

in spirit," said the amiable lady as she folded her in her arms; "and by letter we may communicate each other's wishes and feelings. I consider it also a sacred trust my having taken upon me the vows of sponsor to your sweet child; her spiritual welfare will always be an object of deep interest to me, and should I live so long, I hope to watch over her education, and to induce you to spare her to me sometimes, unless more powerful friends arise to claim that privilege when I am parted from you," she added, pensively. "Another void will be felt at my heart; your extraordinary likeness to my own sainted Laura first made you dear to me; but now for your own sake I love you. Oh! that I could shield you from every approaching shadow that may darken your path, but He who loves you infinitely more than I, will not suffer one to come upon you that might be withheld with safety."

There was something so unusually affectionate and tender in the manner of Mrs. Bruce, that Katherine was exceedingly touched by it; probably it might have been owing to the prospect of so soon leaving the poor girl without the consolation of her friendship, but no doubt she foresaw the troubles that awaited her in the increasing reckless habits of her husband, and her heart wept for her. When both had rallied their spirits a little, Katherine said:

"I met a lady at the Abbey, a Miss Sykes, rather a singular person, who promised to call on me; am I safe in making her acquaintance?"

"Certainly, my love, she is eccentric and not very refined, but I believe her to be capable of much kindness and generosity; she has made enemies by speaking her mind to persons too freely, yet is liked by others for her plain and honest dealings; she would not flatter for worlds, what she thinks she says sometimes a little too bluntly. But I see Captain Warburton coming up the hill," added Mrs. Bruce, rising. "I will leave you to welcome him alone, and pray let it be with smiles."

Most difficult was it for poor Katherine to obey this last injunction, particularly as no kind greeting, no regrets for his long absence awaited her. He entered the house, speaking angrily to his servant, and using language, which to the ear of a Christian must ever prove distressing. After addressing a few words to her in answer to her salutation, he said:

"Lady Marley intends calling on you to-day; I beg you will remain at home to receive her."

"Certainly, as you wish it," replied Katherine, her heart throbbing at the name. "She is a bride, is she not?"

This question was asked merely to induce a conversation.

"Yes, and thrown away upon a man more than double her age."

"Why do you call it being thrown away—is not her husband kind to her?"

Captain Warburton looked sharply at his wife as she said this, and then replied:

"He is devoted to her, as all must be who know her."

"Then I cannot pity her; a woman is blessed that possesses the affections of her husband."

"Yes, of the husband she loves, not otherwise," returned Captain Warburton, burying his face in the vase of flowers that stood on the table. "How sweet these are, Kate," he added, in a softer tone; "where did you get them?"

"At Woodford Abbey. Oh! how I wish you had been there with me, Neville; so many charming people."

"And yet you left them to return here."

"To return to you, I did."

There was the slightest reproach conveyed in her tone of voice as Katherine said this; she meant it not, but her husband felt it.

"Poor girl, and I left you alone all day. Katherine, I am surprised that you continue to care for me," he said.

Katherine was going to reply, when Morris entered with some message for his master, whose attention being once diverted, returned not again to her.

True to her promise, Lady Marley called in the course of the day. Katherine could not meet her with cordiality; her cheek flushed, and she slightly trembled as she hid her hand in the offered one of her visitor, who evidently did not expect to see so elegant or beautiful a creature, for she started and gazed for an instant in surprise; then recovering herself, said in the blandest tone:

"My dear Mrs. Warburton, I am so happy to make your acquaintance, I hope we shall be great friends and be very often together; don't you think we shall suit each other?" turning to Captain Warburton, who had led her from her carriage.

"I think we shall," he replied, smiling.

"Saucy one, I did not mean you," returned the lady, looking down, but evidently pleased at the admiration with which he was surveying her.

She was certainly very handsome, if fine dark eyes and hair, a brilliant complexion and a good figure could make her so; still with all these advantages, there was a want of grace and feminine softness, that diminished her beauty very considerably. Her dress was of the most extravagant description, but in good taste, for in truth it formed the principal study of her life, aided