The Pickering Masters

The Works of Charlotte Smith

Marchmont

Edited by
Kate Davies and Harriet Guest

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THE WORKS OF CHARLOTTE SMITH
VOLUME 9

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	vii
References and Further Reading	xxvii
Marchmont	1
Explanatory Notes	417

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INTRODUCTION

I

1796 is an important year in the history of British women's writing. It saw the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence*, Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art*, Mary Robinson's *Angelina* and *Hubert de Sevrac*, Frances Burney's *Camilla*, and the continuation of Hannah More's series of Cheap Repository Tracts, as well as of Charlotte Smith's *Marchmont*. These texts responded more or less directly, in different ways and from different positions, to what was perceived by those sympathetic to the cause of liberal political reform to be a newly oppressive climate in British politics following the introduction by William Pitt's government of the Two Acts, which received the royal assent on 18 December 1795. The passage of these 'Gagging Acts', as they were known, effectively suppressed collective political protest in Britain and disabled the movement for parliamentary reform. In the repressive political climate they created, the utopian political visions entertained, and perhaps disavowed, in, for example, Wollstonecraft's *Letters* or Hays's *Emma Courtney* took on a new value as a means of sustaining ideals that it no longer seemed possible to translate into practical policies for reform. Women's writing had seemed detached from the urgent exchange or conflict of views responding immediately to political events which had characterized the pamphlet wars of 1794–5, and that detachment became, in the new political climate, a strength, a capacity to reflect sometimes more obliquely on the character of the times. Their fiction, with its bias towards the private lives of individuals, could explore in that context the implications of forms of oppression or repression which it seemed could barely be criticized or resisted in the public world of politics during what Charles James Fox called William Pitt's 'Reign of Terror'.[1]

Marchmont is primarily concerned with the persecution of the hero, and the sufferings of his mother and sisters, as a result of debts and mort-

[1] Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 390. On the Two Acts, see pp. 386–406.

gages contracted by earlier generations of the family. Debt was of course a problem looming large in Smith's personal life, and one to which her correspondence continually returns. But in this novel the sufferings of the Marchmont family are represented as the occasion for unfavourable comparisons of the British government with the government of revolutionary France, and as symptomatic of the potential British law afforded for the victimization of the innocent and virtuous. The novel uses the Jacobite history of the Marchmont family to explore the compatibility of sentimental attachment to the British past with the liberal and proto-feminist sympathies of the heroine, Althea, and to suggest that the experience of oppression cuts across traditional party-political divisions to create a new opposition between the wealthy and powerful, who are able to use the machinery of the law and its corrupt agents to reinforce their position, and those who are marginalized by their attachment to principles that are seen as anti-modern: the mistaken loyalties of the Marchmonts or the liberal beliefs of Althea.

The society depicted in the novel is by no means utopian. The virtuous characters meet a suitable reward only through the intervention of the rich uncle, freighted with colonial wealth, who appears like a *deus ex machina* in the final volume. The novel finally represents hope of redemption only in the form of isolated acts of individual benevolence, expressing a pessimism that was for Smith both political and personal. In one of the few references to the novel in her surviving correspondence, she wrote to Joseph Cooper Walker, the Irish antiquarian: 'I am writing (pour vivre) another Novel which I hope will be the last. Indeed the present moment is very unfavourable to every species of literature. Just now a sort of election madness seems to pervade all sorts of people.'[1] Like Marchmont in the fourth volume of the novel, she may have felt that booksellers and buyers were wary of her work because the 'passage from discontent to murmurs against oppression, real or imaginary, is very short; and murmurs may savour of seditious notions' (p. 383). The caution indicated by that qualification, 'real or imaginary', is apparent throughout the novel, but for Smith as for other liberal writers in 1796 expressions of personal discontent were shadowed by the sense of political oppression.

Smith's personal circumstances in late 1795 and 1796 were not easy. She was in mourning for her 'most beloved' daughter, whose loss, she wrote, 'fell like the hand of death upon me',[2] and she was harassed by financial worries. She wrote despairingly in November 1795: 'It is impos-

[1] Weymouth, 29 May 1796, in Judith Phillips Stanton, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 237; 'pour vivre' – in order to live (French). The general election of the summer of 1796 confirmed and refreshed Pitt's dominance in the House of Commons.

[2] [Mary Hays], 'Mrs. Charlotte Smith', in *Public Characters of 1800–1801* (London: Richard Phillips, 1807), p. 64. Hays quotes from Smith's letter to a friend.

sible that I can support my family if I were to work at my desk from Sun rise to Sun set, & I am not able to make the exertions I have done, for since my last bitter misfortune my spirits are too much depressd.'[1] When she moved from Exmouth to Weymouth in early February 1796, she asked her publishers to withhold her address from both 'friends or Duns'.[2] She had, for many years, been involved in an acerbic dispute over the substantial estate of her father-in-law, Richard Smith, who had owned plantations in Barbados and made a fortune as a Director of the East India Company. Without benefit of legal advice, he had drawn up a complex will intended to benefit his grandchildren. When he died, in 1776, and after various outstanding matters had been settled, his estate was valued at £36,000, but by the time the trust was finally settled in 1813 its value had been reduced to around £4,000. Smith's attempts to secure income to support her children from the estate involved her in continual wrangling with the trustees and their agents. After her daughter's death she wrote angrily to her publishers: 'The Trustees have refus'd me not only assistance for my daughter while she lived, but wherewithal to bury her.'[3]

Smith acknowledged, in the Preface to the novel, that her experiences of the law in attempting to secure funds from the trust informed her invective against the legal profession. But her complaint was not only based in her personal difficulties. The laws on insolvency which resulted in the imprisonment of debtors were widely regarded as unsatisfactory, and in the 1790s their reform was seen at least in some quarters as a matter of urgency because the war with France considerably increased the numbers of bankruptcies and bank failures.[4] Lord Rawdon (who became Earl of Moira in June 1793), had introduced a bill addressing the problem in 1792. He explained to the House of Lords on the second reading of his Debtor and Creditor Bill (as it was known)[5] that it was an attempt to address the principal weaknesses of current legislation by discriminating between those debtors who were merely unfortunate, and those whose debts were fraudulent. He argued that it was absurd to expect 'from the very dungeon of distress and despondence' the payment of a debt which the prisoner had been unable to meet when at liberty, and he pointed out that it was 'a degradation of justice' to imprison an individual without the possibility of any redress on the affidavit of a single creditor.[6] These complaints

[1] Letter to Thomas Cadell, Jr, and William Davies, 2 November 1795, in Stanton, *Collected Letters*, p. 211.

[2] Letter to Cadell and Davies, Weymouth, 7 February 1796, in *Collected Letters*, p. 222.

[3] Letter to Cadell and Davies, Bath, 2 May 1795, in *Collected Letters*, p. 194. For further discussion of the dispute over Richard Smith's estate, see Marchmont, Preface, pp. 3–5 and n. 2.

[4] See, for example, *Morning Chronicle*, 21 March 1793, and 26 August 1793.

[5] The full title of the published bill was 'A bill, intituled An Act to extend relief in certain cases between debtor and creditor. Ordered to be printed 1st June 1792' (1792).

[6] *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, 28 March 1793.

are echoed in *Marchmont*, and the character of Carlingbury, the dissolute young man incarcerated for debts considerably smaller than his fortune, is strongly reminiscent of the example Rawdon gave of a fraudulent debtor who deserved to feel the full force of the law – a man who had remained in prison for more than seven years for a debt of £10,000, though he was worth £40,000. The *World* newspaper championed Rawdon's bill, and its attack on the inhumanity of the laws on insolvency is worth quoting at length, as an indication of the extent to which Smith's novel tapped a vein of public as well as personal outrage. The paper comments

> The encreasing Calamity of every week makes all possible attention to this Bill a PUBLIC DUTY in every MEMBER of PARLIAMENT: for, from unforeseen circumstances, the honest, but unfortunate DEBTOR, may daily fall into the hands of the lowest class of wretches, the *Pettifogging* ATTORNIES. On every ground of policy and humanity, the DEBTOR, be he who he may, on fairly and unequivocally surrendering up *his all*, should have free liberty of Person. The monstruous Barbarity of shutting up a set of Beings for no purpose but to gratify the malice and the extortions of ATTORNIES and BAILIFFS, grows too crying an Infliction on the justice of the Country![1]

The Lords argued that Rawdon's bill excessively weakened the rights of creditors, and threatened commercial prosperity, and rejected it at the end of May 1793,[2] but, as Lord Moira, he reintroduced it in revised form, and it was debated again in April 1796. By then, however, the political climate had darkened. In 1793, he had been able to claim that his bill was 'grounded on the great principles of justice and humanity', and 'divested of party motives', and his intentions were praised.[3] But in 1796 his bill was debated in language reminiscent of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution* (1791), as though it were an attempt to smuggle in radical policies by the back door. It was condemned as the product of a 'misguided humanity' which would 'continually consider theoretical good, without adverting to the danger of innovation', and which threatened an 'ancient fabric sanctified by the wisdom of ages'.[4] Lord Kenyon, chief justice of King's Bench, added that the bill would encourage gambling, as well as 'those whose infamous trade it was, to seduce the wives and daughters of families'.[5] Opposed by three of the most powerful lawyers in the country, the bill was

[1] *World*, 13 May 1793, quoted in Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England, 1792–1793* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), pp. 286–7.

[2] See *Oracle*, 1 June 1793.

[3] *Oracle*, 1 June 1793.

[4] *Oracle*, 27 April 1796.

[5] *Morning Post*, 27 April 1796. On Kenyon's attempt to clamp down on the aristocratic vice of gambling in 1796, see pp. 456–7, n. 114, below. A husband could sue and gain compensation from the lover of an adulterous wife. Kenyon suggested that the bill would weaken the deterrent effect of this.

thrown out.[1] Smith's novel contributed to the debate on the treatment of debtors of which Moira's bill was a part; Marchmont praises the Earl as 'the pride and honour of his country', and admires the humanitarian appeal of his bill (p. 156). That connection links her writing to those reformers and innovators condemned by the Lord Chancellor for imagining that they were 'like Solon or Lycurgus, forming a new Republic'.[2]

Smith claimed in her Preface that her portrait of the evils of the law was representative, and that 'the destructive monster, armed with the power of doing mischief and of robbing legally – the wretch without feeling or principle, without honesty or pity – is a nuisance widely diffused' (p. 5). Her claim is supported by Vicesimus Knox's argument that attorneys and solicitors wielded excessive influence in government, and were instrumental in increasing its despotic powers. Knox asserted that these men 'have commonly been too long hackneyed among the lowest of mankind, not perhaps in rank only, but in spirit, knowledge, liberality, to retain any very *scrupulous* delicacy in their own bosoms, or to believe in its existence in others. They consider the good things of the world as a scramble, where every man is to get what he can by address, and bold pretension.' With the lawyers involved in prosecuting the treason trials of 1794 in mind,[3] he concluded: 'Certainly there can be no hope of reform … while men so versed in corruption, so enriched by it, and so well pleased with it, bear sway in senates, and direct the councils of princes.'[4]

II

On 9 October 1795, *The Morning Post* reported that 'some writers are now busied in finding out imaginary resemblances between the state of England before the Restoration and the present condition of France.'[5] It was less the act of historical comparison than its politics that bothered the *Post*: the current crisis was reminiscent of the 'sanguinary' 1670s rather than the Commonwealth; the Comte de Provence more appropriately compared to James II than Charles II. Such seventeenth-century 'historical coincidences' form the backdrop to *Marchmont*'s troubled narrative of private disposses-

[1] The principle opponents of the bill were the Lord Chancellor (Lord Loughborough), Lord Thurlow (Lord Chancellor until 1792) and Lord Kenyon.

[2] *Morning Chronicle*, 27 April 1796. Solon and Lycurgus were the legislators thought to have been responsible for establishing the successful and orderly polities of classical Athens and Sparta.

[3] Knox lists the crown lawyers 'put into parliament by PEERS, or *grandees*, as their members or agents, contrary to the law and the constitution', in *The Spirit of Despotism* (London: no bookseller, 1795), sect. xxiii, 'The permission of lawyers by profession, aspiring at honours in the gift of the crown, to have the greatest influence in the legislature, a circumstance unfavourable to Liberty', p. 289.

[4] Knox, *Despotism*, sect. xxiii, pp. 288–9.

[5] *Morning Post*, 9 October 1795.

sion, and are key to the particular ways in which the novel responds to the circumstances of 1795–6.[1] Althea, whose maternal roots lie in Dorset, is a heroine clearly tied to the spaces and history of the English south-west. On her refusal to marry the corrupt and wealthy Mohun, she is banished to Eastwoodleigh, the ruined Devon home of the evicted Marchmonts, and becomes, like them, an exile in her own country. Devon's blood-coloured clay and shattered cliffs are suggestive of her familial rejection and personal isolation, but are also the signs of the painful conflicts written in the landscape. Smith was clearly intensely interested in the West Country legacy of the English Civil Wars and interested too in the ways in which they might be read against those issues of political allegiance, national loyalty and government repression so pressing in the months of *Marchmont*'s writing and publication. The names of many of her characters have obvious seventeenth-century associations (of which more later) and she carefully selected her locales and settings for their historical resonances.

In the South Hams region of south Devon, about five miles from the coast and a couple of miles east of Woodleigh village, stood Fallapit House, the fifteenth-century seat of the Fortescue (Fortesque) family. Like the Marchmonts, the Fortescues were prominent Cavaliers whose depleted and ruined estate was testament to their loyal service in the cause of Charles I. And like Eastwoodleigh, Fallapit was, in 1795, a picturesque ruin, haunted by its royalist past, its exiled relatives, and the curse of the debts of previous generations.[2] Fallapit's south Devon location, family associations and particular 'historical coincidences' (as well as some other intriguing clues) make it a very likely setting for Eastwoodleigh, the story of the Marchmonts and the political lessons through which Althea comes to maturity in the novel's second volume.[3] Perhaps, then, we might read *Marchmont* as a typical country-house novel. Perhaps the hero's and heroine's shared local and

[1] *Morning Post*, 9 October 1795. The Comte de Provence was the brother of Louis XVI, and proclaimed himself King following the death of Louis XVII.

[2] On Fallapit and the Fortescues see Richard Polwhele, *The History of Devonshire*, 3 vols (London: 1797), vol. iii, pp. 466–7. The house was a ruin in the 1790s and was rebuilt in a faux-Elizabethan style around 1810. Prince's *Worthies of Devon* describes Fallapit's royalist exile Sir Edmund Fortescue thus: 'having served King Charles I with great courage, cost and fidelity as a justice of the peace, High Sheriff of the county, and a brave commander in the wars, making as honourable articles for the surrender of Charlesfort at Salcombe, Devon, fled beyond sea … before his death, he left a curse on his posterity if they did not discharge his … debts.' John Prince, *Danmonii Orientales Illustres, or, The Worthies of Devon* (Exeter, 1701), p. 305

[3] The Fortescue family tomb is in the Church of St Andrew in the village of East Allington near Fallapit. A monument close to the tomb commemorates a prominent local family the Everleighs, whose name clearly suggests *Marchmont*'s Eversleys. Fallapit's distance from the coast, the surrounding landscape and woodlands, and the walks Althea takes towards the close of Volume II also suggest it as a likely location for Eastwoodleigh. The rebuilt Fallapit House was a Catholic boarding school in the 1970s, and is currently being renovated into flats.

personal attachment, strengthened through their affection for and renovation of the old Royalist estate, is suggestive of that kind of intertwining of domestic happiness and public reform or improvement so familiar from other novels of this period. Smith's *Old Manor House* (1793), for example, concludes with the hero's return to claim his inheritance in precisely this manner. Following his marriage to Monimia, Orlando generously divides his property, recoups useless buildings for productive farms, appropriately dispenses local charity, and generally transforms the gothic structure of the estate into a progressive economic and domestic establishment: 'without spoiling that look of venerable antiquity for which it was so remarkable, he collected within it every comfort and every elegance of modern life.'[1] But Fallapit/Eastwoodleigh is no Rayland Hall. The ruined house is a site of historic desolation that is deeply evocative, yet completely lost and irrecoverable. It never really conveys the possibility of national restoration through private rapprochement, but serves only as an occasion for meditation, sentiment or mourning. If Eastwoodleigh is at all the nation in miniature, then that nation is a violated monument or tomb.

In occupying Marchmont's family home Althea sifts the meaning of her developing attachment through the wreckage of the past. Like her knowledge of its heir, Eastwoodleigh's history is at first the stuff of glimpses and traces. The abandoned garden displays only fading horticultural remains ('ancient heads of rosemary and lavender, overgrown with gray moss' (p. 136)) and the trees (which register familial injury in so many of Smith's novels) bear the scars of civil war bullets or have been stripped and sold: 'the iron ploughshare of oppression in the form of the law, seemed everywhere to have passed over the domain' (p. 89). The house, too, in its various states of dereliction, documents the Marchmonts' private wounds as well as their political consistency. In each of Eastwoodleigh's 'unket' rooms,[2] Althea finds damaged artefacts that speak of a loyal commitment whose loss she finds matter for regret. One apartment contains a decaying oak table which had fed the King's soldiers led by Ralph Hopton to a famous West Country victory at the Battle of Braddock Down.[3] Another room's worm-eaten oak is said to have concealed Queen Henrietta Maria and, later, Charles II, as they flew from Devon to Stuart-sympathetic France.[4] A lone family portrait allows her to reflect on other objects of memory and mourning: two lost miniatures of Cavalier martyrs Charles Lucas and Lucius Falkland sold against the family's debts by an unfeeling auctioneer.[5]

[1] See Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House* (1793), Volume 6, p. 455.

[2] Dreary or dismal in Devon dialect. See G. A. Cooke, *Topographical and Statistical Description of Devon* (London: Sherwood, Neely & Jones, 1825), p. 25.

[3] Braddock Down is in Cornwall and the battle took place on 19 January 1643.

[4] See Polwhele, *History of Devonshire*, vol. i, p. 306.

[5] Charles Lucas (1612/13–48) is described by Barbara Donagan in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) as, 'after Charles I, the pre-eminent Royalist martyr of the civil

These despoiled Royalist relics have, for Althea, a numinous quality whose melancholy power is partly derived from the absent figure of Marchmont (who haunts her as she tours his family home) and partly from her own status as a mourner (suffering the loss of Mrs Trevyllian and, in her broken relationship with her father, the failure of filial sympathy). Such fragments and traces afford consolation because they suggest the remains of an idealized past buried and betrayed by the modern realities of legal and economic dispossession which she and the new generation of Marchmonts now face. Devoted, heroic, generous, abandoned: the Cavalier Marchmonts lend Althea the sentimental assurance of an imaginary loyalty and consistency in a world of brutal disconnection.

Marchmont, concealed through the novel's second volume like a Stuart fugitive in his own home, seems also a composite of Cavalier scraps and fragments. Two of these scraps are particularly significant. The first is the 'few leaves of the Eîkon Basilike' (p. 102) (which Althea finds mouldering among his Latin juvenilia), the (supposed) private meditations of Charles I as he prepared for his execution and the text which did most to galvanize the nationalist–sentimental reaction to regicide during the century and a half which followed. The other fragment is the famous lyric by Richard Lovelace, 'Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make', from which Smith took the name of her heroine.[1] Like Marchmont's ancestors, Lovelace's Cavalier affiliations led him to financial ruin. He sold off the family estate in support of the King's cause and, according to Wood's *Atheneae Oxonienses* (towards which Smith directs her readers), was reduced from a fashionable object of desire clad in 'cloth of gold and silver' to an impoverished beggar.[2] The lyric of course anticipates Marchmont's own imprisonment in the novel's fourth volume, but also suggests an equivalence between tenderness or intimacy and a loyal attachment to the monarchy, in terms of the confirming, restorative power of both. The third stanza of the lyric (not reproduced in the text) makes this connection clear:

> When (like confined linnets) I
> With shriller notes shall sing
> The mercy, sweetness, majesty,
> And glories of my King;
> When I shall voice aloud how good

wars'. Viscount Lucius Falkland (1609/10–43) was a familiar Civil War hero whose loyalty and gentility were, throughout the eighteenth century, the focus of sentimental reaction. See, for example, Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 2 vols (London: 1766), vol. ii, p. 40. See also Charlotte Smith and Mary Hays, *History of England* (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), vol. ii, pp. 267–8, and compare Edward Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and the Civil Wars in England*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1704), vol. iii, pp. 178–80.

[1] The lyric's alternative title is 'To Althea from Prison'.

[2] Anthony Wood, *Atheneae Oxonienses: An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the most Antient and Famous University of Oxford*, 2 vols [1691] (London, 1721), vol. ii, p. 229.

> He is, how great should be,
> Th'enlarged winds that curb the flood
> Know no such liberty.[1]

Loyalty in politics as in love possesses an alluring and consolatory power of which Smith is acutely aware here as elsewhere. But though Althea's collection of royalist relics enables her to internalize vestiges and traces of the Marchmont family's past, this is not yet enough. Lovelace's loyal linnet shrilly singing is perhaps a more disturbing than appealing image, and in *Marchmont* the kinds of solace afforded by the historical trace or sentimental fragment can only be provisional.

In the 'dreary seclusion' and 'heavy depression' of an Eastwoodleigh winter, Althea turns to the 'study of … English history' in order to elucidate her understanding of 'that period … when the Marchmont family had been so distinguished by its sufferings and fidelity' (p. 120). She carefully reads from the ninth through to the sixteenth centuries, and finds herself disgusted by monarchical ambition, the oppressed state of the populace, and a general lack of private philanthropy – 'so few of those "charities" existed among them which alone render human nature respectable' (p. 120). She hopes for more from the Marchmonts' seventeenth century, for 'to trace through the tumult of civil discord and the bewildering subtleties of mistaken politics, the bravery and persevering loyalty of a single family, was a task suited to the present state of [her] mind' (p. 121). But her mind is perhaps less soothed by the family's continuous narrative than it was by its fragmentary history. Their Royalist past means that later generations of Marchmonts are Tories and Jacobites, the 'bigoted' proponents of an 'unguarded zeal' (p. 123), whose stubborn Stuart prejudices and opposition to popular sovereignty seem as hereditary as the family's ever-increasing debts. If the history of the Marchmonts figures the plight of the French emigrants for whom Smith had some sympathy, the novel suggests that this was not an affection which extended to support for their attempts to restore the French monarchy.

Narrative history, and the rationalization necessary to its reading, disturbs Althea's sentimental identification. It is certainly hard for a woman of the West Country to sympathize with those Marchmonts, who, in their support of James II implicitly sanctioned the atrocities of George Jeffreys's 'bloody assizes':

> That there were men who adhered from principle, and still more from personal affection, to Charles the First, misled and obstinate as he was, she could easily conceive; but it was more difficult to account for the infatuation of those who sacrificed their families and their country to the degraded *pensioner* of France and the unfeeling employer of *Jeffries*. (p. 124)

[1] Richard Lovelace, 'To Althea from Prison', or 'Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make' (1642), ll. 17–24.

Althea's critical response to the later Stuarts marks a crucial shift away from the sentimental remorse prompted by the *Eikon Basilike* and towards the liberal opinions she expresses in the novel's third volume against imperial conquest, slavery and the condition of the labouring poor. Jeffreys is a particularly intriguing figure for her historical opinion to turn on. In the late eighteenth-century West Country, his name still powerfully evoked the terror and oppression suffered a century earlier in the wake of Monmouth's Rebellion. A figure of monarchical allegiance, conservative repression and the tyranny of the law, Jeffreys had also featured in republican critiques of Burke's *Reflections* as the persuasive prototype of its author.[1] Althea's account of the supporters of James II might also be read alongside that of Knox in his *Spirit of Despotism*. He made the connection between the 'narrow loyalty … which is but another name for bigotry' which led the supporters of 'the foolish and unfortunate James' to 'mean servility … silly superstition' and bloody violence, and the kinds of unquestioning compliance demanded by Pitt's administration.[2] For Knox, like Althea, the shift between Cavalier and Jacobite is marked by the difference between a laudable loyalty 'which includes in it a sentiment of affection' and a 'false … adulatory loyalty, which … contributes to diffuse … a servile, abject temper, highly promotive of the despotic spirit'.[3] Smith was later to satirize the despotic spirit of Jacobite Tories, compounded by Catholic superstition, in the figure of Lady Kilbrodie, the malicious Scottish matriarch who persecutes Mrs Glenmorris in *The Young Philosopher* (1798).[4] *Marchmont*, however, is primarily concerned with the effects of mistaken loyalty on private life, which reflect obliquely on the more immediate effects of Pitt's 'Reign of Terror'. For Althea, Jacobitism renders the Marchmonts the agents of their own dispossession and history makes its victims in the private sphere. It is after her historical reflections on the errors of Jacobitism that she finds

[1] See, for example, James Mackintosh, *Vindicae Gallicae* (London, 1791), pp. 325–6. At the 'General Meeting of the Society for Constitutional Information, held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, Strand, Friday, 17th of January, 1794', the following resolutions were agreed: 'Resolved, That we recall to mind, with the deepest satisfaction, the merited fate of the infamous Jeffreys, once Lord Chief Justice of England, who at the era of the Glorious Revolution, for the many iniquitous sentences which he had passed, was torn to pieces by a brave and injured people. Resolved, That those who imitate his example, deserve his fate.' In *The Trial of Thomas Hardy, for High Treason, at the Session House in the Old Bailey. Vol. II. Taken in short-hand by Joseph Gurney* (London: Martha Gurney, 1795), p. 101.

[2] Knox, *Despotism*, sect. viii, 'Of Loyalty and Certain Mistaken Ideas of It', p. 57.

[3] Knox, *Despotism*, p. 59.

[4] See Charlotte Smith, *The Young Philosopher* (1798), vol. ii, ch. 5. The Marchmonts are not Catholics, but their Tory politics link them closely to the Catholic-sympathetic Stuarts. Under the Protestant–Whig hegemony that followed William III's accession, and particularly after the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745, the family's well known politics means they are treated with 'the same precautions' used against West Country Catholics: they are subject to oaths and tests, prevented from participation in public life, and suffer the seizure of their horses and arms.

herself so keen to meet and assist those victims, the impoverished women of the Marchmont family.

Althea began life at Eastwoodleigh by turning from the legal and economic exigencies of modernity to the apparently comforting traces of the loyal West Country past. But a thorough reading of one family's seventeenth-century history acquaints her with a disheartening narrative of power, prejudice and violent dispossession. While fragmentary relics of Stuart martyrdom and exile possessed an easy allure, the narrative shows her how a laudable attachment to the monarchy might turn to bigotry, how family pride heralds family ruin, and how the price of mistaken loyalty is paid by future generations. In some of the novel's most characteristically embittered passages, Althea is led to mock the deceptive glamour of the monarchy and reflect on the misery of the people. 'Her studies', the narrator remarks flatly, 'were not much calculated to exhilarate her thoughts'. 'They led her from the detail of public calamity, to its effects on private life; from the misfortunes of the monarch to the consequent miseries of his servants – and the sad consequences of civil war on domestic happiness' (p. 122).

As the ruins of Eastwoodleigh's private estate cannot be restored by future Marchmonts in a metonymy of public regeneration, so the cold realities of public history are here so internalized that they can only be a matter for private grief. In fact, in *Marchmont*, history is so internalized and privatized that the cruelties it exacts become obsessively intimate and abject. On no fewer than three occasions the reader is told slightly different versions of the Marchmont family history, and the particular reasons for young Marchmont's terrible financial predicament. And on each occasion, the story of mistaken loyalty and familial sacrifice culminates in Marchmont's endeavour to rescue his father's 'poor remains from the inhuman grip of the law' (p. 123). In what seems the novel's ultimate act of authorized inhumanity, lawyers attempt to snatch Sir Armyn's corpse before his funeral in part-payment for his debts. The revisiting of this incident, in all its grim repetition, says something about just how bleak this novel is, how stark and without comfort the political and economic climate it speaks to. The problems of the nation are written back into a defiled family funeral, and, for the loyalist Marchmonts, the narrative of British history repeatedly terminates in the terror of the figure of the violated paternal corpse.

In *Marchmont*, history is silently imprinted on private identity through the characters' names. Smith's association of many of the characters with families important to the West Country and the Civil Wars was evidently intentional. Althea's surname, for example, connects her to the Dacres of Lanercost who forfeited their estate to their support of Charles I and later

Stuarts.[1] Mohun, on the other hand, was the name of a notorious Cornish flatterer of the Duke of Buckingham, thought by his contemporaries to be 'the worst type of court-backed local tyrant'.[2] If Cavalier debts and lost family fortunes are written through the linguistic landscape of the novel like the red strata which guide Althea's paths around the Devon coast, then it seems intriguing that Marchmont's name is one which so obviously dissociates him from his family's Jacobite legacy. The Earls of Marchmont were prominent Whig supporters of William III, whose virulent anti-Jacobitism (including the parliamentary proposal of a strongly worded oath denouncing the 'Old Pretender') attracted some controversy.[3] Within the novel, then, Marchmont's family name signals the stubborn excesses of Tories and Jacobites, while without it is connected to anti-Jacobitical Whiggish immoderation. There is clearly something important about this reversal or exchange of family associations. In another significant scene, Eastwoodleigh's housekeeper, Mrs Wansford, returns from the village and reports that the fugitive Marchmont is said to be 'a Jacobine or Jacobite; I don't know, not I, what they call 'em' (p. 130).[4] While her confusion is meant to suggest popular ignorance, there is also a significant logic to the remarks. Marchmont's family associations mean he could certainly be thought a Jacobite, and perhaps the liberal sympathies his experiences of dispossession provoke might well, in 1795–6, be perceived as Jacobinical. In any case, the interchangeability of Whig and Tory, as well as the reversed associations of the Marchmonts, suggests the futility of political attachment in a world of suffering individuals, and a certain loss of self-determination in the private sphere that extends beyond the freedom of opinion to the level of one's family identity or name. As the tyrannical agents of the law infect the language of village taverns, Britain's reactionary political climate renders all forms of commitment the synonyms of excess.

[1] Thomas Dacre (1606–*c.* 1674) fought for Charles I at Rowton Heath (September 1645) and was forced to relinquish his lands to Parliament in 1652.

[2] See Richard Cust, 'John, first Baron Mohun' (1592–1641) in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

[3] On the Earls of Marchmont and their anti-Jacobitism, see Margaret Warrender, *Marchmont and the Humes of Polwarth* (Edinburgh, 1894).

[4] *The Morning Post*, 9 September 1795, reported: 'The common people of Ireland cannot be taught the difference between the words *Jacobines* and *Jacobites*. Their attachment to James, from whom the latter word is derived, is not abated, when they reflect that their ancestors spilled their best blood in his defence, and forfeited their estates in the cause; they now conceive that the old dispute is revived.' On the confusion of Jacobin/Jacobite in *Marchmont* see also Jane Spencer, 'Women Writers and the Eighteenth Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth Century Novel*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 230.

III

A substantial part of the third and fourth volumes of the novel narrates Marchmont's travels through France and its neighbours. Smith was quite familiar with parts of northern France, having spent the winter of 1784–5 in Normandy, and her desire to live in France is a repeated refrain of her letters in the early 1790s. But the familiarity the novel shows with rural life and opinions in central and southern France is based on Smith's reading and the information she could gain from her diverse network of friends and acquaintances. Smith knew personally, or through their work, a number of people who might have helped her to understand events in France in 1793–4. She had friends in Paris, which she visited in 1791, and where, in November 1792, she was the toast of the British Club for her 'writings in favour of the French Revolution'.[1] She probably drew on Helen Maria Williams's *Letters containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the thirty-first of May 1793, till the twenty-eighth of July 1794 and of the Scenes which have passed in the Prisons of Paris* (1795),[2] and, as Stuart Curran has argued, it is likely that she knew Williams and members of her Girondin circle personally.[3] She counted Dr John Moore in 'the list of my literary friends', and knew his *Journal during a Residence in France, from the beginning of August, to the middle of December, 1792* (1793).[4] In the early 1790s Smith's home in Brighton had been frequented by a group of French emigrants, and her daughter's marriage to Alexandre de Foville in July 1793 ensured that she maintained close ties with them. She had written about France at some length in *Desmond* (1792), where she praised the Revolution, and in *The Emigrants* (1793) and *The Banished Man* (1794), which presented a more complex and ambivalent account.

Marchmont writes of his travels from Paris to Toulon in the period from the end of July to late December 1793 – a period of exceptional unrest. He is in Paris on the eve of the Terror, following the expulsion of the moderate Girondin deputies from the National Convention and the assassination of Marat. His travels across France take place during the period in which conscription was introduced by the *levée en masse*, and touch on the anti-Jacobin uprisings in Lyons and Marseilles. He arrives in Toulon while the

[1] Cited in David V. Erdman, *Commerce des Lumières: John Oswald and the British in Paris, 1790–1793* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 230. On Smith's visit to Paris in 1791, see Jacqueline Labbe, 'Gentility in Distress: A New Letter by Charlotte Smith (1749–1806)', in *The Wordsworth Circle* 35 (2004), pp. 91–3.

[2] Letters survive in which Smith requests earlier publications by Williams, and a letter of 1799 may refer to this volume. See *Collected Letters*, pp. 25, 34, 318.

[3] Smith provided William Wordsworth with letters of introduction to Williams, and possibly also to Brissot, the editor of the *Patriote Français*, and a leading member of the Girondin group. See *Collected Letters*, p. 38, n. 2. See Stuart Curran's Introduction to *Desmond* in *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, Volume 5.

[4] Letter to an unnamed recipient, London, 8 December 1791, in *Collected Letters*, p. 41, and see letter to Cadell and Davies, Exmouth, 5 January 1796, in *Collected Letters*, p. 218.

city is in the hands of the British navy, and besieged by revolutionary forces, and he participates in the attempt to evacuate the city when the British were forced to withdraw. But his account of his travels prior to his arrival in Toulon emphasizes personal and private experience rather than historical events. He does not mention, for example, the public executions of the autumn of 1793, though the deaths of Marie Antoinette and the moderate Girondin leaders in October made a significant impact on British public opinion, and might have seemed to Smith's readers to demand comment.[1] Paris for him is a scene of darkness and confusion, where crowds of people move around unpredictably and for reasons he cannot understand, rather than a theatre for dramatic political events. Marchmont's observations on his journey south do not offer a coherent narrative on the struggles taking place in the Massif Central or Lyon, and they do not offer any simple endorsement or easy condemnation of the revolutionary agenda, but they do suggest an informed understanding of the distance between urban and rural perceptions of the Revolution, of differences which were important to the conflict taking place. Marchmont encounters two men; a peasant cultivating vines in the foothills of the mountains of the Auvergne, and a pedlar. He suggests that these men are too uneducated, too preoccupied with the day-to-day business of making a living, to take much interest in the Revolution, though the pedlar shows a degree of disaffection or alienation from its effects in complaining about the depreciation in value of *assignats* (the revolutionary currency) and in stifling his wife's protests about the conscription of their son because they might attract the notice of local Jacobin officials or missionary agents of the revolutionary government (pp. 295–8). While visiting a half-demolished church, Marchmont reflects on the process of forcible dechristianization which had fed anti-Jacobin feeling in southern France.[2]

The ambivalence of Marchmont's feelings about the politics of the Revolution is most clearly apparent in his visit to a deserted house on the river Sorgue, which reminds him of Eastwoodleigh. He regrets its forsaken and dilapidated state, and the neglected garden in particular is strongly reminiscent of the garden in Devon, which suggests an implicit comparison between the ruinous effects of political upheaval in France and seventeenth-century England. It is also reminiscent of the neglected

[1] Marie Antoinette was executed on 13 October, the Girondins on 31 October, and Philippe-Égalité (the former duc d'Orléans) on 6 November 1793. The *Gentleman's Magazine* condemned Helen Maria Williams, in a review of her *Sketch of the Politics of France*, for not having 'condescended "to heave one sigh, or set apart one tear," to the memory of the ill-fated Queen of France; nor to express one sentiment of compassion for all the evils she suffered', 65:ii (1795), p. 672.

[2] On rural disaffection and the contribution to it of anti-clerical policies, see Alan Forrest, *Paris, the Provinces and the French Revolution* (London: Arnold, 2004), ch. 8, and Colin Jones, *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napolean* (London: Penguin, 2002), ch. 10 (c), esp. pp. 486-7.

chateau of the Count d'Hauteville in Auvergne, which, in *Desmond* (1792), had indicated the obstinate refusal of the aristocrat to embrace democratic reform.[1] For Marchmont, however, the comparison prompts reflections on the devastating effects of persecution for debt in England, from which France had once provided an attractive asylum. He concludes that any 'distressed man' who has had dealings with British men involved in 'money-getting and money-saving' will judge that no country 'has less to boast of as to their genuine illiberality and enlargement of mind than England' (p. 301, and see pp. 299–300). In a move that is characteristic of the novel's politics, he links the plight of 'he who is struggling to rise' with that of 'he who has fallen from his rank', and represents both as oppressed by an illiberal alliance of law officers and commercial men, as well as the representatives of political corruption – 'the profligate pensioner, the titled parasite, the plunderer of his own country or of any other' (p. 301). His remarks suggest that English society is so corrupted by esteem for wealth, regardless of the crimes involved in its acquisition, that France could still be an attractive alternative; he condemns 'Robespierre and his agents' but insists that they are 'not more destructive and more cruel' than the instruments of British legal oppression' (p. 302).

IV

Smith explained in her Preface that she began writing *Marchmont* 'some months' (p. 4) after the publication of *Montalbert* in the early summer of 1795. It was probably this novel that she alluded to in a letter written to Cadell and Davies (for whom she was writing *Rambles Farther: A Continuation of Rural Walks*, published in August 1796) on 5 January 1796, asking for books. She told them: 'In a work of imagination merely, it is possible to trust to oneself to a certain degree, But where instruction is to be convey'd, it is impossible to do without books of referrence.'[2] In the months while she was working on the novel, she also finished *Rambles Farther*, and produced her narrative of the wreck of the fleet bound for the West Indies at Chesil Bank in November 1795, which she published in February 1796 for the benefit of one of the survivors.[3] She explained to Cadell and Davies that *Marchmont* was 'undertook for the immediate

[1] See *Desmond*, letter xii, in *Works*, Volume 5, pp. 76–84.

[2] Letter to Cadell and Davies, Exmouth, in *Collected Letters*, p. 218. Compare p. 4 below.

[3] *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus and Piedmont Transports, and the Thomas, Golden Grove, and Æolus Merchant Ships, near Weymouth, on Wednesday the 18th of November last. Drawn up from information taken on the spot, by Charlotte Smith, and published for the benefit of an unfortunate survivor from one of the wrecks, and her infant child* (London: Sampson Low, 1796).

means of living, & sold volume by volume to Mr Low'.[1] Her remarks on the novel are characteristically disparaging. She habitually represents her dependence on the lowly genre as a chore – in for example her acerbic remark that 'I love Novels "no more than a Grocer does figs"'[2] – and it was in her interests to suggest to Cadell and Davies that she offered them only her most superior productions. But she clearly did find some relief in her writing. In a letter written not long after the death of her daughter she explained to Cadell and Davies that she found it necessary to exert her mind, since 'when I am not compelld to be occupied, I sink into despondence – and Poetry will not always be at hand'.[3] The narrator regrets, when Marchmont considers writing for money during his confinement in King's Bench, that 'He was not now to learn how much any pursuit, and above all one in which a man engages from the influence of duty, elevates while it occupies the mind' (p. 383), and the sentiment may well have been important to Smith's notion of herself. She certainly had ambitions for her novels, though the pressure to complete them speedily and to the desired length told on her health and, with *Marchmont*, left her little opportunity for correction or revision. Mary Wollstonecraft, whose comments on Smith's work in the *Analytical Review* are usually admiring, noted of this novel that it was 'certainly spun out in the beginning, and wound up too hastily at the conclusion; still the design of the showing the misery, which unprincipled men of the law may bring on the innocent, is well imagined'.[4]

The final volume of the novel is almost twice as long as each of the first three, which may suggest that Smith was attempting to produce five volumes. The haste Wollstonecraft detects is apparent in the intervention of the rich uncle, Desborough, who pays Marchmont's debts and helps Althea with the legal processes necessary to her inheritance of a substantial estate, which enables the novel to reach a satisfactory conclusion in which virtue is rewarded. Desborough is a complex figure. The youngest son of a clothier, he is one of those who have struggled to rise, rather than fallen from their rank. His fortune is free from the associations of greed and corruption which the novel persistently attributes to great wealth because it is colonial in origin. Global commerce takes on the capricious role of fortune in a number of novels of the second half of the eighteenth century, where the timely appearance of benefactors made fabulously wealthy as a result of years spent in the East or West Indies resolves the difficulties of

[1] Letter to Cadell and Davies, Weymouth, 10 May 1796, in *Collected Letters*, p. 233.

[2] Letter to Joseph Cooper Walker, Storrington, 9 October 1793, in *Collected Letters*, p. 80. Smith alludes to Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* (1742), ed. by Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 71.

[3] Letter to Cadell and Davies, Bath, 17 May 1795, in *Collected Letters*, p. 196.

[4] In Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, asst Emma Rees-Mogg (eds), *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 7 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), vol. vii, p. 485.

the virtuous.[1] Desborough's repugnance for the plantation system, and his wish to liberate slaves, seems to mean that his wealth can be represented as though it were free of both domestic and colonial guilt (p. 408). He is represented as dissenting in his religious beliefs, and republican in his political sympathies (pp. 408, 410–11, 414–15). But, in keeping with the political tenor of the novel, he denies that he is interested in 'Utopian and hopeless' schemes of political reform, claiming: 'I have long since given up any such chimerical idea, as that of being able to make men happier who are wicked and miserable by prescription.' He is concerned only to relieve 'individual distress' through private acts of benevolence (p. 414).

Of equal significance to Desborough's intervention in the fortunes of the novel's hero and heroine, is his support of the women of the Marchmont family. Marchmont's mother and sisters are the casualties of a history of mistaken loyalty, and it is through her identification with and assistance of them that Althea's proto-feminism is most to the fore. Women of rank in reduced circumstances are, of course, familiar figures in late eighteenth-century novels, but the level of economic desperation to which the Marchmont women fall, and the steps they take to remedy it, are unusual. The Marchmont sisters reject the possibility (familiar from the novels of Jane Austen) of 'just creeping through a vegetative sort of life in a cheap country town', and prefer the scheme of keeping a shop in Margate – a place and an occupation which, they recognise, will compromise their social position irretrievably (p. 241, and see pp. 234–5 and p. 232, n. 7). The lesson they learn of the relief of individual distress by useful activity and female solidarity is rewarded in the novel's final pages. Private philanthropy releases them from the debts and errors of mistaken loyalty. The Marchmont women trade in family history for a future of small returns in the private sphere:

> The people among whom we live will no more respect us, though our great grandfathers were cavaliers, than they reverence the royal oak itself; half the world know nothing about Charles or his martyrdom and more than half the rest think the English people on the other side were in the right, and the cavaliers only obstinate proud fools. … if we exert the few faculties we have, we shall be too busy to think of the neglect of those who were once our equals, or to dread the supercilious scorn of people that know no crime so great as poverty ... We shall be amply repaid for the sacrifice of our pride, by the delight of … humblest independence. (pp. 241–2)

In the concluding pages of the novel, Desborough offers the women the use of his house at Clapham Common, then a small suburban village four miles south-west of London. Clapham was famous as the home of William Wilberforce, Henry Thornton and other members of the 'Clapham sect',

[1] Compare the roles of Mr Maltravers and Harcourt in Smith's *Ethelinde*, as well as, for example, Mr Warner in Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph* (1761) and Mr Randolph in Mary Robinson's *Walsingham* (1797).

and the location links Desborough with their campaign for the abolition of the slave trade.[1] This association also indicates the extent to which notions of individual benevolence and humanitarianism override political differences in the novel, for neither Wilberforce nor his close friend Hannah More would have approved of Desborough's republican sympathies, or the liberal proto-feminism of Smith's novels.[2] In the conclusion, Desborough's help enables Althea and Marchmont to choose to settle in her childhood home, which had belonged to her aunt, though Marchmont regains possession of Eastwoodleigh, and visits it. The decision indicates that Althea's 'work' (p. 416) in securing the happiness of the Marchmont family has redeemed them from their Jacobite history into a present which is liberal, modern and middle class. They do not attempt to rebuild or reform the ancient fabric of the country house, but must adjust to a world in which benevolence is local and private.

Republican Desborough settles his old quarrel with the old Tory Marchmonts and, it seems, conjures away the problems of political difference as he conjures away the novel's debts. But these easy cancellations and annulments in *Marchmont*'s final pages do not, in the end, erase the many anxieties and ambiguities so characteristic of it. For the novel cannot resolve the problems raised by the mistaken loyalty it censures, or resist the brutal tyranny of the law which breaches the sanctity of private life. Its hero is the law's quarry and plaything, and finds no retreat or respite either as a bewildered stranger in a foreign land or as a fugitive in his own home. The novel deflects national conflict onto a disrupted family funeral and shows us a heroine who, in becoming a rational reader of history, must gloomily reject her country's inglorious past. The poverty and desperation of the characters lingers after *Marchmont*'s speedy, happy resolution and there is a certain ire and despondency about its prose that is powerfully suggestive of the hopelessness of the circumstances of its writing. The problems which Smith, in 1795–6 could only begin to address through the intervention of private philanthropy, might find more radical solutions in the writing of women in the years that followed.

Smith's major novels of the 1790s follow a clear trajectory in which *Marchmont* marks an important turning point. The enthusiasm for revolutionary change in France, in *Desmond*, animates the case for reform and renovation in *The Old Manor House*, and though *The Banished Man* is a darker novel it retains faith in the potential of enlightened cosmopolitanism. Both *Marchmont* and *The Young Philosopher* show an increasing emphasis on private benevolence, and a turning away from the possibilities of political reform and towards local and limited forms of social improve-

[1] Wilberforce's bill for the abolition of the slave trade was defeated in April 1792, but he and other members of the Clapham sect continued to be active in the campaign.

[2] On More and the Clapham sect, see Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 9.

ment. In *The Young Philosopher*, the novel gestures towards the potential that America offers for pursuing private and liberal utopian visions. But in *Marchmont* that global perspective is not available. It follows the plot structure characteristic of gothic novels, in representing the future married life of Marchmont and Althea as turning away from the political struggles and violence of history towards the exclusive contentment of provincial family life.

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MARCHMONT:

A NOVEL.

BY CHARLOTTE SMITH.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED BY AND FOR

SAMPSON LOW, BERWICK STREET, SOHO.

1796.

PREFACE.

Few things perhaps are more difficult than to write a preface well, and it is perhaps equally true that no part of a book is so little read.

'Why then,' enquires a friend, 'should you prefix a preface to a work of mere entertainment? Surely it is what novel readers never expect, and are, of all others, the least likely to attend to; and if you intend it as an apology for defects, would it not be better to give the time it will cost you to correct rather than to excuse them?'

I adhere, however, to my preface – not to palliate the errors of a work which I have executed as well as my situation admitted, but because I wish for an occasion to address my readers, or such of them as will take the trouble of perusing a few prefatory pages. *The egotism of which I have been accused*, though less excusable in the body of a work, may be allowed me here, because no one is compelled to read it to the interruption of the story, and none can complain that, as in another work, with fictitious sorrows I have mingled my own.[1]

In the composition of what are called novels I have been engaged (from necessity, and by no means from choice)[2] for eight years, and my *thirty-second* volume is now before the Public. To the pecuniary advantages I have derived from them I owe my family's subsistence and my own, while labouring under the heaviest (and now the most irremediable) oppression that was perhaps ever practised or suffered in a country boasting of its laws.[3] But notwithstanding that, by unremitting labour, I have existed, the consequences of the robbery committed on me and my children have been fatal; and after having resisted, for twelve years, difficulties and distresses such as women are seldom called upon to encounter, *one* dreadful evil has overtaken me, and nearly overwhelmed me – that lovely Being who was the greatest blessing of my life, who alone had the power to sooth my wearied spirit and sweeten my hours of toil, has been torn from me for ever;[4] and this last and bitterest calamity I shall ever impute to the conduct of our inhuman oppressors. Yet in the hour of my extreme misery, while I *dreaded,* and after I had suffered this severity, what did I receive from them – from these men who *then held*, who *still hold*, the property of my family? – Refusal of the most necessary assistance, taunts, and insults:[5] – and I owed it to the friendship of one amiable and exalted female character,[6] to

a nobleman eminent for his good actions,[7] and to a physician of the first reputation in London[8] (to whom I was wholly a stranger), that at that period of agonising distress I did not entirely sink; while to a physician at Bath[9] I was indebted for every friendly, every skilful exertion which I could not purchase, but which were unremittingly applied to save me from the blow that has indeed crushed me to the earth, and rendered the residue of my days 'labour and sorrow.'[10]

But the arrow was fled, and my misery without remedy; yet with a heart torn by such anguish as only they who have felt it can imagine, it was absolutely necessary for me to sit down to finish a novel for which I had received money from my present publisher, who would have been injured if I had not forced myself to fulfil my engagement. Could I *then* have written a preface, this apology for the defects of *Montalbert*[11] would have been in its place; but I was at that time quite unable to ask the indulgence which it was impossible a book written in such circumstances should not have occasion for.

Still continuing (from mere inveterate wickedness on the part of these unjust persons) under the necessity of earning by my pen the subsistence of my remaining family, I began some months afterwards the present work; but suffering in health from the incurable wounds of my mind,[12] I was unable to remain in any fixed habitation, and still more so to return to the country,[13] where alone I had the benefit of literary conversation, for there every scene would remind me of my murdered happiness: – these volumes, therefore, have been written under the disadvantage of wanting a friendly critic on those errors of judgement which occur in every long work entirely dependent on the imagination; nor have I had any correcting eye to detect the more trifling faults of style which will sometimes happen, or of orthography, which those who write to live, and consequently write in haste, can seldom escape committing. From my few books also I have been absent, and the libraries of bathing towns rarely contain such as I have had occasion to refer to:[14] the mottoes and quotations I have used have, therefore, been either copied from memory or a common-place book; and as neither the one nor the other always furnished me with the name of the poet or essayist whose words I borrowed, I have omitted the names of all.

I have been gravely told that I have made enemies by personality.[15] In many instances it has certainly been the consciences of the prototypes that have helped the world to the resemblances; but I do not affect to deny that I have occasionally drawn from the life; and I have no hesitation in saying, that in the present work the character most odious (and that only) is drawn *ad vivum*[16] – but as it represents a reptile whose most hideous features are too offensive to be painted in all their enormity, I have softened rather than overcharged the disgusting resemblance. – It has been observed to me, that

such an obscure wretch as an attorney, remarkable only for his skill in saving the ears he has so often deserved to lose, is too contemptible for satire. As an individual he is; but as a specimen of a genus extremely poisonous and noxious he becomes an object to be held up to detestation; and I have figured him here as, in drawings to illustrate natural history, I would delineate the scorpion, whose touch is mortal, or give a figure of the upas-tree[17] – perhaps I should rather say of the strychnos *nux vomica*),[18] or some more familiar poison – for the deadly up as if (it be not a fable) exists singly: but the destructive monster, armed with the power of doing mischief, and of robbing legally – the wretch without feeling or principle, without honesty or pity – is a nuisance widely diffused, and spreading frequent desolation. That there are honest and good men in the profession I believe, for I know *two;*[19] but I have reason to suppose that the majority are so much otherwise, that it would be well for the world if they were restrained by means more adequate to the purpose than those ever practised in *the present order of things.*[20]

The great master of novel-writing, Fielding, has attacked this legal pestilence long before inferior writers ever touched upon it. If *he* failed of having effect, my feeble pen can do nothing but prove that other Murphys and Dowlings[21] exist in the present day; yet some purpose will be answered if the representation should deter any individual, who has a drop of manly or human blood in his heart, from sharpening the fangs of one of these scourges of the earth against the innocent and defenceless: then perhaps some group of promising children, of unprotected orphans, may escape the misery, desolation, and death, that have fallen on mine!

What will be thought of my peculiar ill fortune, when I assert that I have it in my power to produce a counterpart to this demon? The *Great Man* who from paltry pique directed, or from bloated indolence slept over; the injuries we have endured, put us, by way of *protection*, into the trust of a worthy cousin of his own.[22] The worthy cousin, instead of driving away the evil spirit whom he found preying on the wreck, began to consider how he might appropriate a share of it to himself – He croaked, and, lo! his fellows, and his partners, and his agents, flocked around, and numberless vultures fed instead of one: – so that our *Great Director* was like the man in the parable,[23] who being infested with a devil, goeth forth and taketh unto him seven devils, not worse (for that was impossible), but almost as bad as the first, and consequently the last state of the wards of the *Great Man* is undoubtedly *worse than the first.*

A few words may be allowed me on the subject of the present work. It is a fault frequently imputed to novels, that they are directed to no purpose of morality, but rather serve to inflame the imaginations, and enfeeble by false notions of refinement the minds of young persons. I know not what share of those faults may be found in the present production, but my purpose

has been to enforce the virtue of fortitude: and if my readers could form any idea of the state of my mind while I have been writing, they would allow that I practise the doctrine I preach.

ERRATUM.

Page 74, for '1794,' read '1793.'

MARCHMONT.

For she was just, and friend to virtuous lore,
And pass'd much time in truly virtuous deed.[24]

CHAPTER I.

In a beautiful village, near one of the most populous towns[25] in the west of England, lived the only unmarried sister of an ancient family – Mrs. Trevyllian,[26] (for she had for some years ceased to write herself Miss) was near fifty; she had never been handsome, but there was something in her countenance more interesting than even the remains of beauty – an expression of goodness, sense, and candour, which seemed to mark her as the friend of the unfortunate, and the guide of the innocent – her person was elegant, and her manners remarkably conciliating and attractive. The small house she inhabited was fitted up with so much taste, that she was become a sort of oracle among those who wished to exhibit elegance in their apartments: she had an excellent collection of books, in a room which opened into a small, but very pretty garden, filled with the sweetest shrubs and flowers. Books and plants supplied to her the place of society, which she was rarely mixed in; and to the gratification of these attachments she applied what others in her situation usually bestow on cards and company. Still, however, she had always a purse in reserve for the necessitous; and her active spirit and sound judgement often did more service than mere pecuniary assistance. Extremely beloved by her friends, living in a course of cheerful and rational piety, enjoying tolerable health, and a competent income, Mrs. Trevyllian knew no other uneasiness than that which arose from her reflections on the future fate of a lovely girl, to whom she had been more than a mother, and for whom she felt all a mother's tenderness.

Althea[27] was the child of her favourite sister, of whom, though she had been dead near thirteen years, Mrs. Trevyllian retained the most affectionate remembrance; and as Althea grew nearer to womanhood, she became

doubly dear to her aunt, because her features and manners acquired every day a stronger resemblance to that dear sister; and while she read or conversed, this resemblance, and the tones of her voice, brought so strong a recollection of what her mother was at that age, that Mrs. Trevyllian often caught herself gazing at her with tears in her eyes, while the innocent, unconscious Althea wondered at these painful emotions; but when the cause of them was explained, she would mingle her tears with those of her dear aunt; then smiling as she wept, she tried to win the thoughts of her benefactress from the contemplation which caused them.

But the sadness which arose from recollection of the past was light when compared with the fears which frequently assailed the heart of Mrs. Trevyllian as she looked forward to the future. The father of Althea was a younger brother of good family, who being a cornet of horse[28] quartered in a country town, had fallen violently in love with the fourth daughter of Mr. Trevyllian; and, failing in his attempt to persuade her to elope with him, had at length prevailed on his family and hers to consent to their marriage, and to make up a small income till his promotion in the army should enable him better to support the expence of an establishment; but the dependance and restraint in which this arrangement placed Mr. Dacres, who was ambitious, and addicted to expence, must soon have become so irksome to him, that his wife would probably have been made unhappy, had she lived long; but she died before the end of the second year, leaving only the little Althea, then about ten months old, whom her aunt Trevyllian immediately took charge of. Mr. Dacres,[29] who had now sold out of the army, was at liberty to avail himself of a handsome person, and great family interest, to acquire a more affluent wife. Such a one he soon found in the co-heiress of a man who had acquired a considerable fortune in trade, which at his death he left between two daughters, the eldest of whom was married to a newly-created Irish peer;[30] and the youngest divided between her passion for a title and her taste for the handsome figure of Mr. Dacres, at length settled the contest between love and ambition, by bargaining that a certain sum of her money should be appropriated to the purchase of a baronet's title; and though she did not rank so high as her sister, she consoled herself by reflecting, that she was elevated above most of her former acquaintance; and while 'Lady Dacres' sounded extremely well, she had the gratification of having for a husband not only a man of fashion, but one of the handsomest men of his time.

A few years brought a numerous family; and Sir Audley, embarked in that political career which he thought necessary to enable him to provide for them, left the management of these children entirely to their mother, while the little Althea was almost lost to his recollection. He seldom saw her, and seldom thought of her. Her aunt, however, deeming it unreasonable that he should be wholly exempt from expence, regularly sent in

an account for Althea's board, cloathing, and education, though with no other view than to form of the sums she thus received a little fund for her beloved ward, which she put into the stocks every year, as soon as it was paid. This annual payment, however trifling, was frequently delayed beyond the regular period, and by degrees excuses were made for letting it run far in arrears. – Tenants were not punctual – election expences had been unusually high – or some improvement at his country seat – were occasionally pleaded by Sir Audley; but Mrs. Trevyllian, who was cruelly hurt at evasions which she thought were proofs of his want of affection for Althea, failed not after they had been twice or thrice repeated, to signify that she must insist on more regular payments, adding some hints that she should otherwise be under the necessity of sending her charge home, and a little more attention was observed; for Sir Audley had not the least wish to enlarge his family by the return of his eldest daughter, and Lady Dacres had still less inclination to receive her.

As Mrs. Trevyllian resided at a great distance from London, four years had passed since Sir Audley had seen Althea: and these years, between the age of twelve and sixteen, had made a very favourable change in her person, which was always delicate and interesting. – Mrs. Trevyllian, who had promised to spend some months with an old friend in Hertfordshire, lately become a widow, determined as she passed through London to stay a week or ten days, as well to see some of her own family, to whom she had been long a stranger, as to give Althea an opportunity of paying her duty to her father and Lady Dacres, and to renew with her brothers and sisters the friendship which so long an absence had almost obliterated.

The visit was announced in form, and in form the visitants were to be received. Sir Audley met them at the drawing-room door, and saluted Mrs. Trevyllian with his usual politeness – then advancing to embrace his daughter, he started, seemed astonished, and even affected – for he beheld the very image of his once-adored, his once-regretted Althea. She seemed, after fourteen years, to be again present to him. He recovered himself, however, before any one but the object who had caused his confusion observed it; and having kissed Althea, whose eyes were streaming with tears, he led her towards Lady Dacres, who, coldly saluting her, remarked that 'Miss Dacres was very much grown indeed.' – Then casting a look, which the watchful and observant eye of Mrs. Trevyllian did not fail to translate into a malignant remark, she resumed her seat, and entered on indifferent topics, carefully avoiding any subject which might lead to farther recollection of the long time that had elapsed. The daughters of Lady Dacres, who were of course grown in proportion, made their entrance in great formality with their governess; and the eldest son, a rude Westminster boy,[31] now turned of fourteen, who came with a companion older than himself to dine. These lads voted the old lady, Mrs. Trevyllian, a very great quiz, and their new sis-

ter a very pretty girl. Young Dacres even venturing to utter across the room in an audible whisper to the eldest of his sisters – 'Caroline, Caroline, this is a prettier sister than ever you will be – here is Montford swears it.'

Miss Caroline, who had no great satisfaction in resigning even for one day the name of Miss Dacres, was not put into very good humour by this address. Dinner, however, passed, and the wearied Althea, who had been comparing the quiet and rationality of her aunt's house with the irksome parade and tedious ceremony of her father's, secretly rejoiced that an engagement for the evening separated the party at an early hour. She felt, however, as she kissed her father's hand at parting, that she was his child; and though he struggled to check sensations in her favour, he was still sensible of the pleasure of having such a daughter. Another dinner party, and two or three morning visits, passed between Althea and her family, before her aunt left London. Though it was now the gayest season, and though Althea had been much amused with seeing plays, the opera, and Ranelagh,[32] yet did she sincerely rejoice when the day came which conveyed her with her aunt into Hertfordshire.

The house they were expected at was about four and thirty miles from London. They arrived there early in the afternoon; the family had one day's notice of their arrival; and at the gate of a small paddock that surrounded the house an old butler, who had lived many years in the family, waited to receive them. The poor man looked very melancholy, which Mrs. Trevyllian imputed to the recent loss of his master; but when the chaise had entered the gate, he beckoned to the postillion to stop, and, advancing to the window, said in a very depressed tone, 'I thought it right, Madam, to let you know the state of our house before you entered it – My poor mistress.' – 'Good God!' exclaimed Mrs. Trevyllian, 'what has happened?' – 'My poor mistress,' continued the man, 'is extremely ill. We have reason to fear the fever infectious, as it began with a servant, who is dead, and two others are ill. My good lady, ever attentive and kind, has attended them herself against the advice of the physician, who warned her of her danger. She is now given over.' He burst into tears, and could not proceed.

'And who is with her?' enquired Mrs. Trevyllian. 'Only the housemaid, and a nurse from the village, for her own maid and the housekeeper have failed since yesterday.' – 'Good Heaven! what a situation,' said Mrs. Trevyllian, 'for my poor friend – ever so ready herself to assist her sick friends, yet to be thus deserted. But what can I do? My dear Althea, I cannot risk your health – I will not even suffer you to enter the house; though, for myself, I can as little think of abandoning my friend in her distress. – How can I act?'… She paused a moment or two for consideration; and Althea, who feared only for her aunt, ventured, while this silence lasted, to say, 'Dearest Madam, if you determine to go, I entreat you not to spare me?

Why should I fear a danger which my dear aunt determines to encounter? If any ill befals her, of what consequence would be the life of her Althea?'

'You are a dear girl,' cried Mrs. Trevyllian, kissing her; 'and I every day see occasion to love you more and more – but I cannot think of your going with me to my poor friend. You are of an age to take infection much more easily than those farther advanced in life. – But how to dispose of you, my sweet girl, I know not. I am unacquainted with any person in the neighbourhood to whom I could entrust you. … However, we will return to the inn where we changed horses, and consider what can be done.'

The butler was then directed to assure Mrs. Polwarth,[33] her sick friend, that she was hastening to her, and as fearful for her lovely ward as unapprehensive for herself, Mrs. Trevyllian fell into a deep reverie as they returned to the town, which was about three miles distant.

This melancholy silence Althea at length ventured to interrupt, by asking why none of Mrs. Polwarth's own family were with her? – 'The question,' replied Mrs. Trevyllian, 'is very natural, since you have heard that my friend *has* a family; but her daughter is gone to the West Indies with her husband, whose property lies there; her son is a man of business, who thinks of little else than the political matters in which he is engaged; and as to his wife, she is so fine a lady, such a compound of vanity, extravagance, and affectation, that to attend a sick parent would never occur to her as a necessary duty. Thus my poor friend is left totally without the soothing offices of affection. Her three grandchildren are boys, and not of an age, were they of a sex, to attend her sick chamber. If you knew her, my dear Althea, you would not wonder that my heart bleeds for her – that I wish to see her – and if it must be so – to receive her last sigh, her dying wishes. We were friends in our early childhood; and, in the happy days of our youth, we passed much of our time together. I had once a severe and tedious illness; it was at a time when the fairest prospects were opening before my friend, then Henrietta Sebright. She was on the point of being married to a man, equally her parents' choice and her own; yet, regardless of every claim but that of friendship, she hazarded a life, which was likely to be thus happy, to attend on me, through many months of languor, and greatly contributed to the restoration of my health.' Mrs. Trevyllian paused a moment, as if to recover from some bitter recollections, and then proceeding in a low voice, said, 'It is now more than thirty years ago; but is there any period at which a debt of true gratitude may be cancelled?'

Althea had seldom seen her aunt so much affected, and forbore to question her farther. They soon arrived at the inn, where Mrs. Trevyllian, enquiring for the mistress of the house, desired her to prepare a room for her niece, and to take particular care of her accommodation, as she would remain there that night. Then eagerly assuring Althea that there was nothing to fear for her own safety in visiting her friend, and that she should hear

from, or probably see her the next morning, she tenderly kissed the weeping girl, and recommending her to the care of her own woman, whom she left at the inn, she departed for the house of Mrs. Polwarth.

Temporary as this separation was likely to be, Althea felt dejected and miserable, a thousand fears for the health of her beloved guardian assailed her; she passed a sleepless night, but was rendered infinitely more unhappy the next morning, by receiving the following note:

'I found my poor friend very ill, yet sensible, and rejoiced to see me. My presence seems to have revived her; and while she bids me leave her, lest I should suffer by staying, I see that she believes my presence necessary to her restoration. I cannot therefore quit her, my Althea – neither can I consent to your coming hither. In this difficulty I have determined to send you back to London under the care of Morris, and recommend you for the short time of our unavoidable separation to the care of Sir Audley and Lady Dacres. Believe me, dearest Althea, my heart bleeds at the necessity of suffering you to be absent from me even for a day; but under the protection of your father there can be nothing to fear for you, and I trust that the undivided attention I shall then be able to give to my poor sick friend will, under Providence, be the means of restoring her, and that we shall meet again, my very dear Althea, in a few days, to rejoice together in her recovery. I send orders to Morris respecting your journey, and I write to Sir Audley and Lady Dacres. Heaven preserve my dearest girl. This is the incessant prayer of her affectionate

Anne Trevyllian.'

Althea endeavoured to submit to this painful necessity in the way least likely to give uneasiness to her aunt, but with a heavy and foreboding heart she stepped into the chaise with Morris, and arrived in Lower Grosvenor Street just as the family were sitting down to dinner with a large party of friends.

Althea stopped at the door while the letter she had brought was sent in, and the interval was long enough to allow her to feel much pain from doubts she could not help entertaining of a welcome reception. When one of the footmen, with a message from Sir Audley, desired her to walk in, she trembled so as to be hardly able to leave the chaise, and leaning on the arm of her aunt's woman, slowly followed him, not imagining that Lady Dacres would have so little consideration as to suffer her to enter a room full of company: this, however, she found to be the case. Sir Audley got up, and leading her to a chair next himself, said he was sorry for Mrs. Polwarth's illness – supposed she had not dined, and bade her sit down to table; while Lady Dacres slightly bowed to her from the top of it, and said, with cold civility, that she hoped she was well. In a moment every body

seemed to have forgotten she was there – and the common conversation that passes on such occasions was renewed.

Poor Althea, whose thoughts were wholly with the aunt at Abbotshanger, and who found in this numerous circle not one whose heart seemed to sympathise with hers, felt her spirits sink, and her eyes every moment ready to overflow with tears. She sometimes stole a timid look at her father, in hopes of finding his turned towards her with a tender welcome; but after her first entrance he too seemed to consider her only as one of his guests. She withdrew when the other ladies followed Lady Dacres to the drawing-room, most earnestly wishing for permission to retire to her own – but Lady Dacres continued to converse with her friends on the usual topics, without once addressing herself to, or even noticing Althea, who being in a travelling dress,[34] while the lady of the house, as well as the company, were more dressed than usual, she felt her fatigue and vexation every moment increase, yet she could not acquire courage to rise amid so formidable a circle and retire; neither did she know whither to go, for the young ladies, her half sisters, had not appeared, they not being, to use the common phrase, 'come out yet,'[35] and only allowed to dine with Sir Audley and Lady Dacres when alone, or merely a family party.

At length some of the company rose to go, and much was said as they departed of a future meeting in the evening, by which Althea found that Lady Dacres was going out. Seven or eight persons yet remained, and some of the gentlemen, attended by Sir Audley, came up to tea; he seemed on seeing Althea to be surprised, as if he had forgotten all that had passed, and approaching his wife, whispered something, to which she answered in a way that Althea thought almost peevish, 'Well, well, Sir Audley, I must give orders, I must see about it.' She then rang the bell, and directing the housekeeper to attend in her dressing-room, she left the room for a moment, and returning, said to Althea, in a very formal manner, 'Miss Dacres, if you chuse to retire, my women have orders in regard to your accommodation: you will, perhaps, not find it very convenient, but my house is too small for my family.' Althea, glad on any terms to escape from her present comfortless situation, thanked her in words as cold, but rather more civil than her own, and assured her, she should be perfectly satisfied with whatever her Ladyship had directed, and adding, that she was extremely fatigued, begged leave to retire. She was shewn by a very fine lady, who was, she found, Lady Dacres's woman, to an upper room, which was plainly, but neatly furnished. Her trunk was already placed in it; and dejectedly, by the window, sat Morris, who no sooner found herself at liberty, than she said, with a deep sigh, 'Ah! dear me – I trust, Miss Dacres, we shall not have to stay long in this house. I am sure I am weary of it already. But I hope Sir Audley and my lady have made *you* welcome?'

Althea, whose heart was full, burst into tears, and threw herself on the bosom of Morris, who had been as a foster mother to her, where she sobbed aloud; yet feeling from her innate sense of propriety that it was wrong to encourage the murmurs of her aunt's woman in the house of her father, she endeavoured, since she could not stifle her concern, to impute it merely to her fears for her aunt, and regret at their sudden separation. 'I believe, nay I am sure,' said she, as soon as she recovered herself a little, 'that my father is glad to see me; but the suddenness of my arrival, and there being so much company.' – 'Don't tell me,' cried Morris, who had been used to speak her mind – 'I've no notion on't for my part. I'm sure a perfect stranger would have been gladder to have seen you than Sir Audley was to see his own child; I know that well enough by what I heard those impertinent laced monkies[36] below say; and as for my *Lady,* she is known to begrudge the least matter in the world for you. – Then they've stuffed you up into this room, which is not much better than a garret – and make a mighty favour of it too.' – 'Oh! my dear Morris,' cried Althea, 'the room does very well – I hope I shall not long need it; a palace would make me no amends for being absent from my aunt, and uneasy for her health as I am now.'

'They'll take care you shan't trouble them long, I believe; for Mrs. Midgeley forsooth took occasion to tell me, when she shewed me up here, that indeed her Lady's eldest son from Westminster School always slept in this room, and that if he was to come home to stay, as he did every now and then, she did not know how her Lady would do – Such a fuss indeed with her Lady, and her Lady – I took care to tell her, that I thought *my* ladies of quite as much consequence as hers, though they had not titles – and I hinted to her, that if there was any such great matter of inconvenience in your staying here, I was sure you had a good house at home, and that *my* Lady would not suffer you to be troublesome to *her* Lady, or to any body else, but would send you home, and that I could take care of you well enough till such time as *my* Lady could come down herself.' –

The honest zeal and mortified pride of Morris combined to give the greatest pain to Althea. – Sensible as she was of the former, she knew not how to repress the latter; yet she foresaw that her stay, of whatever duration it might be, would be rendered doubly uneasy by these heartburnings, and that Lady Dacres, while she considered her as a burden, would look upon Morris as a spy. – Probably the little affection her father had for her would be diminished by the complaints this would occasion, and in whatever view she regarded this unlucky visit, it promised only unhappiness. Her greatest consolation was, that it could not be long; for, in the conversation of the evening, Lady Dacres had taken occasion to tell her company, that they proposed going into the country in about a month; and had dwelt much on this circumstance in conversation, as if on purpose to let Althea understand that her stay could not be prolonged beyond that time.

All the poor Althea could now do was to endeavour to appease the irritable spirit of her aunt's woman; for Morris did not easily consent to give up the indignation which some real or imaginary affront had raised – and at last went murmuring away, leaving Althea to indulge reflexions the most painful she had ever felt.

CHAP. II.

… Loud, vain, presumptuous,
Proud of his power of tongue, the braggart came.[37]

Mrs. Trevyllian was not easier at Abbotshanger than Althea was in London; yet more accustomed to the vicissitudes and vexations of life, and being of a firm and steady spirit, she would have blamed her niece for indulging anxiety, could she have known it – and still more her woman for yielding to querulous discontent while she was engaged in a scene where the real evils of life were surrounding her. Her unfortunate friend was sick both in body and mind; Mrs. Trevyllian had however the consolation of feeing that her society soothed her spirits, while her care seemed to have snatched her from the grave; for she was already out of danger, but so extremely weak, that her final recovery was very doubtful. – Her son neglected her; and her daughter, whose absence was a continual source of pain, was not only far from her, but subject to the greatest inconvenience and danger, from the situation of the country to which she was gone – and the afflicted mother dared hardly look after news; yet, when she forbore all inquiry, she found her conjectures even more dreadful than the truth.

Mrs. Trevyllian was incessantly employed in the difficult task of calming these apprehensions, which she felt were generally too well grounded. Several days elapsed while strength returned so slowly to the enfeebled frame of Mrs. Polwarth, that she existed, but could hardly be said to live – while Mrs. Trevyllian, without any new cause, felt her own spirits gradually declining – and at the end of about ten days it was too evident to the medical attendants that she was seized with the fever from which her unwearied care had greatly contributed to recover her friend. Suspecting this herself, she pressed them to avow the truth; and when she had with difficulty extorted it from them, she insisted upon their promising to give her notice of the degree of danger she might be in. – 'I do not fear death,' said she; 'and for my few worldly concerns, they have long since been settled – but I have a dear child who is almost entirely dependant on me, and I would use the last hours of my life in making such a provision as I can for her against the inconveniences that must follow my loss; and therefore

it is, Gentlemen, that I wish to hear the truth in every stage of the disorder which has seized me.'

If this fortitude of mind made the task easier to the Gentlemen with respect to Mrs. Trevyllian, it became extremely difficult to acquit themselves towards Mrs. Polwarth, who could not bear to hear the most remote hint that her friend was in danger, and threw herself into agonies that endangered her own life. – Fortunately the fever was milder than they had at first reason to fear; and in a few days there was little to apprehend but from the extreme debility it left. As the danger had never been imminent, the illness of her aunt had been carefully concealed from Althea, who could not but wonder she did not hear from her as usual, and that short and incoherent notes from Mrs. Polwarth supplied the place of those instructive and affectionate letters which she had received during the first days of their separation. – At length Mrs. Trevyllian exerted herself to conceal her trembling hand, and, under the pretence of head-ach, excused the shortness of her letter, which appeased the cruel alarms Althea had begun to feel – and, by the returning post, she wrote the following answer:

'It is impossible to express to you, my dear, dear aunt, the delight with which your Althea read a letter written with your own hand. It has removed many apprehensions that I was tormented with: for, notwithstanding Mrs. Polwarth's kind letters, I feared you were very ill; and had it not been that I am determined never to disobey you, I should have surprised you at Abbotshanger. – Have you not been ill? – Oh! yes, I still fear that is the truth – but my dear aunt would never deceive me; and as she assures her Althea she is well, and that we shall soon meet, I will believe her, and appease my apprehensions. I cannot however promise to be as happy as you bid me – for if it were possible for me to feel pleasure where you are absent, indeed it could not be here. You bid me relate what passes, and flatter me that it amuses you to hear my simple narrative. – Alas! I am not like Miss Byron[38] – my journal will not contain an account of the fine things that are said to me, and the approbation I meet with, for I am a mere cypher – or what is worse, I seem to be selected by that odious Mr. Mohun[39] as an object of ridicule – it were better to remain in insignificance.

'You have never seen this very disagreeable man, my dear aunt, or you would not, I am sure, however you may dislike any tendency to satire, think I represented him in colours too unpleasing. – I cannot tell why he singles me out as an object of attention, which I am sure is far from being flattering, and I heartily wish my father would not encourage him in addressing himself to me. – Why he should do it I cannot imagine, as he seems at the same time to consider me as a child and a mere country girl, and impertinently affects to be mightily amused with my simplicity. But there is no judging how hateful he is, unless I describe the sort of man. – He is a tall, awkward, rawbone figure – with a countenance it is impos-

sible to look at without disgust, for it has the most disagreeable expression I ever saw: – when he speaks, which is always more than any body in the room, it reminds me of the voice and manner of the man whom I heard plead against those poor creatures who were prisoners at Exeter, the only time you ever took me into a Court of Law,[40] so that I suppose it is the usual manner of lawyers, and that Mr. Mohun cannot divest himself of it in private company. Whatever he says, however, he says as if it were impossible he could be wrong; and indeed nobody ever ventures to dissent from him. If any unfortunate being has temerity enough to attempt it, Mr. Mohun flies at him like an enraged hornet, and will contrive to sting before he has done with him, for there is nothing rude and brutal he will not say, totally regardless of the pain he may inflict. I have once or twice heard him make such very insolent reflections that I have been astonished he has not excited the resentment of the people to whom he addressed himself: but it seems as if other men, who have probably as much spirit as he has, are thunderstruck and amazed at his excessive assurance. – Nor are his manners towards women at all pleasant – Lady Dacres, with whom he appears to be a great favourite, and who is in general remarkably nice and correct, only laughs at him when he tells long stories of pleadings about divorces,[41] and I know not what scandalous stories, which I am sure Lady Dacres would not suffer from any other person. Her partiality to this man is astonishing, but my father's still more so, for it is impossible any two people can be more unlike each other. They are Members of Parliament,[42] it seems, for the same borough, and Sir Audley has some obligations to him – so he told me this morning – and he bade me never again behave rudely to him. You will naturally ask, my dear aunt, if I *did* behave rudely? – I will tell you what passed, and you shall judge for me yourself. This Mr. Mohun, who lives here, I think, had dined with my father as usual, and there was to be a small card party in the evening. The weather is dreadfully hot in this disagreeable London – and I cannot imagine how any human beings can shut themselves up in a room, and sit down to those everlasting cards. I found my own room, which has windows to the West, so very warm, that, though I generally stay there as long as I can, I came down into the withdrawing rooms earlier than usual, and long before the company were assembled, or Lady Dacres herself had appeared. – Three other gentlemen dined with my father, and I concluded they would be long engaged over their wine; I took my work therefore, and placed myself near a window in the great drawing-room. A few coaches passed with people going to Kensington Gardens[43] – I felt my confinement uneasy, without however envying them. – I wished not to join any of these parties – it was with you I longed to be – a thousand uneasy conjectures assailed me, (for I had not then received your dear letter) and I was more disposed to weep than to go on with my work, when the door of the anti-room suddenly opened, and

Mr. Mohun, who seemed to be much affected with the wine he had drank, staggered into that where I was sitting, and, approaching me with some of those disagreeable speeches which he often makes, very confidently sat himself down on the same seat; and putting his arm around my waist, he stared at me, and said, I was the most divine little dear he had ever seen.

'I sprang from him in an instant, more terrified than I ever was in my life, for never had I been subject to such impertinence before. – He besought me to stop; but I flew up to my own room, determined not to leave it till Lady Dacres's company were assembled – nor then unless I was sent for. – Alas! my dear aunt, how every incident concurs to increase my regret at our separation, and with what ardent wishes I look forward to our return into Devonshire! – I was in some hopes that, inconsequential as I am, I might have been forgotten, and have been allowed to remain alone for the rest of the evening, as I never take a place at a card table, and of course could not be wanted. – Ah! no – I was not so fortunate. I received an order from my father to attend Lady Dacres, and reluctantly I obeyed.

'When I entered the room every body was at cards but my father and Mr. Mohun, who were in deep conference at one end of it. I went up to the table where Lady Dacres was at play, and said one of the nothings which one is in a habit of saying to Miss Cornwallis, who was of her party: by a side glance I saw that my father and his friend were talking of me, and that Mohun held his opera glass to his eye – an impertinence he is frequently guilty of, as if to survey me the better. – A moment afterwards Sir Audley called me to him; and, what is very unusual with him, began to talk to me with some degree of interest and affection. So little has your poor Althea been accustomed to listen to the voice of tenderness from a parent, that the slenderest mark of my father's regard always affects me. – He saw that I was affected, and seemed pleased; then, as if some one had beckoned to him from the other side of the room, he suddenly left me, standing near Mohun, who, throwing something into his manner which I suppose he thought was softness, took my hand, and, I believe, was beginning an apology: but I flung from him, and, on his following me to a card-table, whither I had fled for refuge, hurried out of the room, determined rather to incur my father's displeasure than suffer for a moment the renewal of such insolent familiarity.

'I found he staid supper, and therefore excused myself from going down. I hoped indeed that I should have heard no more about him – but this morning, when the post came in, I could not forbear going down; and anxiously inquiring of the porter if there was not a letter for me, I saw that hand-writing which gives me the greatest pleasure of any in the world; and, unable to restrain my impatience, had eagerly torn open my letter as I returned up stairs, when my father came out of his study, and ordered me to come to him there. I obeyed – not without trembling, because he spoke

so sternly. He shut the door, and said in a tone of voice which did not serve to quiet my beating heart – 'Althea, I am much displeased with you; and I must tell you, that, if you stay with me, I expect very different behaviour.' – Unconscious of what I had done, I asked, in a faltering voice, how I had been so unfortunate as to offend him? – He answered – 'You behave with rudeness, and in a manner very unbecoming a young woman, circumstanced as you are, to my best friends. – Come, come – you must not affect to misunderstand me, Althea. – You know perfectly well that I mean Mr. Mohun. He condescends to take notice of you – which, I assure you, is an honour half the women of the highest consequence in town would be flattered by, and you give yourself airs of flippancy and contempt. If it were possible that such a man as my friend Mohun, who will undoubtedly be Chancellor,[44] could think seriously of such a girl, be assured, Althea, it would be the most fortunate circumstance of your life. – That, unhappily, is not at all likely. In the mean time I must insist upon your behaving to him, whenever he addresses himself to you, with the respect that is due to his condition, his fortune, and, above all, to your father's friend. You now know my sentiments; I expect to have no occasion to repeat them. Go, Althea, I will hear no reply.' – Indeed, my dear aunt, I had no inclination to answer. I was too much amazed at the purport of what my father spoke, and his peremptory manner, which was so much more than the occasion seemed to demand, that I should not have had voice or courage to have replied, had I not been thus forbidden. I hurried to my own room; and, to tell you the truth, my dearest and best friend, though I began my letter with tolerable composure, I have hardly yet recovered from my uneasy astonishment. Yet my father certainly could not mean more than he said – Oh! my dear, dear aunt, let your poor Althea return to you, wherever you are. Ten thousand fevers are not half so dreadful, in my opinion, as this one Mr. Mohun. If he should have taken it into his head … but, no – I will not torment myself with such useless conjectures, but repeat, most earnestly repeat – let your Althea return to you directly – Oh! send me permission by the return of the post. – Believe me, though her Ladyship is just civil to me, it is with evident effort, and Lady Dacres will be much relieved by my absence – while to embrace my dearest aunt, never again to quit her, is the first wish of her Althea Dacres.'

The recovery of Mrs. Trevyllian was not at all promoted by this letter, which gave occasion to many uneasy conjectures. – She knew that Sir Audley, with high notions of the power of parents over their children, had long since conquered those sentiments which had, in the early part of life, induced him to sacrifice every other consideration to love. He was now quite a convert to the necessity of prudence and discretion, and thought money and power two things which every man of sense should make it the business of his life to obtain. Mrs. Trevyllian foresaw therefore that, if the

sacrifice of Althea could be made subservient to these purposes, Sir Audley would not scruple to insist upon it; and that as to herself, though she might assist the resistance of her niece, the rejection of her father's friend would inevitably disoblige him, and render her future life uncomfortable. – These thoughts pressed more painfully on her mind, because she felt her health so much impaired that she thought the time was probably near when she must leave this beloved girl to the protection of her father, or leave her totally unprotected. – What might, in either case, be her destiny, Mrs. Trevyllian could not think of without losing much of that fortitude which no other contemplation on the future had power to shake.

To a young woman, situated as Althea was likely to be in case of her death, nothing could be so desirable as an honourable and affluent marriage – but Mrs. Trevyllian knew her too well to believe that any advantage could engage her to accept such a man as Mr. Mohun; and that her young and ingenuous heart, though without any prepossession in favour of another, would shrink from his arrogant pretensions, and suffer every degree of inconvenience rather than hazard the misery of passing her life with a man she could not love.

Of the wretchedness of such an union Mrs. Trevyllian was too well aware to think for a moment of promoting it; but she foresaw so much pain and uneasiness likely to arise from the instances of Sir Audley, that to remove Althea from the sight of this unwelcome admirer seemed to be immediately necessary – and this she determined to do, though at the risk of her health, which was by no means in a state that enabled her to travel with safety; but to bring Althea to Abbotshanger would have been so imprudent, that she wrote merely to bid her send Morris to accompany her to London, as she purposed being there on the following Friday. She wrote also to Sir Audley, informing him of her intentions, and requested that her niece might be ready to receive her at her lodgings.

Althea received this news with unallayed transport: it confirmed what she had before some doubts about, that her aunt was well; and it removed her from a scene where, amidst an unceasing round of company and apparent gaiety, she had never tasted a moment's content or pleasure. Lady Dacres heard of the immediate departure of her visitor with satisfaction, which she gave herself very little trouble to conceal, and Sir Audley with indifference; for whatever projects were floating in his mind in regard to Mr. Mohun, he thought they would rather be forwarded than retarded by the influence of a woman who knew so much of the world as Mrs. Trevyllian.

Althea having dispatched Morris, who had never received so welcome a commission, began to count the hours till that fixed for her aunt's arrival. Her clothes were packed up and sent away, and she sat down to anticipate the delight she should have in again embracing, after this painful absence, her first and best friend. – As it was now the end of June, she supposed Mrs.