

"More deeply than you imagine," answered Mrs. Carter, with a sigh.

"You are related to her, perhaps. I saw a likeness in your face to hers the moment I entered this room."

"We are related by the nearest tie that kindred owns—Lady Perriam is my daughter."

"What! You are the mother of whom she spoke to me with such affection, for whose sake the married Sir Aubrey Perriam?"

"Did she tell you that?"

"Yes, she told me that you were in abject poverty—almost starving—and that her only chance of helping you was by a marriage with a rich man."

"It was true—I was in abject poverty—and after her marriage she relieved me with an occasional remittance. But I have every reason to believe that at the time she was ignorant of our relationship. I accepted her alms as an act of pure benevolence from one who knew not that I was more to her than a stranger."

"But she did help you?"

"She did. And when she had the opportunity of giving me lasting employment and a home as Sir Aubrey's nurse she sent for me."

"She employed you as a servant in her house?"

"Yes, the position was one of servitude, but she did not make it degrading. I lived apart from the other servants, and I was near her. That to me was exquisite happiness, until—"

"Until what?"

"Until she tempted me to aid her in a sinful act, a wicked act, which poisoned my life and hers. You, of all men, should be merciful in your judgment of her, for it was her fatal love for you that urged her to commit that sin."

"May God deal as mercifully with her as my thoughts," said Edmund, deeply moved.

"You will think less kindly of her, perhaps, if you knew all; but it is a wicked story, and I hate myself for the weakness that made me help in that evil work. Since I have been in this house, with the fear of death before my eyes, I have written an account of all that happened at Perriam Place. Dare I trust you, as a Roman Catholic would trust his Father Confessor? Will you promise to make no use of that information against Sylvia?"

"Against her! You do not know how blindly, how utterly I have loved her. If her love for me has been fatal, mine has been fatal too—and it has been thorough, which hers never was. Whatever power I have to shield her from the consequences of her guilt shall be used to the utmost. But, alas! I fear that power is of the smallest."

"Where is she now?"

"In London, with her father."

"Lose no more time here, then, but go back to her. Tell her that all is discovered."

"She must know that, for she knew where we were coming when we left her this morning. But I will go back and see if I can be of any use, though it will be hard to see her face again."

"Do not trust her father's kindness in the hour of misfortune. Take my keys and open that desk in the chest of drawers." The feeble hand groped under the pillow and drew out a small bunch of keys. "The smallest key belongs to the desk." Edmund obeyed. "You see a roll of papers."

"Yes."

"Take those with you and go."

"Cannot I do anything for you? Have you proper medical attendance—good nursing?"

"Yes, these people do all they can; but my doom is sealed. Go to her—you may save her from despair."

CHAPTER XLV.

"IT IS THE TALE WHICH ANGRY CONSCIENCE TELLS."

Edmund Standen put the roll of paper in his breast-pocket, and took his leave of the sick woman, wondering at the mother's unselfishness, which even on a death-bed made the thought of a daughter's peril paramount above all personal suffering.

Anxious as he felt about Sylvia's fate, he stopped to appeal to Mrs. Ledlamb, on behalf of the helpless invalid upstairs, volunteering to pay any charges that might be incurred in careful nursing, and to reward kindness by liberal donations. Mrs. Ledlamb, who was soft-hearted, wept, and promised to do her best.

"We'll move her down into Mr. Perriam's room. It's better than where she is; and she shall have every attention, shan't she, Clara?" said Mrs. Ledlamb, appealing to the sharp eleven-year-old daughter, her eldest hope.

"Yes, Mar, I'm sure I'm willing to do anything. She was always ladylike and pleasant, and gave no trouble."

"Quite a superior person," said Mrs. Ledlamb. "Anyone could see that."

Edmund administered another five pound note, as an earnest of future favours, and left the dreary Arbor, to go back to London, and to Willoughby Crescent.

He had to walk back to Hatfield, through the unknown lanes, in the deepening dusk, carrying a heavier heart than he had ever known yet; for the pain of Sylvia's desertion two years ago seemed light, when looked back upon, in comparison with the anguish of knowing her to be the guilty creature she was.

He arrived at Willoughby Crescent late in the evening; and here he found Mr. Carew in a wretched and uneasy state. The whole household was disorganised. Lady Perriam had gone, none knew whither.

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Carew, helplessly. "I know nothing—have been kept in the dark—treated as a cipher."

"She has gone, knowing that shame and disgrace were inevitable if she remained," said Edmund, when the father had finished his fretful lamentings. "Perhaps it is better that it should be so. Flight was the only escape possible to her. If she has but found a safe asylum, I am content. I, who have loved her so dearly."

But then came the thought of a darker possibility. What if she had rushed out of that house, restless and despairing, to find the surest escape in death?

Edmund questioned Céline as to the manner of her mistress's departure. The girl could tell him nothing, except that Lady Perriam had gone, that she must have left the house dressed in her weeds, and could have taken nothing with her,

except a small morocco bag, which was the only object Céline had missed from the dressing-room.

This looked bad, but Edmund did not despair.

"She may have taken money in the bag, and money will buy everything. Do you know if she had any money in the house?"

"Yes, sir, I have seen a bundle of notes in her jewel case."

"Bring me the jewel case."

The case was brought. Edmund smashed the lock with a poker, and examined the case in Céline's presence. The money was gone, and the diamonds. Céline knew that both had been in the case on the previous night.

"Thank God," exclaimed Edmund, when he and Mr. Carew were alone. "She has not thought of making away with herself. She would not have taken money and diamonds if she had any idea of suicide."

"There's no fear of suicide," replied Mr. Carew calmly. "It doesn't run in our family."

There was nothing more to be done. She had escaped all interrogation; she had ample means of maintenance for some time to come; she had done the best for herself.

"I do not know that I could have advised anything better if I had been at her side," Edmund thought sadly. "And now she and I are indeed parted; she to be a nameless wanderer, I a desolate broken-hearted man. My mother was too true a prophet when she told me that my love for Sylvia Carew was fatal."

His mother. That name took his thoughts back to Heddingham, to the home whose doors he had shut against himself. There lay the bitterest humiliation. To go back—to confess that he had wasted all the passion of his youth upon a worthless woman.

"No, I will not call her worthless," he said; "whatever her sin was she did all for my sake. My lips shall not condemn her."

He left Willoughby Crescent and went back to that dreariest of all abodes for the dejected—his hotel. Here, after a brief and tasteless meal—the first food he had eaten since eight o'clock in the morning—he drew the lamp near him, and opened Mrs. Carter's manuscript.

It was nearly midnight; the house quiet, the servants at rest in their chambers in the Norman-gothic roof, only the night-watchman on guard below. Mr. Standen had no fear of interruption in the perusal of these closely-written pages; a reading that would doubtless be full of pain.

MRS. CARTER'S CONFESSION.

I write these lines with the knowledge that my troubled life is rapidly drawing to its lonely close—write with the thought and fear of death before my eyes, write because I feel that it is my duty to the living to leave behind me a clear and truthful confession of my sin; even though by so doing I may bring sorrow and shame upon her for whom I sinned, and who is the sole object of my love and pity.

I believe that it is better for her peace—on earth and beyond earth—that the truth should be known. The first suffering will be lighter than the last—better for her that her wrong-doing should be revealed while justice may yet be done while her victim still lives and some atonement may be made, than later, when his life may have been shortened by her sin and atonement may have become impossible. She will say, perhaps, that her mother's sole legacy is shame and grief for her; but let her believe that her mother's last thoughts were full of tenderness for her, and that even in this act of confession her ultimate peace was the chief object of that unhappy mother's desire.

When first I came to Perriam Place as nurse and attendant to Sir Aubrey Perriam, the change in my mode of existence was so complete, that it seemed to me like the beginning of a new life. From the deepest poverty, from the most sordid surroundings, from the ceaseless struggle for daily bread, from a life whose present deprivations were darkened by the shadow of the future, which might bring even worse misery, I found myself suddenly placed in a position of perfect ease and comfort, luxuries that I had not known for years again at my command, my wants provided for without an effort or a thought of mine. All this I owed to Lady Perriam, my benefactress, who had seen me in my distress, and whose benevolence had been enlisted by my abject misery—Lady Perriam, who knew not that the object of her charity was her most unhappy mother!

All that was demanded of me in return for these new and manifold blessings was unvarying devotion to my patient. That I conscientiously rendered. I can safely say that for the first year of my residence at Perriam my duty was never out of my thoughts. I felt for my helpless patient a pity which was almost affection. He was troublesome, he was exacting; my nights were often broken; my days always laborious; but his affliction ensured my compassion, and the study of my life was to lighten the burden of his wearisome existence.

Lady Perriam's son was born, my grandson, and his birth awoke a new joy in my heart. It was my most cherished privilege to watch beside the infant's cradle, to hold him in my arms. But this delight I only enjoyed at intervals, and by the favour of the nurse.

It was not selfish pleasure alone which I felt in that dear one's birth. I rejoiced for the sake of her who was dearer still, the daughter to whom I never dared to reveal myself, lest she should shrink from me with contempt or aversion. "Now," I said to myself, "my Sylvia will be happy. If her life has been hitherto purposeless and unhappy, spent in the gloomy silence of this old house, ministering to a husband who is dead in life, now all will be changed. This first-born son will occupy her empty heart, absorb all her thoughts, all her care—become the centre of all her hopes." This is what I hoped and believed; and for a little while it seemed as if my hope was to be realised. So long as novelty gave a charm to the endearments of her babe, Sylvia was happy; but even in her happiness I saw with deepest pain that the pleasure she derived from her first-born son was rather the delight of a child in the possession of a new toy than the deep joy of maternity. Little by little she tired of the child's company, complained that he was troublesome, lost her interest in his welfare, and left him more and more to the care of his nurse. Then, indeed I trembled for my poor child's safety; for I saw that the one influence which would have purified her nature, redeemed it from all its original imperfections, was wanting. I remembered my own wedded life and its guilty close. Remembered how wanting in maternal love, I had torn myself away from my infant daughter—forever for the right to claim her affection or duty.

Time went on, and I saw Sylvia growing sadder and more

despondent. She took no pleasure in life. If she came to the sick room, and sat by her husband's arm chair for a quiet hour in the long day, her restless melancholy air showed that she was performing an irksome duty. Even Sir Aubrey's dull perceptions were sometimes aware of this. "Go away, Sylvia," he would say, "go and be happy away from your afflicted husband. Why do you stop in this dull room? It makes me miserable to see your sad face."

One night I went to Lady Perriam at a later hour than usual, with a message from Sir Aubrey. I knocked at her dressing-room door, and receiving no answer, ventured to open it and go in. She was on her knees on the ground, her head flung upon the sofa cushions, in an attitude of utter self-abandonment, her hands clasped convulsively amongst the loose dishevelled hair, which fell over her shoulders, her whole frame shaken by the violence of her sobs. The sight of her grief made me forget all the restraints of prudence, and my supposed position in that house. I knelt beside her, lifted her head and laid it on my bosom, wiped the tears from her pale cheeks—kissed her with a mother's passionate love.

"Sylvia," I cried, "Sylvia, Sylvia, my beloved child, what is the secret grief? Confide in me, trust me—not a stranger, but your own mother. In whom should you trust if not in me?"

It was some time before she answered me, and before those convulsive sobs had slowly exhausted themselves. While she was becoming gradually calmer I told her my own wretched story; briefly, but without sparing myself the record of my own guilt. She received the intelligence with wonderful tranquillity; or rather as if some grief of her own so absorbed her mind that she was hardly capable of feeling surprise.

"If you are my mother, you ought to be true to me," she said at last, "yes, and help me, and stand by me in my hour of need."

"Do you think I should ever again forsake you, Sylvia?" I said. "In the sinful years of my youth your childish image haunted me in every hour. Remorse for the wrong I had done you was the bitterest anguish of all I had to suffer. If Heaven gives me an opportunity of atoning for that wrong I shall not be slow to seize it."

To be continued.

HOME AND ABROAD.

THE DOMINION.—The names of Messrs. Walter Shanly, ex-M. P., and W. K. Muir, Manager of the Great Western Railway, are mentioned in connection with the vacant management of the Grand Trunk. A retail Board of Trade is to be established in Toronto. The Halifax House of Assembly has adopted a resolution to erect a memorial in the Legislative Hall to the memory of the late Joseph Howe and Judge Johnston. In the same House a bill has been passed authorizing the seizure and destruction of liquor kept for illicit sale in districts where no licenses are granted.

UNITED STATES.—The veto of the Finance Bill by the President has created great confusion in the camp of the inflationists. Several rumours are abroad as to the steps the latter are about to take. At a recent caucus, according to the *Journal of Commerce*, it was arranged for Morton, Logan, Carpenter, Ferry, of Michigan, and West, to issue an address to the Republican party of the country, replying to the President's veto, charging him with inconsistency, arguing that the Veto Message will depress the industrial interests of the country; that it represents only the President's views as against a majority of the people, and that the Republican party is not responsible for it. It is also stated that the leading inflationists in the House of Representatives have proposed to offer the substance of the vetoed banking bill, or an amendment to one of the appropriation bills, and express confidence that in this shape it will pass and receive the sanction of the President. They assert that the President would not take the responsibility of vetoing an appropriation bill even if it contained very objectionable legislation. Another despatch says the result of several private conferences of inflationist Senators is announced to be an understanding that the vetoed bill shall receive, when the question is put to pass it, notwithstanding the President's veto, every vote that it received when it was passed before. A measure providing for free banking with the retiring of percentage of greenbacks seems now most likely to be probably considered. The Mississippi began to fail on Sunday last. Much damage was caused by the floods. It is stated that in the northern portion of the State of Louisiana 12,500 persons were in actual want. Other districts of the back country swelled the number to 25,000. The overflowed district comprises five millions of acres and a population of 178,000. A quarter of a million of acres of cotton were submerged, besides 100,000 acres of corn. An appropriation of \$90,000 for the purchase of rations for the sufferers has been made. The Arkansas dead-lock still continues, Brooks having refused to accede to Baxter's proposal to allow a competent tribunal to pronounce upon their claims.

UNITED KINGDOM.—A motion censuring the late Imperial Government for the suddenness of the dissolution, was brought up in the House of Commons by Mr. Smollet, who, in speaking to his motion, used exceedingly strong and personal terms. After indignantly refuting the statements made against him, Mr. Gladstone left the House. The motion was negatived without a division. The Premier has advised the Queen to bestow a mark of distinction upon Capt. Glover for his services in the Ashantee War. The Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for India, stated in the House of Lords last week that the next harvest in India promised to be abundant, and the present provision against famine was undoubtedly ample. The bill abolishing sugar duties from May 1st has finally passed the House of Commons. The House of Commons has also voted a reduction of income tax one penny in the pound, and the abolition of the horse license duty as recommended in the annual budget. The French steamship "L'Amérique," having been freed from water, has been examined. Her hull was found to be right, but the valves were open. Her crew were telegraphed for, and she proceeded to Havre on Monday. The Admiralty Court have fixed her bail at £125,000. The rescuers have instituted proceedings for \$400,000 salvage.

FRANCE.—The Government has ordered a rigid investigation in the case of "L'Amérique." The Comte de Chambord arrived at Versailles last week.

SPAIN.—It is rumoured that the Carlists have asked Marshal Serrano for an amnesty. Castelar has written a letter in which he declares in favor of a Federal Republic.

GERMANY.—The session of the Reichstag was closed on Friday last.

TURKEY.—Advices from Constantinople report that the Suez Canal difficulty has been settled by Mr. De Lessep's acceptance of the tonnage rates prescribed by the international commissioners. A famine prevails in Anatolia.