

loved, pointed to her children, closed her eyes, breathed softly, more gently, yet more lightly—no more!

Edward Wilson walked down from the chamber of death and seated himself in the little parlor, another man from what he was a few hours before. Now he was awake, now he felt. The happiness he had destroyed, the hopes he had blasted, the misery he had inflicted, the fearful and now irreparable wrong he had committed, the degradation into which he had sunk, all broke upon his view, and shone into his mind with blinding, scorching rays; he covered his face with his hands, and rocked to and fro in his agony. He raised his eyes and looked around the room; there was no tear on his cheek—he could not weep. He threw himself on the ground, and there, the light of reason, flickering as each gust of emotion threatened to quench it in the thick darkness of insanity, he uttered the wildest ravings. Now some lines of a convivial song broke from his lips, and now he uttered imprecations against imaginary enemies, while sometimes endearing expressions mingled with his incoherent shoutings. I learned from his unconscious utterances that he was more guilty than his wife supposed. Caroline knew not that her husband was dishonest; and well was it for her, too, that she never learned that he had forgotten, at least thought lightly of, the wife of his choice, and once his only love. She was spared the knowledge of these; she had not to fathom the lowest depths of his fall. Among his wild confessions of guilt, this injury of Caroline occupied the chief place, and ever and anon, after a moment's silence, he would utter with deep feeling some sentence of the declaration he had made when he stood with her before the altar, and made her his wife. After a time, the violence of his emotions seemed to have subsided; he sighed deeply, and presently sank into slumber. When he awoke, he endeavored to assume a calm demeanor, but his countenance betrayed the presence of deep emotion within. He went upstairs, and gazed on all that remained of his wife; then calling the children into the room, he kissed them all, and when they asked for their mother, told them they might see her again sometime; and then, after weeping with them, he left the house, and entered it no more. People who came into the room in a day or two after, said he had drowned himself on the evening that his wife had died.

CHAPTER III.

MR. WILSON'S establishment being, as already detailed, broken up, everything was sold, and in this sale I was parted from my old companion chair.

I was carried away by the auctioneer as a cheap purchase of his own, and lay in a sort of lumber room for some time. I have reason to regard this as, on the whole, the dulllest period of my existence. Whether I should have remained there until now, or been chopped up for firewood, in the ordinary course of events, I cannot guess; but it happened very fortunately for me that, when I had for many years been immured in this uncongenial retirement, there arose an extraordinary mania among ladies for antique furniture, and, in particular, old Gothic chairs were in great demand. The auctioneer who had originally purchased me, had disposed of his business and some articles of furniture to a younger member of his profession, and this gentleman, coming into the room one day, no sooner set his eyes upon me, all dusty as I was, than he perceived at a glance how good a sale might be made of me. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have been only too happy to have sold me at a slight advance on the sum he paid for me, to any one requiring a strong garden or hall chair. As it was, although I was far too young for the purpose, and, indeed, was scarcely so antique as many of the ladies, the subjects of the mania, who would probably have strongly denied the applicability of the epithet to themselves, it was determined that I should figure in the next catalogue as a genuine old oak. Accordingly I was taken down, dusted, and polished up a little, and in the next catalogue I appeared in the character (positively my first appearance in that character) of a "valuable antique elbow chair, of dark oak, elaborately carved, very suitable for a lady's drawing-room."

On the day of sale, a number of ladies, and one or two gentlemen, examined me, and pronounced me a gem-unique. The competition for me was extremely keen, and at first pretty general, but speedily the bidders for the most part withdrew from the contest, leaving it to be decided by two elderly ladies—a widow and a spinster—who seemed prepared to contend with all the ardor that animated the two survivors of the Horatii and Curiatii in the last round of their memorable combat. The auctioneer repeated his estimate of my great beauty and value, and the two ladies puckered up their lips, frowned, and bid half-crowns in advance of each other with an energy and pertinacity which left nothing to be desired. The strife, at first friendly, had now assumed the character of a duel, and threatened to degenerate into a serious personal quarrel. The ladies were old rivals at this sort of thing; the sale-room had been the scene of frequent conflict, and each had her own partisans, aiders, and abettors. They were equally matched in desire to possess me, and in the pecuniary qualification for so doing; but perhaps the unmarried lady had rather the greater obstinacy of the two, though the stock of the inferior one in respect to this article was by no means small. The widow (as *Bell's Life* would word it) began to show signs of distress. She waited rather longer before bidding in advance than she should properly have done. The spinster followed up her advantage, and shrieked out her advance with an air of defiance. This had quite the opposite effect from what was intended, and cost the foolish virgin five shillings, for the widow at once capped it with another half-crown. The interest and excitement had now reached a high pitch, I should have said their height, had not a trifling incident occurred, which at once gave a powerful impetus to the excitement, imparted an air of hilarity to the whole affair, and, perhaps, was the means of beating the widow out of the field. It was this: among the crowd of porters, and men in a similar position in society, who formed the background of the crowd who frequented the auction mart, was one man who