

had had no heart for a fratricide war, and now that his life was about to pay the penalty, he was glad that he could lay no man's death to his charge. He was innocent of that, at any rate.

The things he had seen and suffered during the last few months had given him a dread of life. He hated to think of leaving his mother behind him in this sad world — his mother whom he loved so dearly, who had always been so inexpressibly good to him ; but he comforted himself with the thought that before long she would come, too — she could not have much more suffering to undergo, she was so weak when he last saw her, three months ago.

" Kiss me again, my dear boy," she had said, " for I feel that I may never again see you."

And, he thought, sadly, as he stood in the commandant's office, if they would only trust him — would give him only one hour of liberty — how he would run to her and then come back and give himself into the hands that hungered for his life. He would give his word, and he would keep it. Why not ? Save his mother — and she, too, was dying — there was no one to regret his fate. To see her again, to kiss her dear lips once more, console, encourage her, and leave her hopeful — then he would face death bravely.

He was in the midst of these sad reflections when the commandant, followed by several officers, approached him.

" Now, my fine fellow, you and I have a score to settle : you know what awaits you ?"

" Yes, General ; and I am ready."

" Really ? So ready as all that ? You are not afraid of death ?"

" Less than of life. I have seen so much the last six months — such awful things — death seems better than such a life."

" I wager you would not hesitate if I gave you your choice. If I said, ' Put your best foot foremost and show me how soon you can be out of sight,' you would soon be off, I'll warrant."