

Literature, &c.

From the London Metropolitan.
ACTING UPON SUSPICION.A STORY.
By Mrs. Abby.

Two months ago, it appeared, Mrs Stanfield's own maid began to receive letters with the London post mark, directed in a free bold, manly hand, she was taxed by the servants with having a lover, and like most ladies in high or low life, denied the accusation. A few days ago she happened to be from home when a letter arrived for her: it was only secured by one of the modern wafers, which are so easily removed that honour alone renders them any security at all. The honor of Martha Wilson was not proof against the temptation; under the pretence of taking care of it for its owner, she conveyed it to her room, and carefully removed the wafer—it was only a blank cover; within was a letter directed to Mrs Stanfield, but the writer, more careful of that than the enclosing sheet, had sealed it with a crest, and Martha, afraid to examine it, folded it up again, replaced the wafer, gave it to the lady's maid when she returned, and proceeded to Miss Sowerby to enlighten her with the news.

Miss Sowerby immediately, of course, placed the worst possible construction on the mystery; in fact, the circumstance did appear rather suspicious, for Mrs Stanfield had frequently mentioned that she had no relations living except a family of cousins, who were settled in London in independent circumstances, and with whom she was in habits of regular and recognized correspondence: the letters could not be from any petitioner for her bounty, for the generosity of her husband rendered it quite necessary that such communications should be made in private. 'They must come from a lover,' said Miss Sowerby, and her heart beat with rapture at the thought. She gave Martha five shillings, a donation of unexpelled prodigality on her part, and told her at all risks to open the next letter that came, read the contents, and secure it again with a plain seal; but, alas! the next letter was taken in by their lady's maid in person, who stood in the hall evidently on the watch for it, and Miss Sowerby could only console herself by assuring all her friends at Westford, in the greatest confidence, that she had ascertained that Mrs Stanfield was in habits of correspondence with a lover, and that she should immediately disclose her conduct to her poor injured husband, did she not deem it prudent to wait till matters came to a more decided crisis; consequently the whole female population of Westford looked on Mrs Stanfield with horror, as being something of the mixed personation of Calista in the Fair Penitent, and Alicia in Arden of Feversham, and longed as earnestly as a child for the beginning of a pantomime, that the day might arrive which should bring discovery, disgrace, and ruin, on a woman who had never injured them except by her superiority to themselves in mental and personal endowments.

On the following day Martha Wilson called on Miss Sowerby, not to acquaint her of the arrival of another letter, but to tell her of an extraordinary plan of Mrs Stanfield's, which a more candid judge than any of the Westford coterie might call rather suspicious.

I have mentioned that Mrs Stanfield had a family of cousins in London; their name was Belton, and they resided in one of the unfashionable streets of Bloomsbury: she had made known to her husband and her household her determination to go and pass a month with these relations, only taking her own maid with her. Mr Stanfield felt that losing his wife for so long a time would be like losing a part of himself; he offered her a house for the season in London, and give her permission to invite her whole family of cousins to Elbury Hall for an indefinite time, but Mrs Stanfield, usually so mild, patient, and self-denying was on the present occasion fixed in her purpose; and as she eagerly thanked him for his painfully extorted consent, he began to think that his wife was a little less angelic than he had supposed her to be; the discovery of her human weakness, however did not at all reconcile him to the loss of Society, and the sound of the carriage coming to the door on the morning of her departure seemed to him like the knell of all his social happiness for the next month.—Neither had Mrs Stanfield at all the air of a lady who, having battled successfully to get her own way, is on the point of leaving her evenful home and dull companions to enjoy the gaieties of Lon-

don unwatched by any restraining eye; she took leave of her husband more as if it were for life than for a month, weeping bitterly as she did so, and clasping Amelia in her arms with earnest affection.

Miss Sowerby was at her window as the carriage passed through Westford.

'Well,' said she, 'if I ever become a wife, I shall prove a very different sort of one—'; and two or three gossiping visitors who stood behind her simultaneously exclaimed,

'No doubt you would?'

Miss Sowerby had very important business to perform that day more important even than calling on Mr Stanfield and telling him what an unfortunate a man he was to be thus deserted by his wife. Martha Wilson had informed Miss Sowerby of the name of the street in Bloomsbury where Mr Stanfield's cousins resided, and it was music to her ears. In that street was a boardinghouse in which was domesticated a little busy, loquacious widow an intimate friend of Miss Sowerby's, and she wrote to her a long letter, telling her all the circumstances that had recently occurred in Elbury hall, and instructing her to make inquiries, whether any young man in particular visited intimately at the Beltons, and whether Mrs Stanfield had rendered herself the subject of any observation or animadversion. A week elapsed before Mrs Pearson answered this letter; and Miss Sowerby had paid her projected visit to Mr Stanfield, and rendered him so nervous by her dire forebodings and melancholy condolences, that the housekeeper was obliged to administer hartshorn drops, camphor julep, and sal volatile, alternately to him during the rest of the day.

When however, the letter came, it completely repaid Miss Sowerby for the trial of waiting for it so long.

'The lady you mention,' wrote Mrs Pearson, 'came this day week to stay at the Beltons. I was greatly surprised when you said that she meant to remain with them for a month, for I happened to know some weeks ago that they intended to pass three months in France and that they had let their house for the period of their absence. In three days they carried their plans into execution, and their visitor and her maid vanished where I could not tell, but they did not accompany the family on their travels. Knowing your anxiety for the information, and knowing the party who engaged it had not taken possession of it I called and asked the servant who remained there, if she could tell me where Mrs Stanfield had removed; she informed me that she had taken a lodging in one of the streets near the Regent's Park, and as she acquainted me with the name of the street, number of the house, I walked there the next day. I found that she occupied only a part of the house, since the remainder was to be let. I asked to see the landlady under pretence of wishing to engage the apartments, and make some inquiries respecting her other inmates: she informed me that she had only a lady and her maid, who had taken lodgings for a month and had been with her two days; that the lady appeared out of health and spirits, and very retired habits, and that she had each day received a visit from a gentleman.

I think you will allow, my dear friend that I have acquitted myself very successfully in this little delicate commission, and have gained a great deal of information without committing myself or you. If you would like to come up to town and sift the matter fully in person, Mrs Hutton's establishment is extremely select and reasonable.'

Miss Sowerby dropped the letter in the excess of her joy. She might have said, as gentlemen do when their health is drunk at a public dinner, 'This is the proudest day of my life!' so complete a triumph did it give her over the envied and hated Mrs Stanfield.

Carefully picking up the precious document, she placed it in her bosom, and sallied forth that evening to a tea-party, feeling qualified to be the lioness of the evening. As soon as tea was over, Miss Sowerby disclosed her information to the company, and professed her determination to go to London forthwith, for that the guilty ought always to be exposed: it was a duty to society to do it.

It is astonishing how zealously people discharge their duty to society when they can destroy the peace and reputation of a fellow creature by doing so.

'Poor Mr Stanfield will break his heart,' said a compassionate old lady, taking out her pocket handkerchief.

'Not at all,' replied a portly matron by her side, encircled by five unmarried

daughters, 'he will get a divorce, marry again, and be much happier than he ever has been yet.'

'I should not like to marry a divorced man,' said a pale, sentimental girl.

'Nonsense, my dear,' said the portly matron, 'it is the best thing you could do; you would be sure never to be reproached with the good qualities of his first wife.'

'I think,' said the lady of the mayor, casting a furtive glance at her husband, 'that when the affair becomes generally known the authorities of Westford ought to carry up an address of condolence to Mr Stanfield.'

'Ridiculous my love,' replied the mayor with a reproving look, 'it is no matter of condolence at all; that is,' he added in a hurried manner, perceiving the four stormy orbs of his wife and his daughter Clarinda fixed upon him, gentlemen have nothing to do with those things; if the ladies like to compile a little address among themselves, I am sure I have no possible objection to it.'

This hint mollified the lady, and that night she wrote the rough draft of an address of condolence to Mr Stanfield, which Clarinda copied the next morning in an exquisite Lilliputian hand, on a sheet of superfine lavender paper edged with black.

It is much more easy to talk about an undertaking than to carry it into effect. Miss Sowerby had declared her intention of proceeding to London 'forthwith' in as decided a manner as if she had nothing to do but to desire her own maid to pack up her dresses overnight, and to give orders to her coachman to bring the carriage to the door early the next morning; there were many preparations, however, to be made prior to the commencement of the journey.—Miss Sowerby, like most country ladies had an awful idea of the finery necessary to constitute herself presentable in London, and felt quite unequal to the task of facing the 'select circle' of Mrs Hutton's establishment, till her straw bonnet was lined and trimmed with pink, her blue silk dress turned, her blond scarf cleaned, and her apple green satin died black.

All these economical contrivances occupied a great deal of time, and a fortnight had elapsed before Miss Sowerby's wardrobe was duly refreshed and her place took in the coach for the ensuing day. She did not, however, much lament this delay: Mrs Stanfield had taken her lodgings for a month, consequently there would be no chance of escape, and every day would accumulate fresh evidence, and render her guilt more glaring and decided, besides which Miss Sowerby, in the intervening fortnight, was loaded with caresses, fine speeches, and invitations to tea and supper from the elite of Westford, who all wished to see Mrs Stanfield exposed without insuring the risk and responsibility of being themselves active agents in the exposure, and consequently welcomed in Miss Sowerby that character not to be found in fable, and rarely existing in real life—the rat willing to tie the bell round the cat's neck.

The day after Miss Sowerby's arrival in London, she proceeded, according to the direction, of her friend Mrs Pearson, to the street where Mrs Stanfield resided, carefully cloaked and veiled, so that she might not be recognized by her erring neighbor if she should happen to be at the window?

Beyond all expectation, Mrs Stanfield was at the window, looking very pale and ill.

'Ah!' soliloquised Miss Sowerby, 'conscience has been busy with her; no doubt her lover begins to grow tired of her: I dare say she is watching for his approach.'

If such were the case, she did not watch long, for a very handsome man, in the prime of life, knocked at the door, was admitted, and Mrs Stanfield immediately disappeared from the window. Miss Sowerby returned home, exulting in her good fortune, to communicate it to her dear friend Mrs Pearson, to declare her belief from the upright bearing and carriage of the stranger, that he was certainly military, and to indite a long epistle to Mr Stanfield, telling him the whole state of the case, abjuring him to come up to town without delay, and recommending to him, as a legal adviser, Mr Stephen Sharply, a most promising young man, and a third cousin of her own. The wish to do good is said to have the power of brightening our mental faculties; the wish to do harm has often the same effect.—Miss Sowerby was not in general a good letter writer; but so inspired was she by her present subject, that Mr Stephen Sharply

himself could not have stated the fact with more clearness and accuracy than did his third cousin.

The feelings of Mr Stanfield, when he received this letter, were pitiable, knowing little of the world, and still less of books, he was not at all conscious how free are the instances in which innocence is unjustly aspersed, and 'life' life lied away, under circumstances of mere suspicion. Thinking (unlike most husbands) humbly of his own attainments, and highly of those of his wife, he was disposed rather to blame himself, for having ever supposed she could love him, than the censure her for ceasing to do so.

'Oh! how will she repent,' he thought, 'how bitterly will remorse be felt by such a maid as hers!'

Taking a hurried leave of Amelia, whom he merely told that circumstances of great consequence demanded his presence in London, the unhappy husband, thus suddenly precipitated from the height of happiness to the depth of misery, proceeded on his journey, and when he arrived in town immediately wrote to beg that Miss Sowerby would come to him at the hotel where he had fixed himself. She complied with the summons, all sweetness and sympathy, for she, like a poor matron at Westford, anticipated a divorce, and thought that in that case, Mr Stanfield might turn his tardy regards on herself, in which events she meant generously to forgive his former neglect, accept his proffered hand, and pass a speedy reform bill for the benefit of himself, his daughter, and his household, who had all, she averred, been completely spoiled and ruined by the mill and water insipidity of the first Mrs Stanfield and the hypocritical cajolery of the second. She immediately proffered her company to Mr Stanfield on a visit to his wife's apartments, hoping as she expressed it, 'to surprise her into a confession;' and though she declared it was 'inexpressible painful to the feelings to go such an errand,' no one would have inclined to believe that she was suffering deep distress, who marked the brisk alertness of her walk, and the unwonted sparkle of her eye.

Arrived at the door, she desired the wretched husband 'to place the matter in her hands,' and inquired if Mrs Stanfield was at home: the servant replied in the affirmative, and Miss Sowerby hastily ascended the stairs, leaving her companion to follow as he could. How did she congratulate herself on her good fortune when she beheld the tableau that awaited her entrance.—Mrs Stanfield, pale and drooping, was reclining on a sofa, and by her side sat the handsome stranger, whom Miss Sowerby had before seen; he was holding her hand, but quickly dropped it on the appearance of the unwelcome visitor. Mrs Stanfield looked amazed at the sight of Miss Sowerby, but started violently when she beheld her followed into the room by Mr Stanfield.

'My dear husband!' she exclaimed, rising to meet him, 'who could have possibly told you of my retreat; after all the pains I have taken to keep it secret?'

'O Sophia,' said the unhappy man, bursting into tears, 'how could you desert one who so truly loved you?'

'Perhaps my conduct was injudicious,' replied Mrs Stanfield, 'but, believe me, dear Stanfield, it only proceeded from a wish to spare your feelings.'

'Dreadful to listen to such sophisticated hardihood,' exclaimed Miss Sowerby: 'she calls conjugal infidelity 'injudicious,' and declares that she runs away from her husband because she 'wishes to spare his feelings.' Now, Mr Stanfield, you see what comes of marrying a literary lady, and Amelia told me only last month that she had three hundred volumes in her own little library.'

Mrs Stanfield sank back in the sofa, apparently too much horror struck at Miss Sowerby's accusation to be able to reply to it, and the handsome stranger for the first time spoke.

'Am I to understand,' he said, 'that this lady is accused of having deserted her husband and her home?'

Miss Sowerby was so shocked at being addressed by this 'gallant gay Lotbario,' that she had never so much felt the want of her fan; she, however, made a temporary one of her well darned Scotch cambric pocket handkerchief, and replied, 'Facts speak for themselves, sir, your presence here is a confirmation of them, and an insult to the eyes of indignant virtue.'

The handsome stranger burst into a contemptuous laugh, and then took the hand of Mrs Stanfield. Miss Sowerby imagined that he was seized with sudden delirium, especially as he held the lady's