

Lord Avon was so much shocked by this heartless speech, that he gazed on her a few moments in silence, and then replied :

"I was needlessly fearful of distressing you, I find. Lady Clifton is gone ; she was burnt to death by her dress catching fire while sitting at her toilette table ; her maid had left her only for a few moments, and on her return found her lady in flames ; you may imagine the rest, but a fate so awful while in the very act of breaking one of God's commandments, must strike every heart that is not utterly hardened in sin. Will it make any impression on you—or will you still close your eyes against your danger, and plunge headlong into the gulph of destruction ?"

This was said with extreme agitation, and in raised tones.

"For Heaven's sake, hush ! I am not prepared to answer you ; how very dreadful ! Poor Lady Clifton," and Lady Barbara burst into tears.

"God be praised that all right feeling is not destroyed within you," said Lord Avon more calmly ; "Barbara, these tears give me new hope—may they be the harbingers of better days to come."

Lady Barbara held out her hand to him, as he said this ; he pressed it with kindness, little aware that the kisses of another had so recently profaned it. The remainder of this day she spent in her room, humble, contrite, yet not convinced.

Many duties, unpleasant and distressing to Lord Avon, devolved upon him in consequence of the demise of the unfortunate Countess, duties that brought him into frequent collision with Sir Arthur Clifton, who had always flattered himself that he would have been her Ladyship's heir ; but on her will being opened, to his consternation, he found that instead of this, Lord Avon had succeeded to nearly the whole of her property, including plate and jewels, to an enormous amount. The disappointment almost overwhelmed him, for, depending on her promises, he had contracted heavy debts, besides raising sums at various times from Brokers in the city, for which he had been paying the highest interest for years. He now beheld himself a ruined man, and the hatred he conceived against Lord Avon, as the cause was only equalled by the revenge that lurked behind it ; these, however, he dissembled, determining to work upon the well known generosity of his rival, to whom he confided his situation. Lord Avon heard him in astonishment, being aware that he had inherited from his father, the late Sir Henry Clifton, a very handsome estate.

"What had become of this ?"

"The timber had been cut down, and the lands mortgaged long ago, it yielded him nothing," he said.

"And suppose you were put in possession of Lady Clifton's whole fortune, how long would it

last, do you imagine ?" inquired Lord Avon, with a smile.

"Come, come, my dear fellow, you must really do something for me for old acquaintance sake," rejoined Sir Arthur. "It would be hard indeed to be cut short in my brilliant career at the age of thirty."

"It might prove the most fortunate circumstance in your life, if you were ; yet I will not be the one to make the experiment," returned Lord Avon. "The interest of your aunt's fortune shall be yours, but the principal I will retain in my own hands, lest you should forget that you have sisters. To them I will make over all the plate and jewels, as I consider they have a higher claim than myself."

"Bravo, my boy ! you are of the right sort after all," said Sir Arthur, clapping him on the back. "I was afraid your new religion had spoiled you. I must get out of the power of these sharks in the city as fast as possible, and shall call upon you very early, depend upon it, to assist me in so doing."

Any one would imagine that the disinterested conduct of Lord Avon would have won the esteem and gratitude of Sir Arthur Clifton ; but so far from this, he hated him the more for the superiority he had gained over him, and the obligation he had placed him under ; but well did he know how to conceal his feelings under the mask of assumed regard ; and he succeeded in this so entirely, that Lord Avon, in the hope of weaning him from his love of play, once more held forth the hand of friendship, and invited him to his house. This was just what Sir Arthur expected and desired. How he requited him, we shall presently see.

When Lady Barbara heard the way in which Lord Avon had disposed of Lady Clifton's jewels, her rage and disappointment knew no bounds.

"Those beautiful diamonds upon which I had always set my heart !" she exclaimed. "How could you be so unjust, so unkind to me ? You had no right to give them away without consulting me."

"Why, Barbara, surely you have jewels enough," returned Lord Avon. "What could you possibly do with more ?"

"Old fashioned trumpery of our mother's and our grandmother's !" retorted Lady Barbara, tossing her head. "Now Lady Clifton had hers reset last year, and so exquisitely."

"Cannot you have yours reset after their pattern ?"

"Don't talk such trash ; I tell you they are not half the size. Have you really pledged your word to Sir Arthur Clifton, that his sisters are to have them ?"

"I have—past recall ; and in writing, lest I might be induced to change my mind."

"Then you have been most wanting in affection to me ; but this is nothing new ; I ought by this time to have become accustomed to your total dis-