

ate falsehood my lips had hitherto been unstained, and I was some time before I could bring myself to write the guilty word.

After a thousand excuses, however, and a thousand imaginary pulliations, the deed was done; and though I felt as if by that single movement of my pen, I was sealing my sentence for eternity, shutting myself out from hope here and hereafter, and placing an immovable barrier between myself and all things pure, and peaceful, and holy; the thought that no eye beheld me, still operated as my transient and fatal security. It was in appearance but a trifling net, and soon done; yet being premeditated, and unrepented of, where was my guarantee that it should not be repeated?

It is my firm conviction, that one sin deliberately committed, and wilfully persisted in, has the power to harden the conscience, and blacken the soul, as effectually as if the calendar of guilt was filled up with every crime under heaven. Such at least was the consequence to me.

A falsehood once told, is easily repeated. It seemed to me but little exaggeration of my culpability, to tell Emile, from time to time, that I was not guilty; and I had all the while so many ailments both of body and mind, that the grounds on which I had resumed my fatal habit, grew stronger than ever.

Still I lived constantly in a state of irksome restraint, taking much less than formerly, and thus enjoying neither the reward of self-denial, nor the grosser satisfaction of entire indulgence. Emile was all the while writing more and more kindly to me, touching less and less upon the one hateful theme; until at last he ceased to mention it altogether, believing, no doubt, there was no longer any necessity for wounding my feelings on such a point.

Two years had passed away in this manner, when I was surprised one day by a letter from my only friend, in which he proposed paying me another visit; and on examination of the date, I found he would be with me on the following day. For the first time in my life, I felt no pleasure at the prospect of seeing him; for what could his presence bring to me but conviction and shame.

On his arrival, I could see at once that he was more cheerful than usual, and his first words of kindness smote me to the soul. He watched me attentively, and looked earnestly in my face; and I thought I could discover something like disappointment, that I was not able to meet his searching glance with a steady look in return.

Never before in my life had I felt so utterly degraded. More than once I had nearly yielded to a sudden impulse to cast myself at his feet, to make confession of my guilt, and to ask his forgiveness once more. Had I been really desirous of forsaking the evil of my ways, I should unquestionably have done this; but, alas! there remained at the bottom of my heart, notwithstanding all the seasons of suffering and humiliation through which I had passed, an unshaken determination still to defy my God—still to shut myself out from his mercy then, and for ever.

It would have answered no good purpose, therefore, had I made confession to Emile. And regarding it as an unnecessary exposure, too painful both for him and for me, I acted my part with tolerable composure, though not without being afresh convinced, of

"What a tangled web we weave  
When first we practice to deceive."

For the questions he put to me, and the false footing on which I had dared to place myself in his esteem, all tended to plunge me deeper and deeper in falsehood; until, when I retired to rest that night, I felt as if the earth held not on her bosom a guiltier wretch than I.

In vain I tried to sleep. Spectres of every horrible shape surrounded my pillow, and if I sank for a moment into forgetfulness of the present, it was only to be carried back to more vivid recollections of the past—of my father's house—of the day when I was the joy of his proud heart—of my sister, and our innocent and happy childhood—of all that I might have been to Emile, and he to me; and then to awake to a fresh conviction of what I really was.

In the morning Emile came again. He took a kind and lively interest in all that he regarded as connected with my happiness. He examined my books, arranged them afresh, and appeared surprised and grieved that I could not speak with pleasure of any thing I had been reading, or doing.

"Flora," said he, "you are not candid—you are not confiding as you used to be, and as I hoped you still would be to me. I fear there is some estrangement on your part—that I have assumed too much the privilege of early friendship, or that you no lon-

ger wish your happiness or misery to be in any way connected with me. I am the more sorry for this apparent estrangement, because it is the time I had fixed in my own mind for proposing to you that we should both hold in remembrance the last request of your sainted sister. I pretend to no second love; but for the sake of your father, and of Lillah—for the sake of the memory of the past, as well as for your own virtues—I would rather share my home with you, than with any other woman. It is true it may not be yet; but I am distressed to think of your loneliness, and I want you to feel that there is a home awaiting you, not destitute of comfort; and a friend whose proudest wish on earth would be to make you happy."

And I heard all this, like one who sits in darkness, while the lightning flashes before his eyes. Heaven seemed to be opening before me—far, far away; while hell yawned beneath. I answered not. How could I answer? And he went on so kindly, urging upon me, what I knew too well, that loneliness was not good either for man or woman; that if I lived with him, I should have many pleasant duties, to lead me out of myself, and that if the spirits of the blessed could know the events which transpired on earth, the friends we had loved and lost, would smile upon our union.

This conversation was interrupted by a loud knock at my door. At first I felt a relief, and hoping some necessary occupation would call me out of the room, I awaited the entrance of my servant, who was a country girl, and had not lived with me many days.

Her message came sufficiently soon. She threw open the door of the sitting-room, and said, in a voice particularly audible and distinct, "Here is a boy from the wine merchant's, who says he has brought the brandy that was ordered."

I looked at Emile, for I was in a state of frenzy. His face was flushed with indignation; but he spoke not until the whole affair was arranged, and the door was again closed. He then rose, and fixing his eyes upon me, "Flora," he said, "you are a guilty, a despicable woman. The vice of which I warned you was one to claim my deepest pity, because I believed circumstances rather than inclination, had brought it upon you. I was prepared to learn that you had fallen a victim to it again and again, for I know its insidious nature. I was prepared to bear with you, to struggle with you, to pray with you—and, provided you overcame it, as I believed you had done, I was prepared to live with you and love you: so deep was my sympathy with you, so dear my remembrance of the past, with which you alone were connected. I was prepared for all this, Flora, but I was not prepared for being deceived. I was prepared for all this; but it had never entered into my calculations that it was possible for you to stain your high character with falsehood."

He paused, but again resumed in a tone more sad and less severe.

"Every link is now broken, Flora, between you and me, except that of common kindness, and a trust, of Christian charity. I will serve you still if you desire it, in any way that remains in my power; but you and I must dwell apart. God alone can be your help and comfort now. To his care I leave you. To his care I will not cease to commend you in my prayers. Farewell, farewell; my poor lost Flora. I must not stay to pity you."

There is a long season of my life after this time, which I find it impossible distinctly to remember. When I look into it, it appears like a gulf of darkness, in which spectral forms are flitting. I believe I must have sunk deeper and deeper into humiliation and despair; for I have an impression on my mind, that the boys of the village used to call after me, and that my servant joined in their laughter. At last, after a long, long while some one brought me to this place. I suppose it was Emile, for no one else had any right over me, or would have cared to exercise it if they had.

I will tell you but one thing more, for I see you are weary. Every one wearies of me. Emile is married. His wife is an excellent and pious woman, and they live together in a pleasant village far away in the north; where they have schools and charities, and are followed by the blessings of the poor. And I am here; and the people around me are howling. "Hark!"

And she echoed the sound which had struck upon her ear, by a piercing cry, the prelude of one of those dreadful proxyms of the disorder to which she was subject, and of which the people of the house had warned me as almost invariably following the recital of her story. For this reason I had hesitated as to whether it was justifiable in me to listen. But they said it made no difference,