

A LORD OF THE CREATION.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"You to do this thing—you to speak so to me—you, whom I have loved, and counted my friend," Caroline said, with intense and concentrated bitterness.

The hearer tasted the gall; the stony face quivered a little.

"My dear, I can bear your scorn. I could wish—ay, so I could!—that I deserved it. I false, and Vaughan Hesketh true, would make a very different world to you. But God has willed otherwise."

At that last solemnly-uttered sentence, for the first time, Caroline shrank back. But the next instance she lifted her head. In a somewhat softened tone, with a degree of stately compassion, she spoke again.

"What has deluded you? What can have put into your mind falsehoods so vile as these? Above all, what possessed you to bring them to me? To me—who know Vaughan as my own soul—who have loved him ever since I can remember what love was—who would trust him—trust him—before and against the whole world!"

Miss Kendal dashed her hand desperately before her eyes.

"Poor child—poor child—poor child! God comfort you!" she cried. Then, in a changed voice, deep and steady, she went on—"But you *must* know the truth. You must believe, Caroline; there is a witness to the truth of what I have said. He cannot be far away. You shall appeal to him."

The girl looked sharply round. But the further end of the room was lost in shadow. She could see nothing there. She turned to Miss Kendal again with even added haughtiness.

"What do you mean by all this mystery? Do you value your own word so lightly, that you think I shall credit it the more for one—or a thousand witnesses? You mistake."

"You *must* believe," the other said again, as if encouraging herself, after her own stern manner. "You *must* believe. You must be told by Vaughan himself—Vaughan Hesketh, who confessed to me the thing you cannot believe—who bade me tell you. Summon him; ask of him!"

While she spoke, Caroline stared blankly at her. Then she put back the thick braids of hair from her forehead, in a mechanical helpless way. Indeed, she felt, for the instant, like one half-awaking from some feverish sleep—altogether dizzied, bewildered, overwhelmed with the weight of she knew not what.

With a start she roused herself. The girlish figure was drawn to its full height, as she walked with a firm step across the room, and rung the bell.