

Blanche derived from religion—she had learnt its forms from her earliest childhood, but she had yet to feel its renovating power in her heart. As the child of many prayers, Lady Neville always looked hopefully forward to the time when these would be answered and blessed.

“Assure me of her soul’s salvation, while I am on earth,” would the fond mother mentally cry; “spare her from sorrow, if she can be brought to thee without it—yet if she needs chastisement, she is in thy hands—oh, Lord, do that which seemeth right in thy sight.”

Rosetta, we repeat, was affectionately attached to her only parent and to her cousin, and till she knew Sidney Forester, not a thought had been withheld from either; but from the day she beheld him, a newer and a brighter existence seemed to open before her, for in him she discovered the hero of her fairest dreams—his handsome appearance attracted, while his lively manners pleased her; these, added to the exclusive admiration which he bestowed upon her, soon won her young and inexperienced heart. Could his have been bared to her, how would she have mourned that she had lavished one thought on him, who was in reality totally unworthy. Since the night that Blanche had so seriously admonished her, she felt that she could no longer sympathize with her, and she determined to confide in her no more—as the result had proved so destructive to her wishes. She tried to think her cousin too strict in her notions—but in this she was not successful—while the affectionate endeavours of Blanche to win her to reveal what was so evidently weighing on her spirits, seemed to reproach her for her ingratitude—how much more the redoubled kindness of her excellent mother. The letter of Forester she placed beneath her pillow, and read and re-read until every word was engraven on her memory. All her sacred duties were at this dangerous time neglected, save those which she mechanically performed, in the presence of Lady Neville, who watched her with the deepest anxiety. Thinking to divert her, she drew her friends more frequently around her at the priory, indulging the hope that one like Lord de Melfort could not long be viewed with indifference—but her penetration quickly discovered his preference for Blanche, nor did it surprise her, though she sighed to see her fondest hopes thus fading before her. But sorrow having taught her the mutability of all earthly desires, she resigned herself to the will of her Heavenly Father, praying only that he would preserve her child from the evil to come.

Rosetta reflected some time ere she replied to the letter she had received. There were moments when she felt inclined to cast herself on her mother’s bosom, and reveal its contents to her—then the form of her lover would seem to rise up before her, and upbraid her for her cruelty to him.

“What can I do,” cried the unhappy girl; “whichever way I turn, misery haunts me—if Blanche was in doubt or sorrow, prayer would console and strengthen her—but to me it brings no relief.”

Rosetta forgot that it is only when we pray aright that God hearkens to us—she implored no guidance, or if she did, it was with a predetermined will of her own. How then could she expect a blessing?

By the advice of Lumley, (alas, what a counsellor to choose,) she at length wrote to Forester, expressing the struggles she felt between her sense of duty and her affection for him. Lumley would have urged her to meet him, but this her instinctive delicacy forbade, and she positively refused to do so, telling him that if even it were practicable, her consent to such an act would never be given. Forester was severely disappointed with her reply, and in his chagrin, showed it to his friend, Major Stapleton, who at once perceiving the advantage that had been gained over her by this first act of concealment, said:

“She has not betrayed you to her mother, therefore you have only to press your suit with more vehemence, and rest assured the prize will yet be won.”

It is needless to say that Forester did so—but not even his influence could avail to shake the determination of the innocent Rosetta, who experienced a shock at the very idea of such a dereliction from all she had been taught to consider correct and right—he was obliged therefore to have recourse to stratagem.

Lumley entered her room one morning, telling her that Lady Neville had sent for her to join her in her walk in the grounds.

“Why, mamma rarely goes out so early,” replied Rosetta; “I left her but a little while ago, and she was then going to write letters—where is she?”

“In the elm walk,” replied Lumley; “here is your bonnet, Miss Neville.”

Rosetta hastily tied it on, and left the room through the glass doors which led by steps from the balcony—the elm walk was at the very extremity of the grounds, and opened on to the road. On reaching it, Rosetta looked for her mother, but not seeing her, she called to her—when a quick footstep was immediately heard, and in another instant Captain Forester stood before her. Rosetta screamed, and would have fled, but he detained her, when such was her terror that she fainted—he carried her to a bank and threw water over her face from a small brook, over which a slight bridge was constructed. She looked so like a child as she lay in this helpless state, that his heart for an instant smote him, as he reflected how ill this fair young creature would be able to cope with the dangers and hardships which might fall to her lot, were she united to him. When again her eyes unclosed, and