

at a higher tribunal. Yes—I will forgive him. I will not add to his future misery.”

He came back to the bed, and taking the burning hand of the miser, said, in a broken voice:

“Brother, I do not hold you accountable for your actions, and I hope God will view your unnatural conduct to me in the same light. By the mercy he shows to his erring creatures, I forgive you for the past.”

The stony heart of the miser seemed touched. He pressed the hand of his generous brother with convulsive energy, and, without speaking again, proffered the papers. Twenty years back, and the high spirited Algernon Hurdlestone would have rejected the offer with contempt; but his long intercourse with the world had taught him the value of money, though his extravagant habits generally exceeded his fine income. With an air of cheerful good nature he thanked his brother, and carelessly deposited the draft in his pocket-book. After having absolved his conscience, by what he considered, not only a good action, but one of sufficient magnitude to redeem his soul, Mark intimated to his brother a wish that he would leave him—a permission which Algernon eagerly embraced. As he groped his way through the dark gallery that led from the miser’s chamber, a door was opened cautiously by some one, at the far end of the passage, and revealed a figure bearing a dim light, who, without advancing beyond the door sill, silently beckoned to him to approach. Not without reluctance Algernon obeyed the summons, and found himself in the centre of a large empty apartment, which had once been the state saloon. Mrs. Hurdlestone, for it was Elinor, carefully locked the door, and putting down the light on the mantle-shelf, stood before the astonished Algernon, with her head bent down, and her hands tightly pressed across her breast. Yes, it was Elinor Wildegrave; but not a vestige remained of the beauty and grace which had won his youthful heart; and so great was the change that years of hopeless misery had effected, that Algernon, in the haggard and care-worn being before him, did not at first recognise the object of his early love. Painfully conscious of this humiliating fact, Elinor at length murmured out: “I do not wonder that Mr. Algernon Hurdlestone does not remember me—I once was Elinor Wildegrave.” A gush of tears, bitter, heart-felt, agonizing tears, followed this avowal, and her whole frame shook with the overpowering emotions which convulsed her mind.

Too much overcome by his feelings to speak, Algernon took her hand, and, for a few minutes, looked mournfully on her altered face. What a history of mental and physical sufferings was written there! That look of tender sympathy recalled the blighted hopes and wasted affections of other years; and the wretched Elinor, unable longer to

control her feelings, bowed her head upon her hands, and groaned aloud.

“Oh, Elinor!” he said, “you might have been happy with me. How could you, for the paltry love of gain, become the wife of Mark Hurdlestone?”

“Do not reproach me, Algernon,” said the unhappy woman; “my punishment is already greater than I can bear. Money had nothing to do in my unhappy choice—I was deceived—cruelly deceived, and dire necessity left me no alternative. Yet, would to God, that I had begged my bread, and dared every hardship and fatigue, been spurned from the presence of the rich, and endured the contempt of the poor, before I had consented to become his wife.”

“But what strange infatuation urged you to ruin your own happiness, and throw away mine? Did not my letters constantly breathe the most ardent affection? Were not the sums of money constantly remitted in them, more than sufficient to supply all your wants?”

“Alas, Algernon! I never received any letter from you, after the third year of our separation.”

“Can this be true?” exclaimed Algernon, grasping her hand. “Great God! Is it possible that this statement can be true?”

“As true, Algernon Hurdlestone, as that I now stand before you, a betrayed, forsaken, heart-broken woman!”

“Poor Elinor!” how can I look into that sad face, and believe you false?”

“God bless you! my once dear friend, for those kind words; you know not what peace they convey to my aching heart. Oh, Algernon! my sufferings have been dreadful, and there were times when I ceased to know my sufferings. They called me mad, but I was happy then; I thought I was another than myself, and my misery, as Mark’s wife, was forgotten. When sanity returned, the worst pang of all was, the horrible consciousness that you believed me to be a heartless, avaricious, ungrateful woman. I would not have insulted you with my presence this night, or wounded your peace with a recapitulation of my wrongs; but I could no longer live, and bear the imputation of such guilt. When you have heard my sad story, you will, I am sure, both pity and forgive me.”

Algernon listened to the account of his brother’s iniquitous conduct, with feelings of unalloyed indignation; and when Elinor confessed her sad relation, he fiercely declared that he would return to the sick man’s chamber—reproach him with his crimes, and revoke his forgiveness.

“Leave the sinner to his God,” exclaimed the terrified Elinor, placing herself before the door; “for my sake—for your own sake—pity and forgive him. Remember, that, monster though he be, he is my husband—the father of that unfortunate child, whose birth I anticipate with such sad forebodings.”