

know Fred will wait, it will be a disappointment; but I can trust him."

This year passed even more swiftly than the preceding one, and Alice was again looking forward to her bridal day. Mr. Stuart had a house ready for his bride, in a pretty retired street near the Mount, when Mr. Clement was taken ill of intermittent fever. He lingered in it for weeks and was but recovering a little strength when he received a paralytic stroke. When the crisis of this new trial was passing, Alice ventured to ask the doctors if they thought he would recover.

"He will recover partially; and may live for months, or even years, but will never be the same man he was; he will need constant care and attention now."

In the course of a few days, it became evident what the doctors meant when they said Mr. Clement would never again be the same man he was; his mind was much weakened, as well as his body—memory entirely gone. Poor Alice! here was a new trial to which she had never looked forward—doubly severe, because it called upon her to choose between duty and love to her uncle, and inclination and love to her affianced husband. Before coming to a decision, she laid her difficulties before Mr. Stuart, expecting to receive from him sympathy and counsel. He listened to her in silence, and when she paused for a reply, said, in a cold, unnatural voice,

"Alice, I see that you wish our engagement broken,—I have thought so for the past year, and I am perfectly willing to release you."

"Very well," replied Alice, her face showing no change of expression, her brown eyes looking into his as sweetly as ever.

"Very well," he repeated, and left Lindenwold forever.

Alice sat for hours where he left her, without realizing anything. It was not until Charlie came bounding into the room and placed a sealed package on her lap, saying, "From Fred, Alice," that she aroused herself to a consciousness that she was not dreaming. With a shudder she lifted the parcel and carried it to her room; she did not open it,—she knew too well that it contained returned gifts.

Alice did not tell her uncle the sacrifice she had made for him; there would have been no use in her doing so, for he had forgotten all about her engagement. He could not remember from hour to hour what occurred. She read to him; talked with him, and walked with him, during the six months of his living death. Of Mr. Stuart she heard nothing, except that he had sailed for Europe, and that on board the same steamer there was a young lady and her mother, with whom Rumor had often connected his name. Alice had never been jealous of this young lady—she had placed implicit confidence in Fred; but now the tormenting question often presented itself, "Had Miss Miller anything to do with his willingness to break our engagement?"

During Mr. Clement's illness, Alice had no time to regret the sacrifice she had made, and very little to think of it. But when thoughts of Fred and the happy past *would* intrude, she tried to put them aside with the assurance to her own heart, that she had done her duty, and that this trial was one of the "all things" that would work for her good.

Day by day her uncle grew more and more dependent upon her society and attentions. Helen's presence disturbed him; when she was near he seemed trying to grasp at some fragment of memory which constantly eluded him. Latterly this became so painful to him, that Alice advised her to keep out of his sight. On the morning that he died memory appeared to return. Noticing Alice, Frank and Charlie by his bedside, he asked for Helen. When she came he took her hand affectionately, and said,

"You are so like your mother, child." Then looking at Frank he asked, "Is Mr. Bertram safe yet? Is his name good?"

"No," replied Frank, "he became insolvent a week ago."

"My poor children!" he exclaimed. He died in a few hours after this, without speaking again.

CHAPTER II.

Alice was still in the drawing-room when her brothers returned from the funeral.