

gry and disappointed that she never murmured even her disappointed hopes; that she controlled her feelings, and kept on the even tenor of her way—calm and collected with a breaking heart. But God is just! The arrow I remorselessly planted in her bosom, has pierced my own. Uncle," she continued, grasping his arm tightly as she spoke, "How can I expect forgiveness for sins like these?"

Mr. Fleming was silent.

"I see you condemn me, uncle; how can you do otherwise. But I have commenced a confession of my guilt, and bitter as the task is I will not shrink. I will tell you all."

Mr. Fleming assured her that she might rely upon his honour, and she faithfully related to him the events of the past twelve months, from the hour she contracted her first debt until the moment when, in order to free herself from its debasing thralldom, she was tempted to steal his purse. Mr. Fleming was greatly shocked by the humiliating recital. But when she mentioned her attachment to Captain Ogilvie, and the manner in which she had deceived her friends, in order to meet her lover privately in L— Wood, he suddenly relinquished her arm, and gazed upon her for some time, with aversion, amounting to horror. Sophia covered her face with her hands, to shut out the piercing glance of her uncle's eye. It seemed to look into her soul, and brought back many bitter recollections to her mind.

"Sophia Linhope," he said, sternly, "you have given me such a dreadful picture of human depravity and guilt, that it makes me shudder; but experience, in some instances, cannot be too dearly purchased. Those who scorn advice will always learn many bitter lessons in her school. The first debt you contracted was the first step towards dishonesty—persons who contract debts for things they do not want, and which they have no means of liquidating, are guilty of a crime little inferior to swindling and shop lifting. Extravagant people are generally the most selfish, as well as the meanest people in the world. They gratify their own expensive whims, and are reckless of the misery they occasion others. They borrow money of their friends in the same manner in which they obtain their finery, without ever meaning to repay them. It would be a good thing for these harpies, who live at the expense of the public, if they would sometimes call to mind the import of the sacred proverb—'The ungodly borroweth, and payeth not again; but the righteous is just in all his dealings.'"

"Indeed, uncle, I have been severely punished for my folly! I have neither waking or sleeping enjoyed one happy moment since I ordered that odious hat. Had I not been driven to desperation by the exposure Mrs. Lawrence threatened, I should never have been tempted to take the purse."

"Never taking the purse, Sophia, bad as it was,

did not grieve me half so much as the deceitful manner in which you denied having seen it—your unblushing cheeks proved to me that you were hardened in guilt."

"Then you saw me take it up?" said Sophia in a hurried voice.

"I dropped it purposely in your path, to try your honesty. I have sincerely blamed myself since for making such a dangerous experiment, particularly when I knew that, in the affair with Captain Ogilvie, you had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. I attributed your correspondence with him to youthful indiscretion, and was willing to believe that you would not commit so mean and base an action as to appropriate money which was not your own; but so fast does the perpetration of one crime lead to another, that when the first step is taken, and the barrier between virtue and vice is thrown down, the road to destruction is so broad and easy of access, that the sinner plunges boldly on, without pausing to examine the gulfs and pitfalls that lurk beneath the flowers that pleasure scatters in his path—but you have yielded, Sophia, to a greater temptation than this."

"In what respect?" said Sophia, with a sudden start.

"When you listened to the flattering speeches of a heartless libertine, and deliberated on the commission of a crime, which would have plunged you into the lowest gulf of infamy."

"Uncle! I was unfortunate, but not guilty," sobbed Sophia.

"Not guilty? when I heard you compromise your virtue by listening to proposals, which should have called forth the utmost scorn and indignation!"

"Captain Ogilvie knew that I would never yield to such proposals. They were made as a trial of my virtue."

"You are mistaken, child; you would have yielded to them, as easily as you yielded to the temptation of secreting my purse. Circumstances alone prevented you from becoming the dupe of a scoundrel; a lost, degraded, miserable creature!—an object of scorn to the betrayer of your innocence—the guilty destroyer of the peace of a worthy and amiable family! Do not deceive yourself, Sophia; Captain Ogilvie will never make you his wife."

The colour mounted to Sophia's brow, as she replied with some warmth, "But I am certain that he will."

"On what security?"

"His word, his solemn word!"

"It is not worth a rush," said the old gentleman. "If such were his intentions, what prevented him from asking you of your mother? He was certain that she would not oppose his wishes. A man of honour, at least, would have made the trial."