

To her unfeigned delight, Leighton, through the courtesy of the captain, whom he had previously known, brought her the news that he was permitted to accompany her down the St. Lawrence as far as Kamouraska, where they would stop for the mails and land the river pilot. In her loneliness and affliction she felt deeply thankful for what she reverently termed "this new mercy." In the passage down the river, Leighton considerably tried to divert her thoughts from her brooding trouble. Even his own sorrow he put aside by giving Mercedes some practical counsel as to how she was to proceed in the different stages of the long journey before her. What were to be the issues of this journey, neither could foresee, and so neither referred to the future. Of one thing Leighton was not left in doubt, and that came out quite naturally in their talk down the river. The old love, he saw, was not dead in Mercedes' heart, and the message from the far-off monastery, it was clear, had revived in her breast more than the sense of duty.

By this time the evening had come on, and the steamer's pulsing screw was fast bringing separation to both loved and lover. Hurred now were the parting words of the two, though the emotion of both made those words few and fitful. The steamer at first slowed, then stopped, then came the sound of shuffling feet along the deck, and the touch on Leighton's shoulder of the hand of the shore-going pilot. Mercedes rose and held out her hand, with words of broken farewell to the young artist. Leighton, greatly moved, was about to raise the dear hand to his lips, when, with a swooning cry, she withdrew it from his grasp and flung both arms around the neck of her lover. The captain cried to him that in another moment the ship would be off; but Leighton did not heed, though he must heed, the warning. Twining his arms round the slight figure that hung on his breast, he bore it to a seat near by, fervently kissing, as he did so, the lips of the woman he loved. Re-committing his charge to the captain's care, he bounded to the open gangway at the steamer's side, caught the rope-ladder, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

"She fell upon me like a snow-wreath thawing;
Never were bliss and beauty, love and woe,
Ravell'd and twined together into such madness,
As in that one wild moment; to which all else,
The past is but a picture—that alone is real."

More than a year has passed since the occurrence of the events we have related, and Leighton still finds himself in the thrall of his consuming love. Within a month after the parting scene on the waters of the Lower St. Lawrence, the queenly Mercedes became in reality a widow. Arriving duly at Liverpool, the latter hastened at once to the continent, and made no halt until she reached the monastery in the Bavarian Alps, on the northern frontier of the Tyrol. When she was admitted to the hospital of the Order, the good priest who took her name said compassionately that her husband still lived, but that in another day it would have been too late. Poor Wilton, she found, was barely conscious; the angel of death was even now hovering over his pallet. The same evening he died, and on the morrow was buried.

Just before the end there was a brief lucid moment, during which the wan face of the dying man was lit by a brief ray of recognition. This, with a feeble pressure of the hand, was all the solace that was vouchsafed to Mercedes. It was too late to receive from Wilton's own lips the story of his escape from death and the motives which led him to hide from his wife what had really occurred, and his place of concealment. The Lady Mercedes had the facts afterwards narrated to her by the Abbot of the Monastery. These, however, we need not recite, as, curiously enough, they closely corresponded with what had long been her own convictions. But it was not, it seems, the injuries her husband met with, in his fall from the cliff, that killed him, though they left him maimed and deformed. More than three years after the occurrence a gloom fell upon the poor man, and at times he was the victim of strange delusions. During one of those periods of mental alienation he

made an attempt upon his own life, and it was from the effects of this that he died.

After poor Wilton's death, one of the Friars of the Monastery, who was a special favorite of the deceased artist, put a packet in the Lady Mercedes' hands, which, in view of his death, had been entrusted to his care. The packet contained, beside some pathetic references to the blight that had fallen upon both their lives, a memorandum of moneys due to him, which he bequeathed to his wife, from the sale of pictures from his brush that had been sent from time to time to Munich while he was cloistered in the monastery. These pictures had commanded high figures, though the name of the painter had never been disclosed; and the price Wilton received from them had enabled him not only to become a princely patron of the monastery, but to leave a considerable sum to his widow. The subjects of the paintings were chiefly ecclesiastical; many of them being Madonnas of such rare beauty that they had been sought after as altar ornaments by the great dignitaries of the Church. One of these the artist had set aside in the monastery as a gift to his wife; and the poor friar who informed Mercedes of the fact was rash enough to add that the faces of all the Madonnas were replicas of the face of her with whom he now spoke. For this carnal but natural remark, the poor monk, no doubt, would speedily scourge himself and do humble penance.

For a month or more after the burial of Wilton the Lady Mercedes lingered in the village hard by the monastery, tending the flowers on her husband's grave and trying to read the riddle of life in presence of the Eternal Hills. At the village she was joined by her aunt, to whom the Kinglakes had written, giving her the few facts that were in their possession, and begging her to have a care of Mercedes, as they knew she would, until their return to England.

This lady, who was much attached to her niece, took the poor widow from the Tyrol to her home in Devon, and did much to bring back to her cheek the hue of health and to her mind its wonted tone and vigor. In this she was greatly assisted by the return of the Kinglakes, with whom, after a while, Mercedes went to reside.

In the meantime, the reader will doubtless ask, what of Leighton? He, poor fellow, for a year after he heard of Wilton's death, had his days of uncertainty and nights of tribulation. Mercedes of course corresponded with him, though, at first, at long intervals. His own delicacy of feeling prevented him from obtruding more frequently with his own letters. But he had become a fast friend of the Kinglakes, and both husband and wife were his regular correspondents. It was chiefly through them that he heard of the object of his affections; and in fragments of their epistles and on messages occasionally enclosed in them from Mercedes, he kept his love alive. Of late, however, he had heard more often and directly from the regal widow, and always in terms of unmistakable affection. It was from her he learned that Mr. Lewis's sons were not coming this year to Canada, but that they would sail early in the following spring, accompanied by their sister and her husband, Mr. Kinglake. By the following mail Leighton received a letter from Mr. Lewis himself, confirming the news Mercedes had given him, and extending a cordial invitation to him to visit England as his guest. This Leighton was sorely tempted to do, and indeed before receiving the invitation, he had resolved upon a trip to the Old World on his own account. This he found, however, from the number of commissions that now crowded upon him, as a rising artist, was at present out of the question. Perhaps later on in the year, he wrote, the project might be undertaken.

Since dispatching to Mr. Lewis his apologies for inability to accept his invitation some months have elapsed; and Leighton now finds that he is compelled to abandon his visit to England. The regret which this news occasioned to all has given place to joy in Leighton's mind at the announcement contained in a late letter from Mrs. Kinglake. This letter informed the artist that the writer and her husband were to accompany her brothers (Mr. Lewis's