

graded by exerting her ingenuity or her talents as a means of support.

Mrs. Diggory now took her leave, and Constance turned to the window, to conceal from Lessingham the tears that in spite of her self-command were now stealing down her cheeks.

Lessingham hastily went up to her, and taking her hand, he said with much feeling, "Dear Constance—Miss Allerton I mean—what has happened during my absence? Why do I see you thus? But I fear I distress you by enquiring. I perceive that you are not happy, that you have suffered much, and that your circumstances have changed. Can I do anything to console you, or improve your situation? Let me at once have a right to do so; let me persuade you to unite your fate with mine, and put an end to these unmerited, these intolerable humiliations."

"No," Mr. Lessingham," said Constance deeply affected, "I will not take advantage of the generous impulse that has led you thus suddenly to make an offer, which, perhaps, in a calmer moment, and on cooler consideration, you may think of with regret."

"Regret!" exclaimed Lessingham, pressing her hand between both of his, and surveying her with a look of the fondest admiration; "dearest Constance, how little you know your own value; how little you suppose that, during our long separation—"

Here he was interrupted in his impassioned address by the entrance of Mrs. Allerton and her daughters. Constance hastily withdrew her hand, and presented him as Mr. Lessingham, a friend of hers from New Bedford.

Being much agitated, she in a few minutes, retired to compose herself in her own apartment. The girls soon after withdrew, and Lessingham, frankly informing Mrs. Allerton that he was much and seriously interested in her sister-in-law, begged to know some particulars of her present condition.

Mrs. Allerton, who felt it impossible to consider Mr. Lessingham as a stranger, gave him a brief outline of the circumstances of Constance's residence with them, and spoke of her as the guardian angel of the family. "She is not only," said her sister-in-law, "one of the most amiable and affectionate, but also one of the most sensible and judi-

cious of women. And never have we in any instance acted contrary to her advice, without eventually finding cause to regret that we did so." And Mrs. Allerton could not forbear casting her eyes over her mourning dress.

Lessingham, though the praises of Constance was music in his ears, had tact enough to take his leave, fearing that his visit was interfering with family arrangements. Next morning, the weather was so mild as to enable them to sit up stairs with their sewing, for latterly, the state of their fuel had not permitted them to keep a fire except in the parlour and kitchen. Lessingham called and enquired for Constance. She came down and saw him alone. He renewed, in explicit terms, the offer he had so abruptly made her on the preceding afternoon. Constance, whose heart had been with Lessingham during the whole of his long absence, had a severe struggle before she could bring herself to insist that their union should be postponed for at least two years; during which time she wished, for the sake of the family, to remain with them, and get the school fairly established; her nieces, meanwhile, completing their education, and acquiring, under her guidance, a proficiency in the routine of teaching.

"But surely," said Lessingham, "you understand that I wish you to make over to your sister-in-law the whole of your aunt Ilford's legacy. You shall bring me nothing but your invaluable self."

Though grateful for the generosity and disinterestedness of her lover, Constance knew that the interest of her ten thousand dollars was, of course, not sufficient to support Mrs. Allerton and her children without some other source of income; and she was convinced that they would never consent to become pensioners on Lessingham's bounty, kind and liberal as he was. She therefore adhered to her determination of remaining with her sister and nieces until she had seen them fairly afloat, and till she could leave them in a prosperous condition. And Lessingham was obliged to yield to her conviction that she had acted rightly, and to consent that the completion of his happiness should accordingly be deferred for two years.

He remained in Philadelphia until he had seen the Allerton family established in their