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FIRST LOVE. A NOVEL IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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All the mottoes annexed to the chapters of this work, have been selected from the Author's dramatic and other poetical works, not yet published.

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FIRST LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

"No hut shelters Comala from the rain."

A family of travelling vagrants were overtaken on the high road just leading out of Keswick, on the Penrith side, by a gentleman on horseback. He had observed the same group begging during the entertainments of the regatta which had concluded but the evening before.

"Ho! ho! my good woman," he said, as he passed in a sling trot, "I am glad to see your boy has found his second leg!"

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The woman, who appeared to be young, and who would have been handsome, had not dirt and impudence rendered her disgusting, looked behind her, and perceived that a poor, sickly, ragged child, apparently about five years old, who followed her, tired of his crutches, which pushed up his little shoulders almost out of their sockets, had contrived to loosen the bandage of his tied-up leg, and slip it down out of the dirty linen bag, in which it usually hung on the double, and from which it was not always released, even at night, as so doing necessarily incurred the further trouble of tying it up again in the morning. She laid down her bundle, and stood still with her arms a-kimbo, till, with hesitating steps, and looks of suppressed terror, her victim came up; then glancing round, to ascertain that the gentleman was out of sight, she seized the child, snatched

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both the crutches from his trembling hands, and grasping them in one of hers, she began to flog him without pity. He seemed used to this, for he uttered no sound of complaint; silent tears only rolled down his face.

“Ye villain!” said she at last, with a strong Cumberland accent, and gasping for breath, “it’s not the first time, is it? it’s not the first time I’ve beat you within an inch of your life for this. But I’ll do for you this time: that I will! You shan’t be a burden to me any longer, instead of a profit. If it wasn’t for the miserable looks of ye,” she added, shaking him almost to atoms as she wheeled him round, “that sometimes wrings a penny out of the folk, I’d ha’ finished ye long ago.” Then, with her great foot, armed with an iron-rimmed wooden shoe, she gave him a violent kick on the offending leg, continuing thus:—“Its

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best break the shanks on ye at ance, ye whey-faced urchin ye! and then ye’ll tak te yeer crutches without biddin’!”

Finding, however, that though he had staggered and fallen forward on both hands, he had yet risen again, and still contrived to stand, she once more lifted her foot, to repeat the kick with increased force: for she was as much intoxicated by drink as by rage, and really seemed to intend to break the child’s leg; but her husband, a sort of travelling tinker, coming up at the moment, and uttering a violent curse, struck her a blow that, poised as she just then was on one foot, brought her to the ground.

During the scuffle which ensued, the poor little sufferer, who had occasioned it all, crept through the hedge of a field by the road side, and hid himself under some bushes. But the

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woman, soon after pursuing in search of him, jumped the fence, and dropped among the very brambles where he lay. She perceived him instantly, and shook her clenched hand, which so paralysed him, that he did not dare to move, though she for some time delayed seizing him. Finding that the inside of the hedge was covered with clothes for bleaching, she thought it best, the first thing she did, to secure a good bundle of so desirable a booty, and fling it over to her husband. She was just in the act of so doing, when the owner of the linen came into the field, and immediately set up the halloo of “Thieves! thieves!” upon which, dropping what she had collected, and giving up all thoughts of carrying the child with her, she made the best of her way, and disappeared not only from the spot, but from the neighbourhood.

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About an hour after, when the poor boy, pressed by hunger, crept from his hiding place, a girl, who was left to watch the clothes, spying him, cried out, “Ha! you little spawn e—the devil! did she leave you to bring her the bundle?” And so saying, she pursued and beat him, till she drove him out of the field, and into the adjoining garden of an old woman, who was standing at the moment with a long pole in her hand, endeavouring to beat down, as well as her failing sight would permit, the few remaining apples from the topmost branches of her single apple-tree: the well laden lower boughs of which had been robbed of their goodly winter store but the preceding night.

On seeing a boy scramble through her hedge, she concluded, of course, that his errand was to possess himself of the said remaining apples, and, accordingly, uttering a yell of exe

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cration, she converted her fruit-pole into a weapon defensive and offensive, and hobbling towards the poor child, drove him from her premises; over the boundary of which, long after he had so far escaped, she continued to address to him, at the very top of her voice, every opprobrious epithet of which she was mistress: her shrill tones the while collecting, at the heels of the fugitive, hooting boys, and barking curs innumerable. These, however, did not follow him far; and when they returned to their homes or their sports, he wandered about for the rest of the day, avoiding houses and people, and fearing that every one he met would beat him. At length, towards evening, he found himself on the borders of the lake of Derwent, and seeing a boat fastened close to the land, he got into it; partly with the idea of hiding him

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self, and partly with a vague recollection of having often wished to be a sailor-boy, when begging about with his mother in sea-port towns. He rolled himself up in an old cloak which lay under one of the benches, where, exhausted by pain, hunger, and fatigue, he fell asleep.

Shortly after our poor wanderer had chosen this refuge, in stepped Master Henry St. Aubin, whose pleasure-boat it was, to take a sail *alone*, contrary to reiterated commands, and for no other reason, but because, for fear of accidents, he had been desired never to go without a servant. He pushed from the land, and began to arrange his canvass. He put up his main-sail, which filling immediately, bent his little bark on one side, almost level with the water, and made it fly across the lake in great style. When, however, it got under shade of the high mountains on the Borrowdale coast,

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the breeze slackened, and he determined to add his mizen and jib; but what was his surprise, when, on attempting to remove the old cloak which lay near them, he discovered within its folds the sleeping boy. Supposing him to be a spy placed there to watch his movements, and report his disobedience, he began to curse and swear, kicked at him under the bench, and ordered him to pack out of his boat instantly. The poor child, but half awake, gazed all round him, got up as well as his bruises would permit, and was about to obey in silence; but, when, he saw how far they were from land, he hesitated; upon which Henry took up a rope's end, and lashed at him in the manner that sailors call starting, repeating at each stroke, "Jump, spy! jump!"

Driven almost wild with the pain of the blows, the child at last did jump; but, at the

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same moment, caught instinctively at the side of the boat, to which he hung with both hands, and so kept his head above water. Henry set up a loud laugh, and rowed out, towing him after him. Then, willing to make sport for himself, by terrifying the beggar brat, he attempted to push his fingers off the edge of the boat, but they clung to it with all the tenacity of self preservation; when the one hand was forced for a moment from its hold, the grasp of the other became but the more convulsively strong; and when the second was assailed by the united efforts of both of Henry's, the first returned to its former position.

At length, tired of the jest himself, Master St. Aubin turned into shallow water, leaped ashore, and suffering the half-drowned child to land as he might, bade him scamper, ere he had well got footing. Then, intent on

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pursuing his sweet, because forbidden amusement, he stepped back into his boat, which with its white sails, contrasted with the dark woods of the coast it glided silently beneath, soon became as picturesque an object as though the urchin that guided it had been the most noble and adventurous of romantic heroes.

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CHAPTER II.

—“And I tremble amid the night.”

About the centre of the entrance of the vale of Borrowdale, conspicuously situated, stands that curious rock, called, by the native Cumbrians, Borrowdale-stane. In form and position it is much like a dismasted and stranded vessel, laying on its keel and leaning a little to one side. On the highest point of this rock, a station well known to the lovers of the sublime, stood a lady wrapped in a warm fur lined cloak. Her air, however, was much too fashionable and modern

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to harmonize in any degree with the wild desolation of the surrounding region, which, when viewed from the elevated position she thus occupied, as far as the eye could reach, resembled a stormy ocean: its gigantic billows formed by the congregated tops of mountains.

The evening was cold, approaching to frost; and the sun, though still much above the natural horizon, was just sinking from view behind the lofty chain of western hills: his last rays lingered a while on the most prominent parts of each stupendous height, then, gradually retiring, left point after point, which, like so many beacon lights extinguished by an invisible hand, successively disappeared, till all became shrouded alike in cheerless gloom and volumes of mist rolling down the sides of the mountains, a dense fog settled in the valley like a white and waveless lake.

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The lady on the rock appeared to deem it time to return home, for, withdrawing her eyes from the distant view, she cast them downward in search of the path by which to descend; when, amid the rocks and huge rough stones which lay scattered beneath like the ruins of a former world, she thought she saw something move, though very slightly. She looked at it for a time; it quitted not the spot where she first descried it; yet, still it certainly did move! She descended, approached, and beheld a poor little boy, who seemed about five or six years old. He was sitting on the ground; the wretched rags, in which he was dressed, were dripping with wet; his poor limbs, which were all bent together, and drawn up close to his face, trembled extremely, while his little hands, with their long emaciated fingers, spread and hooked round his knees, seemed endeavouring to hold them,

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as though the violence of their motion was becoming too much for his frame to bear. The lady stood looking down on him for a moment with mingled pity and surprise. He was slowly rocking himself from side to side: it was a movement quite expressive

of despondency, his chin rested on the backs of the hands which held his knees, and his eyes wandered hopelessly among the bare stones that lay around him, while his head retained the same fixed position.

"Little boy, look up!" she said, taking one of his cold wet hands in hers. He raised his face; misery was depicted in every feature: his teeth chattered excessively, and his poor eyes, that swam in tears, were now lifted to hers with an expression truly piteous.

"Poor child! come with me," she said. Something like hope began to dawn on his forlorn countenance; but she finished her sentence, in

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what she intended for the most comforting manner, by saying, "and I will take you home to your mother."

He had not risen. He drew his hand from hers, turned on his face on the ground with the universal shudder of terror, and, clinging to the rocks, cried, "No! no! no!"

She endeavoured to soothe him, and to untwist his fingers from the fastenings, which, like so many fibres of roots, they had found for themselves among the crevices and broken fragments of his flinty bed; but he hid his face against the hard stone, and would not turn round. When she succeeded at length in detaching one of his hands, and was gently endeavouring to raise him, his inward shudderings increased so visibly that she became fearful of throwing him into convulsions: she desisted therefore, and, feigning to go away, removed a few paces; then

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stopped, and said, "Well! I am going; but won't you tell me your name?"

"Edmund," he sobbed out; without, however, raising his head.

"Well, Edmund," said the lady, in a kind voice, "good night!" He turned, sat up, looked at her, and then all round, as though having had her near him, even for the last few seconds, the thought of being left alone for the night now struck upon his heart anew with fresh desolation; then, resuming the attitude she had first found him in, he began, as before, to rock himself from side to side and weep. "But where do you mean to sleep tonight, Edmund?" said the lady; "I am sure you must be cold sitting on those hard stones with your clothes so wet."

"Yes, I am," he said, looking up wistfully again, "very cold, and very hungry." Then, hesitating a little, he suddenly stretched out his

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hand, and said, "I'll go with you, if you will hide me from every one."

"I will! I will, my poor child!" she exclaimed, flying back to him, kindly stooping over him, and, with some difficulty, assisting him to rise; for he was so stiffened it seemed scarcely possible to unbend his knees: nor did there appear to be one spark of vital heat remaining in the poor little creature! She drew a part of her warm fur mantle close over him, and endeavoured to soothe him and give him confidence in her protection.

"And will you stay here with me, then?" he whispered softly.

"I will take you to a much more comfortable place," she replied, "where there is a good fire, and a nice dinner for Edmund."

"And are you sure she won't find me there?" he said, still whispering.

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“She shall never hurt you, while you are with me,” the lady replied, “whoever she may be.”

“Then I will go!” said Edmund; and he lifted his head and tried to smile through his tears. The lady, still sharing with him her warm cloak, now led him by the hand, while he held hers fast in both of his, and walked, with short uneven steps, so close to her, that she was every moment in danger of treading on his little bare feet; and thus did they arrive at Lodore House, just as the first roll of the thunder resounded along the desolate valley they had so lately quitted.

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CHAPTER III.

“Vases filled with liquid beams, hang in chains Of gold.”

“A sumptuous banquet Spread, invites the taste.”

The cheerful, well-aired, already lit up dwelling, now entered by our wanderers of the valley, formed a striking contrast to the dreary scene they had just left. An excellent fire blazed in the hall, bronzed figures held flaming lamps aloft, and powdered, well-dressed, well-fed servants, bustled to and fro, bearing, towards the dining-room, dishes, which though covered, tempted the palate by the various savoury odours

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they sent forth. In short, every comfort, every elegance, nay, every luxury, evidently abounded beneath the roof of Lodore House.

It had indeed, some years since, been a mere shooting lodge, situated in the midst of an extensive property, on which, from its remoteness, no family mansion had ever been built. Mrs. Montgomery, however, its present possessor, had, since her early widowhood, made additions to the lodge in her own taste: and though on her daughter’s account she regularly visited London during the fashionable season, at all other times she chose to reside in this romantic retirement. The lady, who had just entered, leading poor Edmund by the hand, was Frances Montgomery, the only child of Mrs. Montgomery. As Frances, with her charge, crossed the hall already described, they met Henry St. Aubin, a nephew of Mrs. Montgomery’s, a boy

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of about twelve years old. Frances called immediately for the housekeeper, and desired her own maid to bring some warm soup. While her attention was thus engaged, master Henry contrived to come up close to the poor little stranger, and say to him in an under tone, “Take care, you sir, you don’t dare to tell, or I’ll—” Frances feeling an additional pressure of Edmund’s hand, turned suddenly round, and saw the frown still on Henry’s face, with which he had thought fit to strengthen his arguments.

“How can you look so cross, Henry?” she exclaimed; “you actually frighten the poor child!”

“Pshaw!” said Henry, and went laughing into the drawing-room, where he attempted to entertain, by ludicrous descriptions of the pretty new pet Frances had found; while she proceeded to the housekeeper’s room, and there,

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before a comfortable fire, herself assisted, in despite of the dinner-announcing voice of the gong, the operations of the two women she had summoned. They released the poor child from the wet rags which hung about him, sending a chill to his little heart; they put him up to the neck in warm water; and cautiously gave him, by a little at a time, some nourishing soup. Frances then called for meat, pudding, and every thing nice she could think of; and, lastly, for a supply of her own night things. By all these prompt exertions, the poor, naked, shivering, starving Edmund, was soon dressed in a long sleeved, high collared, full frilled sleeping chemise; his limbs warmly clothed in a pair of the housekeeper's worsted web stockings, which served him at once for drawers and hose; a large dressing-gown of Frances's folded about him, and a pair of her dressing slippers on his

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little feet; and, thus equipped, he was seated in front of the fire, with all the other good things which had been called for, placed on a table before him.

It was with the greatest pleasure that Frances, who stayed to help him herself, saw him venture, thus encouraged, to eat some dinner; and what with the refreshment, the cleanliness, the glow of all the surrounding warmth on his cheeks, and the comfortable white dress up about his neck, he certainly appeared almost a new creature; though, when he looked up, there was still a wildness, the unsteady glance of fear mingled with the appealing expression of his eyes; and when he looked down, their long black lashes, sweeping his hollow cheeks, might well inspire the beholder with even a painful degree of compassion; yet when, notwithstanding his timidity, he smiled with gratitude and a

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sense of present pleasure arising from bodily comfort, Frances, at least, could not help thinking him grown already quite a beauty; and she ran to the dining-room door, and entreated her mamma just to come out for a moment and see what a fine child the poor boy was, now that they had washed and dressed him.

Lord L., hearing her voice, begged permission to follow, but was refused.

Frances' absence had, in the meantime, banished the smiles of Edmund, so that Mrs. Montgomery, on entering the housekeeper's room, exclaimed, with a laugh, patting her daughter on the cheek, "I cannot say much for his beauty, my dear!—But that is no reason why you should not save the life of the poor child," she added; and, with the tenderness of one accustomed to a mother's feelings, she stroked his little head. He smiled again, and

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she continued, "but he may be pretty when he gets fat."

"And shall he stay here to get fat, mamma?" asked Frances eagerly.

"To be sure, my dear," replied Mrs. Montgomery, "we will never turn the poor little thing out of doors again, while it wants a shelter." Frances was delighted; caught up both her mother's hands and kissed them, and then the forehead of her protégé: nor did she leave him till he dropped asleep in a comfortable bed, with her hand in his to give him confidence.

Frances at length entered the dining-room, just as the domestic party engaged round the table were dispatching a third or fourth summons for her; the second

course having by this time made its appearance. Lord L., who occupied his usual seat beside her chair, began to

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question her about the adventure of the evening. Compassion made her eloquent on the misery, the cold, the hunger, the wretchedness of poor Edmund; but when she came to his beauty, she faltered and looked at her mother with a beseeching expression.

Mrs. Montgomery laughed, and replied to the look, "Oh, yes! there was a sweetness when he smiled, that made me begin to think he would be pretty if he were fat; but now, the poor child is all eyes and eyelashes."

"Oh, mamma!" said Frances, "he has the most beautiful mouth I ever saw in my life, and such nice teeth!"

"Has he, my dear?" said Mrs. Montgomery, with provoking indifference: for she happened to be deep in a discussion on the nature of the poor laws, with Mr. Jackson, the clergyman.

Master Henry, meanwhile, was greedily de

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vouring tart and cream, with his face close to his plate, and his eyes levelled at the dish, in great anxiety to be in time to claim the last portion which now remained on it; but, in his attempt to swallow what was before him, he missed his aim, and was a moment too late, though he thrust out his plate with both hands just as he saw a servant coming round; but the tart was dispatched to Lord L., to whom it had been offered, and who, being too much occupied to refuse it, had bowed. It lay before him a few moments, and went away untouched. Henry, vexed extremely, and desirous of revenge on Frances for the disappointment occasioned him by her lover, said, "If you are talking of the beggar brat, he is the image of a monkey! I was quite afraid he would bite me as I passed him in the hall."

"I am sure, Henry," retorted Frances, "he

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seemed more afraid of you, than you could be of him: and, by the bye, you need not, I think, have looked so cross at the poor child."

"Cross!" repeated Henry, "I did not look cross. What reason do you suppose I had to look cross? I never saw the brat before in my life."

Henry's speech was accompanied by that hateful expression, which the eyes of an ill-disposed child assume, when it knows it is uttering falsehood!

"Henry!" said Mrs. Montgomery, with some surprise; "you need not look angry, much less guilty. No one can suppose that you know any thing of the poor boy. But leave the room, sir: and remember you don't sit at table again, till you know better how to conduct yourself."

Henry obeyed, but slowly and sulkily; trailing one foot after the other, and determining to

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have revenge on the cause of his disgrace. He offered no apology, and therefore was not taken into favour again for the evening, though poor Mrs. Montgomery, as she passed to her own apartment, looked into that where he lay, and said, with a sigh, "Good night, and God bless you, child!"

To account, in some degree, for the unprepossessing manners of Master Henry, we shall introduce a few words respecting the young gentleman's birth, and hitherto unfortunately directed education.

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CHAPTER IV.

"Lifting at The thought my timid eyes, I pass them o'er His brow; and, if I would, I dare not love him: Yet, dare I never disobey that eye, Flashing outward fires, while, within its depths, Where love should dwell, 'tis ever still, and cold, To look upon."

St. Aubin, Henry's father, was a Frenchman, and totally without religion. A flourish of worldly honour, as long as no temptation had arisen, had sustained for him even a showy character. By this, a showy appearance, and showy manners, he had, what is called, gained the affections, that is, he had dazzled the fancy, of Maria, the younger sister of Mrs. Mont

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gomery. Maria was a beautiful girl, and but seventeen. Her sister, who was also her guardian, for she was some years her senior, and their parents were dead, disapproved of the match, but in vain: Maria married St. Aubin, and was miserable! The marriage being a runaway affair, no settlements were entered into, which circumstance St. Aubin imagined would be in his favour; but, when he discovered that the consent of the guardians not having been obtained, gave them the power of withholding Maria's fortune till she should be of age, and of then settling it on herself and her children, without suffering him to touch one shilling, his brutality was such, that Mrs. St. Aubin, before the birth of her child, for she had but one, was broken-hearted.

She denied herself the consolation she might have found in the sympathy of her sister, for

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she wished to conceal from her the wretchedness she had brought upon herself, by acting contrary to her advice. She was, however, shortly removed out of the reach of that sister's penetration.

St. Aubin was deeply in debt when he married, and things had been ever since becoming worse and worse. He had always flattered himself that the guardians would not use the full power of which they spoke, and that by making fair promises he should be able, when once Maria was of age, to get the money, or the greater part of it, into his own hands; he had therefore laboured incessantly to put off the payment of every demand to the day of his wife's coming of age, and made all his arrangements with reference to that period. At length it arrived. He made application for his wife's fortune; but Mrs. Montgomery, in reply, re

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minded him, that her sister having married without her consent, had given her, as sole remaining guardian, a power, which she now saw it was her duty to exert; namely, that of refusing to pay down any part of the money. She should, therefore, she said, secure the whole of it in the hands of trustees, as a future provision for Maria and her child.

With this letter open in his hand, St. Aubin, foaming with rage, entered the room where his wife sat with Henry, then between two and three years old, playing on the ground at her feet, while she was absorbed in melancholy anticipations of the probable result of her husband's application. St. Aubin flung the letter in her face, swearing, with horrid imprecations, that he would be the death both of her and her brat, and then blow out his own brains. Mrs. St. Aubin remained silent; but the shrieks of

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the child brought servants. By the time they arrived, however, St. Aubin was striding up and down the room, venting his rage on the open letter, which he kicked before him at each step.

Shortly after this final disappointment respecting Maria's fortune, St. Aubin found it necessary to take refuge from his creditors in the Isle of Man; whither he went accordingly, carrying with him his wife and child, and settling there with a very reduced establishment.

Not choosing, it would seem, to be hung for declared murder, he appeared determined, by every species of ingenious barbarity, to torture the wretched Maria out of her remaining shred of existence; and, among other devices, he daily and hourly made her shudder, by his vows of deep and black revenge on her sister. One day, after sitting some time leaning his

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head on his hand, with a countenance resembling the thunder-cloud, lightning suddenly flashed from his eyes, imprecations exploded from his lips, he started to his feet, stood before his wife, and clenching his hand, uttered these words: "I tell you, Mrs. St. Aubin, that child, that I hate, because it is yours! that child, to whose future provision she has sacrificed me! that child I will rear, I will preserve, for the sole purpose of being the instrument of my revenge! —by his means, were it twenty years hence, were it thirty years hence, I will break her heart! Yes," he added, as if in reply to a look from Maria of astonishment, almost amounting to incredulity, "and I have determined how I shall do it." He then resumed his sitting attitude, and again leaning his head on his hand, a long hour of utter silence followed, during which his unhappy wife sat at

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the other side of the table, not daring to arouse him by rising to leave the room. Henry, at this time, promised to have in him a strange mixture of the dispositions both of his father and mother; or, in other words, of evil and good. The evil certainly did predominate; yet, had a careful hand early separated the seeds, cultivated the good, and cast out the bad, this ill-fated child might have been saved from perdition; or had he, with all his faults, been supplied with that only unerring standard of right, the practical application of sacred truths to moral obligations, even in after-life there might have been hope; but his father, as we have said, had no religion: he daily scoffed at whatever was most sacred, purposely to insult the feelings of his wife, and this before his child. One morning, he found Maria with the Bible before her, and Henry on her knee. He

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looked at them for a moment; then taking the child by the shoulder, he raised one foot level with the hand in which he held him, and kicked him, in a contemptuous manner, as he swung him to the middle of the floor, saying, that such a mammy's brat ought to have been a girl. Mrs. St. Aubin ran to raise the child from the ground. St. Aubin snatched up the sacred volume, open as it lay, and flung it after her, telling her, in a voice of thunder, that she was a psalm-singing fool, and ordering her not to cram the boy's head with any of her cursed nonsense. Indeed, in his calmest and best disposed moods, "You are a fool, Mrs. St. Aubin!" was his usual remark on any thing his wife ventured to say or do.

Mrs. St. Aubin having ascertained that the child was not hurt, took up the book, arranged its ruffled leaves in silence, and laid it with

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reverence on the table. Her husband viewed her with a malicious grin till her task was completed; then, walking up to the table, he opened the treasury of sacred knowledge, and deliberately tore out every leaf, flinging them, now on one side, now on the other, to each far corner of the apartment; then striding towards the fire-place, he planted himself on the hearth, with his back to the chimney, his legs spread in the attitude of a colossal statue, the tails of his coat turned apart under his arms, and his hands in his side-pockets.

"Now," he said, looking at his wife, "pick them up!—pick them up! pick them up!" he continued, till all were collected.

Mrs. St. Aubin was about to place the sheets within their vacant cover on the table; but, with a stamp of his foot, which made every article of furniture in the room shake, and

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brought a picture that hung against the wall, on its face to the floor, he commanded her to put them in the fire. She hesitated; when seizing her arm, he shook it over the flames, till the paper taking fire, she was compelled to loose her hold.

"I ought to have reserved a sheet to have made a fool's cap for you, I think," he said, perceiving that silent tears were following each other down the cheeks of his wife.

"Why, what an idiot you are! the child has more sense than you have," he added, seeing that Henry, occupied by surprise and curiosity, was not crying. "Come, Henry," he continued, in a voice for him most condescending, "you shall carry my fishing basket to-day."

Henry had been just going to pity his poor mamma when he saw her crying; but hearing his father say that he had more sense than his

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mother, he could not help feeling raised in his own estimation, and anxious to show his sense by flying with peculiar alacrity for the basket.

He had viewed the whole of the preceding scene with but little comprehension, as may be supposed, of its meaning, and with very confused ideas of right and wrong, being, at the time, not above six years old; but the practical lesson—and there are no lessons like practical lessons—made an indelible impression: all future efforts, whether of mother or aunt, usher or schoolmaster, layman or divine, to infuse into Henry precepts derived from a source he had seen so contemned by his father, were for ever vain. His father, he was old enough to perceive, was feared and obeyed by

every one within the small sphere of his observation: for him, therefore, he felt a sort of spurious deference, though he could not love him. For his mother, who [42]

had always indulged him with the too great tenderness of a gentle spirit utterly broken, and who had wept over him many a silent hour, till his little heart was saddened without his knowing why, he naturally felt some affection; but then he daily saw her treated with indignity, and therefore did not respect either her or her lessons: for he was just at the age when a quick child judges wrong, a dull one not at all.

Henry had much of the violence of his father's temper, with some of the fearfulness of his mother's. In judicious hands, the latter, though no virtue, might have been made to assist in correcting the former; the whole current of his fears might have been turned into a useful channel: in short, he might have been taught to fear only doing wrong, and, by a strict administration of justice, proving to him his perfect security from blame while he did right,

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he might have been given all that honest-hearted boldness in a good cause, which, throughout after-life, is so necessary to ensure dignity to the character of man, and the early promises of which, it is so delightful to see in the happy open countenance, in the very step and air of a fine frank boy, who has never had his spirit broken by undeserved harshness, or been rendered hopeless of pleasing by inconsistency.

Henry, on the contrary, when he had done no real wrong, was frequently treated with the most violent cruelty; while his very worst faults passed unreprieved, if they did not happen to cross the whims of his father: and this cruelty, thus inflicted on a helpless, powerless child, which could not resist, for ever raised in the breast of Henry, who was, as we have said, naturally violent, an ever unsatisfied thirst of vengeance; a sense too of the injustice of the pu

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nishments inflicted, a thing early understood by children, embittered his feelings, and the transient impressions thus rendered permanent, corroded inwardly, till they settled into a malice of nature, totally subversive of all that was or might have been good or amiable.

Alas! why will not parents reflect, how much the characters and happiness of their children, in after life, depend on the species of minor experience collected in infancy, and the few years immediately succeeding that period. When intellect is matured, we may call upon it to judge of great events, to guide us in great undertakings, or lead us to signal self-conquests; but by this time, the feelings, the strong holds, whether of vice or virtue, are pre-occupied, and the passions, already in arms and in the field, too probably on the side of error, certainly so, if hitherto undirected. And hence it is, that in

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so many minds the kingdom within is found in a perpetual state of rebellion against the sovereignty of reason: or, in other words, hence it is, that so many people daily act by impulse, contrary to what they call their better judgment. Here, then, is the true task of the parent; to use, for the benefit of his child, that deliberate sense of right, which, in his own case, comes frequently too late for action. And how shall that

parent depart in peace, who has not thus endeavoured, at least, to smooth the path of truth before the footsteps of his child?

When Henry was old enough for public education, Mrs. Montgomery wrote to her sister, to offer an allowance for the expenses of placing him at school. St. Aubin ordered his wife to accept the offer, and selected S— B— school, with the meanest description of lodging

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in the neighbouring village, as the cheapest he could hear of, that a part of the allowance, which was liberal, might remain in his own hands.

The school-house, at the period of which we speak, could accommodate but a very few of the boys, while the rest were generally lodged in the houses of the poor villagers; where, it is to be feared, they lorded it, and did just as they pleased.

Rather more than a year before the opening of this history, St. Aubin was assailed by a temptation, against which, the fear of detection, in the desperate state of his affairs, was an insufficient defence. He yielded, and became engaged in a swindling transaction to an immense amount. The business was discovered, and St. Aubin apprehended under circumstances which left no doubt of his being hung,

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unless steps were taken to prevent the prosecution. In this extremity the wretched Maria entreated her sister, if the sacrifice of the fortune so long preserved would suffice, to rescue with it herself and child from the disgrace of having a husband and father die an ignominious death. A compromise was accordingly offered, and accepted. It was not, however, in the power of the persons principally interested, to do more than connive at the escape of St. Aubin, who therefore fled the kingdom, taking with him his miserable wife, and his black factotum, the only slaves utter beggary had left him; and abandoning the child, still at S— B— school, to the compassion of Mrs. Montgomery. Nor did he remit any part of his hatred to that lady, notwithstanding her late concession; on the contrary, he called down fresh imprecations on her head, as being the sole cause, he said, of

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all his misfortunes, by having withheld the money at the time it would have been really of use, and enabled him to have arranged his affairs before they became quite desperate.

The next accounts Mrs. Montgomery had of her sister and St. Aubin were, that the ship in which they had sailed, with all the crew, and passengers, had perished off the coast of France. The affair was of too public a nature to afford, from the first, the slightest hope of mis-statement; for the vessel, though a merchantman, was of importance, from the value of her cargo, as she had much specie on board. The circumstances too under which she was lost were remarkable, and consequently made a great noise, for the weather was perfectly calm. She had been seen and passed in the evening by a frigate homeward bound, but after that was never seen or heard of more, and

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not even one individual, it was stated, had escaped, to relate the particulars of the accident: it was therefore concluded, that she must have foundered during the night.

Thus was Henry cast entirely on Mrs. Montgomery; who, while she grieved to trace in him the evil nature of his father, could not help loving him, as the child of her poor lost sister. Having concluded this necessary retrospect, we shall, in our next chapter, return to our narrative.

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CHAPTER V.

“He To her face looked up, with innocent love, And she looked fondly on him.”
We left the family at Lodore House enjoying, we hope, the refreshment of a good night’s rest. The next morning Frances, before she thought of breakfast, repaired to the bedside of Edmund. He had been for some time awake; but, unaccustomed, it would seem, to have any friend or confidant, he had not ventured to speak or stir. The tones of Frances’ voice, naming him to the servants as she inquired for him, appeared to bring at once happiness and confidence to his

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heart. He opened his eyes as she bent over him: he started up, clung round her neck, and wept; though now it was evidently for joy. These first transports, over however, he cast, from time to time, doubting glances on the various sides of the apartment, and especially towards that in which the door was placed, and evinced a great anxiety to retain Frances’ hand. She thought him feverish; and with great alarm perceived that his poor little frame was covered with fearful bruises. His neck and hands first drew her attention; and Mrs. Smyth, the housekeeper, soon ascertained that the limbs, concealed by the night-dress, had suffered full as much. Frances sent to Keswick for medical aid, and left her charge with Mrs. Smyth. Mrs. Smyth was a good-natured woman, added to which, the patience and gentleness of the little sufferer had begun to win upon

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her heart, from the very moment her assistance was first ordered to him. She found it necessary to sit by and encourage him while he breakfasted, for, like a wild animal, driven by hunger nearer to the haunts of man than usual, he started, and desisted from eating, at every sound.

“And what might you have for breakfast yesterday’s morn, my dear?” said Mrs. Smyth.

“Nothing,” he answered.

“And what had you for dinner, then?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing, my dear!” repeated the good woman; “and ye could na ha’ less! Ney fault tell the cooking o’ sic dinners, to be sure! And wha was it then, that beat and bruised the life and saul out on ye in this shamefoo manner, my dear?” she continued.

Edmund trembled, sighed heavily, and was silent.

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“And win’t ye tall me wha it was ’at beat ye?”

Tears stood in his eyes, but still he was silent.

“So you win’t speak till me! And after the nice breakfast I geed ye, too!”

The tears now flowed, but still he was silent.

“And wha was it then, that drooned ye in the water?”

He looked all round, but did not speak; and Mrs. Smyth soon saw it was vain to persist in questioning him.

Mr. Dixon, the Keswick surgeon, arrived. He inquired of Mrs. Smyth what the child had eaten, and how his food had seemed to agree with him. Having received due replies, he turned to Frances, who by this time was just entering, and addressed her thus:—

“I should not have anticipated, madam—I should not have anticipated, that so great a

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variety of aliment would have assimilated well in the child’s stomach; but, such being the case, I never set my face against facts, madam!—never set my face against facts! I should, therefore, continue the course which has been hitherto pursued, with respect to nutriment.”

“Yes, sir; but have you seen his bruises?” asked Frances.

“My practice is very simple, madam,” resumed the doctor, without answering her question; “I love to go hand-in-hand with our great instructress, Nature.”

“But—these terrible bruises, sir! What is your——”

“It is too much the custom with men of our profession, to oppose the efforts of nature; but I love to assist them, madam—I love to assist them.”

“You are quite right, sir. But, do you

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think those bruises will be of any consequence?”

“Depend upon it, madam, depend upon it, there is always a revulsion, as it were, towards right; a rebounding, a returning, in nature to her usual functions, as first ordained by her all, wise Creator; and our part, is carefully to watch those movements. And when the elasticity of any power is impaired by the forcible, or long continued pressure of adventitious circumstances; first, to remove the weight of such, and then, by gentle stimulants, to restore buoyancy to the injured spring; thus, madam—thus, I ever doff my cap to Nature!”

The doctor having arrived at what seemed a pause, at least, if not a conclusion, Frances had some hopes of being heard; and, by way of exordium, said,

“Your system, sir, is as judicious as it is pious.”

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“I am not presumptuous, madam!” again interrupted the doctor; “I am not presumptuous—”

“And I should like,” persisted Frances, “to have the opinion of one so skilful, respecting the bruises of this poor child.”

The doctor’s ear at length caught the word. “The bruises, madam! the bruises! They have been inflicted by a cruel and most unsparing hand! No doubt of it, madam—no doubt of it! Who was it that beat you in this shocking manner, my little dear?” he continued, stroking the child’s head good-naturedly.

Edmund looked alarmed, but made no attempt at reply.

“There are, I hope, no inward bruises,” resumed the doctor: “some of these outward ones are attended with a degree of inflammation, doubtless; but it is very slight and quite local,

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and may, I hope, be even beneficial: inasmuch as it may divert the attention of the system, and prevent any more vital part becoming the seat of disease; but it is not such as to require any general reduction of a patient already so low."

"I am delighted to hear you say so, sir!" exclaimed Frances; "for I wish so much to give him every thing good, when I think, poor fellow, that perhaps he never had a comfortable meal in his life, before last night! And I long so, too," she added, looking at Edmund, "to see the little creature quite fat and rosy."

"No roses here, madam! doubtless none, nor rotundity of limb, that is most certain. I do not know that I have ever met with a more decided case of emaciation in the whole course of my practice! Look at his fingers, madam! do look at his fingers! Nor do I think that his pulse would warrant me in bleeding him at

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present, as I should, doubtless, any other patient, labouring under contusions of this nature. I will, therefore, send an emolient and cooling mixture, with which, Mrs. Smyth, you will bathe the parts frequently. Nutriment and quiet will do the rest," he added, turning again to Frances, "for his fever proceeds entirely from irritation of the nervous system, not from general fulness; therefore, as I said before, cannot require general reduction. General opposed to general, you see, madam, in the healing, as well as in the wounding profession! Heigh! heigh! You don't admire puns, I know; but come, that's rather a good one, is it not? Good morning to you." And so saying, though on the wrong side of sixty, the doctor performed an active pirouette at the door, as was his custom; and, with the lightness of a lad of sixteen, made good his retreat,

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being in great haste to leave the impression of the last good thing he had said fresh on the minds of his hearers. Notwithstanding these little innocent peculiarities, Mr. Dixon was a truly worthy, a kind-hearted, and a skilful man, charitable to the poor, and solicitously attentive to his patients; and, with all, he had not a mercenary thought! Mrs. Montgomery had employed him for many years; and such was her confidence in his abilities, that she would have judged those she regarded, less safe in any other hands.

Frances flew after Mr. Dixon, to entreat his aid for Fairy, her beautiful Italian greyhound, that she had left very ill in the arms of Lord L—. But, alas! the poor little dog was no more: it had expired in convulsions; and the group which presented itself, on entering the breakfast-room, appeared holding a sort of

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coroner's inquest over the body. Lord L., still faithful to his charge, held the motionless favourite on his knee; Mrs. Montgomery sat near, with a countenance which seemed to say, "all is over!" Frances' maid and the butler stood, one with a saucer of milk, the other with a plate of water, both now become useless; while Henry pinched, first a foot, then the tail, then an ear, to ascertain, as he said, whether the thing were quite dead. Frances gently put his hand aside, and looked in the doctor's face. The doctor shook his head. He was asked if he could say, from the symptoms, what had caused the creature's death?

"Poison, madam! poison!" he replied, without hesitation.

Henry reddened. "It does not admit of a doubt, madam!" continued the doctor, "the animal has died by poison." The servants had

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their own opinion, as to who had given the poison, but were silent.—Such are the beginnings of crime.

Poor Edmund had now been some days an inmate of Lodore House, but, as yet, no one had been able to discover who or what he was: while from himself no replies could be obtained, but sobs and terrified looks.

One morning Frances sent for him to the breakfast-room, and, after giving him many good things, began a kind of questioning, which she hoped might draw some information from the child, without alarming him: such as, Where was his home? Where was the place where he used always to be? He replied, "No where." Was there any one that used to love him? "Yes," he said. She now thought she had found a clue to some useful discovery, and asked him, who it was that

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loved him? "You do," he replied. Frances took him on her knee, and put her questions in low whispers; upon which, when she asked him particularly about the large bruise on the side of his leg, he stole his little arms round her neck, and breathed softly in her ear, "She wanted to break it off." "Who, my dear, wanted to break it off?" "My mother." Then, alarmed at the great effort he had made, he became more silent than ever, and looked so much distressed, that at last, for his own relief, he was dismissed in charge of good Mrs. Smyth. While Frances, inspired by the same sentiment which had guided the righteous judgment of Solomon, felt convinced that the woman, whoever she might be, who could treat a child so barbarously, was not its real mother. Mrs. Montgomery was herself disposed to entertain the same opinion; she, however, laughed

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at the romantic deduction attempted to be made by Frances, that Edmund therefore must be the child of parents in an exalted rank in life.

While the ladies were discussing this point, Mr. Lauson, an attorney resident at Keswick, came in to pay his respects: for he was agent to the Cumberland and Westmoreland estates, as well as general man of business to the family. Lauson had passed Mrs. Smyth and Edmund in the hall, and had looked rather hard at the child. As soon as the morning salutations were ended, and he had taken his seat, he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder towards the door, which was behind him, saying, "What child's that?" And, without waiting for a reply, he added, "I'd be sworn but it's the boy that was begging about at the regatta with one leg."

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"With one leg!" interrupted Frances.

"Ay, ay," said Lauson; "but I saw him myself find the other, so there is nothing so surprising in his having the two now."

The ladies requested an explanation, and Mr. Lauson gave the best he could, by recounting as much as he had witnessed of the scene which opens our history.

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CHAPTER VI.

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