

## CHAPTER VI.

"Fare thee well and if forever,  
Still forever fare thee well."—BYRON.

The night was cloudy, and a chilly wind was beginning to shudder among the maples as Walter Marston, with his usual upright carriage and firm step, made his way towards Mrs. Harle's dwelling. The jealousy which had so long consumed his every thought was almost gone, and he felt he could now speak out his mind and tell this maiden how he despised her conduct without a fear of the love he had once felt toward her preventing or rebuking his reproaches. For the last three days he had debated with himself upon the matter, and in his meditations he would sometimes surprise himself to find that he was speaking aloud, yet all alone—sometimes addressing her in words of tenderness, in gentle reproof for what he felt she had done wrongly, though in perfect innocence, and at other times tragically exclaiming to her that he was above feeling hurt from any conduct of one who could hold her honor so lightly. Then his breast would protrude, and he would cry out that she was unworthy of his love. It was no one's fault but her own, he reasoned, if a girl betrothed to another was possessed of so little dignity that she would allow him to caress her. No. He would bear no malice toward me. He would only pity my weakness, and let me pass out of his mind. There was nothing likely to cause anything like business transactions to be a matter of necessity between us, and in all probability we would never meet again, so there was no need of a quarrel; but the case of Jessie Harle was different. He had felt himself in honor bound to marry her, and in his most ambitious glances at and painting of the future, he had always seen and colored this pretty, bright-eyed Jessie, this lively, innocent Jessie, as being with himself in the foreground. But she was to be obliterated from the scene and her place not supplied. That was impossible. No one could fill that blank as Jessie had filled it—nay, the whole picture was ruined without her there. His own person must fall from it too, and there could be no picture—no future. All behind him was a saddening dream, and all before a blank. Sometimes, too, would Walter feel that the tie that bound them had not entirely snapped, and a ray of hope would decoy him into the belief that Jessie might have had some hidden motive for her conduct. And then, in a still more extraordinary manner for the studious, sober, philosophical young teacher, he would throw himself at full length on his bed, all alone in his snug little chamber, and moan in absolute despair.

Walter Marston had been a young man of ambition, and his future had ever been a plain, open and industrious successful life. No ordinary sanguine castle-building of a careless life and genuine social ease and comfort had it been his nature to look forward to. He had reasoned well and deeply, counting on his own strong muscle and steady mental application to carry him onward to his success, and he knew, too, that the energy with which he felt himself inspired was derived, in a great measure, from the beautiful and light-hearted girl, whom he had ever pictured as his future wife. But nothing now remained of all that well-built castle, and much as he had prided himself upon the practical sense which had prompted his hopes, and upon his philosophical treatment of future sorrows, whereby they should be to him only minor circumstances bending before his powerful will to the great objects of his life, he felt the weakness of the proposition of man and the might of the Omnipotent power to dispose.

Poor Walter Marston! Never before had such a blight come upon him. He had really in his short career never before known any real sorrow, and only now was he aware of the extreme sensitiveness of his nature, which had always been shrouded by a philosophical cloak. This blow fell upon him with all the force of a first great grief, which alone can reveal to the strong, powerful and ambitious youth his weakness. He had been swiftly hurled from childhood's Arcadian fields to a raging ocean of troubles; from the romantic scenery of youth to the rocky reality of existence.

Thank God most of us have escaped so sudden a transition; but during our early manhood we have all felt and learned the bitter lesson, and so our fathers and grandfathers before

us. Those who are schoolboys now and the children—the painless, jovial little ones that prattle in the innocent doorway or about the mirthful hearth, and their children and grandchildren will some day have to feel and learn it too.

The days that followed that eventful night passed slowly by, or rather dragged their weary length along, and now, when he felt the tediousness of time, Walter had been seized with a desire to see Jessie again and indignantly demand an explanation, which meeting he had resolved would positively be their last.

The night, as we have stated, was dark and chilly on which the sorrowing young man with steady, upright bearing sought Mrs. Harle's dwelling, but the gusty eddies of the sand he saw not as he passed along, nor heeded he the searching winds that chilled the ordinary pedestrian through and through.

There was nothing wonderful in the fact that Jessie was alone. He had often found her thus, but this time he had not hoped for such good fortune, and as she held out her hand which he mechanically shook, and led him silently into the parlor, he felt a sort of confused dizziness, for which in a passive state of mind he neither tried to account nor analyze.

"Why, Walter," she exclaimed, as he took a seat provided for him, and she still stood before him, "you look pale to-night. What's the matter?"

"I don't feel quite as well as usual," he replied, his face assuming that same old rigid expression which she had known it to wear when he was about to administer severe rebuke or punish a pupil in his school and cared not to exhibit his real feelings; "in fact, I've been ill for a few days."

"But, Walter, you talk so differently to-night and look so cross. Have I offended you?"

"Do you think you have?"

"I know you think so. But, come, tell me what I've done, and I'll be sorry."

She playfully approached him and in her thoughtless, girlish manner placed her hand loosely upon his shoulder and smilingly looked into his pale face.

"Jessie," he said, sternly, "I am not to be humored thus. You see and know that a breach has occurred to divide us; and I sincerely hope that you may never regret it. I came to-night only to say good-bye to you and let you know that your conduct will no longer begalling to me. The breach between us will widen with time, and you are free to enjoy whose company you wish. You have not valued my affection as it deserved, and you may some time be sorry for it."

Jessie trembled and grew pale. When he paused she sank in a seat, and he arose, drawing himself up with a courtly dignity that she was compelled even amid her resentment to admire.

For a few seconds he stood thus with his back upon her, and his eyes glancing with an apparent scrutiny over the volumes in the book case before him.

"Jessie," he said at length, without turning around till he had finished, "as I don't expect to see you again for some time, I came to say good-bye."

"Are you going away?" she asked, with a little start, and the faintest indications of surprise sweeping over her face.

"Well, yes, I think I shall go away."

He spoke slowly and calmly, and surprised himself with the firm coolness with which he was proceeding.

"Walter!" she exclaimed, with but a faint effort to suppress the quivering of her voice, "you are not like yourself to-night. Do tell me why you act so."

But his icy manner made her ashamed of herself the next minute, and she drew herself up indignantly as if her speech had been unbecoming, but in thought instead of blaming herself for uttering it, she, with true weak womanly imagination, was ready to protest she had not spoken as she had.

Walter was in no mood to question her thoughts or pry into what she might think. He was too much pre-occupied with his own thoughts for that, and a debate was then going on within his bosom as to whether he should coldly leave her without more ado or unburden himself by laying before her the thoughts that were loading him down by reason of their being unuttered. He had already felt too much the weight of a burdened mind and leaden heart, and the debate could not last long. He had felt, too, and pondered upon the