

"Would be additionally painful, I grant; but the necessity is none the less, nor the duty."

"But, under the present circumstances, it is not his anger that I dread—it is his grief. He is depressed at present more than I ever saw him. Look at all sides of the question. I am his adopted nephew—his heir: to me he looks for help—for comfort. If, instead of this, I but bring him new troubles, it is enough to break his heart. His indignation, his displeasure, I could bear—but his sorrow—George, spare me that!"

He spoke with an earnestness that made his voice falter. His friend turned to him, and looked steadily in his face.

"I cannot quite understand you," he said, dubiously. "From what you told me of your uncle, I was led to expect a hard, harsh disciplinarian, rather than the genial old gentleman I find—or the tender-hearted being you now speak of. You said nothing of his probable distress—it was his unreasonable anger you deprecated."

"That is true, I admit. When away from him, I thought more of his stern strictures, of his uncompromising, business-like love of prudence. But I come here, and I find—himself! softened, too, by troubles of his own, kinder and more loving than he has ever shown himself to me." The speaker glanced at his companion's face, but the drooped eyes and inflexible lip told little. He went on—"Then again, there is another consideration—dearer, sweeter, holier than all. My cousin Caroline. I could not bear to crush her—to sadden her——"

The rigid mouth of the listener quivered, the impassive face flashed as with newly-kindled light.

"To *crush* her? I do not comprehend——"

"At least it would cause her some misery. Remember, George—she loves me."

"Loves you?" he again echoed.

"Loves me! Her tenderness and devotion are just now at once my pride and my pain. To see her betrothed husband——" He broke off, as if he expected some interruption here; but Mr. Farquhar was once more contemplating the ground, and made no remark. "I forgot," Vaughan resumed; "you do not know, probably, that Caroline and myself have always been intended for one another. Only this morning my uncle was speaking to me of our marriage."

"Is that true?"

Mr. Farquhar stood still, facing his companion with an intent but still impassive gaze. The words were uttered more emphatically, perhaps, than he was aware of. Vaughan coloured angrily, and drew back.

"I presume you do not doubt——" but he did not finish the sentence,