

self-reproach. "I shame indeed to say so—proof as it is, of a goodness which demands my earnest gratitude and reverence. But, Cecilia, all my interest has been absorbed by you—all my thoughts have been yours—and—dare I say it—you have been the inspirer of every hope that has brightened for me the pathway of the future."

His voice trembled as he spoke, nor was Cecilia less agitated—but anxious to avoid a direct reply; lest it should lead to confessions even more embarrassing, and which, with instinctive dread, she shrink from hearing uttered, she said in a tone as quiet as she could command:

"You have lost much gratification, Arthur, in having failed, with your usual just and generous appreciation of goodness, to note the beautiful conduct of Grace since we have been at Hazeldell—nor only here, but through the months of previous trial, whose harsh, but salutary discipline, was not endured by her in vain. I would indeed, Arthur," continued Cecilia, anxious to awaken in him a deeper interest for her young and gentle friend, "I would that you gave to the lovely character of Grace Cleveland, the study it deserves—believe me, you would find it one of singular beauty, and as pure and fresh as the forest flower that owes its nurture to the caressing airs, the sunshine, and the dews of heaven. Ah, how earnestly, did I believe it would find an echo in your heart, should I give utterance to the fondest wish of mine!"

"Do so, dear Cecilia," said Arthur faintly, for a secret foreboding told him what she was about to say. "There are few requests of yours which I should have the courage to deny—one only, that I can now think of, which it would give me pain to grant."

"Nay, Arthur; far be it from me to extort from you a binding promise—not even, though assured its result would bring you happiness. I wished only—and, perhaps, here too I am wrong—yet, since you give me permission, I cannot forbear to say, that among my latest and fondest hopes, I have cherished this one—that our sweet Grace may not only be a daughter to our venerable relative, but a friend nearer and dearer than a sister to my generous cousin—she is worthy of him, and he of her—for he would find in her the rich elements of as true, as gentle, as elevated a character, as ever unfolded to perfection beneath the fostering care and guidance of a loving and a trusting heart."

"Ah, Cecilia!" exclaimed Arthur with irrepressible emotion; "is not my very soul bare to your gaze, that you must wound me by the vain request to lavish on another, affections which are no longer mine to give!"

"Forgive me, dearest Arthur," said Cecilia

with a pale and quivering lip, "I would not for the wealth of worlds inflict on you a moment's pain, and I ask only, since you have no other sentiment to give, that you bestow at least a friend's, a brother's interest and affection, on the lovely girl, who has not been slow to recognize and render homage to your virtues—such homage as the heart of a pure and tender woman yields to the impersonation of the bright ideal, which she has long shrined in the innermost recesses of her soul."

"I will be to her all you would have me be," said Arthur, his cheek blanched by the painful surprise and agitation occasioned by the knowledge now conveyed by him;—"yes, all—all in name—in care—in kindness—but ask no more of me, Cecilia, for the heart long consecrated by your image, never,—no never—can permit another to usurp its place."

"Be to her whatever your feelings, your inclinations prompt you to become, Arthur, and I ask no more. I have done wrong, perhaps, in betraying a secret, which the modest lip of Grace never breathed to any human ear, and which she would weep tears of bitter mortification, should she know that even I had read. But it was because I sought your happiness, and her's also, which is scarcely less dear to me, that I have been thus unreserved, since I believe you both formed to confer on each other, true and lasting felicity."

"When I can forget the past, Cecilia, I may perchance look forward to giving and receiving happiness," said Arthur, sadly; "but, till then, I could but fling back from the cold, impassive surface of my heart, the richest affections which another might lavish upon it."

"Nay, Arthur, I would that the pure and tender sentiment which unites us should exert a softening and a healthful influence upon your soul. Let it endure forever, but let it bring forth fruits of peace, or it is perverted to unworthy uses. With the autumn flowers I shall have passed away, but my memory will still dwell with you, and when the thoughts it brings to you of me, shall become chastened and mellowed into a quiet and sacred joy, your heart, it may be, will unfold again to the influences of sweet and tender emotions, and you will find, as I humbly hope, in that only paradise of earth, a happy home, the realization of your fairest day-dreams, the peace, the confidence, the cloudless love, which all seek and sigh for, but which few attain—striving as they do, to draw from broken cisterns that hold no water, the sparkling stream which is to gladden with perennial verdure, the weary pathway of existence."

"This is too fair a picture to be realized, Ce-