

The contrast a few hours had made, struck me forcibly. "Such is life," I mentally said, "a mixture of the troubled ocean, and the calm sea. Oh, may the last," I continued, apostrophising the sleeping girl, "be thy portion, fair child. Thou whose delight it is to render others happy, ought surely to possess it thyself—and thy Heavenly Father, who is a God of love and mercy, will withhold none which it is safe for thee to have."

I now perceived Mr. Bertram and Captain Selby at some distance, apparently in deep, and to them interesting conversation, for they would occasionally pause in their walk, and by the energy of their gestures display how intensely they felt. I watched them for a considerable time, wondering in my own mind to what it would lead, for old maids are, you know, proverbially curious—and indeed I confess there was a sympathy for Captain Selby which had considerably strengthened within the last few days.

Annie now unclosed her eyes, and started up on beholding me.

"Why you idle little lady," I exclaimed, approaching her, "how is it that you are still slumbering, when others are awake and abroad; rise up, I pray, else the knight of the rueful countenance will be gone."

"Oh, Mrs. Mary, Captain Selby is not going—tell me I implore you," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and in a tone of deep emotion, while her whole countenance instantly became saddened and overcast.

"No, my child, he is walking with your father," I replied; "he is not going, and I am much mistaken, if it is your desire that he should remain, whether he will ever go."

Annie looked steadfastly at me a few moments, but made no answer. She rose from her bed, and looking forth, remarked—

"What a lovely morning, and how fresh every thing appears after the rain. The early day always speaks of bright hopes, and calls forth religious feelings more powerfully—prayer to me at this time is as the dew on the grass, invigorating and refreshing to the spirit, in preparing us to sustain the duties of the day. And yet, alas, how weak was my faith last evening—and into what dangers did not my unnecessary terror lead all whom I most love. How easy to preach—how difficult to practice—and what a God of patience we serve, who is never tired under our constant provocations."

"Yes, my Annie," I replied, "your words are indeed true, and how happy is it that at your tender age you have learnt to appreciate the rich blessings which flow from religion, but which to the minds of some, appears clad in gloom and morbid melancholy. Where it exists in *reality*, it *must* diffuse life and joy, since it not only gives mental strength, hope, and peace, in this life, but the promise of eternal happiness in a better."

"Very susceptible minds may, notwithstanding, invest religion in gloom," returned Annie; "but the fault is in themselves, and demands our tenderest pity."

"And is it this near affinity to a warmer affection that has made you confer happiness on one *most* susceptible mind?"

Annie deeply blushed, as in a tone slightly indignant, she replied: "Pity can never be allied to any feelings we may entertain towards the noble gifted being who we look up to as one of a higher order. Oh, no, no, pity is reserved for very different objects—for the repentant sinner—the prodigal son—for all those who suffer by their own misconduct, and would wish to return to the paths they have forsaken, and to the guides of their youth."

"Your pardon, fair lady," said I, smiling, as I pressed my lips on her still pale cheek—"for presuming to lower the banner of your true knight—you cannot hold it higher than I wish to see it held—pure and unsullied as it has ever been in the hands of one of the best—one of the bravest."

Annie clasped my hand as I uttered this, her eyes had filled with tears—which fell upon it as she raised it to her lips. I then hurried from her to complete my toilet: in another hour I descended to Mr. Bertram's study—Annie was already there—Mr. Bertram approached me cheerfully as I entered, and held out both his hands to greet me. "My dear kind lady," he said, equally the sharer of our joys and of our sorrows, I trust you have not suffered from your exposure last night to the storm, while seeking our stray lamb, who was so naughty as to wander from the fold."

I assured him I had not, when he continued—"Then we have still greater cause for thankfulness and let us now humbly offer it in prayer and praise."

The little household were soon collected, and the only absentee was Captain Selby. Mr. Bertram most feelingly dwelt upon the great mercy he had received in the preservation of his beloved child from a frightful death, and Annie, who was much endeared to all the servants, could not be beheld by them, as she now appeared, kneeling before her father, her beautiful head bowed on her clasped hands, without the strongest emotion—all shed tears, while Mary, the delinquent, wept aloud. When again we were left alone, the manner of Mr. Bertram became still more agitated. He drew Annie towards him, and placing her affectionately on his knee, he said, "I have another duty now to perform for one not here. Are you aware, my child, that you have innocently conferred great misery, or great happiness upon an object of (to me) great regard?"

Annie gave an involuntary start. "Do not be alarmed," continued Mr. Bertram soothingly, "but listen to me—to your own father. I have held a long and deeply interesting conversation with a friend of ours this morning—he dreads that he may