

HUSBAND HUNTING;

or, the

MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS.

A TALE OF FASHIONABLE LIFE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

BY

S——L J—N, Esq.

THE age has passed away, when Novels delighted themselves the picture of manners that never existed, and narration of adventures that never could have been performed; with unnatural sentiment, and ponderous impossibility.

Time —— which has been charged such ravage of external things, is not always a conspirator against human improvement; that which has covered the surface of the Pyramids with decay, has polished the fabric of the Novel, and life reflected in the elegance of poetic fancy, and the sharpness of individual satire.

In our Work we have been not insensible to this great improvement; and if we have suppressed well-known names, or thrown a veil over well-known countenances, we have yet drawn *from the life*. The two great sources of wisdom, personal knowledge, and public fame, have not been forgotten; and *titled beauty*, beset by family intrigue, will find her virtues and sufferings in Catherine Greville; while *rival Duchesses* may be reprov'd by the heartless ambition and profitless artifice of Mrs. Courtney !

We now commit our volumes to the world, we shall not say, with indifference to their reception; for what author has not felt the buoyancy of hope, and the depression of fear; what literary bosom has not been rejoiced by anticipated panegyric, and appalled by prospective criticism?

But we must take the common chance of our species, and be content to purchase the honours of literature by the general penalties of fame.

Yet in the utmost severity of fate there is sometimes a compensation; and he who is criticised by all must be first read by many.

That Reviewers claim an exemption from this great law, has been strongly affirmed; but we must allow that it has been as strongly denied. "Non nostrum est tantas componere lites." Perhaps truth lies between, and Reviewers read —the title.

But whatever opinion the world may pass upon our work, we have that within, which living statesmen and dying heroes have been often denied — our own perfect approbation!!!

When our volumes shall have reached afterages, and shall make the learning of the wise and the delight of the gay; when pages of annotation shall be amassed upon a sentence, and solemn controversies piled upon the simplicity of a surname, then shall be our triumph. Yet what shall it then avail us; if we shall be where triumphs are heard no more!

S. J.

Bolt-court, London.

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HUSBAND HUNTING;

OR,

THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

I live with bread like you, feel want, taste grief,
Need friends. — *Shakspeare.*

"It grows late, your honour," said old Peter, the white-headed valet de chambre of the master of Halston-Hall, as he advanced to the bed-side. No answer was returned, but a low murmur evidently meant to express reluctance to be disturbed. To this Peter was accustomed, and he soon returned to the charge. "A fine rainy morning, your honour: the post has come in, and the newspaper is arrived, and on the breakfast table." The charm failed of its effect, and Peter played his last card. "There are visitors, your honour; a lady and her son." A voice, something between querulousness and anger, now uttered from within the bed — "Visitors! and why, in the name of all that's preposterous, did you not tell me that before, you old goose?" The rest sank into soliloquy. "A lady! and what can she have to do with me? some petition, some made-up story to extort money: I'll be sworn it's some baggage, marauding through the country, in tragic black, or with a child in one hand and a subscription list in the other. But I have my money for other purposes. Go, you inveterate old fool; turn her out, and tell her to look for dupes elsewhere. No, stay, I'll go and turn her out myself." The speaker now flung back the curtains, and was making an effort to rise, while Peter stood at a distance with customary awe, when a glance at the sky, now charged with heavy clouds, and full of the chill and dreary aspect of a fixed rainy day, repelled him. "Yet, for what should I rise?" he ejaculated rather than spoke. "To see the same sky I saw yesterday; to hear the same nonsense; to eat, drink, and doze the same; to be robbed by the same rogues; to feel life the same dreary, dull, disgusting thing, to the end of the chapter. Go, sir, send those people about their business, and tell them never to come here again until I am dead and buried, do you hear? Why does the fellow linger, bowing and grimacing like a monkey or a Frenchman?"

"Don't speak so loud, your honour," said Peter, with his hand on the door, and in a tone hushed to a whisper, "or you will be heard in the room — Mrs. Vaughan is there."

A flash of surprise lightened across his master's withered features; he was evidently smitten by strong and mingled recollections. "Mrs. Vaughan! my brother's widow! Confound your stammering; why did you not awake me when she came: order a fire — breakfast. Go and tell her that I will see her immediately." "I dare say, sir" said Peter, "the poor lady is glad enough to find herself under your honour's roof at last. She has been travelling all night in the mail. and a cold and rough night it has been. She has been inquiring for your health, and hoping that your honour stands out this weather well, and asking how you look. and a whole heap of other kind things."

"Indeed! well make her my compliments. Twenty years ago, Peter, she was the finest girl in the country: a bright-eyed, blooming, light-hearted creature." The rest was nearly to himself, and broken by the process of putting on his various habiliments. "Could and hungry, no doubt, and thinking me in her soul a heartless, worthless, kindless, miserable old man. But she a fool: to marry my brother, a fellow with nothing to depend upon but his commission! They did not want for advice, for I told them that they were a pair of fools. So they married, in me very teeth. and never came near me after. They took me for a hard-natured, butter, money-saving dog; and what the thought me, perhaps, after all. they made me."

During this conference the new visitor, Mrs. Vaughan, awaited the result, in no very enviable state of mind. With her eyes fixed on her son, she revolved the perplexing thoughts that press upon an affectionate and delicate mind, making its first application to dubious generosity. The tear stood in her eye as she thought of the separation, which must be the consequence even of success in her appeal to the old man in behalf of his nephew; and as the increased movement in the next room told her that the interview was still nearer at hand, she felt her spirit die within her, and, in the language of holy weariness of the world and its conflicts, wished for the "wings of a dove, that she might flee away, and be at rest."

Her son amused himself in gazing round the curiosities and oddities of the room. Halston-Hall was a venerable mansion; and it was, besides, the mansion of an old bachelor. It was, of course, filled with furniture, combining the formidable taste of ancestry with the quaint and rustic absurdities and equipments of an old country gentleman, bound up in resolute celibacy; massive chairs, of the fashion of Queen Anne's time; a ponderous marble table, under a mirror, in which

"He of Gath might have seen his whole bulk,"

and surrounded with a frame, crowded with bird, beast, and fruitage, carved in sullen oak: a mighty bookcase piled with black letter, the Game Laws, Treatises on Magistracy, and County Chronicles; walls hung with family portraits, now all alike, and all covered with the brown antiquity of dust and smoke; prints of celebrated racers, that had long run their last course; a mantel-piece, loaded with noseless busts, the importation of a travelled ancestor; the hereditary snuff-boxes of the whole line; and, suspended above all, the fishing-rod, the net, and the fowling-piece, with which the present lord of the mansion had once ruled over lake and forest. At length the door opened. Mrs. Vaughan could not recognize in the figure before her the man she had known twenty years before. The vigorous frame and full feature were gone, and she saw nothing but the feebleness and exhaustion of premature old age. Her countenance probably expressed this, for he suddenly flung off Peter, and advancing towards her with an affected firmness of step, took her hand. "You don't know me, madam, I perceive," said he; "no wonder, no wonder. — Time, time, madam, and illness, and solitude, though all that, perhaps, was not to be laid to my charge; and the hatred and contempt for a wretched world of rogues and fools, madam, might have broken down a stronger man. But you," and he gazed intently on her fine expression — "Time has passed lightly over you; yet sorrow has been here," and he drew his pale thin finger across her forehead. "What, tears? ah, I suppose you have seen hard days with that fool of a husband." The blood mounted into Mrs. Vaughan's cheek. "Fool! sir." "Well, well, say no more about it," he murmured, as he started away and paced the room. "Why, in the name of common sense, did you not tell me your situation long ago? I inquired for you when the first burst of that silly quarrel was over: but you were not to be heard of. So you had rather bury yourself in some obscure corner of the earth, where you might as well have been dead at once, than have come, and have dealt fairly with me; openly, honestly, told me that you were alone, that you were not above recollecting your husband's brother; and it might be, "as he thrust out his shrivelled hand, "that you would not have found me the man of stone and iron that you thought me. And, now, there's the mischief of it! — you have come too late. I am hampered already; bound neck and heels by a whole muster-roll of relations, nephews, nieces: yes, they remembered me well; there was no fear that they would forget the old man, at least till the breath was out of his body."

"I entreat you, sir, to believe," said Mrs. Vaughan, in a voice overpowered with emotion, "that I was incapable of forgetting you; that I lamented the unhappy difference of our families,

which I fear was sustained by unfortunate and unfriendly reports; and that I forbore to trouble you, only from respect for your quiet, and the wish of one who never ceased to have a brother's affection for you."

"Come, dry your eyes, and sit down, lady — Mrs. Vaughan — sister. Let the past be past. Introduce me to your boy. Bless my soul! wonderfully like: the living image of my brother. Well, sir, and what do you intend to be, a bishop, a judge, or a general?" Francis blushed and bowed. "That," said his mother, "must be left to his own decision. I am in great doubt."

"Well, madam, there is no doubt that we must do something with the fellow. He is too old for bird-nesting and rambling through the country, and too young to be trusted into that hive of knavery and absurdity, the world, alone. So we must send him to college: there, at least, he will learn to chop logic, drink port, and put a grave face on a confounded deal of nonsense. I have been there myself, madam, though but little of the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees has stuck to me."

"I have been thinking of mortgaging my pension," said the anxious mother.

"No, madam, you shall not mortgage so much as your pin-cushion. We'll set about the matter without delay;" and his faded eyes lighted up with a new feeling of benevolence. "Bound as my hands are by promises to my sister's family, and they will want nothing for asking for it, I can yet launch the lad into life. No thanks, madam," and he gently put down her hands, which she had raised almost in an attitude of prayer: "I did as much for Philip Courtney, my nephew: the boys shall start fair. But," turning to Francis, who had listened with a delight that forbid all thanks but those of his burning cheeks and brightened eyes, — "you have never been in London: well, young man, London you must see first. There was a monstrous spirit of jeering in Oxford in my time, and I am inclined to think the spirit has not much declined. So, you must not be laughed at as altogether a rustic; and so — I have it. I'll give you a line to Philip Courtney; a fellow that knows the town well, and, perhaps, more too than is good of it; but, no matter, he will keep you out of mischief; and this day shall the letter be despatched. It is a day of reconciliation, and we will make it memorable."

Day after day passed, and it was about three weeks before the old man could prevail upon himself to part with his nephew. At length a letter was written to Philip Courtney, enclosing another from Mrs. Vaughan to his mother, with whom she had kept up, for some years, a reluctant and intermitting correspondence.

CHAPTER II.

'Tis with our judgments, as our watches, none
Go just alike, but each believes his own.

Pope.

Scandal's the sweet'ner of a female feast.

Young.

MRS. COURTNEY had been handsome, and a belle of her day; opulent; and had fully assisted an extravagant husband in getting rid of his estate; and arrogant by nature and habit, a quality which had faithfully remained behind when the estate and the beauty had fairly flown. In all points a woman of the world, in the world she was determined to remain, and to figure as long as she was able; and for those purposes, was compelled to exert that severe ingenuity by which so many of the luckless and fashionable contrive to keep up appearances. She still exhibited an establishment, *imposing* in all senses of the word; gave occasional routs, inevitably announced, with the keenest circumstantiality, in the newspapers; went to birth-days, with a diligent loyalty worthy of the purest times; curtsied low to a countess, twice as low to a duchess, and honoured the king, at least as faithfully as she did homage to the other half of the commandment. This was to be presumed the mere result of a due respect for subordination; for no "Lord-lyon" could observe the degrees of human inequality with a more scrupulously rigid distinction. The whole race of the untitled or unestimated felt their doom at once, and it was said that the blood and rental of the circle could be estimated at any distance that would give a view of Mrs. Courtney's physiognomy. Her Christian virtues were as public as those of a woman of fashion ought to be. She appeared, with undeviating punctuality, in the charming and crimson-cushioned pew of Dr. Dandy's delightful chapel, and there, safe and select from the obtrusion of the vulgar, gazed, in serene piety, on the Doctor's auburn wig and diamond ring; re-echoed the aspirations of lips, touched by the very spirit of politeness; and, with her feet on the fender of her stove, suffered wisdom, in its most delicate essence, to distil into her bosom; Mrs. Courtney had a son, of whom more is to be told in this history, and daughters, who may be suffered to speak for themselves. Those, altogether, were now her great business; and to scatter a family handsomely through the Court Calendar is still found among the very severest of the regular tasks of fashionable maternity.

Mrs. Courtney was not wanting to herself in this emergency. She consulted the Baronetage and Peerage lists with fresh activity; gave double the number of routs; rode with her fair daughters in the park, at the congenial hour for picking up an escort; had the first intelligence of the arrival of a Yorkshire baronet, or a wandering Irish peer, invited him to her mansion, and lunched him into incipient love; condescended to introduce the wealthy uninitiated into fashion; and chaperoned the awkwardness of heiresses without a friend.

The four fair daughters of this accomplished lady were lingering over a late breakfast, and languidly discussing the costumes and complexions of the last night's rout, when their mother walked into the room. Her step was hurried, and her countenance ruffled to a degree that would have surprised an observer of the infinite serenity, varied only by the most gracious of smiles, that expanded over it for the six long hours of the night before. She brought an open letter in her hand. She stood for a moment, with her eyes fixed upon the group, but obviously too much engrossed by her personal meditations, to have any very distinct knowledge that they were gazing at the changes which ran so rapidly over her countenance, "in pale ire, envy, and despair."

However, she at length perceived them, and smoothing her features at once, and in the most suppressed tone of vexation, she inquired whether any of the ladies had received letters that

morning. "Not one," was the general reply. "Then, my dearest loves, I have received one, which agitates me most painfully," sighed Mrs. Courtney; "not for my own sake; for what have I to fear or feel in this world? but for you, my loves, for your interests, for your happiness, for your honourable establishment in life, my sweet girls." The honied strain was customary, and her sweet girls were quite satisfied how far it was sincere. But the matter was now evidently something beyond the usual well-bred calamities, and they solicited to know the nature of this formidable missive. She glanced over it, and her eye caught sudden fire. "There," said she, flinging the letter on the table; "read there. I wish from my soul that that woman, that Mrs. Vaughan, were in Newfoundland, or anywhere else ten times farther out of the world. She has made her way to that old fool at Halston-Hall, in full weepers and weeds, no doubt; has told him a long story with her sentimental tongue; and has absolutely won over the old miser, ay, melted his heart, heaven help us! *his* heart, by the whole artillery of sobs and sighs — 'drawn iron tears down Pluto's cheek.' Nay, she has had the effrontery to prevail on him to provide for her overgrown boy at college, out of *my* money. For mine it was already, by his will, and mine it would have been this hour, if the old fool had not been so obstinate in living, I should not wonder if he would change his will: at all events here is a new danger, and, let me tell you, a most formidable one."

The intelligence was certainly perplexing; but youthful belles are not easily put out of countenance, and, after a moment, Clementina, her eldest daughter, and by habit taking the lead in the family council, observed, "that the matter *was* vexatious, and that the vexation was not at all lightened by its having been the work of imprudence in a quarter for which she had, of course, the highest consideration." The sisters smiled; but Mrs. Courtney had heard this preface before, and no smile sat upon her cheek. "Let me hear no more of this folly, child," uttered the matron, in a tone which it took all her serenity to keep within bounds. "Read the letter for yourself, and see, if you like it, how near all your prospects are to ruin, ay, nothing less than total ruin."

Clementina was a blonde and a belle of the first distinction. She had, upon due occasion, the most roseate of all complexions, and the most captivating of all dovelike eyes above it; but now the cheek was flushed fiery red, and the dovelike eyes flamed. "Madam," said Clementina, rising from her seat in angry majesty, "I will tell you by whom, if we are undone, that undoing has been effected; — it was by the vanity, the blindness, the idle artifice" — Here, however, the remainder of the party interposed; and Clementina was calmed down to resuming her chair, "Yet," said Seraphina, the sentimentalist of the family, "my dear sister, as to my mamma's corresponding now and then with Mrs. Vaughan, there was, after all, no great harm in the affair. It was useful to know what she was about; and even now, but for this correspondence, she would have been undermining us with the old miser, without our knowing a syllable on the subject. She certainly writes a very pretty pathetic letter, edged still with tragic black, and sealed with a very elegant antique."

Julia, the youngest and most beautiful of the family, now observed, by way of palliation, "that Mrs. Vaughan might be forgiven, as her efforts were not for herself; that, even if she were to come to town, she could not enter into competition with the young and lovely." Clementina and Seraphina made an involuntary bow; "and that she could not, of course, marry the old gentleman of Halston-Hall." "Nay, for that matter," whispered Martha, the homeliest of the household, and probably for that reason the least dulcet in her style, "it is next to impossible that she can marry any one. There is no hope, alas! for *widows* of the sober age of thirty and upwards." A glance from her mother's eye showed that the arrow had reached its mark; but Mrs. Courtney was not accustomed to sit long under exposure. "Martha, my love," said she, in her most silvery tone, "happy are they whom Nature has secured from the troubles of either, wife or widow. — But here," and she flung the letter to a dependant niece, sitting in one of the windows; "here, Catherine, since none of those young ladies, in their infinite wisdom, will read this letter, let me hear it coolly, if the present company have no peculiar objection." She threw herself back on the fauteuil with a bitter smile, covered her eyes with her hand, and listened with a flushing cheek, and a lip quivering with variety of passion.

The letter was, after all, a simple one: it mentioned that "the necessity of educating her son Francis, now rapidly growing into the time when he must choose a profession, had overcome her

dread of applying to the old man of Halston-Hall, the brother of her late husband. That she had unexpectedly found him more than civil, nay, generous; that Francis was to be furnished with the means of going through the University, and that, as he must first visit London to make his arrangements, she would feel grateful for his cousin Philip Courtney's guiding his inexperience through the wonders and perils of the great city." "And here comes Philip to answer for himself," said Martha, as the door opened; and young Courtney, a showy youth, dressed in the extreme of fashion, entered, with an exclamation, "What, all assembled, the whole Divan! Well, so much the better; — I have news for you; but I see you have had your despatch too," — and he took the letter peevishly from Catherine's hand. "Was there ever any thing so unlucky! That incorrigible woman — that feeble, flexible, childish uncle of our's! I must give up my horses, be seen no more in the clubs, and get rid of my curricule and all that, — if this fit of ridiculous generosity lasts. Why, I have lost to the amount of —" He checked himself in the full career of confession. "No, as to the estate into which those people will worm themselves, I don't care; but it is confoundedly hard, at my time of life, to be compelled to dangle after heiresses, and chain oneself down to matrimony." "Does your letter mention the woman's son," inquired Mrs. Courtney. "No — yes," — said Philip, crushing it between his hands. "*That* I am determined not to do; I'll be bear-leader to no one's booty from the West or from the East. I'll not make myself ridiculous to the whole world by teaching him his paces! —'pon my life, I should not be surprised to find myself followed by every acquaintance I have on earth, with their shillings a-piece for the show I had the happiness to exhibit to the admiring multitude." — A thought sprang up in his mother's prolific brain. "No rashness, sir," said she, "no boyish imprudence. Come here, Philip." — She took him by the arm, and leading him to a vacant window, communicated her design in a voice too low to be heard by the sisters; and interrupted only by Philip's sudden "Ha! —capital —it must do — first of politicians." Those exclamations, however, at last became so illustrative, that Mrs. Courtney, with her finger on her lip, led him from the room.

CHAPTER III.

Misers are not unuseful members of the community; they act like dams to rivers, hold up the stream that else would run to waste, and make deep water where there would be shallows.—*The Jew*.

He had the wit which I can well observe
To-day in our young lords; but they may jest
Till their own scorn return to them unnoted,
Ere they can hide their levity in honour.

All's well that ends well.

MR. Vaughan was stigmatized by the world, at least, the little world to which he was known, as a miser. Whether or not he deserved the appellation we will not at this moment determine. Certain it was, that his establishment was by no means proportioned to his fortune; but one plain carriage, when it was well known that he could have as easily maintained three — servants as few as it was possible to dispense with — a table never sumptuously spread; — all were against him. He mingled but little in society, and his charity was bestowed with a cautious and sparing hand. It was possible that his retired life might be the most congenial to his taste, — that he might avoid society from a dislike of it, — that he might be well aware of the truth, that whatever gratification he might have in gazing at two or three splendid equipages, he could not possibly make use of more than one at a time, — that the smaller his household, the less was his anxiety, — and lastly, that a long life of experience might have taught him the necessity of guarding against the impositions practicable on a solitary man. But where conduct is liable to two constructions, the world generally bends the balance to the worse, and the little word "miser," was so simple a solution that it was used without ceremony; yet, there was one person, at least, who was far from condemning Mr. Vaughan's system of economy, and that was his nephew, Philip Courtney. It was true that Mr. Vaughan had never made any direct promise to his nephew, but somehow or other it had become a generally-received opinion that he was to be the old man's heir. He was always a privileged guest; — he was the only relative who, for many years, had set foot beneath his roof. His professional pursuits and other engagements did not permit him to pay frequent visits to Halston-Hall. Thus he came often enough to remind the old man of his existence, but not often enough to weary him; and then he displayed such an abundance of the virtues during his stay, — was so abhorrent of the extravagance of fashionable life, — was so abstemious and so pastoral in all his tastes, nay, even slumbered so opportunely during his uncle's evening slumber, that his excellencies were irresistible. Thus having once established himself in favour, he thought the coast clear before him. The unfortunate Vaughans, from the long variance which had subsisted between the families, were as nothing in the way of such claims. Courtney was one of a numerous family. Splendid marriages for her four daughters, and his uncle's fortune for her son, were his mother's views; and Philip was too well aware of the advantages of money, and had too many ways of spending it, to have any intention of frustrating her expectation; still, he wished that some more decided step should be taken. He could never learn that any will had been actually made. The old man was capricious, — was far advanced in life, — some artful dependant might gain his ear; — he might die suddenly. In his absence, the fear of being superseded haunted him occasionally; but no very serious alarm had taken possession of his mind, till the unexpected intelligence of the arrival and consequent reconciliation of the Vaughans seemed to call upon him to reconnoitre the frontier position of the enemy, and exert his finesse, of which he had his share, to prevent their acquiring undue influence. He prepared himself accordingly to answer his uncle's letter in person.