

ENOCK CRANE

him know it was he who had acted in that capacity; then, before Joe could question him, he added seriously: "Promise me something. I do not wish you to mention my wife's death to Sue. It would do no good—only worry her uselessly. I have carried it alone and will continue to. I tell you of her death, because its effect on my movements in life might be misunderstood by you. People, I say, have always misunderstood me. I know what they think of me. Their opinions have time and time again reached my ears. I have heard them call me crabbed, crusty—a sour and malignant old man," he went on, "even mean. Ah, yes! A sour and malignant old man, always in a temper—an old curmudgeon."

Joe started to protest, but Enoch continued:

"A hermit, who prefers his own companionship to that of friends—but if you knew how little the opinions of others affect me. I have long ago ceased to care for other people's opinions. I have learned something in my life, lonely as it has been—and that is tolerance. Be tolerant, Joe; tolerant of every one—of even the ignorance, the vindictiveness of others. Perhaps even *you* think I am hard-hearted"—and before Joe could interrupt him: "You see me dry-eyed, and yet you have no idea what her death means to me. She did not suffer, even when the end came. I am grateful for that."

He paused again, seeming to lapse into a revery, his chin sunk deep between his hands.

"Could nothing be done?" ventured Joe.