

or else, perhaps, he thought that "the question once popped" and being "acknowledged," would be quite enough, from its very common-placeness, to dissipate all the delight of believing that the one sought was necessary for the other's happiness; so it was, however, and when he was forced to quit the vicarage, the opportunity was gone. Procrastination, thou art the thief of time! He must depart without even knowing by one little word from "Nora's own lips that he was beloved." "But," thought he to himself, after he had bidden farewell to his worthy host, and had forced his horse to a gallop, "I will write to her and explain: and in a few days, a fortnight at most, I will come back and claim her as my own."

"Well, my dears," said the vicar one morning at breakfast, as he settled comfortably into his easy chair, "what do you think of our late visitor?"

"O papa! he is such a nice young man," exclaimed Nora in her gay manner, which often betrayed her into expressions which, had she but considered a moment, she would not have made use of: "I do wish he had not gone, or that I had been here to have wished him good-bye, I shall never forgive that tiresome storm. Don't you think he will come back soon, papa?"

"Very probably he will," replied the elder sister. "He seems," she added in a half-interrogating tone, "very fond of the vicarage."

"You mean of some of its inmates," returned the old man.

"For shame, papa!" exclaimed Nora.

"Father!" ejaculated Mary, as she turned an imploring gaze upon him.

More than the period he had allotted himself had elapsed, and yet Driscoll returned not to the vicarage. He had just returned to his inn from a walk on the barren coast, vexed and weary at his protracted stay, when immediately on entering, his eye glanced at a letter lying upon the table. It was in a hand-writing he did not know. He hastily broke the seal. The contents ran thus:—

MY DEAR SIR,

It is with the greatest pain I write to inform you that my poor daughter was taken suddenly ill a fortnight ago, and since that hour she has not quitted her bed. She is constantly asking if you have returned, or if we have heard from you. All desire kind remembrances; and hoping to see you as soon as possible, I remain, my dear Sir, your's faithfully,

JOHN BURNS.

D—— Vicarage, Oct. 20th, 1828.

"She is indeed very ill. I hope your affairs will be arranged satisfactorily. Pray come."

The appalling tidings came like the destructive flash of forked lightning upon Driscoll's darkened mind. How little had he been taught what was woman's heart! Had he then left his beloved to pine and die, merely from a selfish regard to his own momentary feelings? "Poor Nora," he exclaimed, as folding the letter up, he placed it near his heart. "Poor Nora! I did not think it would end thus. So gay, so pure, so young, to be cut off thus by my hand. God forgive me, if it be so!"

The morning's sun saw our hero on his way from Scotland. His business was not completed, but the voice of a dying girl sounded in his ears, urging him forward. In the silent shades of night he heard a gentle tone perpetually beside him whispering, "Charles, Charles, why did you forsake me?"

To a sensitive mind, the thought of having caused ill to any one, creates painfully acute sensations; but doubly so when it is to one we love,—one for whom, perhaps, we would have laid down our life, and yet from mere carelessness, or folly, that one has been unintentionally injured. In elapsing the butterfly, we have taken the beautiful bloom from its wings, which we can never again restore.

It is a lovely autumn twilight, not a breath of wind passes among the dark leaves, not a sound is heard in the fields, save the chirp of the grasshopper, or the rustling of a bird in its hidden covert. The sun has gone, and the hues of autumn have nearly died away: many of the gar-

ments of the trees lie neglected around their roots; but there is still the yew tree, all covered with darksome foliage, and the ivy climbing even to the vicarage roof. "Emblem of affection," thought Driscoll, as having passed through the shrubbery he paused for a moment, enjoying the calmness and tranquility of the hour; and how soft is the peaceful air, so unlike the close breathings in a busy city. Look! there is still a pale rose hanging o'er the lattice, perhaps the last beauty of the season, clinging yet to its supporter. There is a light at the casement, the white curtains are closely drawn—it may be the home of death." He could hear his heart beat audibly, as he knocked at the vicarage door. There was no answer: he could see no light. He knocked again more loudly in his agitation; a soft foot-fall beat upon the stairs; he heard it glide almost noiselessly along the hall. Surely it was a step he knew. The door opened, and his own Nora, pale, but startled at his sudden appearance, stood before him.

"O Charles! Charles! my poor sister!" she exclaimed, as endeavoring to stifle her sobs, she gently withdrew from his half-unconscious embrace. "I am so glad you have come, for Mary is dying, and she calls for you. Sometimes at midnight she will say, 'Where is Charles? Do not hide him from me; he does not know it. Go—go; tell him that I love him. Tell him my heart is breaking.'"

Driscoll followed the weeping girl into the parlor: to his own selfish hopes, the scene was like a resurrection from the grave. Not a word had been said in the vicar's letter, by which he could have told which daughter it was that was ill; and his own excited fancy could alone believe it was the one in which he was most interested, whom he imagined others knew as well as himself. He sat beside the young creature of his hopes; but at such an hour he could not talk of love. As he gazed upon her fair features, mellowed from their gaiety by sisterly affection into an interesting languor, he could not avoid thinking that he had never before seen so beautiful a being. "Will you not come and see my sister?" said Nora, "for I am sure she is asking for you; and even standing upon the brink of the grave. How she loves you, Charles; and love like hers were well worth possessing: there are few, I am certain, whose affections are like poor Mary's;" and hand in hand, they quickly ascended to the room above.

The apartment was nearly dark, save where the bright moonbeams passed over the pillow of the young sufferer. At the foot of the bed knelt the aged parent, his hands clasped in prayer; and as the words fell from his lips, there was heard a low calm voice murmuringly repeating them. Nora and Charles stood hidden by the curtains of the bed. They had entered noiselessly, and they now scarcely breathed; for it would indeed have been sacrilege to have disturbed the worshippers in this awful sanctuary. The voices of the living and the dying mingled before a throne of grace. The last words of prayer had sunk into a silence. "Father, may I not see you pale moon which casts its sickly light over my bed: I should like to see it yet before I die, for, perhaps—however wrong it may be to think of such things—perhaps it shines upon him. Would that he were here, for I have a duty yet to perform before I go hence; and time is growing short." Again there was silence, for although Nora wished her sister to know that Driscoll was there, yet she feared the shock his presence might produce on her weakened frame would be too much for her.

"She is sleeping now," said a low voice beside the bed.

"No, Nora, I am not," replied her sister, "I shall never sleep again in this world, until I sleep the one long sleep. I thought you would not leave me now that I have but one little hour to stay, but we shall meet, dear sister—do not let your hot tears fall upon my hand—we meet beyond the grave. The Saviour has trod the dark sea; his arms will bear me safely o'er the billows; we shall meet, and love one another even as we have here, only more purely, more blissfully, where the weary are at rest. I wish I could behold Charles before I die;—ah! methought I heard a sob. It was not that of my poor father; God will support him. It is—it is my own Charles!" and

the pale girl, grasping the hand of him she loved, sunk back upon the pillow.

Driscoll gazed upon her marble beauty, which the deceitful bloom had left white as the palest flower. Little did he think when he confided to her the secret of his love, as she sat upon her mother's grave, that he had planted a canker-worm in her heart, that would bring her to a low grass pillow.

There was an awful moment of suspense; at length a happy smile passed over the features of the maiden, she moved slowly aside the long dark silken lashes from her brown eyes. "Thank God, she murmured, 'he has given me strength to die contented.'"

"Forgive me, Mary, forgive me," ejaculated the young man.

"Hush!" she exclaimed with more firmness, "it was a hard trial; but in you, Charles, I have nothing to forgive. I have kept your secret till now. I am now on the brink of the grave—it cannot be improper—it will ease my heart to speak it. Charles—Charles, I have loved you fondly, but it is past! Had I lived, you could not have been mine—it is but right I should die. You could not love me other than as a sister. God's will be done! Be it so. I am growing weaker—fainter. Nora—Nora, where is your hand? You shall, Charles, love me as a sister even in death. I feel it, Nora, now, although I cannot see you—but you too had a secret, though you would not tell it even to me. Yes, you loved Driscoll even before he left us, now nearly six years ago. I have seen it, though I did not believe it. Nay, Nora, do not tremble, your poor sister will never stand in the way of your earthly happiness; but she hopes to share your happiness in heaven. Nora! Nora! do not draw your hand away! Take it—take it, Charles—it is yours. You have loved one another long, although the word has not yet been spoken. Take it, Charles—what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Keep it, Charles remember me. God—God bless you both! I—my Father—" The light of the moon rested on her pallid face—the lips had fallen—the voice was hushed. The hands of the lovers were clasped together in that of the dying girl. They felt the uniting pressure of the slight struggle as the soul burst from its earthly tenement, and soared away to heaven. They were joined by the cold fingers of the dead. A low sob was heard at Nora's side: it came from her father's heart. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," half articulated the old man, as they slowly and sadly left the room, that now contained nothing but the cold corpse of her who had fallen a victim to England's bane, consumption.

It was an awful scene for those two young beings who had never told their loves, to have its full light thus burst in upon them as they knelt beneath a breathless sacrifice, to hear of affection from lips that would in a few moments speak amongst the angels of heaven, to be wedded o'er a sister's death-bed. It would be impossible to describe the sensations of Nora and Charles. They knew that they were beloved, but what had been the cost of their happiness? It was the sorrow which mingles with every thing serene, and they betook themselves in prayer unto the presence of Him "whose ways are not man's ways." That night the vicarage was a place of gloom; for our holy religion bids us to grieve for the departed, "but not as those without hope." Nora had gained her heart's desire, but—she had lost a sister! She who had been the companion of her days, the sharer in her toils and her joys, who had loved her as a sister can only love, could no longer fold her in her arms, and call her her own dear little naughty pet. They could no longer read the same book together, or sing the same song, or bend over the same spot in prayer! Poor girl! when she awoke in the morning, she turned to look for Mary's smile answering the first glance of her unclosing eyes—it was not there—Nora was alone!

That winter was a dreary one to poor Nora; and even when the spring came, she had scarcely recovered from the dreadful shock.

Time is the healer of all our painful thoughts, and it is