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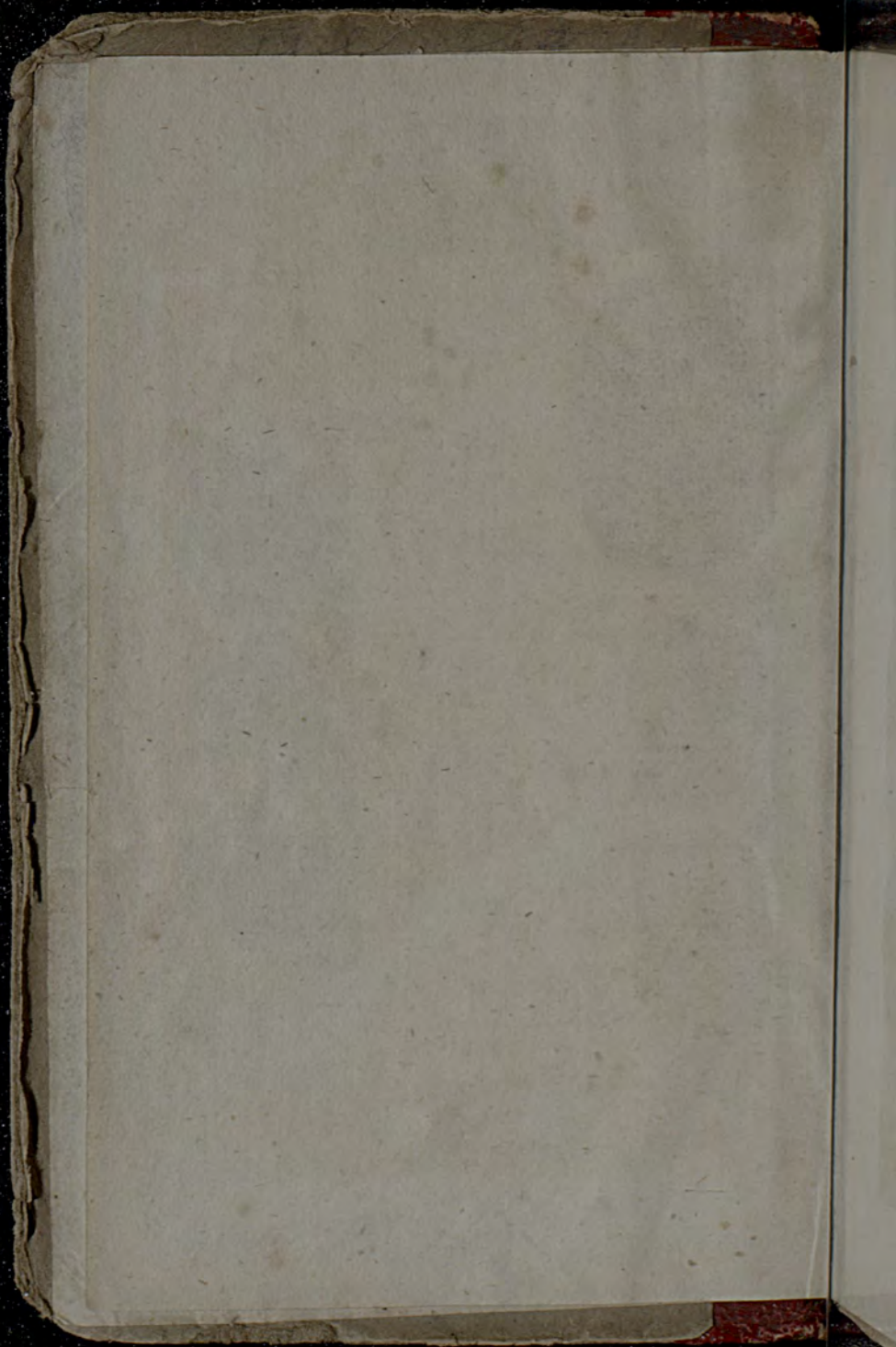


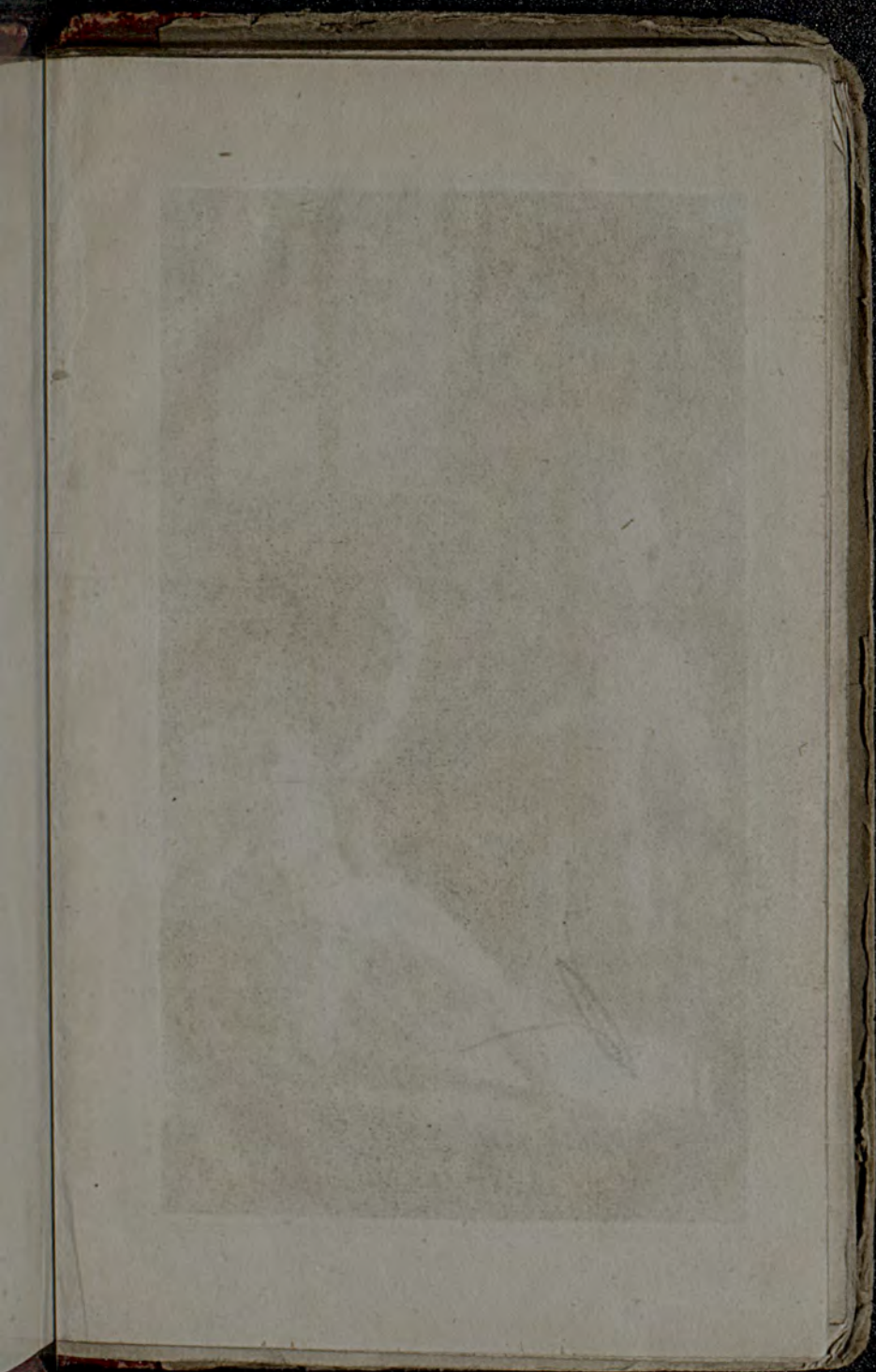
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HENRY;

OR,

Secrets of the Ruins.

A MORAL TALE.

BY MRS. RICE,

Author of Progressive Lessons for Early Youth.

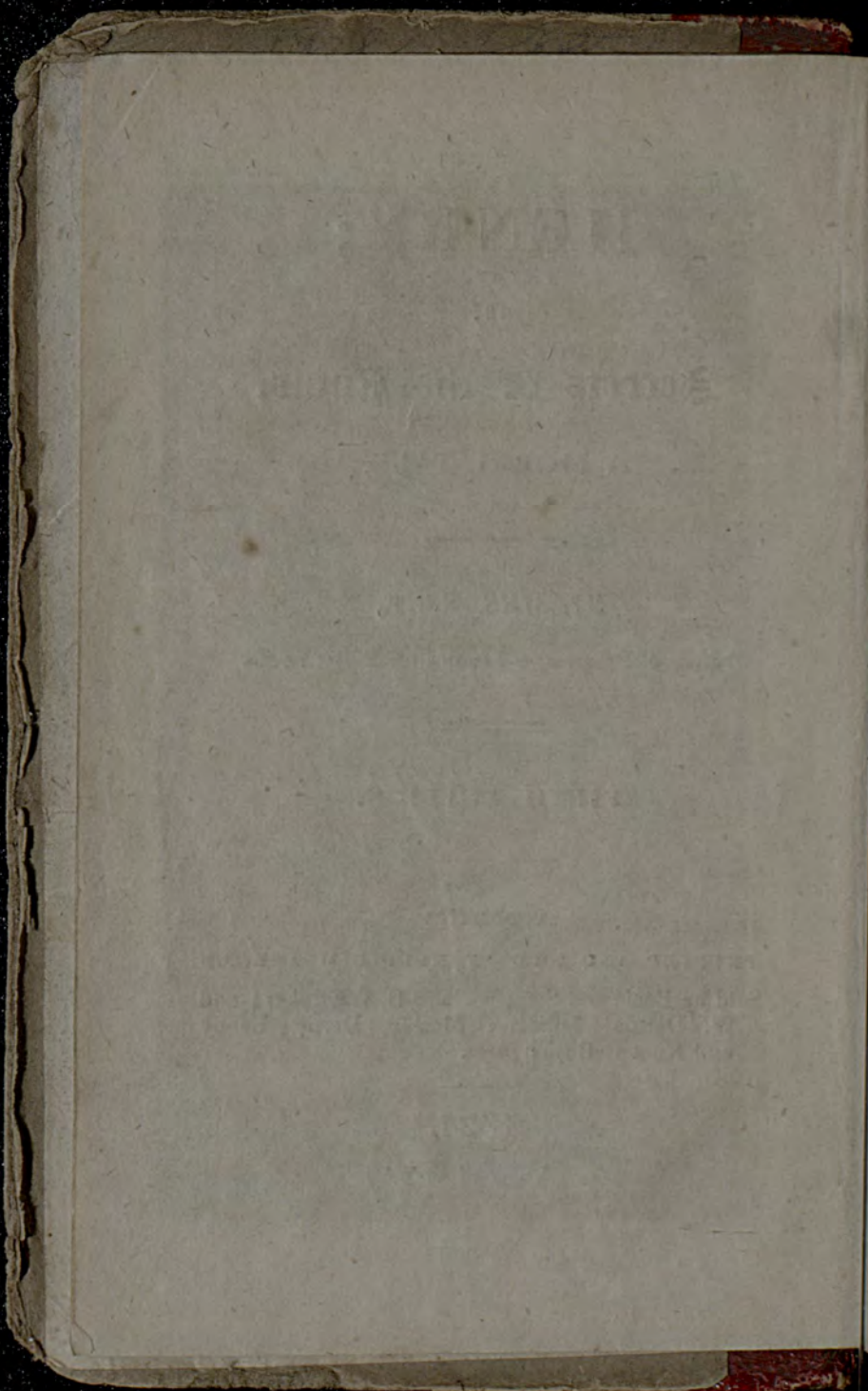
FIFTH EDITION.

Cobventry:

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1824.



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HENRY:

OR,

SECRETS OF THE RUINS.

“NOW,” said HENRY, as he made an end of his homely supper, “I will finish the story I began last night. How thankful I am, that I can read! how many things I have learned, that I could never have known, if it had not been for my little books! O that I had more money to buy books, and

more time to read them ! but my father is poor, and cannot do without my help in the field ; so I must strive to be content with my lot : yet I cannot but wish, that my father was as rich as 'Squire Mortimer ; for then I could have plenty of books."

Mr. Mortimer and his Lady were people of large fortune, who resided in a delightful village, among the most romantic scenery, in Devonshire ; and Henry's father rented a small farm upon his estate. The former had two sons. Edward, the elder, now in the fifteenth year of his age, was of a very unpromising disposition. He was indolent, ob-

stinate, clownish, and sullen; though his parents afforded him the advantage of able tutors, he was little profited by them; his mind was as uncultivated as his manners were coarse and disgusting.

The younger son, William, within a year of the age of his brother, was rather more active in his pursuits. He had made some little progress in learning; but to this he was incited by no virtuous motive: he had heard the tutors call his brother a blockhead and a clown, and say it was a pity he was likely to inherit a good estate, for he would never be a gentleman. An artful servant, who found it advantageous

to flatter him, soon perceived that he could not more effectually do it than by praising him, at the expense of Edward; and often took care to say, in his hearing, that he hoped he should live to see Master William supplant his elder brother. Possessed with this idea, he paid some little attention to his studies, and meanly took every opportunity that offered, to make his brother appear to disadvantage.

Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer would have been deserving of pity, in having children whose early youth wore appearances so unpromising, had not the defects of these children been chiefly owing to their own negligence.

Mrs. Mortimer was too much the fine lady to perform the duties of an attentive mother. Dissipation had injured her health, and when she was not engaged in parties of pleasure, she was either languishing on her bed or on her sofa; where the only company she could endure was her waiting woman and her lap-dog.

Her sons were seldom admitted to her presence. She thought she had done quite enough to appoint them tutors; and it was too great a fatigue to enquire what progress they made by their assistance.

Mr. Mortimer was what is usually termed a friendly good-natured

man. He was strongly attached to the sports of the field, and they made his chief pursuit. He welcomed his neighbour, and his companions of the chase, with a plentiful table and a cheerful song. His ideas on all subjects, except hunting, were very limited; and he spoke of his eldest son, as a blockhead, with less concern than he expressed at his want of courage to ride a high-blooded hunter, and leap a five-barred gate.

From this slight portrait we may infer, that he was not a man very likely to interest himself greatly about the mental attainments of his children; he could leave them an

ample fortune ; and that, in his opinion, should be the chief concern of a parent. The estate on which he now lived, he had purchased for about half it's real value ; the former possessor, having suddenly taken a disgust to his native country, had hastily sold it to the first person that offered to purchase, who chanced to be Mr. Mortimer.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the prospects which surrounded this spacious and elegant mansion ; which had been long known by the appellation of the Manor-house.

It was situated on a rising ground, sheltered by the lofty western hills, and before it was a rich and fertile

valley, which presented to the eye all that imagination can conceive of rural beauty. The extensive pleasure grounds were laid out with taste; and, at the extremity of the southern side, was a picturesque view of the ruins of a castle, whose lofty turrets and massy walls had resisted many a besieger, during remote ages.

The venerable remains, now mouldering into dust, presented to the imagination ideas of men and things for ever passed away: still there remained sufficient of the building, to give a perfect conception of what it had been. Part of the wall was yet standing, as also

some of the interior of the edifice. Several of the chambers were entire, and almost habitable in that part which was called the keep, or house of residence, where the Barons, of former times, had been accustomed to hold their state. A lofty portal still remained entire, which was once the grand entrance. Some remnants of a draw-bridge were also left : but the moat, which surrounded the Castle, was dried up ; and in places filled with the stones which had gradually fallen from the edifice.

At no great distance from the ruins, was a neat but humble dwelling, occupied by farmer Westbury,

who had several children, of whom Henry was the eldest. He had given them all as good an education as was in his power; but his own and their mother's example had taught them some of the most essential duties of man. They were honest from principle, and industrious from habit. They devoutly worshipped the Parent of all good, and humbly strove to please Him by the constant practice of every moral duty.

The parents were contented with their lot, and the whole family were united in the closest bonds of harmony and affection. Henry's father was not a native of Devon-

shire ; he had only rented the farm since Mr. Mortimer purchased the estate, to whom he had now been some years a tenant.

Henry, though only one year older than Edward, the eldest son of Mr. Mortimer, was greatly his superior, in person, manners, and attainments. He was much taller and stouter than most boys of his age ; exercise had assisted nature in the growth and strength of his finely proportioned limbs : his whole appearance was calculated to attract notice and inspire regard. The education which his father had been able to bestow was but limited ; but the ardent mind of Henry would

not permit him to sit down contented with the little learning he had acquired in the village school.

Every six-pence he possessed was laid out in the purchase of books ; and he would often walk three miles, to a neighbouring market-town, after a hard day's work, if he had a trifle to lay out with the bookseller.

It happened that the classical tutor to Mr. Mortimer's sons had frequently been at the bookseller's shop, when Henry came to make a purchase ; and his notice had often been attracted by the eagerness with which the youth enquired after books, and the delight he manifest-

ed when permitted to turn over the little volumes before him.

Mr. Wilton, which was the name of the tutor, was at length induced to converse with Henry ; and finding him evince talents and understanding, far beyond his expectations, he resolved that such a boy should not want the instruction he appeared so capable and so desirous of receiving. He therefore passed many of his leisure hours at farmer Westbury's ; who was too sensible of the advantage of his instruction to Henry, to permit him to lose such an opportunity for improvement ; and he cheerfully redoubled his own labor, that his son might have time for study.

In one twelvemonth the youth had made such a progress both in Latin and English, that he astonished and delighted his instructor; who hesitated not to pronounce, that he would be a great man, and an ornament to his country. But the improvement of Henry was not confined to his books alone, for his manners gradually became as polished as his mind; which, added to his cheerful disposition and sweet temper, made him beloved and respected throughout the village.

One day farmer Westbury purchased a horse, at a neighbouring fair, which he imagined to have been a great bargain; but when it

was brought home, and he attempted to ride it, he found it so vicious and stubborn, that it had nearly endangered his life. It happened that Mr. Mortimer, and some gentlemen, his companions, were passing through the village at the moment the farmer was unhorfed. Mr. Mortimer, being well skilled in the management of horses, no sooner perceived him thrown from his saddle than he instantly mounted; and, with an air of confidence in his own superiority, said to all around him, that the farmer was more in fault than the horse. In a few minutes, however, he was convinced of his mistake: the creature, already

irritated, by a very liberal use of the spur, grew every minute more violent and unmanageable, and, after kicking and plunging some time, without advancing a step, he threw Mr. Mortimer over a bridge into a river, at a considerable height from the road. The current being very rapid, he was carried some distance before he rose, and the sides of the river being much clogged with weeds, amongst which he was entangled, he would probably have lost his life, if young Henry had not plunged in, and caught him just as he was sinking. He soon brought him safely on shore, where calmly stood his own sons, who had been

silent and inactive spectators of an accident which had threatened the life of their father.

Mr. Mortimer was immediately taken home; and as soon as he had changed his clothes, and recovered from his fright, he became desirous to see and thank his preserver.

In the course of an hour or two Henry made his first visit to the Manor-house. The pleasure of having done a good action heightened the expression of his animated countenance; and in a dress of the most perfect neatness, which was exactly fitted to his graceful form, he entered the room where Mr. Mortimer was seated with his two

sons, and the gentleman who had witnessed the accident.

His fine person and graceful deportment seemed to strike them with surprise and admiration.

Mr. Mortimer hastily rose, and shaking him very cordially by the hand, said, "Well, my brave lad, you have preserved my life at the hazard of your own! Your courage and humanity ought to be rewarded; and I will take care that it shall be, to the utmost of my power: you shall gain something beside a wet jacket. But now sit down, and take a glass of wine; you and I have both had water enough."

'I think not of any recompense,

Sir,' replied Henry, bowing; ' I have been taught that no man should lose an opportunity of doing a good action; and that the best and highest reward is self-approbation. Who would not run some hazard to save the life of a fellow-being? and what greater reward can be desired than to know that the exertion was successful? Believe me, Sir, I rejoice to see you safe; and I hope you will not talk to me again of a reward: there was no merit in doing that which gratified myself.'

" You are a noble fellow," replied Mr. Mortimer, highly delighted at the behaviour of Henry; " and I shall take every opportunity of

showing that I think you so. I beg you will come and see me as often as you can; my sons want company; and you, who know how both to think and to conduct yourself so worthily, will be a desirable companion for the sons of any man.

“Come hither, boys,” said he to Edward and William; “take this youth by the hand, and learn from him how to practise courage and generosity.”

The young Mortimers, with a very ill grace, obeyed their father; and Henry, bowing to the company, was going to withdraw, not a little pleased by his invitation to the Manor-house, as he now hoped to

be more frequently with his friend, Mr. Wilson; for whom, next to his parents, he cherished the greatest respect and affection. Another circumstance, which he also thought of with pleasure, was, that he perhaps might now obtain a more easy access to books.

Mr. Mortimer had a well-furnished library, which was made very little use of, and in which he was now seated: but the numerous volumes, ranged in order round the apartment was a sight so pleasing to Henry, that he could not help looking at them with a wishful eye: This being observed by Mr. Mortimer, he asked, if he could read?

Henry, who had much of that pride which is or ought to be possessed by all who are conscious of having some claim to superiority of mind or attainments, colored deeply at the question, and replied, with modest warmth, ‘Yes, Sir; I ought to be able to read, for I am very near sixteen years of age; and though I have helped my father to work hard, I thank God, I have found a little time for learning. I could read in the Bible at six years old, and it is now a great pleasure to me to pass all my leisure time in reading.’

“You speak well, I am sure,” said Mr. Mortimer; “and such a

laudable spirit as your's ought to meet with encouragement. Go and take any book you like, and oblige me by reading a page or two; I shall be glad to find that you do credit to our village school-master."

Henry was a little abashed at such a request, especially as he saw the young gentlemen look at each other and laugh; but being again desired to read, he went without further hesitation to the shelves, and taking down a volume of Pope's Translation of Homer's Iliad, he read for ten minutes, with so much energy and correctness, that Mr. Mortimer and his friends gazed at him with astonishment; the young gentle-

men were also surpris'd, but not pleas'd ; for they were conscious of their own inferiority, and had not generosity enough to hear the praises he so justly received, without envy.

Mr. Mortimer, who had hitherto been very careless in his enquiries respecting his sons' progress in learning, was roused to make some reflections on the subject, by unexpectedly hearing the son of a poor farmer read with so much accuracy. He had contented himself with knowing that he spared no expense to make his children good scholars, but he now became impatient to enquire whether they were so.

Henry was again offering to take his leave, when one of the gentlemen asked him, what progress he had made in any other branch of learning. "Can you write, my lad?" said he.

'Yes, Sir,' replied Henry.

"Do you understand arithmetic?"

'Pretty well, I believe, Sir.'

"And what else have you been taught?" continued the gentleman.

Henry blushed, and looked confused; he was too diffident to be the herald of his own merits, without feeling distressed; and beside, he was fearful of disclosing the obligation he was under to Mr. Wilson; as that gentleman had desired him

to be silent on the subject ; yet, on the question being repeated, he acknowledged he knew something of the Latin tongue.

“ Latin ! ” said the gentleman, with surprise : “ pray, how far are you advanced in Latin ? ”

“ I have read Corderius, Sir ; and I have almost gone through Erasmus.”

The gentlemen looked at each other, and William Mortimer bit his lips with envy ; but the eldest son was too indolent to care who excelled, so long as his pockets were stored with sweetmeats. All the notice he took was to stare at Henry, and fill his own mouth with sugared almonds.

“And pray, who has taught you all these things, my good boy?” said Mr. Mortimer.

Henry expected such a question, and modestly replied,—That he was indebted to a kind friend for what little he knew; but forbore to mention his name, though his heart swelled with gratitude whenever he thought of him.

“You are a very extraordinary boy,” said Mr. Mortimer, after a silence of some minutes: “you and I must certainly be better acquainted: come and dine with me to-morrow—but, now I think of it, I am engaged to-morrow with a party to hunt, and dinner-time will

therefore be uncertain. I expect we shall turn out a fox;—I suppose you are too much of a scholar to like the chase;—what say you? will you hunt with me? have you courage enough to leap a gate?—but why should I doubt your courage in any thing; you have given me proof sufficient!”

‘ I hope I shall never want courage to perform what I consider a duty, Sir; for in a recent instance I have done no more than what I or any one ought to have done; but I do not know how far I might be able to establish my reputation in such a trial of horsemanship as leaping a gate. I have had no op-

portunity of indulging myself with any diversion of the kind ; but I shall be proud to accept the honor you offer me to-morrow ; and I will do my endeavour not to disgrace you.'

Mr. Mortimer was so delighted to think Henry was willing to attend him in his favorite diversion, that he scarcely knew how to make enough of him. " Be sure you are here by five in the morning," said he ; " and if you can but manage a horse as well as you can read, you may challenge any lad of your age in all England !"

Henry at length departed ; leaving all the gentlemen expressing their approbation of him in the

highest terms. But scarcely had he closed the door, ere Mr. Mortimer turned to his sons, and asked them if they could read as well as Harry Westbury.

The countenance of Edward lowered, and he walked sullenly to the window, without speaking; but William, with a disdainful sneer, replied, "That though Westbury read pretty well, for a plough-boy, he should be sorry if he had been no better taught."

"Very well!" said his father; "then I am to understand, that you are conscious of your own superiority; and therefore I shall be much pleased if you will immediately

give me and my friends a specimen of your abilities."

William little expected such a command from his father; and was also very sensible, that notwithstanding his recent boast, he could not read half so well as Henry. He therefore tried to excuse himself by saying he was not accustomed to read before strangers.

"Young Westbury made no such excuse," said Mr. Mortimer; "and as I mean to make a parson of you, you ought to be able to read before any body and every body. How will you be able to preach a sermon before a whole congregation, if you dare not read before your friends?"

Come, come, no more excuses!—take the book that Harry read; if you can but read as well as he does, I will say you are a clever fellow.”

Pride, shame, and envy, caused a severe struggle in the heart of William Mortimer; he found himself compelled to make an effort to read, but anger denied him the power of exercising the poor abilities he possessed; for, after several attempts, he could not articulate more than half a dozen words.

Mr. Mortimer's friends, who had joined so warmly in the praises of Henry, looked as if they wished to have had an opportunity of applauding young Mortimer; but when

they perceived that he every minute added to his own disgrace, and increased the evident vexation of his father, they requested that he might put off the trial of his abilities to a more favorable opportunity.

“The young gentleman,” said they, in a tone that betrayed their ill opinion of him, “is embarrassed; he would doubtless be able to read, if he were alone.”

Mr. Mortimer, who was a very hasty man, after making some severe remarks on William's conduct, was going to lay a claim on the obedience and the faculties of Edward, but in the interval of the contention, be-

tween his father and his brother, he had stolen sily out of the room.

Mr. Mortimer was by this means at least spared the mortification of knowing how unprofitably he had expended his money on the education of his sons; for they were neither of them able to do him, or their tutors the smallest credit.

Early on the following morning, young Westbury joined the hunting party. The 'Squire (as Mr. Mortimer was usually called) welcomed him to the sportsman's breakfast; and told him that one of the best horses in his stable was saddled for him.

'You are very good, Sir,' said

Henry ; ‘ but I have brought the horse my father purchased yesterday ; and, with your leave, I should like to try what he can do.’

“ Why,” said the ‘Squire, staring at him, “ you are not going to ride the unmanageable beast that threw me into river !”

‘ Indeed, Sir, I am,’ replied Henry : ‘ I believe he only wanted to be humored a little, and treated gently. I mounted him soon after I had the pleasure of seeing you safe, and he carried me very well to S——, and back again. I thought I would try what could be done with him ; for I was sadly grieved to think my father should have given twenty

guineas for a beast that was useless.'

Mr. Mortimer was greatly surprised to meet with such gentle manners united to so much courage and resolution as Henry evinced, and could scarcely believe it possible that so high-spirited and violent an animal should have been tamed by the perseverance of a boy. But his surprise was changed to admiration when he saw the youth lightly vault into the saddle, and without the use of either whip or spur, completely manage a horse that had so recently baffled his utmost skill.

Henry kept up with the hounds

during a long chase ; and both his horse and himself were noticed by all present. From that day he obtained general notice and commendation : but it is not to be understood, that he obtained this solely by the good opinion they had of his courage and skill in horsemanship ; for though these first helped to recommend him, it was his excellent disposition, and ardent desire for improvement, that eventually procured him that respect and esteem which ever after distinguished him in his career through life.

Having now free access to Mr. Mortimer's library, he did not fail to profit by it ; which, added to

the kind instruction of Mr. Wilson, greatly aided his progress in learning.

Every day raised him higher in the esteem of Mr. Mortimer, who would have made him his constant companion, in his favorite amusement of hunting, had not Henry found just cause to excuse his attendance in the duty he owed his parents. He was a useful and willing assistant to his father, in the labors of the field; beside which, he spared him the expense of sending his brothers and sisters to school, for he taught them to read and write; he also taught several poor children, in the village, who, but

for him, would perhaps have remained their whole lives in the darkest ignorance.

Whilst he was thus pursuing the surest road to happiness,—a road which all young people might easily find by an early application to learning,—the sons of Mr. Mortimer were treading in a very different path. The eldest grew every day more indolent and stupid: his amusements were frivolous, mean, and selfish; and even of these he was soon weary. The only thing which never seemed to tire him was the pleasure of consulting his appetite; and the only person for whom he appeared to have any re-

spect was the housekeeper. Her store of sweetmeats and jellies were always at his service, so that by degrees his health was impaired, and his body became as feeble as his mind.

William indulged himself in a different manner. His restless envious spirit made him pursue a course equally contemptible, but far more dangerous both to himself and others. His brother had been the principle person against whom his malevolent disposition had bent it's course, and he lost no opportunity to lower him in the estimation of every one. But now accident had thrown in his way

another object ; and how he should most injure Henry Westbury, was the constant subject of his thoughts. His heart sickened at his praises ; and he industriously sought every opportunity to depreciate him, and more particularly in the estimation of his father. He could not endure the idea of seeing him at the Manor-house, where he was now a frequent guest ; and as he knew his father of an unsteady and violent temper, he watched incessantly for a moment when a sudden gust of passion might be raised to disgrace Henry.

Mr. Mortimer had given the latter free permission to take any book he thought proper out of the

library, on condition of returning it in safety to it's place when done with: he was attentive to these injunctions, and had never in any instance disobeyed them.

William Mortimer was, however, mean enough frequently to misplace some of the books and to injure others, and by always laying the blame on Henry, he hoped to bring upon him his father's resentment, or at least to prevent his having the use of the books. But this artifice, though it produced some uneasiness to Henry, did not affect the purpose intended. He then had recourse to fresh contrivances, but finding them all fail, he grew out-

rageous, and secretly resolved to stop at nothing that might tend to destroy the reputation and happiness of young Westbury. He frequently conversed with his brother on this subject, and endeavoured to excite his indolent mind to join him in some plan for that purpose.

Edward Mortimer willingly agreed to any thing that could be proposed, but was too idle to act in any other way than in the propagation of falsehood ; for this cost him no bodily exertion ; and the stories were to be invented by William.

The latter, however, still finding himself at a loss for a more active coadjutor, resolved at length to

summon to his aid the servant whom we have already mentioned.

Ignorant people are easily induced to be base; and the hope of reward will often lead weak minds to commit the most shameful actions. This was the case with Matthew, Mr. Mortimer's groom. He knew that both his young masters were profusely furnished with money; for he had already received many bribes, from William, for services of a very disreputable nature, and he hoped still to reap further advantages; for he had art enough to see through all his designs, both with regard to his brother and young Westbury. Being thus prepared to

promote, or to perpetrate any unworthy action, he was no sooner applied to by William Mortimer than he entered, with great glee, into his designs against Henry.

“Never fear,” said he, Master William; I shall soon be able to get the farmer’s son into such a scrape as he sha’n’t be able to get out of. Let him mind the plough, and take care of his father’s horses; he has no business to come and make disturbances among gentlefolk.”

Unfortunately for poor Henry, an opportunity too speedily offered for Matthew to effect the unjust purpose he was put upon, and he eagerly embraced it. His young

master had already given him a guinea, on the promise of his assistance, and told him to reckon upon four more when his wishes were fully accomplished.

It happened that Henry's mother was taken dangerously ill, and it was necessary to send for immediate help. Farmer Westbury was ploughing some land at a distance from home, where three of his horses were in use, and the rest were gone with a load of hay to market.

Mr. Mortimer had frequently offered Henry the use of any horse in his stables, at any time or at any hour he might find them at home: but pleased as he was with the kind-

ness shown to him, he had never made use of this liberty. He had so little time to spare from the duty he owed to his father, that he devoted no portion of it to any other purpose than that of improvement; he never mounted a horse but from necessity; and though he rode well, and with proper courage, it was solely from the principle he adopted in all his pursuits, which was, to do every thing in the best manner he was able, and always to have in view some useful end.

On the present occasion he lamented that he had no horse of his father's at home, but the urgency of the case soon made him resolve

to avail himself of Mr. Mortimer's kindness, though he knew that he was absent. Notwithstanding the general permission he had received from that gentlemen, it was with much reluctance that he requested Matthew to let him have a horse, for an hour; but his mother's life was in danger, and he had no time to lose.

His respect for the 'Squire had, however, previously led him to mention his necessity to the young gentlemen, and they referred him to the groom, who told him that there was only one horse at liberty out of five or six. Some had taken phyfic, and others were disabled on differ-

ent accounts : " But," said the artful Matthew, " here is my master's new blood mare ; I am sure you can have her, and welcome."

Henry knew that she had been recently purchased at an immense price, and he did not like to take her out of the stable, unless Mr. Mortimer had been at home, he was therefore hastening away to borrow a horse of some other person, but Matthew stopped him by saying, " Do, Mr. Henry, take the new Mare ; I am sure you are welcome to her. My master has often and often told me never to refuse you any horse in the stables ; so, if you don't take her, my life on't, he'll be angry with me."

Anxiety for his mother induced him to yield to the persuasions of the groom; he therefore permitted the mare to be saddled, and rode away for a doctor. Being fortunate enough to meet with him at home, he entreated him to go speedily forward; himself returning slowly, for fear of hurting the horse, which he safely replaced in the stable, desiring Matthew to give his best thanks to the 'Squire, as soon as he came home.

The next morning he received a hasty message, summoning him to the Manor-house; where he no sooner arrived than Mr. Mortimer, in the most violent language,

accused him with having lamed his valuable hunter, so that she was never more fit for the saddle.

Amazed at the accusation, and conscious that he deserved it not, he entreated to be heard in his own defence, but he was not suffered to open his mouth ; nay, so ungovernable was the wrath of Mr. Mortimer that he struck him several times with his horsewhip, and forbade him ever again to come within his doors.

With a heart full of grief, Henry obeyed him, saying, as he withdrew, " I am innocent of this cruel charge, and may heaven pardon my accuser."

Sad and slowly he returned home, for he knew that this event would greatly distress his honest parents; but he endeavoured to seek consolation in reflecting on his own innocence.

He had not gone far before he met his kind friend, Mr. Wilson, who accosted him with his wonted cheerfulness; but Henry was unable to speak for tears.

“What is the matter with you, my good boy?” said the former: “what makes you so sad? your mother is better;—I have just seen her;—you need not be unhappy on her account.”

‘Alas, Sir!’ replied Henry, sob-

bing, 'It is not for her that I grieve at present; I trust in God she will do well! it is because I have had injustice done me, and I am not permitted to defend myself.'

He then related all that had just past at the Manor-house; and solemnly protested, that he was innocent in regard to laming the horse, or doing it the least injury. 'Some enemy,' said he, 'has, I fear, contrived this, to deprive me of Mr. Mortimer's friendship; but I hope I shall not lose your's.'

"Fear not that!" said Mr. Wilson; "I doubt not your innocence; but there is guilt somewhere; and it shall be my business to discover it."

In the mean time be cheerful ; and assure yourself that the truth will unquestionably appear."

Soothed by the kindness of his friend, Henry returned home ; and continued with unremitting duty to assist his parents ; yet he could not but regret the advantage and delight he was deprived of in no longer having the use of Mr. Mortimer's library.

William Mortimer had now gratified his envious and revengeful disposition, and secretly exulted in the despicable contrivance that had brought disgrace and mortification on one whose amiable disposition and superior attainments cast a shade

over his own character, which he had not virtue enough to endeavour to remove by any other than the most dishonorable means.

Soon after this event, Mr. Mortimer's eldest son Edward was taken suddenly ill and died. It was supposed that his death was occasioned by an indulgence of appetite, that brought on indigestion. His parents were at first much affected; but a little time reconciled them to the loss of a child who had shown no attachment to them, nor any wish to conciliate their affections.

William Mortimer was now the only claimant to his father's wealth; and this circumstance so greatly in-

creased his vanity and arrogance, that he became an object of universal reprobation ; even his father was frequently sensible of his disgusting conduct, and was often heard to say, " Oh, that my son had half the good qualities of young Westbury !" For, notwithstanding the violence he had shown on the laming his horse, he secretly acknowledged the merits of Henry : he often recollected the intrepidity that had saved his life ; and would have rejoiced in a son that had at all resembled him.

All at once a report was circulated, in the village, that the ruins of the Castle, we have before men-

tioned, were haunted. Superstition and ignorance gave credit to the tale; and after dark, in the evening, no one would go near the spot on any account.

Some pretended to have seen lights, through the loop-holes of the yet-standing eastern tower. Others had heard deep groans issue from the same quarter; and some declared, they had seen a human form walk round the battlements, and then vanish in an instant.

The things were, one day after dinner, spoken of at the Manor-house. William Mortimer talked very great, and affected to treat the report with contempt. He ridiculed

the ignorance of the country bumpkins, (as he termed them,) and wished he had an opportunity to frighten them in earnest.

“ Well, Sir,” said an old clergyman, in company, “ you cannot, in my opinion, have a better opportunity both to frighten and instruct them. Do but wrap yourself up in your great coat, and walk round the battlements, at twelve o’clock to-night, and you will be sure to effect all you wish on that head: one-half the people in the village are on the watch, every night, till after that time; and when you have sufficiently raised their fearful wonder, then come amongst them

in your own person, and convince them of their folly."

'A good thought,' said Mr. Mortimer; 'come, William, here is a proper opportunity to show your courage! and we will mix with the crowd, to see you try the experiment.'

Young Mortimer little thought his father would second the proposal, and put his courage so unexpectedly to the test. He had been full of idle terrors from his earliest childhood: robbers and ghosts had incessantly haunted his imagination, and even now he would start at his own shadow by moonlight. These ridiculous fears had also recently

gained strength by a consciousness of the scandalous part he had acted towards Henry. As often as he thought of the guilty plot, which had been concerted and put in practice between him and his servant, in regard to laming his father's horse, and laying the blame on an innocent person, he fancied Lucifer at his elbow, and would not sleep in a room by himself on any account. Of these very ruins he had a particular dread, and nothing could ever induce him to enter them even by daylight; we may therefore easily guess his reluctance to explore them at midnight.

Great as were his fears, and

averse as he found himself to play the hero in any thing but words, he nevertheless endeavoured to appear willing to make the proposed trial; for his pride revolted at the thought of being publicly branded with cowardice, though it never prevented him from being privately base. He therefore signified his approbation of the proposal, secretly resolving to make his old friend, the groom, supply his place on the battlements, and stand somewhere snugly concealed, till it was time for him to appear, with all the boast of consequence and courage.

It was accordingly decided upon that he should endeavour to put an

end to the fears of the villagers that very evening.

This matter being settled, he took the first opportunity to withdraw, and seek his friend Matthew; to whom he imparted the engagement he had made, and offered him two guineas, to supply his place.

Matthew hung down his head, and looked a little disconcerted; for his conscience was filled with the same upbraidings as that of his young master. He was often haunted by the phantoms of a guilty mind; and had listened to the tale of these haunted ruins with more than usual dismay.

After pausing and hesitating some

time, on the offered two guineas, he stammered out:—"Why, to be sure, Master William, I would do any thing to serve you in reason, and that you know; and, for fartin, I ha' ne'er fluck at nothing, to oblige you; and, to be sure, I should be as glad to earn two guineas as another man; but then what would two guineas be to me, supposing it should happen that this ghost or devil, or whatever it may be, might have a mind to make me smart for the tricks we have served Westbury. To be sure, I can't say I ha' any great mind to tempt Satan; it would be a dismal thing, you know, Master William, suppose he was to fly away

with me. While I am alive, and in a whole skin, I can repent whenever I like; but if I'm snatch'd away all in a moment, you know, there'll be no time for repentance; and, beside all that, of what use will my money be? So, put it all together, I think I should as lieve not do any thing by way of presumption, tho' I'm sure you know I would do any thing to serve you."

'Very well, Matt!' replied William Mortimer, agitated at his unexpected refusal; 'so you don't choosse to do this business for me! but I tell you plainly, if you will not do it, it shall be worse for you—'

my father shall know who lamed the horse.'

"And if he does know, Master William, what need I to care; I can show him the money you gave me, for doing it," said Matthew; "I only did it to oblige you; and so I shall tell Master."

'It is no matter what you tell him,' rejoined young Mortimer; 'you do not suppose he will believe a rascally servant sooner than me: I shall take care to make my story good, so you may tell him what you please.'

"Don't call names, Master William; if I be a rascal, you helped to make me one: and now, I see,

you'd sell me to the devil, for two guineas!—but it wont do.”

In this manner did William Mortimer and his servant expose their baseness to each other. Such is the inevitable consequence of all guilty combinations against innocence and virtue; the conspirators either betray themselves by private contentions, or, if not, some trivial accident or event at length discloses the most deep-laid plots of villainy.

Young Mortimer and his servant parted in great wrath with each other; but as night approached, the agitation of the former increased, and he resolved to make another offer to Matthew; and this was to

wait for him, with a dark lanthorn, just within the portal, only to stand so that he might not be seen. By this means he thought at least he should have something like a protection, during the dreaded experiment.

After many objections, and great hesitation, Matthew agreed to this, on condition of receiving the before-offered two guineas.

At length the awful hour of midnight tolled from the village steeple.

Mr. Mortimer easily perceived the alarm which this visit created in his son, and, in concert with one of his intimate friends, he resolved to

follow him pretty closely. First, because he thought his timidity might create fresh alarms to the neighbourhood, rather than dissipate those which already existed; and next, lest any thoughtless persons should have concealed themselves in or near the ruins, for the purpose of exciting terror.

Though his paternal feelings induced him to take this precaution, he was very much provoked that William should show so much cowardice, and especially after he had been so forward to ridicule the timidity and ignorance of his poor neighbours.

The night chanced to be unusually

dark ; notwithstanding which, a number of the inhabitants had already assembled, to watch the motions of the ghost. Mr. Mortimer and his friends, taking advantage of the darkness, slid into the ruins, and took their post. The old Clergyman, who had first made the proposal, now mixed with the little group of terror-struck spectators, saying to them,—“ Well, my honest neighbours, where is this ghost ? have you seen it to-night ? ”

‘ No, an’ please your reverence,’ said one, answering for the rest ; ‘ we have seen nothing yet, but a light through the loop-holes of the

old tower; but I dare say it will walk very soon now.'

"Ay, I think it will!" replied the old gentleman, laughing.

William was almost fainting with apprehension, and would certainly have run off, without making the attempt, had not the gentlemen who accompanied him led him by an obscure entrance to the interior of the ruins; and then bidding him take courage, they went round to the front, and joined the rest of the spectators.

In a low trembling voice, he called,—“Matt—Matt! Oh, for God's sake, speak, or I shall die!”

Matt now appeared with his dark

lanthorn; and, taking fast hold of each other, they proceeded with beating hearts and quaking limbs: but scarcely had they began to move forward ere they perceived a human form, coming down the very stairs which they were preparing to ascend. Terror prevented them from making use of their dark lanthorn, to discover who it was; but immediately falling on their knees, they roared out loudly for mercy.

Matthew said all the prayer he could recollect; and bitterly reproached his young master, for tempting him to do evil.

At this instant, Mr. Mortimer and his friend came from their con-

cealment, and the former called out,—“Matt, what are you afraid of? don't you see it is only Harry Westbury coming down stairs.”

“O Lord, forgive me!” said Matt, who knew not the voice of his master; “never more will I wrong the innocent for the sake of gold!”

“O Lord, forgive us both!” said William Mortimer, whose breath was so short he could hardly utter a word.

Henry Westbury stood gazing at the frightened pair, and seemed all amazement; and Mr. Mortimer was no less surprised, at seeing him, in that place, at so late an hour: he would have questioned him on

this subject, had not his attention been fixed by the wild incoherent prayers and confessions he had just heard; and he really began to be alarmed at the excessive agitation of his son, who was some time before he could be convinced that none but friends were about him. At length he and his companion, Matt, recovered the use of their legs and their senses; and Henry assured Mr. Mortimer that his appearance in that place was without the least design to alarm any one, and particularly any part of his family.

“I readily believe you,” replied Mr. Mortimer; “and this night has

convinced me that you are innocent of the charge I was induced to bring against you; but this is no time to talk; come to me to-morrow."

While this was passing, Mr. Mortimer's friend had ascended the stairs, and walked round the battlements, that he might put an end to the story of the ghost: but this had not immediately the good effect intended; for though he afterwards came to the good people, and took much pains to convince them that it was himself whom they had just beheld, they would not believe it, but went to their homes fully persuaded that the ruins were indeed haunted.

It scarcely need be mentioned, that William Mortimer and his servant made all the haste they were able to quit the ruins: but ere the return of morning, Matthew was seized with a fever that affected his brain, and he talked incessantly of all that had passed between him and his young master, in regard to Henry.

Mr. Mortimer was greatly shocked, to think his son was so deeply involved in the guilt of his servant, and reproached him bitterly, for the disgrace he had brought both on himself and his family: but William, who was now recovered from his fright, thought of nothing

but exculpating himself, and denied having been concerned in any contrivances against Henry. Matthew, however, who had intervals of reason, was very earnest in making confessions of his guilt; for he felt himself so ill that he thought it high time to set about repentance. He begged to see his master; before whom, and in the presence of William, he unfolded the plan of destroying the horse, and produced the bribes he received for that purpose. Among other things was a handsome watch, which had belonged to Mr. Mortimer's deceased son, but which had actually been stolen by William, and given for a bribe, on

some occasion, when he was short of money. These were proofs of guilt which young Mortimer could not deny; his last resource therefore was to confess his fault, and intreat his father to pardon him.

“There is one condition,” said Mr. Mortimer, “on which only I may be induced to comply with your request, and that is, that you acknowledge to Henry the injury you have done him; and if he will forgive you, I will endeavour to follow his example.”

Nothing could have been required of William which he would not have more willingly have complied with. What, said he to himself,

shall I be forced to intreat the pardon of a low-born fellow like him ! a poor mean boy that follows the plough !—No—I cannot, I will not do it.

While he sat fullenly debating what answer he should give his father, the servant announced the Rev. Dr. Wilkins.

“ I am afraid I break in upon you a little unseasonably,” said the Doctor, casting a slight glance at William ; “ but I am come, my good neighbour, on business that will admit of no delay.”

Mr. Mortimer now ordered his son to quit the room ; who rejoiced at any thing which might spare him

the mortification of immediately yielding to his father's proposal; and he hoped this interruption would make him forget to urge it any more.

The business which Dr. Wilkins had with Mr. Mortimer, was to request he would immediately accompany him to the ruins, where a person, in the agonies of death, impatiently expected to see him. He could not help expressing his surprise, at so singular a summons, though he willingly yielded to it, and would fain have received some further information, during their short walk thither, but the old gentleman was unable to give it him.

He could only say, that Henry Westbury had fetched him, early that morning, to pray by a gentleman, who was very ill; and that he found him in one of the long-deserted chambers of the old castle, destitute of almost all the comforts of life, and attended by Henry Westbury and his father; and that after having prayed with him a considerable time, he declared himself anxious to divulge a secret which pressed heavily on his conscience, but that Mr. Mortimer's presence was absolutely necessary on the occasion.

“On hearing this I offered to communicate his wishes to you,”

said the Doctor; "for he seemed very unwilling that either young Westbury or his father should leave him, even for an instant."

As the distance was very short between the Manor-house and the ruins, there was no time for further conversation, before they entered the gloomy chambers; where lay an emaciated form, extended on a mattress.

As soon as the dying man beheld them, he ejaculated, in a faint but hollow tone,—“Merciful Heaven, “give me strength and resolution to “do this one act of justice, and then “welcome death!”

Mr. Mortimer looked earnestly

at him : he had a confused recollection of his features ; he thought he saw Sir Charles M——, of whom he purchased the estate on which he now resided. He was not deceived ; it was indeed Sir Charles M—— ; who, after a short pause, spoke as follows :—

“ Behold a wretched man, who
 “ has deprived the natural claimant
 “ of his right ! who has robbed the
 “ orphan, and shut his heart against
 “ the secret pleadings of justice !
 “ But this is the awful hour of re-
 “ tribution !

“ To you, Mr. Mortimer, I particularly address myself : look
 “ upon me, and see if you can re-

" trace the features of Sir Charles
 " M——. This youth," pointing
 " to young Westbury, " is my
 " nephew, and the lawful heir to
 " the estate I sold you. He was
 " left an orphan to my care, and
 " in the helplessness of his infancy
 " I took him to a distant part of En-
 " gland from that which gave him
 " birth, and I left him, one dark
 " night, at the entrance of a small
 " village, to the mercy of the in-
 " habitants.

" Unnatural and base as I was,
 " yet I could not leave him, till I
 " was convinced his innocent cries
 " had moved some compassionate
 " heart. I watched him at a dif-

" tance, and in less than half an
 " hour, I perceived that honest
 " man (meaning farmer Westbury)
 " carry him to his cottage. After
 " this I returned home, and con-
 " trived to make every one believe
 " that the child was dead; and thus
 " I possessed myself of my brother's
 " property.

" But conscience, the secret scourge
 " of guilt, was eternally racking
 " my bosom. From this time, I
 " could never bear to be alone: so-
 " litude distracted me: I plunged
 " therefore into scenes of riot, that
 " I might avoid reflection; yet in
 " the midst of dissipation I was
 " wretched. The only source from

“ which I ever drew a moment’s
“ consolation, was from that of secretly visiting the village, where
“ I had left my orphan nephew.
“ This I did as often as I could, and
“ beheld him gradually rise out of
“ his infancy. I saw him healthy,
“ active, and vigorous; and heard
“ him spoken of as the acknowledged son of the farmer; who
“ had no other child, when he
“ first took my nephew under his
“ protection.

“ Four years had now elapsed
“ since this transaction, when suddenly, to my great surprise, I
“ found farmer Westbury and his
“ family were come to reside in my

" neighbourhood. The unexpected
 " fight of my nephew, who now
 " daily appeared before me, roused
 " the slumbering sensations of guilt;
 " I could not bear to behold him;
 " it awakened a thousand fears, and
 " I dreaded going out of my house,
 " lest I should meet him.

" After suffering much more than
 " I can describe, I resolved to sell
 " the estate, and leave England for
 " ever. You became the purchaser.
 " I hoped that, by flying to a
 " foreign country, I should leave
 " inquietude behind me: but I was
 " deceived. In vain I wandered
 " from place to place, to seek repose;
 " conscience pursued me wherever

" I fled, and the voice of reproach
 " eternally sounded in my ears.
 " At length I sunk into a state of
 " melancholy, which might be justly
 " called insanity.

" I am not able to relate all that
 " happened to me in the last two
 " years. I have a faint recollection
 " of the eagerness with which I
 " sought to return to England ; and
 " I imagined I should be quite well
 " and happy in my native land.
 " But I can give no account of my
 " arrival here, or how I came to
 " take shelter in these ruins ; all I
 " know is, that I suddenly waked,
 " as if from a dream, and found
 " myself bleeding profusely. Far-

“mer Westbury and my nephew
 “heard my groans, and came to
 “my assistance. The features of the
 “latter were too deeply impressed
 “on my memory ever to be for-
 “gotten : and I have employed the
 “past night in explaining to him
 “the relationship I bear him, and
 “the injury I have done him.

“I have received from him and
 “his reputed father all the humane
 “assistance I required, and much
 “more than I deserved. From the
 “little converse I have been able to
 “hold, I have reason to think that
 “the mind of my nephew is as no-
 “ble as his birth ; and I rely on his
 “promise of repairing the injustice
 “I have done you.”

Here, being quite exhausted, he ceased to speak; but, raising his hands to heaven, seemed to pray in speechless anguish.

Henry shed tears of compassion over his dying uncle; and, turning to Mr. Mortimer, assured him that he would never rest till he had re-returned the money he had given for the estate.

In a few hours Sir Charles M— breathed his last. His death was a solemn and affecting proof, that the secret sting of guilt inflicts a wound which never can be healed.

Mr. Mortimer was much irritated at the fraudulent conduct of Sir Charles M——, and resolved to in-

vestigate thoroughly the claim of young Westbury, now Sir Henry M—, but he was speedily convinced that not a doubt existed of his being the lawful heir to the Manor-house.

Every individual, who had the smallest knowledge of this deserving youth, rejoiced in an event which placed him in that sphere to which his virtues alone might have entitled him. The sudden elevation he now experienced made no change in the sweetness and gentleness of his manners; and he sought the earliest moment, after the interment of his unfortunate uncle, to dispel the fears of his poor neighbours; by explaining all the

circumstances, as far as he was able, which had excited their fears of an apparition in the ruins.

He told them that on that very evening, which, unknown to him, had been fixed on by Mr. Mortimer, for his son to appear on the battlements, he and his supposed father, with one or two of their neighbours, were returning home rather late, and their nearest way was by a path which wound close under the old Castle walls. As they passed along, they were alarmed by the faint groans of some person who seemed to be very near them.—Humanity led them to seek the person in distress. They were not

long ere they discovered the unfortunate man we have already described; he was extended on the earth, and bleeding profusely from the mouth and nose. He was at first insensible, but by their care he was soon able to speak: they wished to convey him to their own house; but he intreated not to be removed. He talked, as they thought, wildly; asked where he was, and how he came there? When they had replied to his questions, he bade them convey him to any one of the chambers in the deserted castle, as he was determined never more to enter the cheerful dwelling of man.—Surprised and

distressed at the obstinacy with which he refused to be taken to a more comfortable lodging, they obeyed him in silence, and he was carried to the chamber where he died. He then desired that no one would stay with him but Henry and farmer Westbury; and from them he extorted a promise, that they should not reveal his situation or call any further assistance till the morning; and in the mean time he had something to unfold of importance to Henry. Farmer Westbury very reluctantly complied with this request; for he feared he might not live to make the disclosure he wished; and the mystery of Henry's birth, was

what he had ever anxiously hoped to have revealed.

“All that follows,” said Henry, “is now known. The appearance of a human form on the battlements, you may easily account for. The lights which have been talked of could only be imaginary; for certainly no other light, save the moonbeams, has cheered the gloom of night in this old building for many a year.”

When the villagers heard these circumstances many of them seemed disposed to banish their fears and listen to reason; but the greater part still insisted upon it, that no mortal would venture to walk round

the old battlements, at twelve o'clock at night.

Dr. Wilkins, hearing that these people could not be convinced of their folly, thought it his duty now to interfere.

"My honest friends," said he, "let me ask you, Why you, or I, or any person should not walk round these battlements, at any hour, if we had occasion to do so, as well as round his own house? I cannot see any reason to be afraid of a decayed mansion any more than of an old man or woman! both must yield to the hand of time; and when we see a worn-out human being, ought we to fly, as from an object of ter-

ror? Dark nights and old castles may make us afraid of the living, for villainy sometimes lurks in obscure corners, but darkness and light make no difference to the departed. Confide in God, and do not distrust his wisdom! let the catastrophe you have just witnessed be a lesson to you all. Avoid guilt; do justice to all men; keep a clear conscience; and then you will have no dread of departed spirits."

This remonstrance had a good effect; for no more talk was heard of the haunted ruins.

Sir Henry M——, now took possession of his domain; and all gloomy thoughts were banished by

the joy this event occasioned. He lost no time in making Mr. Mortimer ample restitution, for the erroneous conduct of his uncle; nor was he less anxious to place his supposed parents in such a situation as their tenderness to him and their own worth demanded. In all his arrangements he was assisted by Mr. Wilson, the friend and instructor of his youth; for whom he made a suitable provision, and from whom he was never after separated.

When William Mortimer found that Henry was no longer a plough-boy, he would willingly have made concessions to him, but the latter generously declined any explana-

tion which must have been humiliating to the offender

Though Mr. Mortimer was ready to acknowledge the amiable qualities of the young heir, yet, from a certain littleness of thinking, he resolved to leave the neighbourhood, as soon as the latter was established in his possessions. From one motive he was indeed excusable; and this was a consideration of the disadvantageous light in which his son appeared, when compared with the excellent character of young Sir Henry; for by this time every recent transaction had been made public by the confessions of Matthew.

Sir Henry, who, in his humble

state, had been able to inspire all who knew him with esteem and respect, was now become the object of universal regard and admiration; but nothing could induce him to relinquish his early thirst for learning; and though he often participated with others in the comforts of a plentiful fortune, he never was so truly happy as when striving to gain knowledge in peaceful retirement.

The whole family of the Mortimers soon after quitted the village. Matthew, the groom, died in less than a week after his midnight visit to the ruins; but his last moments

were soothed by the consoling voice of Sir Henry M——.

William Mortimer entered into the army; he declared that reading and study were not his taste, he was not therefore fit for a clergyman; and as he had not courage to leap a gate, his father thought him unfit for a country squire. It is also unlikely that he would ever have consented to be a soldier, had he considered the probability of being forced to use his sword in defence of his country: but in this situation he looked not beyond the pleasure of an idle life, and dissipated companions. But here he

was doomed to meet disappointment, and to bring fresh disgrace on his family. He had not received his captain's commission more than two years, ere he was broke for various offences, that cannot here be enumerated. His envious disposition and revengeful temper increased with his years, so much that this was one cause of his disgrace; indeed he was at once hated, despised, and dreaded by all with whom he had any connexion.

From this period he gradually sunk lower and lower, till he became lost to himself and to society. His mother did not live to witness the

progreſs of his vices; and his father after uſing many efforts to reclaim him, at length renounced him for ever.

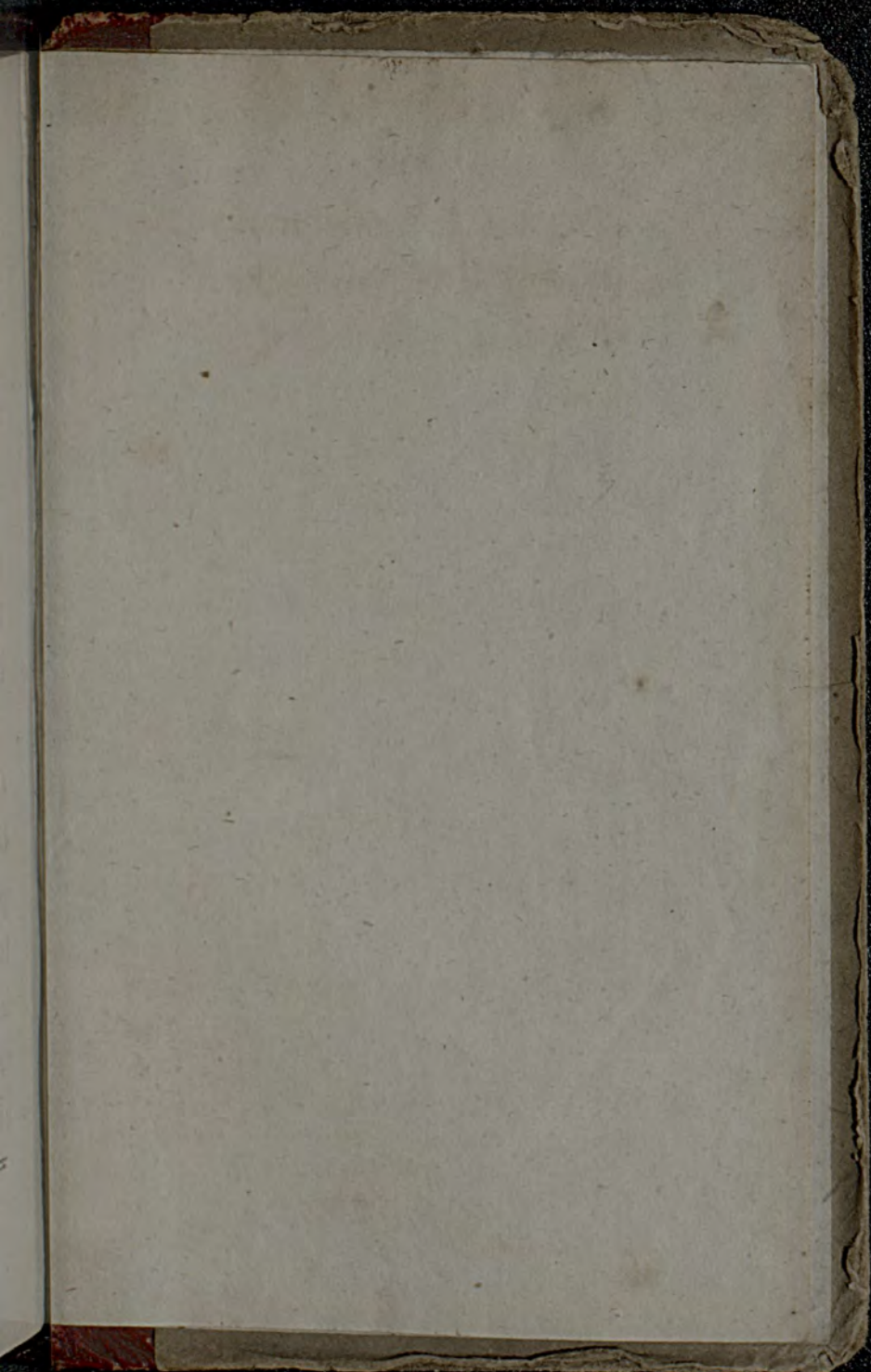
What a contraſt was here to the character and purſuits of Sir Henry M——. Bred up under all the diſadvantages of comparative poverty, he was taught leſſons of induſtry, at an early age, and with theſe he imbibed many moral virtues from his ſuppoſed parents. By the fortunate circumſtance of meeting with Mr. Wilſon, and receiving from him the advantages of inſtruction, he learned how to uſe his talents for the happineſs of himſelf

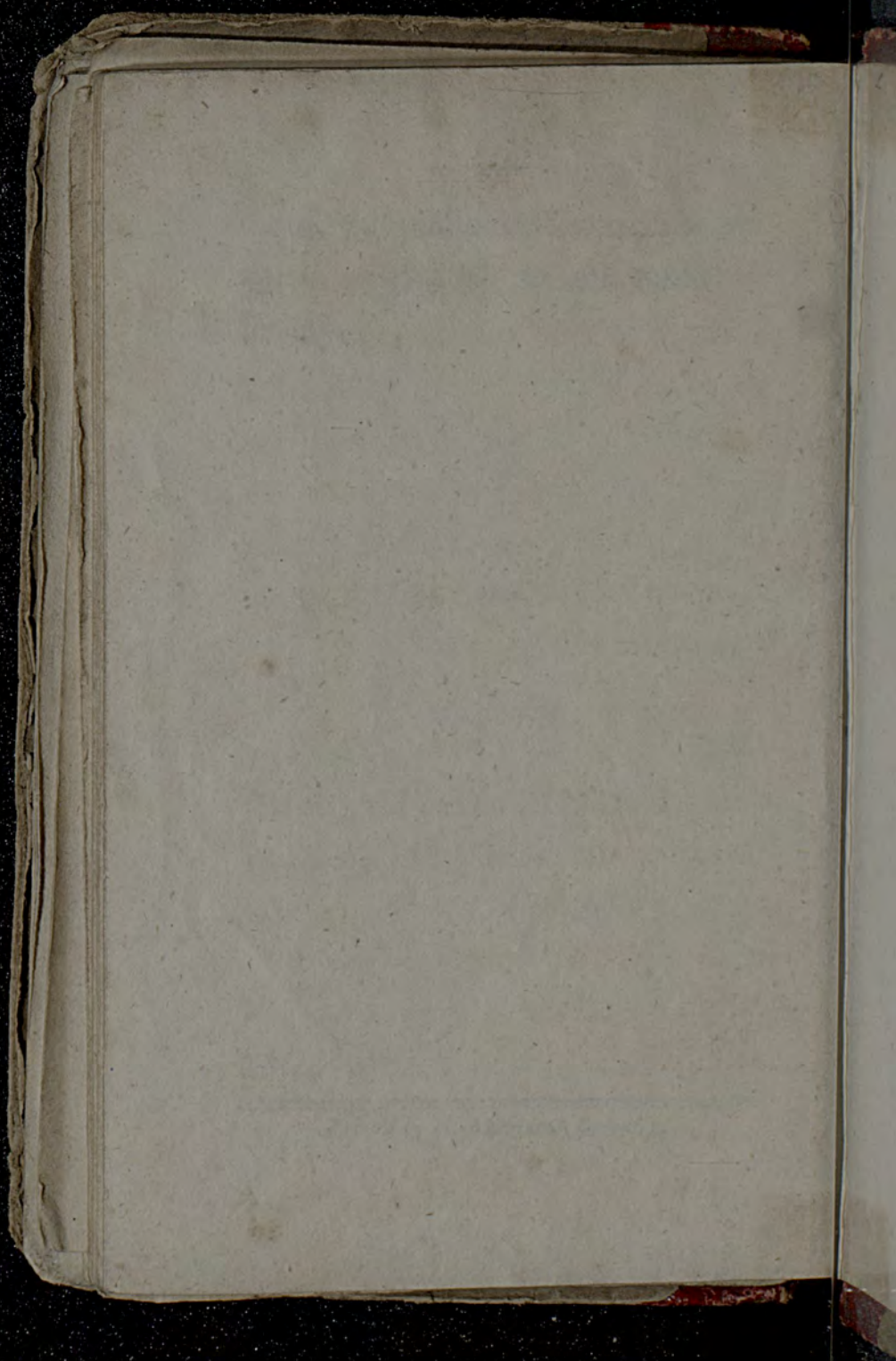
and others. He was at all times mild and gentle, yet possessing true courage, which he was ever ready to exert, either to defend himself or to aid a fellow-being. He was dutiful to the protectors of his infancy, affectionate to his supposed brothers and sisters, and generous to his poor neighbours.

Now that he is blessed with affluence equal to all the wishes of a benevolent heart, one of his greatest pleasures is that of being useful to his less fortunate fellow-beings. He is, in fact, a striking example that early impressions of virtues are generally lasting; and that habits of

industry in childhood cannot be too much cultivated in all ranks of society.

THE END.





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