

The Book of Judgment

415

broken man if he is unable to speak becomingly. We have been blown about till we have lost our reckoning. My daughter has explained everything. It is beyond words. Take my poor thanks, Sir Evan, for rescuing and succouring a mangled fellow-creature flung helpless from among the grinding wheels."

"Had it been in my power to stay them, the wheels should never have ground," replied Evan, hardly able to articulate.

"I am sure of that now," said the other slowly. "Yes, I am sure of that now. I ought to have considered you more when we were together. I ought to have held on to you. But, sir, some of us are made blind, and have our sight restored too late. You might have pulled us all through. When the crisis came, if I had had one brain like yours to help me, I believe we could have weathered the tempest. As it was we went down—down headlong."

"You must not think of these things now," said Evan softly.

"To be sure it is idle vexing ourselves for nothing," admitted Mr. Dudley. "You were fulfilling your destiny, and I suppose we were fulfilling ours. These things are dark, and our destinies have been interwoven like warp and woof, only that you were strong and we were weak. When a certain thing happened I cried out against you, for I am only human, very frail and human, Sir Evan. I said, See what revenge is; and now—now this."

The voice, which had been surprisingly firm, broke, and tears poured down the deeply lined face.

"I cannot speak, Sir Evan, I cannot speak. Bear with me. My heart seems cracking. Your poor pensioner and debtor is beside himself with remorse and gratitude."

He rose trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"If you pardon me, I will leave my daughter to thank our benefactor. She may be able to express a little of what we feel. Out of the depths I pray God to bless you, Sir Evan. Come, my little Florence, let me lean on your shoulder, and we will go into the open air again. I feel stifled. There, my dear, there."

Florence, her childish merriment hushed in the awe of a profound mystery, wondering why her grandfather shook so much, or why her mother held a handkerchief so tightly to her eyes;