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Excerpt
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TALES OF THE HALL.

BOOK XII.

SIR OWEN DALE.

The Rector at the Hall—Why absent—He relates the Story of Sir Owen
—His Marriage—Death of his Lady—His Mind acquires new Energy
—His Passions awake—His Taste and Sensibility—Admires a Lady
—Camilla—Her Purpose—Sir Owen's Disappointment—His Spirit
of Revenge—How gratified—The Dilemma of Love—An Example of
Forgiveness—Its Effect.

TALES OF THE HALL.

BOOK XII.

SIR OWEN DALE.

AGAIN the Brothers saw their friend the priest,
 Who shared the comforts he so much increased;
 Absent of late—and thus the squire address'd,
 With welcome smile, his ancient friend and guest.
 “What has detain'd thee? some parochial case?
 “Some man's desertion, or some maid's disgrace?
 “Or wert thou call'd, as parish priest, to give
 “Name to a new-born thing that would not live,
 “That its weak glance upon the world had thrown,
 “And shrank in terror from the prospect shown? 10
 “Or hast thou heard some dying wretch deplore,
 “That of his pleasures he could taste no more,
 “Who wish'd thy aid his spirits to sustain,
 “And drive away the fears that gave him pain?
 “For priests are thought to have a patent charm
 “To ease the dying sinner of alarm.
 “Or was thy business of the carnal sort,
 “And thou wert gone a patron's smile to court,
 “And Croft or Cresswell would'st to Binning add,
 “Or take, kind soul! whatever could be had? 20
 “Once more I guess: th' election now is near;
 “My friend, perhaps, is sway'd, by hope or fear,
 “And all a patriot's wishes, forth to ride,
 “And hunt for votes to prop the fav'rite side?”
 “More private duty call'd me hence, to pay
 “My friends respect on a rejoicing day,”
 Replied the rector; “there is born a son,

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"Pride of an ancient race, who pray'd for one,
 "And long desponded. Would you hear the tale—
 "Ask, and 'tis granted—of Sir Owen Dale?" } 30
 "Grant," said the Brothers, "for we humbly ask;
 "Ours be the gratitude, and thine the task.
 "Yet dine we first; then to this tale of thine,
 "As to thy sermon, seriously incline;
 "In neither case our rector shall complain
 "Of this recited, that composed, in vain.
 "Something we heard of vengeance, who appall'd,
 "Like an infernal spirit, him who call'd,
 "And, ere he vanish'd, would perform his part,
 "Inflicting tortures on the wounded heart. } 40
 "Of this but little from report we know;
 "If you the progress of revenge can show,
 "Give it, and all its horrors, if you please;
 "We hear our neighbour's sufferings much at ease.
 "Is it not so? For do not men delight—
 "We call them men—our bruisers to excite,
 "And urge with bribing gold, and feed them for the fight? [] }
 "Men beyond common strength, of giant size,
 "And threat'ning terrors in each other's eyes;
 "When in their naked, native force display'd, } 50
 "Look answers look, affrighting and afraid;
 "While skill, like spurs and feeding, gives the arm
 "The wicked power to do the greater harm.
 "Maim'd in the strife, the falling man sustains
 "Th' insulting shout, that aggravates his pains—
 "Man can bear this; and shall thy hearers heed
 "A tale of human sufferings? Come! proceed."
 Thus urged, the worthy rector thought it meet
 Some moral truth, as preface, to repeat;
 Reflection serious—common-place, 'tis true; } 60
 But he would act as he was wont to do,
 And bring his morals in his neighbour's view. []
 "O! how the passions, insolent and strong,
 "Bear our weak minds their rapid course along;
 "Make us the madness of their will obey;
 "Then die, and leave us to our griefs a prey!"

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GEORGE CRABBE

Sir Owen Dale his fortieth year had seen,
 With temper placid, and with mind serene;
 Rich, early married to an easy wife,
 They led in comfort a domestic life. 70
 He took of his affairs a prudent care,
 And was by early habit led to spare;
 Not as a miser, but in pure good taste,
 That scorn'd the idle wantonness of waste.

In fact, the lessons he from prudence took
 Were written in his mind, as in a book:
 There what to do he read, and what to shun;
 And all commanded was with promptness done;
 He seem'd without a passion to proceed,
 Or one whose passions no correction need. 80
 Yet some believed those passions only slept,
 And were in bounds by early habits kept;
 Curb'd as they were by fetters worn so long,
 There were who judged them a rebellious throng.

To these he stood, not as a hero true,
 Who fought his foes, and in the combat slew,
 But one who all those foes, when sleeping, found,
 And, unresisted, at his pleasure bound.

We thought—for I was one—that we espied
 Some indications strong of dormant pride: 90
 It was his wish in peace with all to live;
 And he could pardon, but could not forgive;
 Nay, there were times when stern defiance shook
 The moral man, and threaten'd in his look.

Should these fierce passions—so we reason'd—break
 Their long-worn chain, what ravage will they make!
 In vain will prudence then contend with pride,
 And reason vainly bid revenge subside;
 Anger will not to meek persuasion bend,
 Nor to the pleas of hope or fear attend; 100
 What curb shall, then, in their disorder'd race,
 Check the wild passions? what the calm replace?
 Virtue shall strive in vain; and has he help in grace? []

While yet the wife with pure discretion ruled,
 The man was guided, and the mind was school'd;
 But then that mind unaided ran to waste:

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SIR OWEN DALE

He had some learning, but he wanted taste ;
 Placid, not pleased—contented, not employ'd—
 He neither time improved, nor life enjoy'd.

That wife expired, and great the loss sustain'd, 110
 Though much distress he neither felt nor feign'd :
 He loved not warmly ; but the sudden stroke
 Deeply and strongly on his habits broke.

He had no child to soothe him, and his farm,
 His sports, his speculations, lost their charm ;
 Then would he read and travel, would frequent
 Life's busy scenes ; and forth Sir Owen went.
 The mind, that now was free, unfix'd, uncheck'd,
 Read and observed with wonderful effect ;
 And still, the more he gain'd, the more he long'd 120
 To pay that mind his negligence had wrong'd ;
 He felt his pleasures rise as he improved ;
 And, first enduring, then the labour loved.

But, by the light let in, Sir Owen found
 Some of those passions had their chain unbound ;
 As from a trance they rose to act their part,
 And seize, as due to them, a feeling heart.

His very person now appear'd refined,
 And took some graces from th' improving mind ;
 He grew polite without a fix'd intent, 130
 And to the world a willing pupil went.

Restore him twenty years—restore him ten—
 And bright had been his earthly prospect then ;
 But much refinement, when it late arrives,
 May be the grace, not comfort, of our lives.

Now had Sir Owen feeling : things of late
 Indifferent he began to love or hate ;
 What once could neither good nor ill impart
 Now pleased the senses, and now touch'd the heart ;
 Prospects and pictures struck th' awaken'd sight, 140
 And each new object gave a new delight.

He, like th' imperfect creature who had shaped
 A shroud to hide him, had at length escaped ;
 Changed from his grub-like state, to crawl no more,
 But a wing'd being, pleased and form'd to soar.

Now, said his friends, while thus his views improve,

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And his mind softens, what if he should love?
 True; life with him has yet serene appear'd,
 And therefore love in wisdom should be fear'd;
 Forty and five his years, and then to sigh
 For beauty's favour!—Son of frailty, fly! 150

Alas! he loved; it was our fear, but ours,
 His friends', alone. He doubted not his pow'rs
 To win the prize, or to repel the charm,
 To gain the battle, or escape the harm;
 For he had never yet resistance proved,
 Nor fear'd that friends should say—"Alas! he loved."

Younger by twenty years, Camilla found
 Her face unrivall'd when she smiled or frown'd;
 Of all approved; in manner, form, and air, 160
 Made to attract; gay, elegant, and fair.
 She had, in beauty's aid, a fair pretence
 To cultivated, strong intelligence;
 For she a clear and ready mind had fed
 With wholesome food; unhurt by what she read.
 She loved to please; but, like her dangerous sex,
 To please the more whom she design'd to vex.

This heard Sir Owen, and he saw it true;
 It promised pleasure, promised danger too;
 But this he knew not then, or slighted if he knew. 170 []

Yet he delay'd, and would by trials prove
 That he was safe; would see the signs of love;
 Would not address her while a fear remain'd;
 But win his way, assured of what he gain'd.

This saw the lady, not displeas'd to find
 A man at once so cautious and so blind;
 She saw his hopes that she would kindly show
 Proofs of her passion—then she his should know:

"So, when my heart is bleeding in his sight,
 "His love acknowledged will the pains requite; 180
 "It is, when conquer'd, he the heart regards;
 "Well, good Sir Owen! let us play our cards."

He spake her praise in terms that love affords,
 By words select, and looks surpassing words.
 Kindly she listen'd, and in turn essay'd
 To pay th' applauses—and she amply paid,

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SIR OWEN DALE

A beauty flattering!—beauteous flatterers feel
 The ill you cause, when thus in praise you deal;
 For surely he is more than man, or less,
 When praised by lips that he would die to press, 190
 And yet his senses undisturb'd can keep,
 Can calmly reason, or can soundly sleep.

Not so Sir Owen; him Camilla praised,
 And lofty hopes and strong emotions raised;
 This had alone the strength of man subdued;
 But this enchantress various arts pursued.

Let others pray for music—others pray'd
 In vain; Sir Owen ask'd, and was obey'd;
 Let others, walking, sue that arm to take—
 Unmoved she kept it for Sir Owen's sake; 200
 Each small request she granted, and though small,
 He thought them pledges of her granting all.

And now the lover, casting doubt aside,
 Urged the fond suit that—could not be denied;
 Joy more than reverence moved him when he said,
 “Now banish all my fears, angelic maid!”
 And, as she paused for words, he gaily cried,
 “I must not, cannot, will not be denied.”

Ah! good Sir Owen, think not favours, such
 As artful maids allow, amount to much; 210
 The sweet, small, poison'd baits, that take the eye
 And win the soul of all who venture nigh.

Camilla listen'd, paused, and look'd surprise,
 Fair witch! exulting in her witcheries!
 She turn'd aside her face, withdrew her hand,
 And softly said, “Sir, let me understand.”

“Nay, my dear lady! what can words explain,
 “If all my looks and actions plead in vain?
 “I love”—She show'd a cool, respectful air;
 And he began to falter in his prayer, 220
 Yet urged her kindness—Kindness she confess'd;
 It was esteem; she felt it, and express'd,
 For her dear father's friend; and was it right
 That friend of his—she thought of hers—to slight?

This to the wond'ring lover strange and new,
 And false appear'd—he would not think it true.

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Still he pursued the lovely prize, and still
 Heard the cold words, design'd his hopes to kill;
 He felt dismay'd, as he perceived success
 Had inverse ratio, more obtaining less; 230
 And still she grew more cool in her replies,
 And talk'd of age and improprieties.

Then to his friends, although it hurt his pride,
 And to the lady's, he for aid applied;
 Who kindly woo'd for him, but strongly were denied. []

And now it was those fiercer passions rose,
 Urged by his love to murder his repose;
 Shame shook his soul to be deceived so long,
 And fierce revenge for such contemptuous wrong;
 Jealous he grew, and jealousy supplied 240
 His mind with rage, unsooth'd, unsatisfied;
 And grievous were the pangs of deeply wounded pride. []
 His generous soul had not the grief sustain'd,
 Had he not thought, "revenge may be obtain'd."

Camilla grieved, but grief was now too late;
 She hush'd her fears, and left th' event to fate.—
 Four years elapsed, nor knew Sir Owen yet
 How to repay the meditated debt;
 The lovely foe was in her thirtieth year,
 Nor saw the favourite of the heart appear; 250
 'Tis sure, less sprightly the fair nymph became,
 And spoke of former levities with shame;
 But this, alas! was not in time confess'd,
 And vengeance waited in Sir Owen's breast.

But now the time arrives—the maid must feel
 And grieve for wounds that she refused to heal.
 Sir Owen, childless, in his love had rear'd
 A sister's son; and now the youth appear'd
 In all the pride of manhood, and, beside,
 With all a soldier's spirit and his pride; 260
 Valiant and poor, with all that arms bestow,
 And wants that captains in their quarters know;
 Yet to his uncle's generous heart was due
 The praise, that wants of any kind were few.

When he appear'd, Sir Owen felt a joy
 Unknown before, his vengeance bless'd the boy—

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“To him I dare confide a cause so just;
 “Love him she may—O! could I say, she must!”
 Thus fix’d, he more than usual kindness show’d,
 Nor let the captain name the debt he owed; 270
 But when he spoke of gratitude, exclaim’d,
 “My dearest Morden! make me not ashamed;
 “Each for a friend should do the best he can,
 “The most obliged is the obliging man;
 “But if you wish to give as well as take,
 “You may a debtor of your uncle make.”
 Morden was earnest in his wish to know
 How he could best his grateful spirit show.
 Now the third dinner had their powers renew’d,
 And fruit and wine upon the table stood; 280
 The fire brought comfort, and the warmth it lent
 A cheerful spirit to the feelings sent;
 When thus the uncle—“Morden, I depend
 “On you for aid—assist me as a friend:
 “Full well I know that you would much forego,
 “And much endure, to wreak me on my foe.
 “Charles, I am wrong’d, insulted—nay, be still,
 “Nor look so fiercely—there are none to kill.
 “I loved a lady, somewhat late in life,
 “Perhaps too late, and would have made a wife; 290
 “Nay, she consented; for consent I call
 “The mark’d distinction that was seen of all,
 “And long was seen; but when she knew my pain,
 “Saw my first wish her favour to obtain,
 “And ask her hand—no sooner was it ask’d,
 “Than she the lovely Jezebel unmask’d;
 “And by her haughty airs, and scornful pride,
 “My peace was wounded—nay, my reason tried;
 “I felt despised and fallen when we met,
 “And she, O folly! looks too lovely yet; 300
 “Yet love no longer in my bosom glows,
 “But my heart warms at the revenge it owes.
 “O! that I saw her with her soul on fire,
 “Desperate from love, and sickening with desire;
 “While all beheld her just, unpitied pain,
 “Grown in neglect, and sharpen’d by disdain!

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"Let her be jealous of each maid she sees,
 "Striving by every fruitless art to please,
 "And when she fondly looks, let looks and fondness tease! [] }
 "So, lost on passion's never resting sea, 310
 "Hopeless and helpless, let her think of me!
 "Charles, thou art handsome, nor canst want the art
 "To warm a cold or win a wanton heart;
 "Be my avenger" —

Charles, with smile, not vain,
 Nor quite unmix'd with pity and disdain,
 Sate mute in wonder; but he sate not long
 Without reflection:—"Was Sir Owen wrong?
 "So must I think; for can I judge it right
 "To treat a lovely lady with despite,
 "Because she play'd too roughly with the love 320
 "Of a fond man whom she could not approve?
 "And yet, to vex him for the love he bore
 "Is cause enough for his revenge, and more.
 "But, thoughts, to council!—Do I wear a charm
 "That will preserve my citadel from harm?
 "Like the good knight, I have a heart that feels
 "The wounds that beauty makes and kindness heals:
 "Beauty she has, it seems, but is not kind—
 "So found Sir Owen, and so I may find.
 "Yet why, O! heart of tinder, why afraid? 330
 "Comes so much danger from so fair a maid?
 "Wilt thou be made a voluntary prize
 "To the fierce firing of two wicked eyes?
 "Think her a foe, and on the danger rush,
 "Nor let thy kindred for a coward blush.
 "But how if this fair creature should incline
 "To think too highly of this love of mine,
 "And, taking all my counterfeit address
 "For sterling passion, should the like profess?
 "Nay, this is folly; or, if I perceive 340
 "Ought of the kind, I can but take my leave;
 "And if the heart should feel a little sore,
 "Contempt and anger will its ease restore.
 "Then, too, to his all-bounteous hand I owe
 "All I possess, and almost all I know;

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