

steps. "If I could, — I, so untutored, so unworthy, — if I could comfort you in a single care!"

She said no more, but she had said enough; and Maltravers, clasping her to his bosom, felt once more that heart which never, even in thought, had swerved from its early worship, beating against his own.

He drew her gently into the open air. The ripe and mellow noonday of the last month of summer glowed upon the odorous flowers; and the broad sea, that stretched beyond and afar, wore upon its solemn waves a golden and happy smile.

"And ah!" murmured Alice, softly, as she looked up from his breast, "I ask not if you have loved others since we parted, — man's faith is so different from ours, — I only ask if you love me now?"

"More, oh, immeasurably more, than in our younger days!" cried Maltravers, with fervent passion. "More fondly, more reverently, more trustfully, than I ever loved living being! — even her in whose youth and innocence I adored the memory of thee! Here have I found that which shames and bankrupts the ideal! Here have I found a virtue, that, coming at once from God and Nature, has been wiser than all my false philosophy, and firmer than all my pride! You, cradled by misfortune; your childhood reared amidst scenes of fear and vice, which, while they scared back the intellect, had no pollution for the soul; your very parent your tempter and your foe; you, only not a miracle and an angel by the stain of one soft and unconscious error, — you, alike through the equal trials of poverty and wealth, have been destined to rise above all triumphant: the example of the sublime moral that teaches us with what mysterious beauty and immortal holiness the Creator has endowed our human nature when hallowed