she will allow to be irrevocable, by depriving me of the power of compliance, only can I be safe.

Fly to me, therefore. Be at the front-door at ten this night. My Molly will be my only companion. Be the necessary measures previously taken, that no delay or disappointment may occur. One half-hour and the solemn rite may be performed. My absence will not be missed, as I return immediately. Then will there be an end to, fluctuation, for repentance cannot undo. Already in the sight of Heaven, at the tribunal of my own conscience, am I thy wife; but somewhat more is requisite to make the compact universally acknowledged. This is now my resolve. I shall keep it secret from the rest of the world. Nothing but the compulsion of persuasion can make me waver, and concealment will save me from that, and to-morrow remonstrance and entreaty will avail nothing.

My girl has told me of her interview with you, and where you are to be found. The dawn is not far distant, and at sunrise she carries you this. I shall expect an immediate and (need I add, when I recollect the invariable counsel you have given me?) a compliant answer.

And shall I--Let me, while the sun lingers, still pour out my soul on this paper; let me indulge a pleasing, dreadful thought--Shall I, ere circling time bring back this hour, become thy----

And shall my heart, after its dreadful languors, its excruciating agonies, know once more a rapturous emotion? So lately sunk into despondency; so lately pondering on obstacles that rose before me like Alps and menaced eternal opposition to my darling projects; so lately the prey of the deepest anguish: what spell diffuses through my frame this ravishing tranquillity?

Tranquillity, said I? That my throbbing heart gainsays. You cannot see me just now, but the palpitating heart infects my fingers, and the unsteady pen will speak to you eloquently.

I wonder how far sympathy possesses you. No doubt--let me see: ten minutes after four,--no doubt you are sound asleep. Care has fled away to some other head. Those

invisible communicants, those aerial heralds whose existence, benignity, and seasonable succour are parts, thou knowest, of my creed, are busy in the weaving of some beatific dream. At their bidding the world of thy fancy is circumscribed by four white walls, a Turkey-carpeted floor, and a stuccoed ceiling. Didst ever see such before? Was't ever, in thy wakeful season, in the same apartment? Never! And, what is more, and which I desire thee to note well, thou art not hereafter to enter it except in dreams.

A poor taper burns upon the toilet,--just bright enough to give the cognizance of something in woman's shape and in negligent attire scribbling near it. Thou needst not tap her on the shoulder; she need not look up and smile a welcome to the friendly vision. She knows that thou art here; for is not thy hand already in hers, and is not thy cheek already wet with her tears? for thy poor girl's eyes are as sure to overflow with joy as with sorrow.

And will it be always thus, my dear friend? Will thy love screen me forever from remorse? will my mother's reproaches never intrude amidst the raptures of fondness and poison my tranquillity?

What will she say when she discovers the truth? My conscience will not allow me to dissemble. It will not disavow the name or withhold the duties of a wife. Too well do I conceive what she will say,--how she will act.

I need not apprehend expulsion from her house. Exile will be a voluntary act:--"You shall eat, drink, lodge, and dress as well as ever. I will not sever husband from wife, and I find no pleasure in seeing those whom I most hate perishing with want. I threatened to abandon you, merely because I would employ every means of preventing your destruction; but my revenge is not so sordid as to multiply unnecessary evils on your head. I shall take from you nothing but my esteem,--my affection,--my society. I shall never see you but with agony; I shall never think of you without pain. I part with you forever, and prepare myself for that grave which

your folly and ingratitude have dug for me.

"You have said, Jane, that, having lost my favour, you will never live upon my bounty. That will be an act of needless and perverse cruelty in you. It will be wantonly adding to that weight with which you have already sunk me to the grave. Besides, I will not leave you an option. While I live, my watchful care shall screen you from penury in spite of yourself. When I die, my testament shall make you my sole successor. What I have shall be yours,--at least, while you live.

"I have deeply regretted the folly of threatening you with loss of property. I should have known you better than to think that a romantic head like yours would find any thing formidable in such deprivations. If other considerations were feeble, this would be chimerical.

"Fare you well, Jane, and, when you become a mother, may your tenderness never be requited by the folly and ingratitude which it has been my lot to meet with in the child of my affections!"

Something like this has my mother already said to me, in the course of an affecting conversation, in which I ventured to plead for you. And have I, then, resolved to trample on such goodness?

Whither, my friend, shall I fly from a scene like this? Into thy arms? And shall I find comfort there? can I endure life, with the burden of remorse which generosity like this will lay upon me?

But I tell you, Henry, I am resolved. I have nothing but evil to choose. There is but one calamity greater than my mother's anger. I cannot mangle my own vitals. I cannot put an impious and violent end to my own life. Will it be mercy to make her witness my death? and can I live without you? If I must be an ingrate, be her and not you the victim. If I must requite benevolence with malice and tenderness with hatred, be it her benevolence and tenderness, and not yours, that are thus requited.

Once more, then, note well. The hour of ten; the station near the door; a

duly-qualified officiator previously engaged; and my destiny in this life fixed beyond the power of recall. The bearer of this will bring back your answer. Farewell. Remember.

J. TALBOT.

Letter XLVI

To James Montford

December 9.

Once more, after a night of painful musing or troubled repose, I am at the pen. I am plunged into greater difficulties and embarrassments than ever.

It was scarcely daylight, when a slumber into which I had just fallen was interrupted by a servant of the inn. A girl was below, who wanted to see me. The description quickly proved it to be Molly. I rose and directed her to be admitted.

She brought two letters from her mistress, and was told to wait for an answer. Jane traversed her room, half distracted and sleepless during most of the night. Towards morning she sat down to her desk, and finished a letter, which, together with one written a couple of days before, was despatched to me.

My heart throbbed--I was going to say with transport; but I am at a loss to say whether anguish or delight was uppermost on reading these letters. She recalls every promise of eternal separation; she consents to immediate marriage as the only wise expedient; proposes ten o'clock this night to join our hands; will conceal her purpose from her mother, and resigns to me the providing of suitable means.

I was overwhelmed with surprise and--shall I not say?--delight at this unexpected concession. An immediate and consenting answer was required. I hurried to give this answer, but my tumultuous feelings would not let me write coherently. I was obliged to lay down the pen, and take a turn across the room to calm my tremors. This gave

me time to reflect.

"What," thought I, "am I going to do? To take advantage of a momentary impulse in my favour. To violate my promises to Mrs. Fielder: my letter to her may be construed into promises not to seek another interview with Jane, and to leave the country forever. And shall I betray this impetuous woman into an irrevocable act, which her whole future life may be unavailingly consumed in repenting? Some delay, some deliberation, cannot be injurious.

"And yet this has always been my advice. Shall I reject the hand that is now offered me? How will she regard these new-born scruples, this drawing back when the door spontaneously opens and solicits my entrance?

"Is it in my power to make Jane Talbot mine? my wife? And shall I hesitate? Ah! would to Heaven it were a destiny as fortunate for her as for me!--that no tears, no repinings, no compunctions, would follow! Should I not curse the hour of our union when I heard her sighs? and, instead of affording consolation under the distress produced by her mother's displeasure, should I not need that consolation as much as she?"

These reflections had no other effect than to make me irresolute. I could not return my assent to her scheme, I could not reject so bewitching an offer. This offer was the child of a passionate, a desperate moment. Whither, indeed, should she fly for refuge from a scene like that which she describes?

Molly urged me to come to some determination, as her mistress would impatiently wait her return. Finding it indispensable to say something, I at length wrote:--

"I have detected the author of the forgery which has given us so much disquiet. I propose to visit your mother this morning, when I shall claim admission to you. In that interview may our future destiny be discussed and settled. Meanwhile, still regard me as ever ready to purchase your true happiness by every sacrifice."

With this billet Molly hastened away. What cold, repulsive terms were these! My

conscience smote me as she shut the door. But what could I do?

I had but half determined to seek an interview with Mrs. Fielder. What purpose would it answer while the truth respecting the counterfeit letter still remained imperfectly discovered? And why should I seek an interview with Jane? Would her mother permit it? and should I employ my influence to win her from her mother's side or rivet her more closely to it?

What, my friend, shall I do? You are too far off to answer me, and you leave me to my own destiny. You hear not, and will not seasonably hear what I say. Today will surely settle all difficulties, one way or another. This night, if I will, I may be the husband of this angel, or I may raise obstacles insuperable between us. Our interests and persons may be united forever, or we may start out into separate paths and never meet again.

Another messenger! with a letter for me! Miss Jessup's servant it is, perhaps. But let me read it.

Letter XLVII

To Henry Colden

December 8.

Sir:--

Enclosed is a letter, which you may, if you think proper, deliver to Mrs. Fielder. I am very ill. Don't attempt to see me again. I cannot be seen. Let the enclosed satisfy you. It is enough. Never should I have said so much, if I thought I were long for this world.

Let me not have a useless enemy in you. I hope the fatal effects of my rashness have not gone further than Mrs. Talbot's family. Let the mischief be repaired as far as it can be; but do not injure me unnecessarily. I hope I am understood.

Let me know what use you have made of the letter you showed me, and, I beseech you, return it to me by the bearer.

M. JESSUP.

Letter XLVIII

To Mrs. Fielder

December 8.

Madam:--

This comes from a very unfortunate and culpable hand,--a hand that hardly knows how to sign its own condemnation, and which sickness, no less than irresolution, almost deprives of the power to hold the pen.

Yet I call Heaven to witness that I expected not the evil from my infatuation which, it seems, has followed it. I meant to influence none but Mr. Talbot's belief. I had the misfortune to see and to love him long before his engagement with your daughter. I overstepped the limits of my sex, and met with no return to my generous offers and my weak entreaties but sternness and contempt.

You, madam, are perhaps raised above the weakness of a heart like mine. You will not comprehend how an unrequited passion can ever give place to rage and revenge and how the merits of the object preferred to me should only embitter that revenge.

Jane Talbot never loved the man whom I would have made happy. Her ingenuous temper easily disclosed her indifference, and she married not to please herself, but to please others. Her husband's infatuation in marrying on such terms could be exceeded by nothing but his folly in refusing one who would have lived for no other end than to please him.

I observed the progress of the intimacy between Mr. Colden and her, in Talbot's absence; and can you not conceive, madam, that my heart was disposed to exult in

every event that verified my own predictions and would convince Talbot of the folly of his choice? Hence I was a jealous observer. The worst construction was put upon your daughter's conduct. That open, impetuous temper of hers, confident of innocence, and fearless of ungenerous or malignant constructions, easily put her into my power. Unrequited love made me her enemy as well as that of her husband, and I even saw, in her unguarded deportment, and in the reputed licentiousness of Mr. Colden's principles, some reason, some probability, in my surmises.

Several anonymous letters were written to you. I thank Heaven that I was seldom guilty of direct falsehoods in these letters. I told you little more than what a jealous eye and a prying disposition easily discovered; and I never saw any thing in their intercourse that argued more than a temper thoughtless and indiscreet. To distinguish minutely between truths and exaggerations, in the letters which I sent you, would be a painful and, I trust, a needless task, since I now solemnly declare that, on an impartial review of all that I ever witnessed in the conduct of your daughter, I remember nothing that can justify the imputation of guilt. I believe her conduct to Colden was not always limited by a due regard to appearances; that she trusted her fame too much to her consciousness of innocence, and set too lightly by the malignity of those who would be glad to find her in fault, and the ignorance of others, who naturally judged of her by themselves. And this, I now solemnly take Heaven to witness, is the only charge that can truly be brought against her.

There is still another confession to make. If suffering and penitence can atone for any offence, surely mine has been atoned for! But it still remains that I should, as far as my power goes, repair the mischief.

It is no adequate apology, I well know, that the consequences of my crime were more extensive and durable than I expected; but is it not justice to myself to say that this confession would have been made earlier if I had earlier known the extent of the evil? I never suspected but that the belief of his wife's infidelity was buried with

Talbot.

Alas! wicked and malignant as I was, I meant not to persuade the mother of her child's profligacy. Why should I have aimed at this? I had no reason to disesteem or hate you. I was always impressed with reverence for your character. In the letters sent directly to you, I aimed at nothing but to procure your interference, and make maternal authority declare itself against that intercourse which was essential to your daughter's happiness. It was not you, but her, that I wished to vex and distress.

I called at Mrs. Talbot's at a time when visitants are least expected. Nobody saw me enter. Her parlour was deserted; her writing-desk was open; an unfinished letter caught my eye. A sentiment half inquisitive and half mischievous made me snatch it up and withdraw as abruptly as I entered.

On reading this billet, it was easy to guess for whom it was designed. It was frank and affectionate; consistent with her conjugal duty, but not such as a very circumspect and wary temper would have allowed itself to write.

How shall I describe the suggestions that led me to make a most nefarious use of this paper? Circumstances most unhappily concurred to make my artifice easy and plausible. I discovered that Colden had spent most of the preceding night with your daughter. It is true a most heavy storm had raged during the evening, and the moment it remitted (which was not till three o'clock) he was seen to come out. His detention, therefore, candour would ascribe to the storm; but this letter, with such a conclusion as was too easily made, might fix a construction on it that no time could remove and innocence could never confute.

I had not resolved in what way I should employ this letter, as I had eked it out, before Mr. Talbot's return. When that event took place, my old infatuation revived. I again sought his company, and the indifference, and even contempt, with which I was treated, filled me anew with resentment. To persuade him of his wife's guilt was, I thought, an effectual way of destroying whatever remained of matrimonial

happiness; and the means were fully in my power.

Here I was again favoured by accident. Fortune seemed determined to accomplish my ruin. My own ingenuity in vain attempted to fall on a safe mode of putting this letter in Talbot's way, and this had never been done if chance had not surprisingly befriended my purpose.

One evening I dropped familiarly in upon your daughter. Nobody was there but Mr. Talbot and she. She was writing at her desk as usual, for she seemed never at ease but with a pen in her fingers; and Mr. Talbot seemed thoughtful and uneasy. At my entrance the desk was hastily closed and locked. But first she took out some papers, and, mentioning her design of going up-stairs to put them away, she tripped to the door. Looking back, however, she perceived she had dropped one. This she took up, in some hurry, and withdrew.

Instead of conversing with me, Talbot walked about the room in a peevish and gloomy humour. A thought just then rushed into my mind. While Talbot had his back towards me, and was at a distance, I dropped the counterfeit, at the spot where Jane had just before dropped her paper, and with little ceremony took my leave. Jane had excused her absence to me, and promised to return within five minutes. It was not possible, I thought, that Talbot's eye, as he walked backward and forward during that interval, could miss the paper, which would not fail to appear as if dropped by his wife.

My timidity and conscious guilt hindered me from attempting to discover, by any direct means, the effects of my artifice. I was mortified extremely in finding no remarkable difference in their deportment to each other. Sometimes I feared I had betrayed myself; but no alteration ever afterwards appeared in their behaviour to me.

I know how little I deserve to be forgiven. Nothing can palliate the baseness of this action. I acknowledge it with the deepest remorse, and nothing, especially since the death of Mr. Talbot, has lessened my grief, but the hope that some unknown cause

prevented the full effect of this forgery on his peace, and that the secret, carefully locked up in his own breast, expired with him. All my enmities and restless jealousy found their repose in the same grave.

You have come to the knowledge of this letter, and I now find that the fraud was attended with even more success than I wished it to have.

Let me now, though late, put an end to the illusion, and again assure you, madam, that the concluding paragraphs were written by me, and that those parts of it which truly belong to your daughter are perfectly innocent.

If it were possible for you to forgive my misconduct, and to suffer this confession to go no further than the evil has gone, you will confer as great a comfort as can now be conferred on the unhappy

M. JESSUP.

Letter XLIX

To James Montford

Philadelphia, December 9.

I WILL imagine, my friend, that you have read the letter [Footnote: The preceding one.] which I have hastily transcribed. I will not stop to tell you my reflections upon it, but shall hasten with this letter to Mrs. Fielder. I might send it; but I have grown desperate.

A final effort must be made for my own happiness and that of Jane. From their own lips will I know my destiny. I have conversed too long at a distance with this austere lady. I will mark with my own eyes the effect of this discovery. Perhaps the moment may prove a yielding one. Finding me innocent in one respect, in which her persuasion of my guilt was most strong, may she not remit or soften her sentence on inferior faults? And what may be the influence of Jane's deportment, when she

touches my hand in a last adieu?

I have complied with Miss Jessup's wish in one particular. I have sent her the letter which I got from Hannah, unopened; unread; accompanied with a few words, to this effect:--

"If you ever injured Mr. Talbot, your motives for doing so entitle you to nothing but compassion, while your present conduct lays claim, not only to forgiveness, but to gratitude. The letter you intrust to me shall be applied to no purpose but that which you proposed by writing it. Enclosed is the paper you request, the seal unbroken and its contents unread. In this, as in all cases, I have no stronger wish than to act as

"YOUR TRUE FRIEND."

And now, my friend, lay I down the pen for a few hours,--hours the most important, perhaps, in my eventful life. Surely this interview with Mrs. Fielder will decide my destiny. After it, I shall have nothing to hope.

I prepare for it with awe and trembling. The more nearly it approaches, the more my heart falters. I summon up in vain a tranquil and steadfast spirit; but perhaps a walk in the clear air will be more conducive to this end than a day's ruminations in my chamber.

I will take a walk.

And am I then--but I will not anticipate. Let me lead you to the present state of things without confusion.

With what different emotions did I use to approach this house! "It still contains," thought I, as my wavering steps brought me in sight of it, "all that I love; but I enter not unceremoniously now. I find her not on the accustomed sofa, eager to welcome my coming with smiling affability and arms outstretched. No longer is it home to me, nor she assiduous to please, familiarly tender and anxiously fond, already assuming the conjugal privilege of studying my domestic ease."

I knocked, somewhat timorously, at the door,--a ceremony which I had long been in the habit of omitting: but times are changed. I was afraid the melancholy which was fast overshadowing me would still more unfit me for what was coming; but, instead of dispelling it, this very apprehension deepened my gloom.

Molly came to the door. She silently led me into a parlour. The poor girl was in tears. My questions as to the cause of her distress drew from her a very indistinct and sobbing confession that Mrs. Fielder had been made uneasy by Molly's going out so early in the morning; had taken her daughter to task; and, by employing entreaties and remonstrances in turn, had drawn from her the contents of her letter to me and of my answer.

A strange, affecting scene had followed: indignation and grief on the mother's part; obstinacy, irresolution, sorrowful, reluctant penitence and acquiescence on the side of the daughter; a determination, tacitly concurred in by Jane, of leaving the city immediately. Orders were already issued for that purpose.

"Is Mrs. Fielder at home?"

"Yes."

"Tell her a gentleman would see her."

"She will ask, perhaps--Shall I tell her who?"

"No--Yes. Tell her I wish to see her."

The poor girl looked very mournfully:--"She has seen your answer which talks of your intention to visit her. She vows she will not see you if you come."

"Go, then, to Jane, and tell her I would see her for five minutes. Tell her openly; before her mother."

This message, as I expected, brought down Mrs. Fielder alone. I never saw this lady before. There was a struggle in her countenance between anger and patience; an awful and severe solemnity; a slight and tacit notice of me as she entered. We both

took chairs without speaking. After a moment's pause,--

"Mr. Colden, I presume."

"Yes, madam."

"You wish to see my daughter?"

"I was anxious, madam, to see you. My business here chiefly lies with you,--not her."

"With me, sir? And pray, what have you to propose to me?'7

"I have nothing to solicit, madam, but your patient attention." (I saw the rising vehemence could scarcely be restrained.) "I dare not hope for your favourable ear: all I ask is an audience from you of a few minutes."

"This preface, sir," (her motions less and less controllable,) "is needless. I have very few minutes to spare at present. This roof is hateful to me while you are under it. Say what you will, sir, and briefly as possible."

"No, madam; thus received, I have not fortitude enough to say what I came to say. I merely entreat you to peruse this letter."

"'Tis well, sir," (taking it, with some reluctance, and, after eyeing the direction, putting it aside.) "And this is all your business?"

"Let me entreat you, madam, to read it in my presence. Its contents nearly concern your happiness, and will not leave mine unaffected."

She did not seem, at first, disposed to compliance, but at length opened and read. What noble features has this lady! I watched them, as she read, with great solicitude, but discovered in them nothing that could cherish my hope. All was stern and inflexible. No wonder at the ascendency this spirit possesses over the tender and flexible Jane!

She read with visible eagerness. The varying emotion played with augmented rapidity over her face. Its expression became less severe, and some degree of

softness, I thought, mixed itself with those glances which reflection sometimes diverted from the letter. These tokens somewhat revived my languishing courage.

After having gone through it, she returned; read again and pondered over particular passages. At length, after some pause, she spoke; but her indignant eye scarcely condescended to point the address to me:--

"As a mother and a woman I cannot but rejoice at this discovery. To find my daughter less guilty than appearances led me to believe, cannot but console me under the conviction of her numerous errors. Would to Heaven she would stop here in her career of folly and imprudence!

"I cannot but regard you, sir, as the author of much misery. Still, it is in your power to act as this deluded woman, Miss Jessup, has acted. You may desist from any future persecution. Your letter to me gave me no reason to expect the honour of this visit, and contained something like a promise to shun any further intercourse with Mrs. Talbot."

"I hope, madam, the contents of this letter will justify me in bringing it to you?"

"Perhaps it has; but that commission is performed. That, I hope, is all you proposed by coming hither; and you will pardon me if I plead an engagement for not detaining you longer in this house."

I had no apology for prolonging my stay, yet I was irresolute. She seemed impatient at my lingering; again urged her engagements. I rose; took my hat; moved a few steps towards the door; hesitated.

At length I stammered out, "Since it is the last--the last interview--if I were allowed-but one moment."

"No, no, no! what but needless torment to herself and to you can follow? What do you expect from an interview?"

"I would see, for a moment, the face of one whom, whatever be my faults, and

whatever be hers, I love."

"Yes; you would profit, no doubt, by your power over this infatuated girl. I know what a rash proposal she has made you, and you seek her presence to insure her adherence to it."

Her vehemence tended more to bereave me of courage than of temper, but I could not forbear (mildly, however) reminding her that if I had sought to take advantage of her daughter's offer, the easiest and most obvious method was different from that which I had taken.

"True," said she, her eyes flashing fire; "a secret marriage would have given you the destitute and portionless girl; but your views are far more solid and substantial. You know your power over her, and aim at extorting from compassion for my child what--But why do I exchange a word with you? Mrs. Talbot knows not that you are here. She has just given me the strongest proof of compunction for every past folly, and especially the last. She has bound herself to go along with me. If your professions of regard for her be sincere, you will not increase her difficulties. I command you, I implore you, to leave the house."

I should not have resisted these entreaties on my own account. Yet to desert her--to be thought by her to have coldly and inhumanly rejected her offers!

"In your presence, madam--I ask not privacy--let her own lips confirm the sentence; be renunciation her own act. For the sake of her peace of mind----"

"God give me patience!" said the exasperated lady. "How securely do you build on her infatuation! But you shall not see her. If she consents to see you, I never will forgive her. If she once more relapses, she is undone. She shall write her mind to you: let that serve. I will permit her--I will urge her--to write to you: let that serve."

I went to this house with a confused perception that this visit would terminate my suspense. "One more interview with Jane," thought I, "and no more fluctuations or uncertainty." Yet I was now as far as ever from certainty. Expostulation was vain.

She would not hear me. All my courage, even my words were overwhelmed by her vehemence.

After much hesitation, and several efforts to gain even a hearing of my pleas, I yielded to the tide. With a drooping heart, I consented to withdraw with my dearest hope unaccomplished.

My steps involuntarily brought me back to my lodgings. Here am I again at my pen. Never were my spirits lower, my prospects more obscure, my hopes nearer to extinction.

I am afraid to allow you too near a view of my heart at this moment of despondency. My present feelings are new even to myself. They terrify me. I must not trust myself longer alone. I must shake off, or try to shake off, this excruciating, this direful melancholy. Heavy, heavy is my soul; comfortless and friendless my condition. Nothing is sweet but the prospect of oblivion.

But, again I say, these thoughts must not lead me. Dreadful and downward is the course to which they point. I must relinquish the pen. I must sally forth into the fields. Naked and bleak is the face of nature at this inclement season; but what of that? Dark and desolate will ever be my world--but I will not write another word.

So, my friend, I have returned from my walk with a mind more a stranger to tranquillity than when I sallied forth. On my table lay the letter, which, ere I seal this, I will enclose to you. Read it here.

Letter L

To Mr. Colden

December 11.

Hereafter I shall be astonished at nothing but that credulity which could give even momentary credit to your assertions.

Most fortunately, my belief lasted only till you left the house. Then my scruples, which slept for a moment, revived, and I determined to clear up my doubts by immediately calling on Miss Jessup.

If any thing can exceed your depravity, sir, it is your folly. But I will not debase myself: my indignation at being made the subject, and, for some minutes, the dupe, of so gross and so profligate an artifice, carries me beyond all bounds. What, sir!--But I will restrain myself.

I would not leave the city without apprizing you of this detection of your schemes. If Miss Jessup were wise, she would seek a just revenge for so atrocious a slander.

I need not tell you that I have seen her; laid the letter before her which you delivered to me; nor do I need to tell you what her anger and amazement were on finding her name thus abused.

I pity you, sir; I grieve for you: you have talents of a certain kind, but your habits, wretchedly and flagitiously perverse, have made you act on most occasions like an idiot. Their iniquity was not sufficient to deter you from impostures which--but I scorn to chide you.

My daughter is a monument of the success of your schemes. But their success shall never be complete. While I live, she shall never join her interests with yours. That is a vow which, I thank God, I am able to accomplish; and shall.

H. FIELDER.

Letter LI

To James Montford

December 13.

Is not this strange, my friend? Miss Jessup, it seems, has denied her own letter. Surely there was no mistake,--no mystery. Let me look again at the words in the

cover.

Let me awake! Let me disabuse my senses! Yes. It is plain. Miss Jessup repented her of her confession. Something in that unopened letter--believing the contents of that known, there were inducements to sincerity which the recovery of that letter, and the finding it unopened, perhaps annihilated. Pride resumed its power. Before so partial a judge as Mrs. Fielder, and concerning a wretch so worthy of discredit as I, how easy, how obvious to deny, and to impute to me the imposture charged on herself!

Well, and what is now to be done? I will once more return to Miss Jessup. I will force myself into her presence, and then----But I have not a moment to lose.

And this was the night, this was the hour, that was to see my Jane's hand wedded to mine! That event Providence, or fate, or fortune, stepped in to forbid. And must it then pass away like any vulgar hour?

It deserves to be signalized, to be made memorable. What forbids but sordid, despicable cowardice? Not virtue; not the love of universal happiness; not piety; not sense of duty to my God or my fellow-creatures. These sentiments, alas! burn feebly or not at all within my bosom.

It is not hope that restrains my hand. For what is my hope? Independence, dignity, a life of activity and usefulness, are not within my reach. And why not? What obstacles arise in the way?

Have I not youth, health, knowledge, talents? Twenty professional roads are open before me, and solicit me to enter them; but no. I shall never enter any of them. Be all earthly powers combined to force me into the right path,--the path of duty, honour, and interest: they strive in vain.

And whence this incurable folly?--this rooted incapacity of acting as every motive, generous and selfish, combine to recommend? Constitution; habit; insanity; the dominion of some evil spirit, who insinuates his baneful power between the will and the act.

And this more congenial good; this feminine excellence; this secondary and more valuable self; this woman who has appropriated to herself every desire, every emotion of my soul: what hope remains with regard to her? Shall I live for her sake?

No. Her happiness requires me to be blotted out of existence. Let me unfold myself to myself; let me ask my soul, Canst thou wish to be rejected, renounced, and forgotten by Jane? Does it please thee that her happiness should be placed upon a basis absolutely independent of thy lot? Canst thou, with a true and fervent zeal, resign her to her mother?

I can. I do.

I wish I had words, my friend: yet why do I wish for them? Why sit I here, endeavouring to give form, substance, and duration to images to which it is guilty and opprobrious to allow momentary place in my mind? Why do I thus lay up, for the few that love me, causes of affliction?

Yet perhaps I accuse myself too soon. The persuasion that I have one friend is sweet. I fancy myself talking to one who is interested in my happiness; but this shall satisfy me. If fate impel me to any rash and irretrievable act, I will take care that no legacy of sorrow shall be left to my survivors. My fate shall be buried in oblivion. No busy curiosity, no affectionate zeal, shall trace the way that I have gone. No mourning footsteps shall haunt my grave,

I am, indeed, my friend--never, never before, spiritless and even hopeless as I have sometimes been, have my thoughts been thus gloomy. Never felt I so enamoured of that which seems to be the cure-all.

Often have I wished to slide obscurely and quietly into the grave; but this wish, while it saddened my bosom, never raised my hand against my life. It made me willingly expose my safety to the blasts of pestilence; it made me court disease; but it never set my imagination in search after more certain and speedy means.

Yet I am wonderfully calm. I can still reason on the folly of despair. I know that a

few days, perhaps a few hours, will bring me some degree of comfort and courage; will make life, with all its disappointments and vexations, endurable at least.

Would to Heaven I were not quite alone! Left thus to my greatest enemy, myself, I feel that I am capable of deeds which I fear to name.

A few minutes ago I was anxious to find Miss Jessup; to gain another interview with Mrs. Fielder. Both the one and the other have left the city. Jane's dwelling is deserted. Shortly after I left it, they set out upon their journey, and Miss Jessup--no doubt, to avoid another interview with me--has precipitately withdrawn into the country.

I shall not pursue their steps. Let things take their course. No doubt, a lasting and effectual remorse will, some time or other, reach the heart of Miss Jessup, and this fatal error will be rectified. I need not live, I need not exert myself, to hasten the discovery. I can do nothing.

Letter LII

To Mrs. Fielder

Philadelphia, December 16.

It is not improbable that, as soon as you recognise the hand that wrote this letter, you will throw it unread into the fire; yet it comes not to soothe resentment, or to supplicate for mercy. It seeks not a favourable audience. It wishes not--because the wish would be chimerical--to have its assertions believed. It expects not even to be read. All I hope is, that, though neglected, despised, and discredited for the present, it may not be precipitately destroyed or utterly forgotten. The time will come when it will be read with a different spirit.

You inform me that Miss Jessup has denied her letter, and imputes to me the wickedness of forging her name to a false confession. You are justly astonished at

the iniquity and folly of what you deem my artifice. This astonishment, when you look back upon my past misconduct, is turned from me to yourself; from my folly to your own credulity, that was, for a moment, made the dupe of my contrivances.

I can say nothing that will or that ought--that is my peculiar misery,--that ought, considering the measure of my real guilt, to screen me from this charge. There is but one event that can shake your opinion. An event that is barely possible; that may not happen, if it happen at all, till the lapse of years; and from which, even if I were alive, I could not hope to derive advantage. Miss Jessup's conscience may awaken time enough to enable her to undeceive you, and to repent of her second as well as her first fraud.

If that event ever takes place, perhaps this letter may still exist to bear testimony to my rectitude. Thrown aside and long forgotten, or never read, chance may put it in your way once more. Time, that soother of resentment as well as lessener of love, and the perseverance of your daughter in the way you prescribe, may soften your asperities even towards me. A generous heart like yours will feel an emotion of joy that I have not been quite as guilty as you had reason to believe.

Give me leave, madam, to anticipate that moment. The number of my consolations are few. Your enmity I rank among my chief misfortunes, and the more so because I deserve much, though not all your enmity. The persuasion that the time will come when you will acquit me of this charge, is, even now, a comforter. This is more desirable to me, since it will relieve your daughter from one among the many evils in which she has been involved by the vices and infirmities of

H. COLDEN.

Letter LIII

To James Montford

Philadelphia, December 17.

I sought relief a second time to my drooping heart, by a walk in the fields. Returning, I met Harriet Thomson in the street. The meeting was somewhat unexpected. Since we parted at Baltimore, I imagined she had returned to her old habitation in Jersey. I knew she was pretty much a stranger in this city. Night had already come on, and she was alone. She greeted me with visible satisfaction; and, though I was very little fit for society, especially of those who loved me not, I thought common civility required me to attend her home.

I never saw this woman till I met her lately at her brother's bedside. Her opinions of me were all derived from unfavourable sources, and I knew, from good authority, that she regarded me as a dangerous and hateful character. I had even, accidentally, heard her opinion of the affair between Jane and me. Jane was severely censured for credulity and indiscretion, but some excuse was allowed to her on the score of the greater guilt that was placed to my account.

Her behaviour, when we first met, was somewhat conformable to these impressions. A good deal of coldness and reserve in her deportment, which I was sometimes sorry for, as she seems an estimable creature; meek, affectionate, tender, passionately loving her brother; convinced, from the hour of her first arrival, that his disease was a hopeless one, yet exerting a surprising command over her feelings, and performing every office of a nurse with skill and firmness.

Insensibly the distance between us grew less. A participation in the same calamity, and the counsel and aid which her situation demanded, forced her to lay aside some of her reserve. Still, however, it seemed but a submission to necessity; and all advances were made with an ill grace.

She was often present when her brother turned the discourse upon religious subjects. I have long since abjured the vanity of disputation. There is no road to truth but by meditation,-severe, intense, candid, and dispassionate. What others say on doubtful subjects, I shall henceforth lay up as materials for meditation.

I listened to my dying friend's arguments and admonitions, I think I may venture to say, with a suitable spirit. The arrogant or disputatious passions could not possibly find place in a scene like this. Even if I thought him in the wrong, what but brutal depravity could lead me to endeavour to shake his belief at a time when sickness had made his judgment infirm, and when his opinion supplied his sinking heart with confidence and joy?

But, in truth, I was far from thinking him in the wrong. At any time I should have allowed infinite, plausibility and subtlety to his reasonings, and at this time I confessed them to be weighty. Whether they were most weighty in the scale could be only known by a more ample and deliberate view and comparison than it was possible, with the spectacle of a dying friend before me, and with so many solicitudes and suspenses about me respecting Jane, to bestow on them. Meanwhile, I treasured them up, and determined, as I told him, that his generous efforts for my good should not be thrown away.

At first, his sister was very uneasy when her brother entered on the theme nearest to his friendly heart. She seemed apprehensive of dispute and contradiction. This apprehension was quickly removed, and she thenceforth encouraged the discourse. She listened with delight and eagerness, and her eye, frequently, when my friend's eloquence was most affecting, appealed to me. It sometimes conveyed a meaning far more powerful than her brother's lips, and expressed at once the strongest conviction of the truth of his words, and the most fervent desire that they might convince me. Her natural modesty, joined, no doubt, to her disesteem of my character, prevented her from mixing in discourse.

She greeted me at this meeting with a frankness which I did not expect. A disposition to converse, and attentiveness to the few words that I had occasion to say, were very evident. I was just then in the most dejected and forlorn state imaginable. My heart panted for some friendly bosom, into which I might pour my

cares. I had reason to esteem the purity, sweetness, and amiable qualities of this good girl. Her aversion to me naturally flowed from these qualities, while an abatement of that aversion was flattering to me, as the triumph of feeling over judgment.

I should have left her at the door of her lodgings, but she besought me to go in so earnestly, that my facility, rather than my inclination, complied. She saw that I was absent and disturbed. I never read compassion and (shall I say?) good-will in any eye more distinctly than in hers.

The conversation for a time was vague and trite. Insensibly, the scenes lately witnessed were recalled, not without many a half-stifled sigh and ill-disguised tear on her part. Some arrangements as to the letters and papers of her brother were suggested. I expressed a wish to have my letters restored to me; I alluded to those letters, written in the sanguine insolence of youth and with the dogmatic rage upon me, that have done me so much mischief with Mrs. Fielder. I had not thought of them before; but now it occurred to me that they might as well be destroyed.

This insensibly led the conversation into more interesting topics. I could not suppress my regret that I had ever written some things in those letters, and informed her that my view in taking them back was to doom them to that oblivion from which it would have been happy for me if they never had been called.

After many tacit intimations, much reluctance and timidity to inquire and communicate, I was greatly surprised to discover that these letters had been seen by her; that Mrs. Fielder's character was not unknown to her; that she was no stranger to her brother's disclosures to that lady.

Without directly expressing her thoughts, it was easy to perceive that her mind was full of ideas produced by these letters, by her brother's discourse, and by curiosity as to my present opinions. Her modesty laid restraint on her lips. She was fearful, I supposed, of being thought forward and impertinent.

I endeavoured to dissipate these apprehensions. All about this girl was, on this occasion, remarkably attractive. I loved her brother, and his features still survive in her. The only relation she has left is a distant one, on whose regard and protection she has therefore but slender claims. Her mind is rich in all the graces of ingenuousness and modesty. The curiosity she felt respecting me made me grateful as for a token of regard. I was therefore not backward to unfold the true state of my mind.

Now and then she made seasonable and judicious comments on what I said. Was there any subject of inquiry more momentous than the truth of religion? If my doubts and heresies had involved me in difficulties, was not the remedy obvious and easy?. Why not enter on regular discussions, and, having candidly and deliberately formed my creed, adhere to it frankly, firmly, and consistently? A state of doubt and indecision was, in every view, hurtful, criminal, and ignominious. Conviction, if it were in favour of religion, would insure me every kind of happiness. It would forward even those schemes of temporal advantage on which I might be intent. It would reconcile those whose aversion arose from difference of opinion; and in cases where it failed to benefit my worldly views, it would console me for my disappointment.

If my inquiries should establish an irreligious conviction, still, any form of certainty was better than doubt. The love of truth and the consciousness of that certainty would raise me above hatred and slander. I should then have some kind of principle by which to regulate my conduct; I should then know on what foundation to build. To fluctuate, to waver, to postpone inquiry, was more criminal than any kind of opinion candidly investigated and firmly adopted, and would more effectually debar me from happiness. At my age, with my talents and inducements, it was sordid, it was ignoble, it was culpable, to allow indifference or indolence to slacken my zeal.

These sentiments were conveyed in various broken hints and modest interrogatories.

While they mortified, they charmed me; they enlightened me while they perplexed. I came away with my soul roused by a new impulse. I have emerged from a dreary torpor, not indeed to tranquillity or happiness, but to something less fatal, less dreadful.

Would you think that a ray of hope has broken in upon me? Am I not still, in some degree, the maker of my fortune? Why mournfully ruminate on the past, instead of looking to the future? How wretched, how criminal, how infamous, are my doubts!

Alas! and is this the first time that I have been visited by such thoughts? How often has this transient hope, this momentary zeal, started into being, hovered in my fancy, and vanished! Thus will it ever be.

Need I mention--but I will not look back. To what end? Shall I grieve or rejoice at that power of now and then escaping from the past? Could it operate to my amendment, memory should be ever busy; but I fear that it would only drive me to desperation or madness.

H. C.

Letter LIV

Philadelphia, December 19.

I have just returned from a visit to my new friend. I begin to think that if I had time to cultivate her good opinion I should gain as much of it as I deserve. Her good-will, her sympathy at least, might be awakened in my favour.

We have had a long conversation. Her distance and reserve are much less than they were. She blames yet pities me. I have been very communicative, and have offered her the perusal of all the letters that I have lately received from Mrs. Talbot as vouchers for my sincerity.

She listened favourably to my account of the unhappy misapprehensions into which

Mrs. Fielder had fallen. She was disposed to be more severe on Miss Jessup's imposture than even my irritated passions had been.

She would not admit that Mrs. Fielder's antipathy to my alliance with her daughter was without just grounds. She thought that everlasting separation was best for us both. A total change of my opinions on moral subjects might perhaps, in time, subdue the mother's aversion to me; but this change must necessarily be slow and gradual. I was indeed already, from my own account, far from being principled against religion; but this was only a basis whereon to build the hope of future amendment. No present merit could be founded on my doubts.

I spared not myself in my account of former follies. The recital made her very solemn. I had--I had, indeed, been very faulty; my present embarrassments were the natural and just consequences of my misconduct. I had not merited a different destiny. I was unworthy of the love of such a woman as Jane. I was not qualified to make her happy. I ought to submit to banishment, not only as to a punishment justly incurred, but in gratitude to one whose genuine happiness, taking into view her mother's character and the sacrifices to which her choice of me would subject her, would be most effectually consulted by my exile.

This was an irksome lesson. She had the candour not to expect my cordial concurrence in such sentiments, yet endeavoured in her artless manner to enforce them. She did not content herself with placing the matter in this light. She still continued to commend the design of a distant voyage, even should I intend one day to return. The scheme was likely to produce health and pleasure to me. It offered objects which a rational curiosity must hold dear. The interval might not pass away unpropitiously to me. Time might effect desirable changes in Mrs. Fielder's sentiments and views. A thousand accidents might occur to level those obstacles which were now insuperable. Pity and complacency might succeed to abhorrence and scorn. Gratitude and admiration for the patience, meekness, and self-sacrifices

of the daughter might gradually bring about the voluntary surrender of her enmities; besides, that event must one day come which will place her above the influence of all mortal cares and passions.

These conversations have not been without their influence. Yes, my friend, my mind is less gloomy and tumultuous than it was. I look forward to this voyage with stronger hopes.

Methinks I would hear once more from Jane. Could she be persuaded cheerfully to acquiesce in her mother's will; reserve herself for fortunate contingencies; confide in my fidelity; and find her content in the improvement of her time and fortune, in befriending the destitute, relieving, by her superfluities, the needy, and consoling the afflicted by her sympathy, advice, and succour, would she not derive happiness from these sources, though disappointed in the wish nearest her heart?

Might I not have expected a letter ere this? But she knows not where I am,--probably imagines me at my father's house. Shall I not venture to write? a last and long farewell? Yet have I not said already all that the occasion will justify? But, if I would write, I know not how to address her. It seems she has not gone to New York. Her mother has a friend in Jersey, whither she prevailed on Jane to accompany her. I suppose it would be no arduous undertaking to trace her footsteps and gain an interview, and perhaps I shall find the temptation irresistible.

Stephen has just now told me, by letter, that he sails in ten days. There will be time enough to comply with your friendly invitation. My sister and you may expect to see me by Saturday night. In the arms of my true friends, I will endeavour to forget the vexations that at present prey upon the peace of

Your

H. C.

Letter LV

To Henry Colden

My mother allows me, and even requires me, to write to you. My reluctance to do so is only overcome by the fear of her displeasure; yet do not mistake me, my friend. Infer not from this reluctance that the resolution of being henceforward all that my mother wishes can be altered by any effort of yours.

Alas! how vainly do I boast my inflexibility! My safety lies only in filling my ears with my mother's remonstrances and shutting them against your persuasive accents. I have therefore resigned myself wholly to my mother's government. I have consented to be inaccessible to your visits or letters.

I have few claims on your gratitude or generosity; yet may I not rely on the humanity of your temper? To what frequent and severe tests has my caprice already subjected your affection! and has it not remained unshaken and undiminished? Let me hope that you will not withhold this last proof of your affection for me.

It would greatly console me to know that you are once more on filial and friendly terms with your father. Let me persuade you to return to him; to beseech his favour. I hope the way to reconcilement has already been paved by the letter jointly addressed to him by my mother and myself; that nothing is wanting but a submissive and suitable deportment on your part, to restore you to the station you possessed before you had any knowledge of me. Let me exact from you this proof of your regard for me. It is the highest proof which it will henceforth be in your power to offer, or that can ever be received by

JANE TALBOT.

Letter LVI

To Mrs. Montford

Madam:--

Philadelphia, October 7.

It is with extreme reluctance that I venture to address you in this manner. I cannot find words to account for or apologize. But, if you be indeed the sister of Henry Golden, you cannot be ignorant of me, and of former transactions between us, and especially the circumstance that now compels me to write: you can be no stranger to his present situation.

Can you forgive this boldness in an absolute stranger to your person but not to your virtues? I have heard much of you, from one in whom I once had a little interest; who honoured me with his affection.

I know that you lately possessed a large share of that affection. I doubt not that you still retain it, and are able to tell me what has become of him.

I have a long time struggled with myself and my fears in silence. I know how unbecoming this address must appear to you, and yet, persuaded that my character and my relation to your brother are well known to you, I have been able to curb my anxieties no longer.

Do then, my dearest madam, gratify my curiosity, and tell me, without delay, what has become of your brother.

J. TALBOT.

Letter LVII

To Jane Talbot

My dear Madam:--

New York, October 9.

You judge truly when you imagine that your character and history are not unknown to me; and such is my opinion of you, that there is probably no person in the world more solicitous for your happiness, and more desirous to answer any inquiries in a

manner agreeable to you.

Mr. Colden has made no secret to us of the relation in which he stood to you. We are well acquainted with the cause of your late separation. Will you excuse me for expressing the deep regret which that event gave me? That regret is the deeper, since the measures which he immediately adopted have put it out of his power to profit by any change in your views.

My husband's brother being on the point of embarking in a voyage to the western coast of America and to China, Mr. Golden prevailed upon his friends to permit him to embark also, as a joint adventurer in the voyage. They have been gone already upwards of a year. We have not heard of them since their touching at Tobago and Brazil.

The voyage will be very tedious; but, as it will open scenes of great novelty to the mind of our friend, and as it may not be unprofitable to him, we were the more easily disposed to acquiesce.

Permit me, madam, to proffer you my warmest esteem and my kindest services. Your letter I regard as a flattering proof of your good opinion, which I shall be most happy to deserve and to improve, by answering every inquiry you may be pleased to make respecting one for whom I have entertained the affection becoming a sister.

I am, &c.

M. MONTFORD.

P.S.--Mr. Montford desires to join me in my offers of service, and in my good wishes.

Letter LVIII

To Mrs. Montford

Philadelphia, October 12.

Dear Madam:--

How shall I thank you for the kind and delicate manner in which you have complied with my request? You will not be surprised, nor, I hope, offended, that I am emboldened to address you once more.

I see that I need not practise towards you a reserve at all times foreign to my nature, and now more painful than at any other time, as my soul is torn with emotions which I am at liberty to disclose to no other human creature. Will you be my friend? Will you permit me to claim your sympathy and consolation? As I told you before, I am thoroughly acquainted with your merits, and one of the felicities which I promised myself from a nearer alliance with Mr. Colden was that of numbering myself among your friends.

You have deprived me of some hope by the information you give; but you have at least put an end to a suspense more painful than the most dreadful certainty could be.

You say that you know all our concerns. In pity to my weakness, will you give me some particulars of my friend? I am extremely anxious to know many things in your power to communicate.

Perhaps you know the contents of my last letter to him, and of his answer. I know you condemn me. You think me inconsiderate and cruel in writing such a letter; and my heart does not deny the charge. Yet my motives were not utterly ungenerous. I could not bear to reduce the man I loved to poverty. I could not bear that he should incur the violence and curses of his father. I fondly thought myself the only obstacle to reconcilement, and was willing, whatever it cost me, to remove that obstacle.

What will become of me, if my fears should now be realized?--if the means which I used with no other view than to reconcile him to his family should have driven him away from them and from his country forever? I thank my God that I was capable of abandoning him on no selfish or personal account. The maledictions of my own

mother; the scorn of the world; the loss of friends, reputation, and fortune, weighed nothing with me. Great as these evils were, I could have cheerfully sustained them for his sake. What I did was in oblivion of self; was from a duteous regard to his genuine and lasting happiness. Alas! I have, perhaps, mistaken the means, and cruel will, I fear, be the penalty of my error.

Tell me, my dear friend, was not Colden reconciled to his father before he went? When does he mean to return? What said he, what thought he, of my conduct? Did he call me ungrateful and capricious? Did he vow never to see or think of me more?

I have regarded the promise that I made to the elder Colden, and to my mother, as sacred. The decease of the latter has, in my own opinion, absolved me from any obligation except that of promoting my own happiness and that of him whom I love. I shall not now reduce him to indigence, and, that consequence being precluded, I cannot doubt of his father's acquiescence.

Ah, dear madam, I should not have been so long patient, had I not, as it now appears, been lulled into a fatal mistake. I could not taste repose till I was, as I thought, certainly informed that he continued to reside in his father's house. This proof of reconciliation, and the silence which, though so near him, he maintained towards me, both before and subsequently to my mother's death, contributed to persuade me that his condition was not unhappy, and especially that either his resentment or his prudence had made him dismiss me from his thoughts.

I have lately, to my utter astonishment, discovered that Colden, immediately after his last letter to me, went upon some distant voyage, whence, though a twelvemonth has since passed, he has not yet returned. Hence the boldness of this address to you, whom I know only by rumour.

You will, I doubt not, easily imagine to yourself my feelings, and will be good enough to answer my inquiries, if you have any compassion for your

J. T.

Letter LIX

To Jane Talbot

New York, October 15.

I HASTEN, my dear madam, to reply to your letter. The part you have assigned me I will most cheerfully perform to the utmost of my power, but very much regret that I have not more agreeable tidings to communicate.

Having said that all the transactions between you and my brother are known to me, I need not apologize for alluding to events, which I could not excuse myself for doing without being encouraged by the frankness and solicitude which your own pen has expressed.

Immediately after the determination of his fate in regard to you, he came to this city. He favoured us with the perusal of your letters. We entirely agreed with him in applauding the motives which influenced your conduct. We had no right to accuse you of precipitation or inconsistency. That heart must indeed be selfish and cold which could not comprehend the horror which must have seized you on hearing of his father's treatment. You acted, in the first tumults of your feelings, as every woman would have acted. That you did not immediately perceive the little prospect there was that a breach of this nature would be repaired, or that Colden would make use of your undesired and unsought-for renunciation as a means of reconcilement with his father, was no subject of surprise or blame. These reflections could not occur to you but in consequence of some intimations from others.

Henry Colden was no indolent or mercenary creature, No one more cordially detested the life of dependence than he. He always thought that his father had discharged all the duties of that relation in nourishing his childhood and giving him a good education. Whatever has been since bestowed, he considered as voluntary and unrequited bounty; has received it with irksomeness and compunction; and,

whatever you may think of the horrors of indigence, it was impossible to have placed him in a more painful situation than under his father's roof.

We could not but deeply regret the particular circumstances under which he left his father's house; but the mere leaving it, and the necessity which thence arose of finding employment and subsistence for himself, was not at all to be regretted.

The consequences of your mother's letter to the father produced no resentment in the son. He had refused what he had a right to refuse, and what had been pressed upon the giver rather than sought by him. The mere separation was agreeable to Colden, and the rage that accompanied it was excited by the young man's steadiness in his fidelity to you.

You were not aware that this cause of anger could not be removed by any thing done by you. Golden was not sensible of any fault. There was nothing, therefore, for which he could crave pardon. Blows and revilings had been patiently endured, but he was actuated by no tame or servile spirit. He never would expose himself to new insults. Though always ready to accept apology and grant an oblivion of the past, he never would avow compunction which he did not feel, or confess that he had deserved the treatment which he had received.

All this it was easy to suggest to your reflections, and I endeavoured to persuade him to write a second letter; but he would not. "No," said he, "she has made her election. If no advantage is taken of her tenderness and pity, she will be happy in her new scheme. Shall I subject her to new trials, new mortifications? Can I flatter myself with being able to reward her by my love for the loss of every other comfort? No. Whatever she feels for me, I am not her supreme passion. Her mother is preferred to me. That her present resolution puts out of all doubt. All upbraiding and repining from me would be absurd. What can I say in favour of my attachment to her, which she may not, with equal reason, urge in favour of her attachment to her mother? The happiness of one or other must be forfeited. Shall I not rather offer than demand the

sacrifice? And what are my boasts of magnanimity if I do not strive to lessen the difficulties of her choice, and persuade her that, in gratifying her mother, she inflicts no exquisite or lasting misery on me?

"I am not so blind but that I can foresee the effects on my tranquillity of time and variety of object. If I go this voyage, I may hope to acquire resignation much, sooner than by staying at home. To leave these shores is, in every view, best for me. I can do nothing, while here, for my own profit, and every eye I meet humbles and distresses me. At present, I do not wish ever to return; but I suppose the absence and adventures of a couple of years may change my feelings in that respect. My condition, too, by some chance, may be bettered. I may come back, and offer myself to her, without offering poverty and contempt at the same time. Time, or some good fortune, may remove the mother's prejudices. All this is possible; but, if it never takes place, if my condition never improves, I will never return home."

When we urged to him the propriety of apprizing you of his views, not only for your sake, but for his own,--"What need is there? Has she not prohibited all intercourse between us? Have I not written the last letter she will consent to receive? On my own account, I have nothing to hope. I have stated my return as a mere possibility. I do not believe I shall ever return. If I did expect it, I know Jane too well to have any fears of her fidelity. While I am living, or as long as my death is uncertain, her heart will be mine, and she will reserve herself for me."

I know you will excuse me, madam, for being thus particular. I thought it best to state the views of our friend in his own words. From these your judgment will enable you to form the truest conclusions.

The event that has since happened has probably removed the only obstacle to your mutual happiness; nor am I without the hope of seeing him one day return to be made happy by your favour. As several passages were expected to be made between China and Nootka, that desirable event cannot be expected to be very near.

M. M.

Letter LX

To Mrs. Montford

Philadelphia, October 20.

AH, dear madam! how much has your letter afflicted, how much has it consoled me!

You have then some hope of his return; but, you say, 'twill be a long time first. He has gone where I cannot follow him; to the end of the world; where even a letter cannot find him; into unwholesome climates; through dangerous elements; among savages----

Alas! I have no hope. Among so many perils, it cannot be expected that he should escape. And did he not say that he meant not to return?

Yet one thing consoles me. He left not his curses or reproaches on my head. Kindly, generously, and justly didst thou judge of my fidelity, Henry. While thou livest, and as long as I live, will I cherish thy image.

I am coming to pass the winter in your city. I adopt this scheme merely because it will give me your company. I feel as if you were the only friend I have in the world. Do not think me forward or capricious. I will not deny that you owe your place in my affections chiefly to your relation to the wanderer; but no matter whence my attachment proceeds. I feel that it is strong; merely selfish, perhaps; the child of a distracted fancy; the prop on which a sinking heart relies in its uttermost extremity.

Reflection stings me to the quick, but it does not deny me some consolation. The memory of my mother calls forth tears, but they are not tears of bitterness. To her, at least, I have not been deficient in dutiful observance. I have sacrificed my friend and myself, but it was to her peace. The melancholy of her dying scene will ever be cheered in my remembrance by her gratitude and blessing. Her last words were

these:--

"Thou hast done much for me, my child. I begin to fear that I have exacted too much. Your sweetness, your patience, have wrung my heart with compunction.

"I have wronged thee, Jane. I have wronged the absent; I greatly fear, I have. Forgive me. If you ever meet, entreat him to forgive me, and recompense yourself and him for all your mutual sufferings.

"I hope all, though sorrowful, has been for the best. I hope that angelic sweetness which I have witnessed will continue when I am gone. That belief only can make my grave peaceful.

"I leave you affluence and honour at least, I leave you the means of repairing my injury. That is my comfort; but forgive me, Jane. Say, my child, you forgive me for what has passed."

She stretched her hand to me, which I bathed with my tears.--But this subject afflicts me too much.

Give my affectionate compliments to Mr. Montford, and tell me that you wish to see your

JANE.

Letter LXI

To Mrs. Talbot

New York, October 22.

You tell me, my dear Jane, that you are coming to reside in this city; but you have not gratified my impatience by saying how soon. Tell me when you propose to come. Is there not something in which I can be of service to you?--some preparations to be made?

Tell me the day when you expect to arrive among us, that I may wait on you as soon

as possible.

I shall embrace my sister with a delight which I cannot express. I will not part with the delightful hope of one day calling you truly such.

Accept the fraternal regards of Mr. Montford.

M.M.

Letter LXII

To Mrs. Montford

Banks of Delaware, September 5.

Be not anxious for me, Mary. I hope to experience very speedy relief from the wholesome airs that perpetually fan this spot. Your apprehensions from the influence of these scenes on my fancy are groundless. They breathe nothing over my soul but delicious melancholy. I have done expecting and repining, you know. Four years have passed since I was here,--since I met your brother under these shades.

I have already visited every spot which has been consecrated by our interviews. I have found the very rail which, as I well remember, we disposed into a bench, at the skirt of a wood bordering a stubble-field. The same pathway through the thicket where I have often walked with him, I now traverse morning and night.

Be not uneasy, I repeat, on my account. My present situation is happier than the rest of the world can afford. I tell you I have done repining. I have done sending forth my views into an earthly futurity. Anxiety, I hope, is now at an end with me.

What do you think I design to do? I assure you it is no new scheme. Ever since my mother's death, I have thought of it at times. It has been my chief consolation. I never mentioned it to you, because I knew you would not approve it. It is this.

To purchase this farm and take up my abode upon it for the rest of my life. I need not become farmer, you know. I can let the ground to some industrious person, upon

easy terms. I can add all the furniture and appendages to this mansion, which my convenience requires. Luckily, Sandford has for some time entertained thoughts of parting with it, and I believe he could not find a more favourable purchaser.

You will tell me that the fields are sterile, the barn small, the stable crazy, the woods scanty. These would be powerful objections to a mere tiller of the earth, but they are none to me.

'Tis true, it is washed by a tide-water. The bank is low, and the surrounding country sandy and flat, and you may think I ought rather to prefer the beautiful variety of hill and dale, luxuriant groves and fertile pastures, which abound in other parts of the country. But you know, my friend, the mere arrangement of inanimate objects--wood, grass, and rock--is nothing. It owes its power of bewitching us to the memory, the fancy, and the heart. No spot of earth can possibly teem with as many affecting images as this; for here it was----

But my eyes already overflow. In the midst of these scenes, remembrance is too vivid to allow me thus to descant on them. At a distance I could talk of them without that painful emotion, and now it would be useless repetition. Have I not, more than once, related to you every dialogue, described every interview?

God bless you, dear Mary, and continue to you all your present happiness.

Don't forget to write to me. Perhaps some tidings may reach you--Down, thou flattering hope! thou throbbing heart, peace! He is gone. These eyes will never see him more. Had an angel whispered the fatal news in my wakeful ear, I should not more firmly believe it.

And yet--But I must not heap up disappointments for myself. Would to Heaven there was no room for the least doubt,--that, one way or the other, his destiny was ascertained!

How agreeable is your intelligence that Mr. Cartwright has embarked, after taking cheerful leave of you! It grieves me, my friend, that you do not entirely approve of

my conduct towards that man. I never formally attempted to justify myself. 'Twas a subject on which I could not give utterance to my thoughts. How irksome is blame from those we love! there is instantly suspicion that blame is merited. A new process of self-defence is to be gone over, and ten to one but that, after all our efforts, there are some dregs at the bottom of the cup.

I was half willing to found my excuse on the hope of the wanderer's return; but I am too honest to urge a false plea. Besides, I know that certainty, in that respect, would make no difference; and would it not be fostering in him a hope that my mind might be changed in consequence of being truly informed respecting your brother's fate?

I persuade myself that a man of Cartwright's integrity and generosity cannot be made lastingly unhappy by me. I know but of one human being more excellent. Though his sensibility be keen, I trust to his fortitude.

It is true, Mary, what you have heard. Cartwright was my school-fellow. When we grew to an age that made it proper to frequent separate schools, he did not forget me. The schools adjoined each other, and he used to resist all the enticements of prison-base and cricket for the sake of waiting at the door of our school till it broke up, and then accompanying me home.

These little gallant offices made him quite singular among his compeers, and drew on him and on me a good deal of ridicule. But he did not mind it. I thought him, and everybody else thought him, a most amiable and engaging youth, though only twelve or thirteen years old.

'Tis impossible to say what might have happened had he not gone with his mother to Europe; or rather, it is likely, I think, that our fates, had he stayed among us, would in time have been united. But he went away when I was scarcely fourteen. At parting, I remember, we shed a great many tears and exchanged a great many kisses, and promises not to forget. And that promise never was broken by me. He was always dear to my remembrance.

Time has only improved all the graces of the boy. I will not conceal from you, Mary, that nothing but a preoccupied heart has been an obstacle to his wishes. If that impediment had not existed, my reverence for his worth, my gratitude for his tenderness, would have made me comply. I will even go further; I will say to you, though my regard to his happiness will never suffer me to say it to him, that if three years more pass away, and I am fully assured that your brother's absence will be perpetual, and Cartwright's happiness is still in my hands,--that then--I possibly may--But I am sure that, before that time, his hand and his heart will be otherwise disposed of. Most sincerely shall I rejoice at the last event.

All are well here. My friend is as good-natured and affectionate as ever, and sings as delightfully and plays as adroitly. She humours me with all my favourite airs, twice a day. We have no strangers; no impertinents to intermeddle in our conversations and mar our enjoyments.

You know what turn my studies have taken, and what books I have brought with me. 'Tis remarkable what unlooked-for harvests arise from small and insignificant germs. My affections have been the stimulants to my curiosity. What was it induced me to procure maps and charts and explore the course of the voyager over seas and round capes? There was a time when these objects were wholly frivolous and unmeaning in my eyes; but now they gain my whole attention.

When I found that my happiness was embarked with your brother in a tedious and perilous voyage, was it possible to forbear collecting all the information attainable respecting his route, and the incidents likely to attend it? I got maps and charts, and books of voyages, and found a melancholy enjoyment in connecting the incidents and objects which they presented with the destiny of my friend. The pursuit of this chief and most interesting object has brought within view and prompted me to examine a thousand others, on which, without this original inducement, I should never have bestowed a thought.

The map of the world exists in my fancy in a most vivid and accurate manner. Repeated meditation on displays of shoal, sand-bank, and water, has created a sort of attachment to geography for its own sake. I have often reflected on the innumerable links in the chain of my ideas between my first eager examination of the route by sea between New York and Tobago, and yesterday's employment, when I was closely engaged in measuring the marches of Frederick across the mountains of Bohemia.

How freakish and perverse are the rovings of human curiosity! The surprise which Miss Betterton betrayed, when, in answer to her inquiries as to what study and what book I prized the most, you told her that I thought of little else than of the art of moving from shore to shore across the water, and that I pored over Cook's Voyages so much that I had gotten the best part of them by rote, was very natural. She must have been puzzled to conjecture what charms one of my sex could find in the study of maps and voyages. Once I should have been just as much puzzled myself. Adieu.

J. T.

Letter LXIII

To Mrs. Talbot

New York, October 1.

Be not angry with me, dear Jane. Yet I am sure, when you know, my offence, you will feel a great deal of indignation. You cannot be more angry with me than I am with myself. I do not know how to disclose the very rash thing I have done. If you knew my compunction, you would pity me.

Cartwright embarked on the day I mentioned, but remained for some days wind-bound at the Hook. Yesterday he unexpectedly made his appearance in our apartment, at the very moment when I was perusing your last letter. I was really delighted to see him, and the images connected with him, which your letter had just suggested, threw me off my guard. Finding by whom the letter was written, he

solicited with the utmost eagerness the sight of it.

Can you forgive me? My heart overflowed with pity for the excellent man. I knew the transport one part of your letter would afford him. I thought that no injury, but rather happiness, would redound to yourself.

I now see that I was guilty of a most culpable breach of confidence in showing him your delicate confession; but I was bewitched, I think.

I can write of nothing else just now. Much as I dread your displeasure, I could not rest till I had acknowledged my fault and craved your pardon. Forgive, I beseech you, your

M. MONTFORD.

Letter LXIV

To Mrs. Talbot

New York, December 12.

I cannot leave this shore without thanking the mistress of my destiny for all her goodness. Yet I should not have ventured thus to address you, had I not seen a letter--Dearest creature, blame not your friend for betraying you. Think it not a rash or injurious confession that you have made.

And is it possible that you have not totally forgotten the sweet scenes of our childhood,--that absence has not degraded me in your opinion,--and that my devotion, if it continue as fervent as now, may look, in a few years, for its reward?

Could you prevail on yourself to hide these generous emotions from me? To suffer me to leave my country in the dreary belief that all former incidents were held in contempt, and that, so far from being high in your esteem, my presence was troublesome, my existence was irksome, to you?

But your motive was beneficent and generous. You were content to be thought

unfeeling and ungrateful for the sake of my happiness. I rejoice inexpressibly in that event which has removed the veil from your true sentiments. Nothing but pure felicity to me can flow from it. Nothing but gratitude and honour can redound from it to yourself.

I go; but not with anguish and despondency for my companions. I am buoyed up by the light wings of hope. The prospect of gaining your love is not the only source of my present happiness. If it were, I should be a criminal and selfish being. No. My chief delight is, that happiness is yet in store for you; that, should Heaven have denied you your first hope, there still lives one whose claim to make you happy will not be rejected.

G. CARTWRIGHT.

Letter LXV

To G. Cartwright

Banks of Delaware, October 5.

My brother:--

It would avail me nothing to deny the confessions to which you allude. Neither will I conceal from you that I am much grieved at the discovery. Far am I from deeming your good opinion of little value; but in this case I was more anxious to deserve it than possess it.

Little, indeed, did you know me, when you imagined me insensible to your merit and forgetful of the happy days of our childhood,--the recollection of which has a thousand times made my tears flow. I thank Heaven that the evils which I have suffered have had no tendency to deaden my affections, to narrow my heart.

The joy which I felt for your departure was far from being unmixed. The persuasion that my friend and brother was going where he was likely to find that tranquillity of

which his stay here would bereave him, but imperfectly soothed the pangs of a long and perhaps an eternal separation.

Farewell; my fervent and disinterested blessings go with you. Return speedily to your country, but bring with you a heart devoted to another, and only glowing with a brotherly affection for

J. T.

Letter LXVI

To Jane Talbot

New York, November 15.

The fear that what I have to communicate may be imparted more abruptly and with false or exaggerated circumstances induces me to write to you.

Yesterday week, a ship arrived in this port from Batavia, in which my husband's brother, Stephen Montford, came passenger.

You will be terrified at these words; but calm your apprehensions. Harry does not accompany him, it is true, nor are we acquainted with his present situation.

The story of their unfortunate voyage cannot be minutely related now. Suffice it to say that a wicked and turbulent wretch, whom they shipped in the West Indies as mate, the former dying on the voyage thither, gave rise, by his intrigues among the crew, to a mutiny.

After a prosperous navigation and some stay at Nootka, they prepared to cross the ocean to Asia. They pursued the usual route of former traders, and, after touching at the Sandwich Islands, they made the land of Japan.

At this period, the mutiny, which had long been hatching, broke out. The whole crew, including the mate, joined the conspiracy. Montford and my brother were the objects of this conspiracy.

The original design was to murder them both and throw their bodies into the sea; but this cruel proposal was thwarted both, by compassion and by policy, and it was resolved to set my brother ashore on the first inhospitable land they should meet, and retain Montford to assist them in the navigation of the vessel, designing to destroy him when his services should no longer be necessary.

This scheme was executed as soon, as they came in sight of an outlying isle or dry sand-bank on the eastern coast of Japan. Here they seized the two unsuspecting youths, at daybreak, while asleep in their berths, and, immediately putting out their boat, landed my brother on the shore, without clothing or provisions of any kind. Montford petitioned to share the fate of his friend, but they would not listen to it.

Six days afterwards, they lighted on a Spanish ship bound to Manilla, which was in want of water. A party of the Spaniards came on board in search of some supply of that necessary article.

On their coming, Montford was driven below and disabled from giving, by his cries, any alarm. The sentinel who guarded him had received orders to keep him in that situation till the visitants had departed. Prom some impulse of humanity, or mistake of orders, the sentinel freed him from restraint a few minutes earlier than had been intended, and he got on deck before the departing strangers had gone to any considerable distance from the ship. He immediately leaped into the sea and made for the boat, to which, being a very vigorous swimmer, he arrived in safety.

The mutineers, finding their victim had escaped, endeavoured to make the best of their way, but were soon overtaken by the Spanish vessel, to whose officers Montford made haste to explain the true state of affairs. They were carried to Manilla, where Montford sold his vessel and cargo on very advantageous terms. From thence, after many delays, he got to Batavia, and from thence returned home.

I have thus given you, my friend, an imperfect account of their misfortunes. I need not add that no tidings has been received, or can reasonably be hoped ever to be

received, of my brother.

I could not write on such a subject sooner. For some days I had thoughts of being wholly silent on this news. Indeed, my emotions would not immediately permit me to use the pen; but I have concluded, and it is my husband's earnest advice, to tell you the whole truth.

Be not too much distressed, my sister, my friend. Fain would I give you that consolation which I myself want. I entreat you, let me hear from you soon, and tell me that you are not very much afflicted. Yet I could not believe you if you did. Write to me speedily, however.

Letter LXVII

To Mrs. Talbot

New York, November 23.

You do not write to me, my dear Jane. Why are you silent? Surely you cannot be indifferent to my happiness. You must know how painful, at a moment like this, your silence must prove.

I have waited from day to day in expectation of a letter; but more than a week has passed, and none has come. Let me hear from you immediately, I entreat you.

I am afraid you are ill; or perhaps you are displeased with me. Unconsciously I may have given you offence.

But, indeed, I can easily suspect the cause of your silence. I trembled with terror when I sent you tidings of our calamity. I know the impetuosity of your feelings, and the effects of your present solitude. Would to Heaven you were anywhere but where you are! Would to Heaven you were once more with us!

Let me beseech you to return to us immediately. Mr. M. is anxious to go for you. He wanted to set out immediately on his brother's arrival, and to be the bearer of my

letter, but I prevailed on him to forbear until I heard from you.

Do not, if you have any regard for me, delay answering me a moment longer.

M. M.

Letter LXVIII

To Mrs. Montford

Banks of Delaware, November 26.

I beseech you, dear Mrs. Montford, take some measures for drawing our dear Jane from this place. There is no remedy but absence from this spot, cheerful company and amusing engagements, for the sullen grief which has seized her. Ever since the arrival of your letter, giving us the fatal tidings of your brother's misfortune, she has been--in a strange way--I am almost afraid to tell you. I know how much you love her; but, indeed, indeed, unless somebody with more spirit and skill than I possess will undertake to console and divert her, I am fearful we shall lose her forever.

I can do nothing for her relief. You know what a poor creature I am. Instead of summoning up courage to assist another in distress, the sight of it confuses and frightens me. Never, I believe, was there such another helpless, good-for-nothing creature in existence. Poor Jane's affecting ways only make me miserable; and, instead of my being of any use to her, her presence deprives me of all power to attend to my family and friends. I endeavour to avoid her, though, indeed, that requires but little pains to effect, since she will not be seen but when she cannot choose; for whenever she looks at me steadily there is such expression in her features, something so woeful, so wild, that I am struck with terror. It never fails to make me cry heartily.

Come hither yourself, or send somebody immediately. If you do not, I dread the consequence.

Letter LXIX

To Mr. Montford

New Haven, February 10.

My dear friend:--

This letter is written in extreme pain; yet no pain that I ever felt, no external pain possible for me to feel, is equal to the torment I derive from suspense. Good Heaven! what an untoward accident! to be forcibly immured in a tavern-chamber; when the distance is so small between me and that certainty after which my soul pants!

I ought not thus to alarm my beloved friends, but I know not what I write: my head is in confusion, my heart in tumults; a delirium, more the effect of a mind stretched upon the rack of impatience than of limbs shattered and broken, whirls me out of myself.

Not a moment of undisturbed repose have I enjoyed for the last two months. If awake, omens and conjectures, menacing fears, and half-formed hopes, have haunted and harassed me. If asleep, dreams of agonizing forms and ever-varying hues have thronged my fancy and driven away peace.

In less than an hour after landing at Boston, I placed myself in the swiftest stage, and have travelled night and day, till within a mile of this town, when the carriage was overturned and my left arm terribly shattered. I was drawn with difficulty hither; and my only hope of being once more well is founded on my continuance, for I know not how long, in one spot and one posture.

By this time, the well-known hand has told you who it is that writes this:--the exile; the fugitive; whom four long years of absence and silence have not, I hope, erased from your remembrance, banished from your love, or even totally excluded from the hope of being seen again.

Yet that hope, surely, must have been long ago dismissed. Acquainted as you are with some part of my destiny; of my being left on the desert shore of Japan; on the borders of a new world,--a world civilized indeed, and peopled by men, but existing in almost total separation from the other families of mankind; with language, manners, and policy almost incompatible with the existence of a stranger among them; all entrance or egress from which being commonly supposed to be prohibited by iron laws and inflexible despotism; that I, a stranger, naked, forlorn, cast upon a sandy beach frequented but at rare intervals and by savage fishermen, should find my way into the heart of this wonderful empire, and finally explore my way back to my native shore, are surely most strange and incredible achievements. Yet all this, my friend, has been endured and performed by your Colden.

Finding it impossible to move immediately from this place, and this day's post having gone out before my arrival, I employed a man to carry you these assurances of my existence and return, and to bring me back intelligence of your welfare; and some news concerning--may I perish if I can, at this moment, write her name! Every moment, every mile that has brought me nearer to her, or rather nearer to certainty of her life or death, her happiness or misery, has increased my trepidation,--added new tremors to my heart.

I have some time to spare. In spite of my impatience, my messenger cannot start within a few hours. I am little fitted, in my present state of pain and suspense, to write intelligibly. Yet what else can I do but write? and will you not, in your turn, be impatient to know by what means I have once more set my foot in my native land?

I will fill up the interval, till my messenger is ready, by writing. I will give you some hints of my adventures. All particulars must be deferred till I see you. Heaven grant that I may once more see you and my sister! Four months ago you were well, but that interval is large enough to breathe ten thousand disasters. Expect not a distinct or regular story. That, I repeat, must be deferred till we meet. Many a long day

would be consumed in the telling; and that which was hazard or hardship in the encounter and the sufferance will be pleasant to remembrance and delightful in narration.

This person's name was Holtz. He was the agent of the Dutch East India Company in Japan. He was then at court in a sort of diplomatic character. He was likewise a physician and man of science. He had even been in America, and found no difficulty in conversing with me in my native language.

You will easily imagine the surprise and pleasure which such a meeting afforded me. It likewise opened a door to my return to Europe, as a large trade is regularly maintained between Java and Japan.

Many obstacles, however, in the views which Tekehatsin had formed, of profit and amusement, from my remaining in his service, and in the personal interests and wishes of my friend Holtz, opposed this design; nor was I able to accomplish it, but on condition of returning.

I confess to you, my friend, my heart was not extremely averse to this condition.

I left America with very faint hopes, and no expectation, of ever returning. The longer I resided among this race of men, the melancholy and forlornness of my feelings declined. Prospects of satisfaction from the novelty and grandeur of the scene into which I had entered began to open upon me; sentiments of affection and gratitude for Holtz, and even for the Japanese lord, took root in my heart. Still, however, happiness was bound to scenes and to persons very distant from, my new country, and a restlessness forever haunted me, which nothing could appease but some direct intelligence from you and from Jane Talbot. By returning to Europe, I could likewise be of essential service to Holtz, whose family were Saxons, and whose commercial interests required the presence of a trusty agent for a few months at Hamburg.

Let me carry you, in few words, through the difficulties of my embarkation, and the

incidents of a short stay at Batavia, and a long voyage over half the world to Hamburg.

Shortly after my return to Hamburg, from an excursion into Saxony to see Holtz's friends, I met with Mr. Cartwright, an American. After much fluctuation, I had previously resolved to content myself with writing to you, of whom I received such verbal information from several of our countrymen as removed my anxiety on your account. A very plausible tale, told me by some one that pretended to know, of Mrs. Talbot's marriage with a Mr. Cartwright, extinguished every new-born wish to revisit my native land, and I expected to set sail on my return to India, before it could be possible to hear from you.

I was on the eve of my departure, when the name of Cartwright, an American, then at Hamburg, reached my ears. The similarity of his name to that of the happy man who had supplanted the poor wanderer in the affections of Jane, and a suspicion that they might possibly be akin, and, consequently, that this might afford me some information as to the character or merits of that Cartwright, made me throw myself in his way.

You may easily imagine, what I shall defer relating, the steps which led us to a knowledge of each other, and by which I discovered that this Cartwright was the one mentioned to me, and that, instead of being already the husband of my Jane, his hopes of her favour depended on the certain proof of my death.

Cartwright's behaviour was in the highest degree disinterested. He might easily have left me in my original error, and a very few days would have sent me on a voyage which would have been equivalent to my death. On the contrary, his voluntary information, and a letter which he showed me, written in Jane's hand, created a new soul in my breast. Every foreign object vanished, and every ancient sentiment, connected with our unfortunate loves, was instantly revived. Ineffable tenderness, and an impatience next to rage to see her, reigned in my heart.

Yet, my friend, with all my confidence of a favourable reception from Jane,--her conduct now exempt from the irresistible control of her mother, and her tenderness for me as fervent as ever,--yet, since so excellent a man as Cartwright existed, since his claims were, in truth, antecedent to mine, since my death or everlasting absence would finally insure success to these claims, since his character was blemished by none of those momentous errors with which mine was loaded, since that harmony of opinion on religious subjects, without which marriage can never be a source of happiness to hearts touched by a true and immortal passion, was perfect in his case,--never should mere passion have seduced me to her feet. If my reflections and experience had not changed my character,--if all her views as to the final destiny and present obligations of human beings had not become mine,--I should have deliberately ratified the act of my eternal banishment.

Yes, my friend; this weather-beaten form and sunburnt face are not more unlike what you once knew, than my habits and opinions now and formerly. The incidents of a long voyage, the vicissitudes through which I have passed, have given strength to my frame, while the opportunities and occasions for wisdom which these have afforded me have made my mind whole. I have awakened from my dreams of doubt and misery, not to the cold and vague belief, but to the living and delightful consciousness, of every tie that can bind man to his Divine Parent and Judge.

Again I must refer you to our future interviews. A broken and obscure tale it would be which I could now relate. I am hurried, by my fears and suspenses--Yet it would give you pleasure to know every thing as soon as possible--some time likewise must elapse--You and my sister have always been wise. The lessons of true piety it is the business of your lives to exemplify and to teach. Henceforth, if that principle, which has been my stay and my comfort in all the slippery paths and unlooked-for perils from which I have just been delivered, desert not my future steps, I hope to be no mean example and no feeble teacher of the same lessons. Indefatigable zeal and strenuous efforts are indeed incumbent on me in proportion to the extent of my past

misconduct and the depth of my former degeneracy.

By what process of reflection I became thus, you shall speedily know: yet can you be at a loss to imagine it? You, who have passed through somewhat similar changes; who always made allowances for the temerity of youth, the fascinations of novelty; who always predicted that a few more years, the events of my peculiar destiny, the leisure of my long voyage, and that goodness of intention to which you were ever kind enough to admit my claims, would ultimately provide the remedy for all errors and evils, and make me worthy of the undivided love of all good men,--you, who have had this experience, and who have always regarded me in this light, will not wonder that reflection has, at length, raised me to the tranquil and steadfast height of simple and true piety.

Such, my friend, were my inducements to return; but first it was necessary to explain, by letter, to Holtz--But my messenger is at the door, eager to begone. Take this, my friend. Bring yourself, or send back by the same messenger, without a moment's delay, tidings of her, and of your safety. As to me, be not much concerned on my account. I am solemnly assured by my surgeon that nothing but time and a tranquil mind are necessary to restore me to health. The last boon no hand but yours can confer on your

H. COLDEN.

Letter LXX

To Henry Golden

New York, February 12.

And are you then alive? Are you then returned? Still do you remember, still love, the ungrateful and capricious Jane? Have you indeed come back to soothe her almost broken heart,--to rescue her from the grave,--to cheer her with the prospect of peaceful and bright days yet to come?

Oh, my full heart! Sorrow has not hitherto been able quite to burst this frail tenement. I almost fear that joy,--so strange to me is joy, and so far, so very far, beyond my notions of possibility was your return,--I almost fear that joy will do what sorrow was unable to do.

Can it be that Golden--that selfsame, dear, pensive face, those eyes, benignly and sweetly mild, and that heart-dissolving voice, have escaped so many storms, so many dangers? Was it love for me that led you from the extremity of the world? and have you, indeed, brought back with you a heart full of "ineffable tenderness" for me?

Unspeakably unworthy am I of your love. Time and grief, dear Hal, have bereft me of the glossy hues, the laughing graces, which your doting judgment once ascribed to me. But what will not the joy of your return effect? I already feel lightsome and buoyant as a bird. My head is giddy; but, alas, you are not well,--yet, you assure us, not dangerously sick. Nothing, did you not say, but time and repose necessary to heal you? Will not my presence, my nursing, hasten thy restoration? Tuesday evening--they say it can't possibly be sooner--I am with you. No supporters shall you have but my arms; no pillow but my breast. Every holy rite shall instantly be called in to make us one. And when once united, nothing but death shall ever part us again. What did I say? Death itself--at least thy death--shall never dissever that bond.

Your brother will take this. Your sister--she is the most excellent of women, and worthy to be your sister--she and I will follow him to-morrow. He will tell you much which my hurried spirits will not allow me to tell you in this letter. He knows everything. He has been a brother since my mother's death. She is dead, Henry. She died in my arms; and will it not give you pleasure to know that her dying lips blessed me, and expressed the hope that you would one day return to find, in my authorized love, some recompense for all the evils to which her antipathies subjected you? She hoped, indeed, that observation and experience would detect the fallacy of

your former tenets; that you would become wise, not in speculation only, but in practice, and be, in every respect, deserving of the happiness and honour which would attend the gift of her daughter's hand and heart.

My words cannot utter, but thy own heart perhaps can conceive, the rapture which thy confession of a change in thy opinions has afforded me. All my prayers, Henry, have not been merely for your return. Indeed, whatever might have been the dictates, however absolute the dominion, of passion, union with you would have been very far from completing my felicity, unless our hopes and opinions, as well as our persons and hearts, were united. Now can I look up with confidence and exultation to the shade of my revered and beloved mother. Now can I safely invoke her presence and her blessing on a union which death will have no power to dissolve. Oh, what sweet peace, what serene transport, is there in the persuasion that the selected soul will continue forever to commune with my soul, mingle with mine in its adoration of the same Divine Parent, and partake with me in every thought, in every emotion, both here and hereafter!

Never, my friend, without this persuasion, never should I have known one moment of true happiness. Marriage, indeed, instead of losing its attractions in consequence of your errors, drew thence only new recommendations, since with a zeal, a tenderness, and a faith like mine, my efforts to restore such a heart and such a reason as yours could not fail of success; but till that restoration were accomplished, never, I repeat, should I have tasted repose even in your arms.

Poor Miss Jessup! She is dead, Henry,--yet not before she did thee and me poor justice. Her death-bed confession removed my mother's fatal suspicions. This confession and the perusal of all thy letters, and thy exile, which I afterwards discovered was known to her very early, though unsuspected by me till after her decease, brought her to regard thee with some compassion and some respect.

I can write no more; but must not conclude till I have offered thee the tenderest,

most fervent vows of a heart that ever was and always will be thine own. Witness,

JANE TALBOT.

The End.

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