

ing public, he married a wife more than ten years his senior. But the gossiping public had weightier matters to deal with concerning William Elson and his wife, and no one clearly understood what those matters were. Many there were who would look knowingly at one another when anything in reference to William Elson or his wife chanced to fall into the conversation. If, at any time a scandal had been invented by some thoughtless, mischievous person concerning the Elsons, it would have been readily taken up and carried from house to house, and firmly believed by every listener. But little did the gossiping public know of the Elson household; for the gossiping people of their neighborhood lived in an illiterate world, while the Elsons were highly cultivated. So leaving the gossiping public without, to revel in the mystery they were pleased to think was connected with the Elson family, and to explain it in the most extravagant manner, let us enter the dwelling and speak what we do know concerning their affairs.

Now, there truly was a secret hidden deep in the troubled breast of Mrs. Elson,—a secret even her husband knew not and yet he felt that she was withholding something from him; but in the intense depth of his love he ventured not to question her about it. Twenty years of wedded life had nearly passed away, and yet that secret was gnawing its way deeper and deeper into Mrs. Elson's heart. The breach that kept them not from marrying had grown wider and wider as the years rolled on. Never had the weak foolish woman summoned up enough courage to tell her husband that which he would for her sake have been ever ready to overlook.

She had never loved him. She had never known him with that depth of knowledge—that deep insight into human nature with which the devoted wife should know her husband; and yet, from a simple matrimonial point, their life was far from unhappy. This was, no doubt, because of his submissive nature, and her bold, politic and commanding disposition.

In spite of Mrs. Elson's many interferences Nellie and I managed to meet often and walk around the grounds of "Hazelgrove," the applicable name of our neighbor's residence. And prettier grounds could not well be imagined. The majestic yet neat looking dwelling seemed to have grown out of a sloping hill-side covered with dense hazels, while chestnuts, maples, pines and hemlocks grew in rich profusion on either side. In front, a little silvery stream,—over which were many fantastic bridges,—made its way with many a curve and bend through a magnificent garden, and running onward through a verdant meadow betwixt its graveled banks suddenly spread itself into a large pond, on which a pretty little sail-boat rode at anchor, which, tossing about as if to catch the breeze, would not picturesquely among the willows, that grew in grand abundance all around the shore.

As I write I'm gazing on those very grounds once more, and our walks together live like yesterday. Our parting on that dull spring morning, when I imagined a certain coldness in her manner still vividly comes up before me, and I pause to think how afterwards I blamed her and not my own fickleness because of the feelings I have already spoken of toward the pretty little Jessie Harle at Shulton.

CHAPTER III.

"Changed thus by chance, disfigured by despair." ANON.

On the morning following my arrival in Shulton, Charles Sweeman, the miller, sat at breakfast with his usual stern expression of countenance, if possible more stern than customary. You need only look at the man's face to see that when his lips opened, bitter curses and fiercest scowls were more apt to break from them than acknowledgments of, or credit for, work done. He ate his food with sullen, irregular jerks, sometimes giving his head a demonical twist that would have made a young beholder question whether he was a human being at all or not. When he had finished his repast he turned about from the table, and in a harsh voice shouted, "Arthur!"

The called-one instantly appeared before him, a pale, wretched looking being who cringed before his master's tyrannical gaze.

There were marks though about Arthur Drammel—there were tokens in his pale and puny face that plainly said it was not always thus. The tyranny, the abuse, and the bitter chastisements received at the hands of his master, more severe than ever slave was subjected, had transformed the

once noble-spirited, energetic, handsome Arthur Drammel into the haggard, sickly being that quailed beneath that cruel master's look, and the transformation of the miller on the other hand was quite as marked. He was at one time termed a good fellow among his schoolmates, and even after. But those days were over now, and though you can easily understand the transformation of Arthur Drammel, provided there ever lived such a master as Charles Sweeman, it may be difficult to believe such a transformation as had taken place in that master. It is surprising to notice in how many things we are so nearly alike when children, but, being acquainted with the circumstances of Charles Sweeman's life I do not even feel surprised to see the change that had taken place in him. Men become altered by circumstances and turn about with every gust that blows contrary to their course. Even men with the most powerful wills are easily turned, provided something requiring their great will-force is thrown in their way. There are more what people term unlikely sides and traits in real characters than in the creatures of romance. But to return.

Arthur Drammel stood timidly before his master, who gazed at him with a more terrible look than he had ever worn before.

"Who told you your name was Drammel?" Sweeman abruptly exclaimed, as if the person before him had just told him that that was his name.

"No one," Arthur timidly replied.

"And," with an ironical scowl, "You did n't tell Werbletree it was then."

"No."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him that I lived with a Mrs. Drammel once and always called her mother."

"Worse than I expected!" And he caught the lad by the coat collar with a sudden jerk. At one time Arthur would have resented this, but his spirit was crushed and his strength like nothing compared with Sweeman's.

"I'll keep you out of the way to-day and put you farther away than ever to-night, my lad," said Sweeman, with his customary scowl as he led Arthur forcibly to a room and locked him up. Then leaving the house he went to look after the mill.

The men at the mill never found him a hard master. Indeed he was considered a first-rate fellow by some of them; not that he was utterly different at home and at the mill but that from their first sight of him they expected no encouraging words, and once in a while he would even condescend to give some token of approval for an extra effort. He showed sometimes after all that he was a human being and they were so pleasantly surprised on such occasions that it made them think his manner not unkind.

However, on this particular morning, he was in an ill-humor, and nothing seemed "to go right." His curses were not wanting when things went wrong.

At noon he left the mill under the management of one of the men, saying he was going away on business and would not return until the following day. He did not even go to his home before starting, but straight to Shulton, and thence by the coach going East.

That was the first time I saw him, and though he eyed me suspiciously, not an introductory word passed between us. I think I felt a sense of relief when he got into the coach and started off.

Detained by the pleasant conversation and more pleasant manners of pretty Jessie Harle, I did not get started to take a look about the mill or miller's house till nearly dark. And when I did I learned what I have previously related in this chapter.

When I had ascertained to my satisfaction that the object of my search was the only occupant of the miller's house, I managed to gain an entrance as well as a professional burglar could have done.

I spoke to the wretched victim of what I thought to be merely a tyrannical master's cruelty, and he seemed not to understand me. After a while, however, through many questions I learned that he had lived with the miller some five years, before which time he lived in a large city with a Mrs. Drammel whom he called mother. I learned too that it was for his telling this to one of the employes at the mill that Sweeman had punished him and discharged the man.