

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOO LATE ! TOO LATE !

Faith Kemp entered upon her rôle of cheerfulness with much vigour. She was a girl of great force of will, and she was the more urged to exercise this regnant power of the soul by seeing how her father had always been lacking in self-government. Having before her a daily spectacle of moral weakness, in one of its most painful exhibitions, she felt animated to rule well her passions and emotions and accustom herself to be dominated by the sense of duty. Therefore she was now all day busy and cheerful, and at night did not permit herself to lie thinking of her troubles or of how much better things might have been, but quietly clasped Letty's hand in hers and commanded sleep, as healthy organizations are able to do.

Letty for some time watched her, to see if her cheerfulness were assumed in public and if privately she were miserable; but Faith had decided that there should be "no backward thought, and no returning," and presently Letty began to take comfort in her regard. Privately Ralph Kemp questioned his elder daughter as to why Mr. Julian was seen no more. Letty told him the truth.

"It was then on my account?" father questioned.

"Yes, father. He came up here when you were at your very worst, and Faith sent him away forever."

"Then I have ruined Faith's life in one way, just as I ruined yours in another," said her father bitterly.

"Yes, father; but still—you never meant it."

"And what did I mean? Nothing; that is where the trouble lies. My moral nature has been like a bit of thistle-down swept about by the strong wind of appetite. Such a man as I am ought never to have any children, Letty."

"Father—did you drink before you were married?"

"Only a little, child."

Letty worked in silence at the train of a peacock.

"The lesson from which is," continued father, "that women should never marry men who drink any. They never know unto what that taste will grow. 'Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.' That was what Tom Wharton held, and he was opposed to our marriage, and that is one of the reasons of his hostility to me. I don't blame Wharton; I don't blame anyone but myself—and I blame myself for being morally weak. I wish I knew at what point I might have begun the being stronger. Where could a commencement of moral vigour have been made? before I was born?"

"Very likely," said Letty; "and then, as soon as you were born, your parents might have helped you to understand by their management and training that there was an *ought* and an *ought not*, and that people have to do what is right, whether it is pleasant or no. And so you would have come up with a good habit to the years when you were old enough to know reasons and govern yourself a little."

"The Whartons," said father, "were all people with a tremendous sense of moral responsibility and great will-power. They were headstrong too, on occasion. I think your mother was that when she married me. We loved each other, and for the sake of that love she resolved to take a great risk. Now Faith in her will-power must be a regular Wharton, for I see she has taken a step that must have cost her much, and she is resolutely cheerful about it. I'm sure I wish she had a father more worthy of her. I'd reform if I could, Letty. Sometimes I think I will, if it kills me. Suppose I do resolve!"