

to the presence of the other servants, on the ground of their being probably in league with the delinquent, so sure did Mr. Ainsworth feel of his suspicions having fallen on the guilty object, that he would suffer no interference with his own well-contrived plans.

The smile which had first played upon Betsy's countenance, and which was, in reality, excited by curiosity to see what all these novel movements would lead to, died away immediately upon the first question being proposed to her. In connexion with this question, an alarming truth had flashed across her mind; and little as she really loved her mistress in comparison with herself, that little was enough to make her tremble for the consequences which might ensue from a disclosure of the facts intrusted to her knowledge. This alteration in the look and manner of the suspected party being observed by Mr. Ainsworth, he turned again to the lawyer, and requested him to take note of this fresh evidence of guilt.

It may easily be understood that Betsy Bower was no very scrupulous moralist. Her idea of the wickedness of a falsehood went no farther than the injury it was calculated to do. A falsehood, which served what she called a good end, was, in her opinion, an act of merit, rather than otherwise, and therefore she felt no hesitation in flatly denying the several charges brought against her—simply because she knew that her confession of the truth must bring disgrace upon her mistress. Had the idea of being herself the object of suspicion entered her mind, it is more than probable that such a view of the case would have made a material difference in her bias to the side of truth.

In this manner the proceedings went on, much to Mr. Ainsworth's satisfaction; for he was well pleased to have his suspicions of Betsy's character confirmed by her evident tendency to falsehood, as well as dishonesty.

At last, however, the process of examination took such a turn, that Betsy could not but perceive her own real situation; and amazed and indignant at the injurious sentiments entered against her, she defended herself with energy and warmth. So strong, however, was the evidence against her, that it was difficult to do this without implicating her mistress; yet still she continued firm to her first purpose, plunging deeper and deeper in difficulties, the wider she deviated from the truth.

"And pray may I ask," said she, in the earnestness of her defence, "why, you do not allow me to call my witness—why my mistress is not present—that one person, at least, might do me justice. She knows as well as I do that I am innocent."

"Does she so?" said Mr. Ainsworth, with an air of extreme satisfaction; "then I have a curious fact to lay before you—it is upon the testimony of your mistress that you are condemned."

"Indeed," said Betsy, with a smile of incredulity; "I should like to hear what she has to say against me."

"You would like to hear it, would you?" asked Mr. Ainsworth; "then you shall be gratified."

He then opened a paper which he had all the while held in his hand, and read aloud the condemning facts to which he had obtained the testimony of his wife.

Still the woman was undaunted. Her confidence seemed rather to increase than give way; and in this spirit she observed, on the reading of the paper—that seeing was believing, and that unless she saw what had been read in the handwriting of her mistress, she never would be convinced that she had taken any part in it.

"I will indulge you with that pleasure also, said Mr. Ainsworth; and taking up one of the candles, he walked in a steady and imposing manner across the room, to where Betsy stood.

"Here," said he, holding out the paper, but not trusting it to her hand, "there, read that."

Betsy looked long, and examined the writing well. Every body thought she was either unable to read, or was

taking time to invent some new method of defence. Her resolution during that time had been taken; and stepping some paces back, she confronted her master with a look which flashed defiance, and which said more plainly than words—"Now for the truth at last! My mistress and you shall both repent that you have driven me to this; but since you have driven me to it, you shall know all."

While these proceedings were going on below, Isabel sat alone in her own chamber. She had doubled her usual position that evening, but without effect. It only seemed to rush to her brain, to make it beat and throb the more, and still she knew what was going on, and heard each sound with a distinctness that jarred upon her nerves. She heard each sound, and therefore knew perfectly well when the servants were all summoned to the dining-room. She heard her own maid called in, and then the door was closed; and such a silence reigned throughout the house, that there might have been a meeting of the secret tribunal, about to pronounce its awful and mysterious doom.

Isabel listened, and listened, and still there was no sound. Perhaps at that very moment her faithful servant was bearing injustice, and shame, and injury for her sake.—Perhaps she was disclosing all! The thought was too horrible. She went to the door, and stood out upon the stairs to listen; but all was still.

At last, however, there was a general movement, like the breaking-up of some assembly, before any one feels at liberty to speak. It was a strange kind of movement; for doors were thrown open, and one went this way, and another that, and not a word was spoken. The guests came out, put on their hats, and went away with a short good-night. The two young ladies took up their candles, and walked whispering to bed. The servants betook themselves to their several sleeping rooms, and none but Betsy and her master seemed to be left behind. It was an inauspicious omen. What could they be consulting about together? The clock struck ten, and still they neither of them appeared. Before it reached the stroke of eleven, Mr. Ainsworth's step was heard upon the stairs. It was louder than usual, and much more slow.

Mr. Ainsworth was one of those superficially kind and smooth-seeming men, who are in reality the most severe; and he came up stairs with the full intention of saying every thing to his wife which it was possible to think of, for the purpose of overwhelming her with shame and remorse.

In this object he probably succeeded to his own satisfaction; for Isabel appeared the following day an humbled and an altered woman. She kept her own room, and saw nobody but Betsy, who appeared to be busily employed in gathering together all her own things, and packing them as if for a journey. Nor was this business concluded until the close of the day, when she came into the silent apartment of her mistress, and endeavoured, with evident embarrassment, to enter into conversation with her.

This, however, was impossible in Isabel's present state; and Betsy, pressed by the lateness of the hour, at last told her that she was about to leave her service; and that it was her master's wish that she should leave that very night. "He has paid me all my money," she added, "and, I must say, has behaved to me more handsomely than some others."

"I hope you will find a better mistress, and be happier than you have been with me," said Isabel, in a tone of voice so low as scarcely to be audible.

The woman seemed a little moved, at least she wiped her eyes; and wishing her mistress every blessing, turned away.

"Betsy," said her mistress, calling her back, "I think you loved and respected my mother."

"Oh! yes, indeed I did, above every body."

"Then, perhaps, for her sake, you will take a little care not to blaze about what has lately passed in the house."