

Supported by those lofty and generous resolutions, Ellen Douglas rose to take her departure, and said that she could not remain longer, but that she would send a messenger concerning the business upon which she had come.

Constance would have sent for O'Donnel, but Ellen would not permit her.

As Ellen was about to retire, Constance rose from the couch, and going to a vase, she plucked from it a flower, which she placed in the hand of Ellen.

"Take this," she said, "from one who feels in you a deep, an unaccountable interest,—to whom, although thou art a stranger, her heart warms with affection, and who will often think of thee when far distant. 'Tis said, that at the approach of death the perceptions become clearer and less clouded. If such be the case, I feel that some secret link connects us which neither can know."

"Alas! did'st thou but know it," thought Ellen, "the slender thread of thy existence would be broken. To me alone that withering secret shall be known, and rather would I die than cause thee to shed a tear, than do aught that would hasten thy steps to thy early grave. For him who has been guilty I will nightly offer prayers. To me, it is only the punishment due to my hasty, imprudent marriage, contracted without the sanction of a parent. But if my transgression has been great, my punishment is heavier than I can bear."

"Preserve that flower," added Constance, with a sad smile, which accorded ill with her youthful face, "as an emblem of her who gave it. Like it she is fading, and ere the chill blasts of autumn scatter the beauteous buds which are left on its parent stem, she will lie low as themselves. May some kind hand strew them over her grave!"

"Farewell," said Ellen Douglas, as she pressed the hand of Constance within her own; then bending her eyes full upon the fading lineaments of that youthful face, as if to engrave them deeply upon her memory, she stooped forwards, and imprinting a kiss upon the marble brow, she hastily turned away and left the mansion of Ardmore.

CHAPTER XXI.

Oh! bear me, when dust, to the land of my birth,
And lay me quietly there;
For not to rest in another earth,
Hath ever been my prayer.
I wished to live, to see once more
The place where I was born.
My soul hath yearn'd often before
My frame was so weary and worn.

A LEGEND.

"CHARLES, I cannot rest longer in this land, balmy

though its air, and cloudless though its skies may be. I must home again; and I feel that life will not forsake me till I look once more upon the grey turrets and familiar haunts of Ardmore. Wherefore should I linger here? The damp wings of death already fan my cheek, and his icy chill creeps over my heart. Even your care and affection, Charles, cannot prolong my life. Take me home again, and I will die happy."

Next day they departed from Italy; and Constance returned to her home to die.

It was the night of their arrival; and as she neared Ardmore, Charles supported her head while she looked from the carriage window upon the scenes which she had so greatly desired to behold. She once more entered the house of her childhood, and, though fatigued by the long journey, which O'Donnel had feared she would have been unable to sustain, she appeared to have received new life.

In the evening, as Charles and she sat together, she requested him to accompany her to the apartment in which her father had died. Charles hesitated to comply; for he feared that she would tax her feeble strength too much by such an exertion, and the emotions she would feel, upon re-visiting that chamber, would prove hurtful to her; but she looked so imploringly at him, that he could no longer refuse, but rose and supported her thither.

This was the first time that O'Donnel had entered this apartment since that evening upon which he had witnessed the death of Fitzgerald; and a tide of painful emotions swept over his mind, as he thought of that night of horror. Everything within the chamber had remained undisturbed. The antique furniture, the crimson drapery of the bed, the light of the solitary candle which he held in his hand—all served to recall to O'Donnel the scene of that night; and he almost expected to behold the dying face of Fitzgerald, as, clothed with a ghastly smile, it had looked upon their bridal; and he wondered why that face did not rise to reproach him for his guilt. One thought afforded him consolation in that hour: he felt that, if the spirit of Fitzgerald were to rise before him, it could not reproach him with one act of unkindness—for one neglect, or for one harsh word towards her who had been so solemnly confided to his care. Towards Constance he had been all that even Fitzgerald could have desired; and her happiness had been his only desire, since he had received her from her dying parent. The memory of Ellen Douglas was now to him as a bright but troubled dream, and he had striven to banish her from his mind.