

cause you know they can't come back to prove you the liar you are. We will defy you, for Randall's right is as firm as the rock and you know it."

"That is why you have offered me a hundred pound to go to America with, is it?" she returned. "It was kind of your master,—how generous he must be, good man! Light come, light go, I reckon 'tis with him."

"I do not say the offer is from him, Harriet," said Abel, now evidently restraining himself; "but if 'tis where's the harm? He has done you wrong,—he has wronged me too without knowing it,—but Mary left him of her own free will and is now doing well in America, no doubt of that. Still, he is willing to atone for it as far as may be; and I myself, though 'twill pinch me cruelly, will add another hundred for old times' sake."

"Let him make her an honest woman," she said; "only that way can he right her in the eyes of God and the world."

"But it is too late for that, I tell you, Harriet, and he wants this other girl's money to keep his head above water. Listen, Harriet: we are both up in years, but older folk than we are marry every day. Let this matter drop, and I will take you to church the day after they are married. You used to love me once; late though it is, become my wife now."

The woman surveyed him with dilated eyes. For a moment she said nothing, but when she spoke it was with loathing and abhorrence.

"Your wife!" she cried, "your wife! Do you never think of the time when I begged you to make me that, to save me and the quickened babe from the pointed finger and the jeer that cuts worse than a knife? You left me to bear my disgrace as best I could, and besides becoming a byword to the whole parish, my shame shortened my poor father's days, for he never held up his head from that hour. Your wife! you would make me a wife now to make sure of my tongue, crafty old fox that you are."

"I could not marry then in th' old time, Harriet lass," he said, "and well you know it. I had only just got into service here wi' th' old squire, and marriage would ha' been my ruin. When I was willing to set ye right wi' the world you had vanished, but you know right enough that I sent you what I could every now and again."

"Let it be," she cried, "let it be, in God's name, or I may do you a mischief, Abel Pilgrim. The thought of what I suffered makes me feel like a devil. It was a judgment on me for my pride, for my love of finery, for the delight I took in my own good looks. God in heaven! for years the blessed face o' nature, the fields and the flowers were hateful to me, and but for my child I would have gone to find out if the hell beyond was worse than that I lived in. And he, he came and blasted her life as you had blasted mine! Curse him! curse him here and hereafter! may the lightning blast his body and the devil take his soul!"

Exhausted by the force of her passion the woman sank down on the settle and covered her head with her apron. It is possible that, as she sat there rocking from side to side in anguish, some compunction visited the spectator's bosom, but if so it was well concealed. It was useless to try further persuasion while this mood was on her, and Abel Pilgrim was quick to recognize the fact. Taking up his hat he turned to leave the cottage. Stopping at the threshold he said slowly and distinctly:

"Harriet, the past is gone and done with, but we can do much towards setting things right if we are willing to try. Think on what I offer you,—you needn't live wi' me, lass, if you don't like to,—but you will be an honest woman, and I swear to God that Randall Arderne shall have our Mary brought back to you, ay, if he has to go and fetch her the day after his wedding. You and I have summat to live for, after all, and I will see to it that the girl shall have a carriage to ride in. The cards are ours, and if we play them right