

souls. Marion had died in his arms the other night, and to-day this woman said to him: "Break your heart in silence if you like, but no speck of mud must be splashed upon our immaculate garments from your wallowing in the mire."

Selfish? What right had he to call her anything of the sort? No doubt she quite failed to grasp his feeling about Marion. She was only asking him not to make a scandal; and he had sent Vivian to penal servitude, and broken his wife's heart, and ruined his sister's life.

Yes, he had done enough mischief; Constance, voicing the opinion of his family, was right. He dared not resist their wishes. The only reparation he could make them for the shameful secret of his life was to veil it decently with silence, in order that they might be able to ignore at least what they could not forget.

He saw his punishment in those long moments of silent thought. At the time when he ought to have confessed he had refused to do so with singular obduracy and hardness of heart; at the time when he wished to confess Fate answered through the mouth of Constance: "Too late. It is useless to ask for mercy when it is the time of justice!"

It was the irony of Fate that he should desire of all things earthly to be clean, and that water should be denied him; that he who had been sceptical of a God should long to kneel when his stiffened limbs had lost the power to bend; that he should think of no one but the woman for whose love he had refused to pay the price she asked until she died, and, desiring passionately to give what he had withheld, and more, find that his eager hands were tied. He was never to discharge the debt he owed to his conscience and to her; all his life was to be burdened with it: sleeping he was to dream of it, waking he was to agonise over it. At every meal a ghost would sit on his right hand—the wailing, reproachful ghost of the past.

"You are quite right, Constance," he said at last. "It is not just to make you all pay for my peace of mind. My repentance comes too late to do any good—even to myself. Will you excuse me if I leave you now? I want to think."

"Then we may reckon on your silence, Stephen?" asked St John.