

ined to her own chamber, and left almost entirely to the care of servants, who attended to her wants, as her sisters did also, when they had nothing else to do.

This afflicted girl had been as much spoiled by neglect, as Isabel had been by indulgence. Not that any one was intentionally unkind to her; but in losing her mother, she had lost the only friend whose patient love could have borne cheerfully with her ceaseless complaints, and with that fretfulness of temperament which had probably been occasioned by early suffering, and by mismanagement of almost every kind. Her temper, she was often told, drove every body away from her; and according to Mr. Ainsworth's general system of discipline, she was made to feel the consequences, without any other attempt to remedy the evil.

Isabel had settled it in her own mind, that this child had not a common share of understanding; partly from her extreme ignorance, and partly from the reluctance she evinced to cultivate any kind of intimacy with her step-mother. There was something, however, in her finely formed countenance, which seemed to counteract this impression, and the expression of her face, when she was not suffering either from pain or ill-humour, had something more interesting and intelligent than seemed ever justified by her habits or conversation.

Isabel was so little accustomed to pursue any object which gave her trouble, that she had entirely ceased from all endeavours to gain the affection or the confidence of this singular and solitary being; believing, what was not perhaps far from the truth, that all such endeavours on her part excited prejudice, more than they gained esteem. Yet in her present state of forlornness, and destitution of every comfort, she had learned to seek the chamber of this suffering child, particularly after she had been lulled to sleep by her accustomed opiate, simply because she could sit there more secure from all chance of interruption than in any other room of the house. Under the influence of these opiates, Matilda, for that was the name of the lame girl, slept so soundly, that there was no need for any one to spend the night beside her; and here, then, Isabel used to sit often until long after midnight, her feet resting on the fender, and her eyes riveted on the dying embers of the expiring fire.

Those who would describe the extreme of human misery, are, perhaps, too apt to dwell upon the striking and eventful calamities which mark the different eras in human life. Any sudden reverse of fortune, or awful death, or overwhelming shock, from whatever cause it may arise, is described as the test by which fortitude and faith are most severely tried. There are others, however, whose experience and observation would rather lead them to point out, as scenes of the deepest suffering, those solitary moments which memory may possibly record in the experience of all, when the tears of the mourner fall unseen; when their cause, both in its nature, and its degree of poignancy is unknown; and when, so far from claiming kindness, or sympathy, or fellow-feeling, from any of the human family, the solitary sufferer is shunned by all as an object of contempt or abhorrence.

It is when man has forsaken us, and we feel we have deserved that God should do the same, when a sense of guilt is mingled with our grief, without that penitence which would seek for pardon—it is then that true despair becomes our portion—it is then that mere human fortitude becomes unequal to our aid—it is then that desperation seizes on the unsupported soul, and, with a frenzied and unnatural strength, strange deeds are done, to account for which mankind are subsequently busy in assigning causes, sometimes the most remote from reason and from truth.

Perhaps there is nothing which more effectually accelerates the progress towards this state, than to be entangled in the meshes of our own deception, foiled in our endeavours to do wrong, and thrown back upon the silent and

solitary cogitations of a heart that would have been more sinful if it could. And if, under such circumstances, there should be the additional depression arising from a sudden suspension of accustomed stimulus, we may hold ourselves prepared for any calamitous, or even fatal issue.

It is true, that the victim of excess, under these circumstances, most frequently devises new and more effectual plans for self-indulgence; but, where these are effectually and forcibly defeated, how tender ought to be the treatment, how constant the care, how unobtrusive the watchfulness, how delicate and kind the soothing, that would win back the wanderer to the ways of peace!

The luckless being we have been describing, knew nothing of this treatment. Soothing and tenderness were the last medicines that would have been thought of for her case; and, consequently, she sat alone, day after day, feeling that she was an object of loathing and contempt; and wishing in vain that the grave would hide her from the sight of those who were weary of her life.

It was on one of those miserable nights we have described, when the family had all retired to rest, that she sat, as usual, in the silent chamber of the sick child, whose sleep, for the early part of the night, was generally so heavy as almost to resemble death. And is there not something in the speechless presence of one who is locked in deep sleep, more awful and more impressive than absolute solitude?

Isabel felt this, and, if she moved, it was in that quiet and stealthy step with which people glide around the couch of death; while her eyes were often turned to the bed of the sleeping child, as we turn to the dead with a sort of instinctive notion that the shroud has stirred, or that the feet are trembling underneath. The clock had struck the hour of twelve. It was long after all the members of the household had retired to their different apartments, and not a sound was to be heard, above, below, or around.

Isabel sat for full a half-hour with her eyes fixed upon the mantel-piece, and her whole frame as motionless as the marble on which she gazed. At last, a strange wild thought flashed burning across her soul. It was but for a moment, yet it left its traces there, like what the lightning leaves on the visible and material world. It was but for a moment, yet how changed was even her outward aspect! A wild convulsive movement now distorted every feature, and her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, as she looked again at a small phial which stood upon the marble, and on which, in large letters, was written the word *LADANUM*.

Isabel rose from her seat. She caught a sight of her own countenance in the mirror. It looked strange even to her, for it was ghastly as death, and her lips white as ashes. Her limbs, which at first had trembled, now absolutely quivered. She could not hold that small phial in her hand. A sudden weakness came over her, nature recoiled, she fell back in her chair, and, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, she looked up to that heaven from which she felt as if shut out for ever. Memory—the memory of natural and familiar things, as if then stirred for the last time, brought up from its depths such long-forgotten treasures—such sweet and pleasant pictures of love and joy, of youth and childhood, that from the brink of the dark gulf into which she was about to plunge, she was transported back to those days of comparative innocence, when she used to read the Bible on her mother's knee. It was too much; she sunk on the ground in the attitude of supplication; but she could not pray. How would it have been possible to pray, with such a purpose at her heart?

When she rose again, a calmer and more deathly aspect was on her features. Her teeth were clenched, her lips parted, and drops of cold perspiration stood upon her brow. Her strength returned with more than natural force. She could have wielded a weapon, had such been necessary for her purpose. In one hand she held a cup, with the other she poured out the fatal draught. She raised it to