CHAPTER II.

"THE obstinacy and wilfulness of my disposition—failings of which I am now perfectly conscious, and which I bitterly lament, though now too late—have been the cause of all my troubles. I have been guilty of much ingratitude towards my father, and so I entreat that you will allow his name to remain unknown. It is his secret, alas! and not mine, which I am concealing from you; but I do not wish to reduce you to the sad alternative of delivering me up to his anger, or of retaining me here against his will.

"My father is a wealthy man, and well enough known for the many services he has rendered his country on more than one occasion. I am the only offspring of his first marriage; but, alas! I never knew my mother: she died a short time after my birth.

"After three years of widowhood, my father married again. At first, my stepmother showed much tenderness for me; but after two years had passed happily enough, another child came to our home, and then I fancied my stepmother began to dislike