

plainly expressed his dislike to that gallant officer, here flashed across the young wife's mind, and she answered :

"I am sorry, Letty, but I cannot go with you. Yourself and Dacre must for once do without me."

"Indeed, dearest, we cannot, unless at the risk of giving food for gossip to all the ill-natured people we may chance to meet. Frankly, Virginia, if you are so unfriendly as to refuse us the shield of your patronage, I will remain in the house, and thus, perhaps, offend that over-susceptible Dacre."

"Why, you are growing wonderfully scrupulous, Letty, all at once. 'Tis something new for you to mind what ill-natured gossips, or indeed any one else may say."

"And 'tis something new for you, Virginia dear, to refuse me any request, however trifling, without a good reason. Your affection has spoiled me."

Mrs. Weston had not the courage to brave her friend's ridicule by acknowledging the real cause of her unwillingness to accompany her, so after a few more coaxing words and pathetic entreaties on Miss Letty's part, she promised to be of the party.

Captain Dacre was punctual to the moment, and, thanks to Letty's generalship, the ladies for once were ready, so that the party had just left the grounds when the master of the house entered and hastened up to his wife's room.

Much had it cost him to write that note the night previous, but the deed accomplished, he had congratulated himself more than once since. It would dispel the coldness between them, which was increasing day by day, and would perhaps restore them to the old affectionate intercourse from which they were so rapidly drifting. Yes, he, man of the world, knew better than his thoughtless, girlish wife, the danger that lay in such conjugal estrangements, and was it not for him, even at the expense of a passing humiliation, to do away with—to end them? How pleased he felt that the kind, conciliatory

tone of the noted ensured her compliance with the request contained in it.

But the dressing-room was empty. Perhaps she was in the parlour or conservatory. An imperious ring at the bell brought up Virginia's maid, Cranstoun, who, to his enquiry for Mrs. Weston, informed him that she had gone out a few moments before with Miss Maberly and Captain Dacre.

No hasty movement or angry look betrayed to the woman the storm of indignation her answer had awakened in her master's breast, and he quietly dismissed her. Ah, he had never for one moment anticipated anything like this. Pettishness or irritability he was prepared for, and would have borne patiently, as he had already often borne them, but this open defiance, this reckless disregard of his wishes, evinced so remorselessly, just after he had bowed his pride to make concessions and entreaties, which should more justly have come from her, was surely trying him too far. And yet what could he do. Stronger than wounded pride and anger, stronger even than the jealousy that began to burn so fiercely within him, was the deep, passionate love for her that filled his very being, and covering his face with his hands, he groaned: "Would to God I loved her less!"

The prayer availed him nothing. His heart was hers, hers to torture, wound, trample on as her wayward, cold, coquettish nature prompted; hers to sting with mockery or ridicule, and to turn into a jest the holy, sacred feelings cherished therein, feelings which such as she could neither return nor comprehend. Well, men had suffered before, and from the same cause, yet the world had quietly gone on, so all that remained for him was to endure bravely, and preserve at least his self-respect by hiding from his idol the pangs which would only awake her mockery or impatience.

He went back to his office, and with a dreary feeling of satisfaction entered its narrow, dark precincts, hoping that its matter-