

which a sense of his own lost and miserable condition had made upon his heart.

The old man listened to his relation with tearful eyes. The deep responsibilities which the extravagant youth had incurred, and which he took this opportunity fully to reveal, were all forgotten and forgiven, in the delightful feeling that his son, so long dead to him in trespasses and in sins, was restored to him a new creature.

"William!" he cried, while a smile flitted over his dark, unlovable countenance, like a sunbeam for a moment, bursting through a heavy cloud. "William, my youngest, and until this hour, my least beloved son, you have gladdened my heart by this frank confession. I forgive you from my very soul, and feel more proud of being your father, than if you had never erred and strayed in the paths of sin. Your prayers will go up before the throne of God for me; my afflicted and tossed spirit will find rest in the blessed conviction that you at least are saved—that I have not aggravated my guilt, by giving life to a greater sinner than myself."

He sank upon the shoulder of the astonished young man, who, until this moment, had deemed his father's conversion apocryphal. He flung his arms about his neck, and held him for a few moments in a convulsive embrace, while deep sobs burst from his breast, and the tears which coursed each other down his furrowed cheeks, bedewed his hands, and sprinkled his garments.

"He is mad—the delusion is real!"—thought young Stainer, while the outpouring of natural affection, so closely pent up for years in the cold selfish heart of his parent, staggered his purpose, and made him half ashamed of the base part he had undertaken to perform in the melancholy drama of life. But, too long had William Stainer sat in the scorner's seat, to let such feelings interfere for any length of time with his interests, or worldly pleasures. The sincerity of his father made his task less difficult than he had at first imagined; for truth rarely suspects insincerity in the professions of others.

He listened with many a pious ejaculation, to the old man's lengthy account of his despair, repentance and conversion; but so gloomy was the nature of his religion, so desponding was he of his ultimate acceptance with God, that his experience resembled more the incoherent ravings of a maniac than the happy assurance and blessed hope of salvation, through faith in a crucified Redeemer, which so beautifully cheer and animate a real Christian. The awful doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, which sends with an unutterable, irrevocable, decree, the happiness and misery of millions, had taken such deep root in the heart of the converted, that his reason was

suspended by a hair between these rash extremes. The least turn of the scale would have released him from the dreadful reality, under such circumstances, of being considered an accountable being.

A few minutes conversation convinced the worldly son of the mental disease which threatened his father, and showed him the ease with which he could control, and turn it to his own advantage. The return of Mrs. Stainer and her step-daughter, from a visit to a poor family in the neighbourhood, interrupted the long tête-à-tête between the colonel and his son. With pride the old man rose to introduce him to his wife.

"My William, I entreat you to regard with affection and esteem the excellent mother whom Providence has assigned to you. Rebecca, receive with Christian love, a repentant, and, I trust, a pious and obedient son."

Thus addressed, the lady of the mansion welcomed the prodigal with cordiality and kindness, and he, in return, was all smiles and gentle courtesies. He listened to her conversation with the deepest respect; repeated her observations, and adopted all her opinions, and before he had been an hour in her company, she declared him to be a young man after her own heart; rejoiced at his decided piety, and congratulated her husband on his possessing such a son.

How different was his conduct to his sister. How cold and formal was his reply to her affectionate greeting. How her warm feelings froze, and shrunk back upon her withering heart, as he answered her—"Welcome dear, dear brother—Welcome home!" and her tearful embrace,—with a common place, "How do you do, Charlotte? Dear me, how thin and pale you have grown. You have lost your good looks since I saw you three years ago."

And was this all he had to say to one who had looked forward with feverish anxiety to his coming? who had wept and prayed for his return, that she might find in him a sympathizing friend and faithful counsellor? Alas! poor Charlotte! The world has wrought a fearful change in the brother you loved and prized as a boy. The vicious, selfish man of pleasure, has no feelings in common with the unsophisticated child of nature. He will hate thee for the truth and integrity which he can neither practice nor appreciate. Weeping, she retired to her own chamber to hide in solitude and sorrowful communion with her own heart, the deep and bitter mortification she had experienced.

Exulting in success, with the certain prospect of having his debts liquidated, and of finally inheriting his father's property, William Stainer likewise retired, to the best apartment in the house, which had been assigned for his accommodation.